

Senate Standing Committee on National Security and Defence

Notes for Opening Remarks by Vice Admiral Drew Robertson (ret'd)

19 September 2016

- Many thanks for the opportunity offered to the Naval Association of Canada to convey its views regarding Peace Support Operations and the Defence policy review.
- I'll deal with the DPR, while Captain Harsch will focus on PSOs.

Peace Support Operations – Introduction

- The topic of PSO is an important one, since they, whether conducted under UNSC authorized missions, resolutions, fundamental global treaties like UNCLOS, or the UN Charter, have been the **core business** on which our Governments have deployed the RCN, amounting to dozens of deployments globally by our ships, submarines and aircraft, and task groups in the last 20 years, even while the fleet at home secured our sovereignty.
- Governments have ordered such deployments because supporting today's international rules-based order—anchored by the UN charter, treaties and conventions— has produced the peace and security on which our trade and prosperity depend. Governments do so since acting as a force for good is in Canada's abiding national interest.
- Notwithstanding this unbroken record of success, the RCN's capabilities and capacities have eroded steadily over the past 20 years, incrementally but increasingly compromising its ability to defend Canada or to act as a force for good abroad.
- I'd like to describe where this could lead and the strategic risks governments and the country will face.

Policy, Resources & Strategic Risks Today

- There has been progress. The frigates, now well past mid-life, have been successfully modernized, and our submarines are operational.
- Further, the National Shipbuilding Strategy is an important undertaking of considerable promise.
- The question isn't whether Canada will successfully build warships: we always have. The question is whether their numbers and capabilities will be adequate to the rising challenges.
- The key issue for the Naval Association is that, over the last 20 years, a succession of previous prime ministers and eight parliaments have been unable to sustainably resource the Defence outcomes they set out in policy, with the effect that this G7 nation—with all its maritime interests at home and abroad—has seen its replenishment ships and its destroyers age into their mid-forties before being forced out of commission—not merely without relief, but without governments having even entered into contracts to build their replacements.

- The RCN's successes of the last 20 years were due to investments in the fighting fleets that defend Canada made decades before. Here I include our submarines, frigates, destroyers and maritime patrol aircraft.
- But the ability of this government and those that follow to live off these legacy investments is rapidly coming to a close, even as the strategic risks it has had to assume deepens.
- As a result, beyond having lost capacity, Canada no longer has the ability to independently control events at sea due to the loss of its task group air defence capability, and Canada no longer has the ability to independently sustain deployed task group operations and must rely on others for at-sea refuelling and logistics support, even in home waters. Consequently, Canada is unlikely to be able to conduct a prolonged multi-rotation response to international events, nor is it likely to be offered the significant international leadership opportunities at sea that such a response enables, particularly in complex inter-national operations, as has also been done repeatedly, including after 9/11 supporting our American allies for several years.

Looking Ahead

- Looking ahead, on the present course, future governments face greater reductions and rising risks.
- Today's RCN fighting fleet of submarines and surface combatants is already smaller than research has shown required to meet enduring policy outcomes.
- Yet, as the PBO and others have noted, the CAF is unsustainable over the coming decade, likely to an amount in the tens of billions of dollars.
- So, plans aimed at restoring the fighting fleet's capacity, including to extend the life of Canada's four highly capable *Victoria*-class submarines into the mid-2030s, and replace them with a new submarine capability as well to replace as our *Aurora* Maritime Patrol aircraft, are at not just in jeopardy, they are headed hard aground.
- At current budget levels, you can anticipate the RCN's fighting fleet being further reduced over the coming 15 years. Reduced eventually toward a figure in the press of just 9 surface combatants (a 40% cut from the 15 of just two years ago), while the submarines and the RCAF's maritime patrol aircraft will not likely be affordable or replaced.
- Such changes would each compound the risks I cited earlier by significantly eroding the maritime capabilities and capacities required to contribute meaningfully to continental or international operations. While for decades the government has often had major warships deployed in two separate theatres, that would no longer be sustainable with a smaller fleet
- But most importantly, such a force would not be suitable or adequate for the vast challenge of defending our three-ocean home waters

- The Naval Association believes that this much smaller and unbalanced future force would consequently not be adequate to national need, especially given the rapid changes underway in the global maritime order:
 - As nations throughout the world, but especially Russia and China, continue to narrow or close the technological gaps that western navies have enjoyed for decades and make significant investments in maritime forces, particularly in the Asia-Pacific
 - As great state cooperation continues to give way to competition and confrontation at the expense of the rules-based international order, especially at sea and most notably in the South and East China Seas, and finally,
 - As Canada's third and largest, but least accessible and most fragile, ocean space, opens to commercial shipping and resource extraction, and as the RCN secures our sovereignty in a time of significant nation-building in the Arctic.

Conclusions & Recommendations

- For the Naval Association, the success of the DPR depends on bringing expected defence outcomes and spending levels into balance over the medium - long term through fundamental adjustments upwards or downwards to either or both. The Naval Association would argue, as I have, that the new strategic environment will require increased investment in defence to secure its current expectations, rather than less.
- In making such investments, the Naval Association would observe that in addition to securing Canada's defence, there is no better insurance against strategic risk and unforeseen global shocks than a balanced, multi-purpose and combat-capable maritime force.
- But the Naval Association also believes that this DPR presents a moment of strategic opportunity—an opportunity to not only bring defence outcomes and resources into an urgently needed balance—but to allow the CAF to be restructured for the challenges of this 21st and increasingly maritime century. The force structure of the 20th century that several reviews of defence policy reconciled themselves to, that force structure can be reshaped for the challenges of the decades ahead.
- Such strategy-driven measures will take vision, courage and commitment, and effort over many years. But the result will be a CAF better prepared to defend Canada at home and act as a force for good abroad.