A New Maritime Security Framework: Le mieux est l’ennemi du bien, non?

Peter T. Haydon

For some reason, defence and security are difficult subjects for Canadian governments unless faced with imminent disaster. Of late, the government has also found it difficult to define a realistic place for Canada in today’s complex international system. Thus, it has been difficult to develop a consistent Canadian contribution to international security. At best, the contributions have been ad hoc and based on what was available rather than on the basis of any coherent plan.

As it happened, ad hocery has worked well because the military capabilities kept, albeit reluctantly, after the Cold War provided the government with a great deal of flexibility. The call for “multi-purpose, combat-capable forces” was a reality for a while. The status quo was good enough – at least in theory – and the government saw no need to invest in much new equipment. In practice, though, a military and security infrastructure needs constant attention if it is to remain effective. This requires that money be spent on its upkeep; something the Canadian government was reluctant to do throughout the 1993-2003 period. As a result, the military stagnated into a condition of “rust out” and started to be less effective and less flexible. In the prevailing world situation this is a recipe for disaster. As a result, the government is rapidly losing its ability to play a leading role on the world stage, at least through the use of the military.

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Fortunately, the damage being done to the Canadian Forces by the policy of planned neglect has been recognized, and the government has begun to engage in meaningful security planning. Some hold that this is too little, too late for the recovery to be meaningful. Others decry the pace of spending on new equipment as glacial and exacerbated by a bureaucratic process that adds years to the procurement process.

But let’s be positive about it – there are now plans where no plans existed before. Yes, they are still largely theoretical concepts lacking the commitment of real money to actual contracts to acquire new equipment, but some of the necessary organizational changes are beginning to happen. So, how did this all come to be?

In the policy paper Securing an Open Society: Canada’s National Security Policy (April 2004), the government committed itself to “a long-term path to enhancing the security of our country.” It was a first step in a larger process that called for a less fragmented approach to national security. Some would see this as a grand national strategy, and it did indeed provide direction for the development of a series of subordinate plans that would break down traditional interdepartmental boundaries in implementing the new “vision.” Breaking the bureaucratic rice bowls will not, however, be easy as it calls for both cultural and procedural change in the way things are done. Without specifying them, the new policy also requires new concepts of accountability and oversight. These may be even more difficult to implement – and given the already painful procurement process, may make getting military equipment take even longer.

For the military, the point of departure for the new strategy was the following statement: “Our forces must also be able to defend Canada, help secure North America, and address threats to our national security as far away from our borders as possible. Indeed, getting the right balance between domestic and international security concerns will be an important consideration in determining the roles and force structure of the Canadian Forces.” That’s a very sensible statement, just as good in fact as similar statements made in 1947 and in every defence policy and White Paper since then.

The problem, of course, is that it is an invitation to create innumerable new force structure models and re-define tasks in countless new ways. In other words, unless controlled it becomes an opportunity for the military to re-equip itself. And, as we have seen on other occasions, especially in the wake of the 1987 Defence White Paper, the services can seldom agree among themselves which new equipment to buy.

The idea of total service operational integration, today called “jointness,” was examined in Canada in the 1960s when Paul Hellyer attempted to create a “triphibious” force of navy, army and air force capabilities to support
the UN around the world. It failed because the individual services would not embrace it and, more significantly, because it was far too expensive.

That concept has been resurrected. It began with an internal plan, *Strategy 2020*, to harmonize defence spending priorities across the services to develop a truly “joint” concept of national security. The timing was wrong, the support limited, and so the plan was shelved. The new national security policy was the catalyst for a new joint vision.

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The arrival in April 2005 of the government’s International Policy Statement with a stand-alone Defence Policy Statement, *A Role of Pride and Influence in the World*, called for sweeping changes in the way Canada’s military would be structured and equipped to meet national security requirements. This is truly the military’s solution to the strategic problem posed a year earlier. With a budget that promises a great deal more money than available in the past 10 years, the new military strategy appears to be a step in the right direction.

However, the document is almost entirely theoretical and leaves the door open for a new round of inter-service rivalry in the quest for the new money – if indeed that money becomes a reality. There are a number of difficult issues to address before the theory can be put into practice. Foremost is the maritime security issue which involves determining the answers to the questions of what, where, with whom and with what.

The centrepiece of the new model is a new joint task force able to be deployed throughout the world to respond to regional instabilities – very much a return to the Hellyer concept. However, the implications of international terrorism and the growth of international organized crime are reflected in a greater awareness of domestic security.

The new vision, if it can be called that, has already generated new environmental concepts. For instance, the navy has just produced its latest strategic document *Securing Canada’s Ocean Frontiers* in which the future role of maritime forces in domestic and international operations is discussed. Picking up where its predecessor *Leadmark* left off on the eve of the September 2001 terrorist attacks, the new strategy embraces jointness, as it should, and continues to call for a “high-readiness, multi-purpose, combat capable and adaptive” fleet to meet the new mix of domestic and international requirements.

The future maritime force is seen to comprise:

- expanded Maritime Security Operations and Coordination Centres (MSOCs) that will function both with the new Canada Command concept (see the interview with Rear-Admiral McNeil in this edition) as well as internationally;
- a new generation of multi-purpose warships (called single-class surface combatants) to replace the existing destroyers and, in time, the frigates;
- new fleet support ships (the overdue Joint Support Ships) and additional ships (General Hillier’s “big, honking ships”) to support the new joint task force;
- better off-shore patrol capabilities which will not necessarily be manned by the navy alone; and
- upgraded submarine capabilities for surveillance, information management, force protection, and to support special operations.

The key statement in the new “vision” seems to be,

The Canadian Navy will have combat capable forces that can control and defend Canada’s ocean estate, protect Canadians and secure Canada’s offshore interests. It will be fully interoperable with all Government departments to resolve any maritime domestic crisis, ready to assume a leading role in the implementation and execution of Canada’s National Security Policy. It will seamlessly and jointly operate with the Army and the Air Force to bring lethal and offensive punch to a hostile shore. The Navy must be fully capable of bringing the battle to the enemy as far from Canada as necessary, assisting the Army on the ground, the Air Force in the skies, and coalition partners on the high sea or in the litoral waters of a hostile nation. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) is also moving ahead with its part of the national security policy. This is being done within the framework of the *Oceans Action Plan* with its four pillars: sovereignty and security; integrated oceans management; health of the
oceans; and technology. The sovereignty and security roles of DFO and the Coast Guard were clearly defined by Larry Murray, the Deputy Minister for DFO, at a recent Dalhousie conference. In addition to the traditional Coast Guard role of marine safety, he sees the need for independent activities in several areas including acting as transportation for the RCMP and Fisheries Protection Officers and generally contributing to the overall “maritime picture of activity” maintained by the MSOCs. Moreover, the many activities of DFO, including those of the Hydrographic Service and Arctic operations, are seen as important contributions to the maintenance of sovereignty. In some ways, this appears to be a “business as usual” approach and not specifically linked to the government’s new security initiatives.

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Is all this new? Not really. Interdepartmental cooperation at sea has been going on for years and continues to be an important factor in the broader aspects of national security. For instance, the successful July 2004 operation to arrest a drug smuggler off the coast of Newfoundland involved HMCS St. John’s, the RCMP and the Coast Guard vessel Edward Cornwallis. Nevertheless, coordination problems still exist and will for some time until the correct equipment is acquired and the necessary cross-training carried out. But it’s not just the integration of ships, it requires a major cultural change as well. One cannot expect the navy to do all the things the Coast Guard does nor the Coast Guard to do the navy’s work.

Progress will be made one step at a time but only when the entrenched departmental boundaries have been broken down. National security now encompasses everyone and there isn’t room for turf protection.

In forthcoming editions of the Canadian Naval Review we will be looking at the wide range of issues facing government as a whole in implementing an effective national maritime security strategy. We will ask some tough questions and invite people to answer them. For instance,

- How can the new Joint Task Force be best transported and supported?
- What is the best fleet mix?
- What is the most efficient way of meeting the surveillance, patrol and response requirements for maritime security?
- Can all the surface fleet requirements be met from a single hull design?
- What are the implications of new hull forms and propulsion technologies?

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More importantly, we intend to address the question, “How do we get to the new security structure from the present configuration?” Although the various government documents provide glowing longer-term visions of the future capability mix and the “joint” tasking requirements and talk broadly, some would say glibly, about transformation, none address the specifics of transition from today to tomorrow. This very necessary process will be costly and will likely expose the whole transformation process to further political scrutiny. And it is quite possible that when faced with the real total bill for the new maritime security framework, the politicians may once again put short-term domestic politics ahead of longer-term security commitments.

By holding a debate on the many contentious issues within the new defence and security strategy we hope to be able to impress upon Canadians that creating a sound maritime security framework serves their best interests in both the short and long term.

Peter Haydon is the Editor-in-Chief of the Canadian Naval Review

Notes
1. A downloadable copy can be obtained through the Canadian Navy’s home page www.navy.forces.gc.ca/ and a summary of the document will be posted to our website www.naval.review.cfps.dal.ca.
3. A copy of his remarks will be posted to our website www.naval.review.cfps.dal.ca.