

Let's Stop Comparing Apples to Oranges with the Arctic Offshore Patrol Ships

In Thursday's edition of the *National Post*, retired Commander Robert Cyr offered a critique of the Arctic and Offshore Patrol Ships (AOPS) and voiced concern that Canada has purchased a lemon. His comments were in response to a 23 October *National Post* article which described the engineering challenges experienced during a training program being executed off the coast of Halifax by the first vessel of the class, Harry DeWolf. The problems were severe enough to warrant the ship's return to port, albeit under its own power. Repairs were undertaken and the ship has since returned to sea.

It should be noted that there have been comments in the media about the AOPS similar to Mr Cyr's in the past, and they have been refuted in various academic literature. To highlight the points made previously, indeed the AOPS are very lightly armed and hardly speedy, but to say that these characteristics precludes them from accomplishing their various missions is erroneous. The AOPS were conceived and designed to Canadian specifications not just for the employment in the RCN, but as a 'whole-of-government' solution to a number of challenges, including provision of surveillance and enforcement of Canadian jurisdiction and dealing with unconventional security threats – like trespassing vessels, illegal fishers, and polluters. Given these constabulary tasks, arming the vessels with a major gun system, missiles and torpedoes would be terribly inefficient. The AOPS are designed for operations in the Arctic near ice, and for ice capable operations. Hence their design speed is more than enough (especially with the attached helicopter) to undertake that primary task. Indeed, it would be a marvel to see any engineer design a speedy ship that can also cut through a metre of ice!

Mr. Cyr also raises an old complaint: that the ships are far too expensive as compared to the original Norwegian Svalbard design on which they are based. Indeed, the AOPS are more expensive and it is true that the Norwegians spent less than \$100 million on a similar craft while Canada will spend six times as much. Beyond that the comparison is pure apples to oranges. First, the AOPS is a larger and stronger ship with superior ice-strengthening. Additionally, and more critically, the Canadian cost also includes supporting shore-side infrastructure in home ports of Halifax and Esquimalt and the Nanisivik Naval Facility in Nunavut. As noted in the *Post* article, the AOPS cost also includes initial spare parts, technical data and training as well as ammunition, many onboard systems, and an estimate of operating and in-service support costs over 30 years. Canada also budgeted a huge contingency, which is a common element in our procurement projects.

By comparison, the \$100 million Norwegian price included subsidies to its ship-building industry, where much of its costs were hidden. Indeed, in 2014 the Canadian Parliamentary Budget Office admitted that it had no idea what the Norwegian ship's real price tag was. Appropriately the PBO concluded that there was no way that Canada could procure a Svalbard-class for anything like that oft-cited price tag.

The AOPS are extremely capable vessels that will do the job for which they were built. At this stage we are witnessing the not unexpected trials and tribulations of bringing a new class of ship into service. Ships are complex systems of systems and it takes time to work out all the bugs.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that the AOPS were not designed to be an ice capable frigate capable of power projection, nor was the overall cost of this project meant to be comparable to those of Norway or Denmark.

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