

STARTING OVER

Expeditionary Capability Demands Flexibility

Daily revelations in the news seem to indicate that the impending *Defence Review* will result in the creation of a joint expeditionary capability. Such a fundamental shift in rationale should provoke changes in the force structure of the Canadian Navy.

Canada's current naval capabilities were designed to satisfy the demands of very different defence requirements from those that exist today. To properly assess Canadian maritime defence requirements in the new geo-strategic security environment, it is necessary to go back to those first principles and see what capabilities a top-down assessment produces.

Seaworthy, and blessed with high endurance, frigates are ideal for open ocean operations but are too large and expensive to function efficiently in constabulary tasks. Beyond this, the Iroquois-class destroyers and Halifax-class frigates, obvious hybrids and built on a tight budget, lack the hosting facilities and sheer naval impressiveness to function well in the diplomatic role. A frigate's commander is too junior in rank to compel much notice from foreign navies – only the deployment of a major warship or group of warships rates high-level recognition.

The move to joint expeditionary operations will further emphasize the size deficiencies of Canadian warships. Traditionally, the role of any navy in power projection and manoeuvre warfare is to provide transportation for its sister services, to protect them en route, and to support them in the theatre of operations with firepower, logistics, and administrative services. High endurance, seaworthiness, and underway replenishment are critical capabilities for creating reach. Responsiveness and reasonable speed during transit are important to ensure timely arrival. Once in the theatre, the naval force will conduct a myriad of tasks, ranging from simple coordination activities to delivering Naval Fire Support.

Canadian naval experiences during the Second World War and in Korea showed that the close inshore environment is complex and dangerous.

Modern trends in maritime traffic density, weapon technology, and the development of asymmetric threats all indicate that the littoral zone has broadened and now includes several sub-zones, each with unique challenges and dangers.

Canadian 5,000- to 6,000-tonne warships are too large and unwieldy to venture close inshore for joint support tasks. Yet, Canadian destroyers and frigates have neither the sensors nor the weapons to function effectively from further offshore. The object in expeditionary warfare is to establish an extended network of sensors and vehicles, both manned and unmanned, to provide surveillance of the littoral zone and ensure responsiveness to any need. For navies, the networked C4ISR system is the traditional and most effective method of countering both symmetric and asymmetric threats.

Naval command and control in the littoral zone is the most demanding task in joint warfare. Advanced sensors, highly reliable communications, sophisticated information processing systems, and long-range precision weapon systems are needed to assure the safety, coordination, and effectiveness of joint operations. These can only be accommodated in a major warship that must not be hazarded by unnecessary inshore excursions. Moreover, the area of naval control must extend all the way to the shoreline – to exercise this requirement, highly manoeuvrable and, quite frankly, expendable, small warships are needed to venture

boldly wherever the need arises. Fortunately, high endurance and good sea kindness can be designed into minor warships.

Logic dictates that manned air vehicles should be based onboard large, high value ships, while small warships are the ideal platform for remotely piloted air, surface, and subsurface devices.

The Canadian fleet now finds itself in an awkward 'no-man's-land', composed of warships too small to accommodate the staff, sensors, and weapons needed to perform effectively in the outer littoral zone, but too large to be risked in the inner littoral zone. If a major Canadian contingent is to be transported for an expeditionary operation, simple geographical facts will dictate that it most often will travel by sea. To protect it adequately, both while en route and at its destination, and to support it with the necessary services that only naval forces can provide, the force structure of the Canadian navy will need to be diversified.

The safe assumptions of the past are gone and the price being paid for naval specialization is manifesting itself daily. The new joint expeditionary environment will require a very few large warships to ensure that Canadian authority commands and protects the expeditionary force. A relatively large number of small warships, both surface and subsurface, are required to extend the networked array of naval sensors and weapons about the joint force. This force structure will actually serve Canadian national requirements better, and at less cost, than the current fleet of medium-sized warships and undersized patrol craft.

It's time to start over with a new fleet plan; one that provides the flexibility and capability needed to meet the daunting challenges of today and the future. **FL**



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