

Guest Opinion Piece – Ottawa Citizen

“Arctic Offshore Patrol Ship fleet to fully operational in 2025, says DND” by David Pugliese on 22 April 2019

Sir/Madam

I would like to comment on the recent article on the Arctic and Offshore Patrol Ship (AOPS) Project. The article cites DND sources indicating that all six ships will be delivered and fully operational by 2025. It is further noted that critics place the projected costs at \$400 M per ship, inferring that this is some sort of procurement failure.

In the article, the author compares the Canadian Harry DeWolf-class AOPS with the Danish Knud Rasmussen patrol ships currently in service with the Royal Danish Navy. However, in review of publicly available information, this comparison is problematic. Specifically, at 1,700 tons displacement, the Danish ship is literally one quarter the size of the Canadian DeWolf-class at 6,400 tons. To better illustrate this dichotomy, if one was to liken these ships to building a house, one would expect to pay substantially more for a 4,000 sq. ft house, than a 1,000 sq. ft house. As to actual costs of the ship, it is important to acknowledge that the Danish ships were actually built in Poland,, and any cost comparison with Canada must reflect the different labour rates and employment codes, and the unique EU subsidies.

All that being said, a reasonable question is why are there differences in Canada’s requirement for a patrol vessel from that of Denmark? The short answer is one of geography and the area of operations expected of the ship in its lifetime of service with the RCN. The Canadian design is larger to support independent operations at strategic distances from resupply, whereas the Danish ships are designed to be based in Greenland, employed primarily in Danish coastal waters, and utilizing their national support infrastructure. Moreover, as an Arctic and Offshore Patrol Ship, the Canadian DeWolf-class is intended to operate year-round in waters off Canada’s vast Pacific and Atlantic coastlines, which understandably has a significant impact on ship design. Also, the DeWolf-class must be able to support and hangar the Cyclone maritime helicopter in service with the Canadian Forces, whereas the Danish ship does not have a hangar and is not designed to embark a shipborne helicopter of any type. In short, these ships are not ‘one-trick’ ponies and have been designed to address many unique Canadian requirements.

With respects to the actual procurement costs of these ships the article omits the fact that in Canada projects must report the total project costs and not simply the cost of ship construction. Therefore, any and all costs associated with procuring the capability these ships bring to Canada, entering them into service and supporting them through their service life must be accounted for by the project – this is Treasury Board policy. In a procurement of this magnitude, typical non-ship project costs account for 40-50% of the total project and include spare parts, ammunition, training, supporting infrastructure

– in this case the Nanasivik facility – and modifications to existing infrastructure like jetties, to name but a few.

Finally, there is the issue of time. Typically, from project inception to first ship in the water takes at least 15 years - this is not just Canada, it reflects the experiences of other close Allies. So, a statement that a class of six very large ships will be in service and fully operational on both coasts (over 5,000 km apart) with supporting infrastructure within twenty years of project inception is actually reasonable when compared with other western nations.

In summary Canada is building, in Canada, six very large Arctic and Offshore Patrol vessels, as well as supporting infrastructure on both coasts, to meet her sovereignty commitments. When the facts are examined, it quickly becomes apparent that the AOPS project is doing very well indeed and that the recent article is misleading.

Yours,

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