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WARSHIP OF FRIENDSHIP: WHY CANADA SHOULD INVEST IN AN AMPHIBIOUS CAPABILITY

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Exercise Solo Flight

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

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INTRODUCTION

Hard or soft power? According to Joseph Nye, both types of power need to be employed by states in order to meet the challenges that will be faced in the future security environment. Nye describes this balancing of hard and soft power mechanisms as smart power and indicates that its use "...is about finding ways to combine resources into successful strategies in the new context of power diffusion and the 'rise of the rest'."¹ Throughout his article, Nye highlights that smart power strategies, specifically those employed by the United States (US), are necessary to combat the myriad of global threats the international community will face in the future security environment.² This smart power is a form of international thinking that requires immediate attention by Canada in order to counter future threats and needs in both the domestic and international contexts.

The theme of Liberal Party of Canada's 2015 election platform was "sunny ways."³ It was an election platform that was based on traditional liberalism ideology that may, perhaps, have been attempt to regress to the altruistic Canada that existed in the latter half of the last century. Regrettably, the Liberal platform's point of view, although commendable enough, does not prepare Canada to counter many threats currently faced in the international environment of the 21st century.⁴

Therefore, the question remains as to how Canada will counter future security threats both domestically and internationally in the future. There are those that suggest that the use of

¹ Joseph S. Nye, "Smart Power", in *The Future of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 207-208.

² *Ibid.*, 207-234.

³ The Liberal Party of Canada, "The 'Sunny Way'," last accessed 9 May 2016, <https://www.liberal.ca/the-sunny-way/>

⁴ Department of National Defence, *The Future Security Environment 2008-2030*. (Kingston: National Defence, 2009).

hard power is the only means, while others, such as the current Liberal Government of Canada, suggest that the use of soft power is the solution.

In this essay, I argue that investment in an amphibious capability will provide the Government of Canada, regardless of its political affiliation, an instrument to achieve both hard and soft power requirements. An amphibious capability is a *smart choice* for any government regardless of their political philosophy. I will argue such by providing evidence that an amphibious capability will provide Canada a hard power means that will enhance the Canadian Forces (CF) joint capability, effectiveness in the littoral environment and the speed and flexibility at which the Government of Canada can deploy forces. Secondly, I will argue that such a capability will meet the mobility and capacity requirements for the CF and could fulfill a “sunny ways” approach, by providing humanitarian relief both at home and abroad.

A FLEXIBLE HARD POWER CAPABILITY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

The 2005 Defence Policy Statement (DPS) and the 2008 Canada First Defence Strategy (CFDS) both emphasized the need for the CF to be capable of conducting expeditionary operations.⁵ Complimentary to the release of these strategies for the future of the CF, then Chief of Defence Staff, General Rick Hillier, implemented his vision to transform the CF into a more efficient and operationally focused institution. According to Jeffrey, a key aspect of Hillier’s vision was, “...the development of an integrated CF culture, resulting in focused and integrated effects in operations to ensure all elements of the CF were able to contribute effectively to the mission.”⁶ As part of this overall transformation, the Standing Contingency Task Force (SCTF)

⁵ Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces, “Canada’s International Policy Statement,” last accessed 9 May 2016, <http://publications.gc.ca/collections/Collection/D2-168-2005E.pdf>; Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces, “Canada First Defence Strategy,” last accessed 9 May 2016, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/about/canada-first-defence-strategy.page>

⁶ Canadian Military Journal, “Inside Canadian Forces Transformation,” last accessed 9 May 2016, <http://www.journal.forces.gc.ca/vol10/no2/04-jeffery-eng.asp>

was stood-up as a means of providing a rapid, flexible, integrated and truly joint expeditionary and amphibious capability to the CF. At the heart of the SCTF, was the Joint Support Ship (JSS), a platform that, according to Hillier, would “...help build a truly ‘joint’ navy, army and air force capability.”⁷

Over the course of the last decade, the SCTF was stood down and the concept for a JSS has been reviewed, amended and transformed from its original capability to deliver a truly joint and expeditionary capability for the CF. Although Canada has once again rejected the notion of an amphibious capability in the near future, the arguments in favour of such remain valid for consideration in the current and future security environment.

By its very nature, an amphibious capability in the CF would ensure a joint force with increased efficiency and combat capability at the operational and tactical levels, according to Nolan.⁸ Messenger also states that, “Development of amphibious expertise would increase awareness of joint operations and improve service interoperability.”⁹ Although the CF currently claims to be a joint force, there is no one capability or platform that unites all elements of the CF into a joint force at the tactical level. As a result, there exists a capability gap within the forces where “...differences in doctrine, tactical command and control systems, communications systems, and training, tactics and procedures (TTPs), are still prevalent between the army, navy and air force at the tactical level”.¹⁰

The addition of an amphibious platform would close the capability gap that currently exists in the CF as the elements of the forces would have no other choice but to integrate their

⁷ Helicopter News, “Canada Looking To Buy Medium Lift Helicopters, Support Ships, Trucks,” last accessed 9 May 2016, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/202799446?pq-origsite=summon>

⁸ K.R. Nolan, “Justifying the Need for an Amphibious Capability in the Canadian Armed Forces” (Joint Command and Staff Program Paper, Canadian Forces College, 2016), 2.

⁹ G.K. Messenger, “Flexible, Capable and Relevant: An Amphibious Force for Canada” (Command and Staff College New Horizons Paper, Canadian Forces College, 1995), 13.

¹⁰ Nolan, *Justifying the Need...*, 2.

doctrine and tactics in order to achieve success in missions assigned by the Government of Canada. It would also prepare the CF for future operations in the littoral environment and transform any thinking amongst personnel that land, sea and air wars exist in isolation and the means to counter such are only through army, navy and air force assets respectively.

The littoral will become an increasing area of operations for the CF in the future. As noted by Vego,

70 percent of the world's population live[s] within 200 miles of the coastline and some 80 per cent of the world's capitals lie within 300 miles of the sea. Some 60 per cent of politically significant urban areas around the world are located within 25 miles of the coastline or 75 per cent of these areas are located within 150 miles.¹¹

Given these facts and the increasing threats being posed by non-state, terrorist and piracy organizations throughout the world, it is increasingly likely that international states can expect threats to increase in the littoral environment. With increased globalization and with it, increased reliance by states on the economic trade imports and exports to ensure prosperity within the global environment, it would be naïve to believe that terrorist and piracy groups would not target ports, shipping or other targets of opportunity within the littoral environment to pursue their economic or ideological means. As Hanlon puts it, we can expect “chaos in the littorals” to weaken both the global economy and power of states in the future.¹²

Despite the increasing evidence that the littoral will be a crucial area of operations in the future, Canada has been reluctant to invest in an amphibious capability to meet future security challenges in such an environment. This reluctance may be attributed to

¹¹ Milan N. Vego, *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1999), 184.

¹² Edward Hanlon, “Taking the Long View: Littoral Warfare Challenges,” in *The Role of Naval Forces in 21st Century Operations*, ed. Richard H. Shultz and Robert Pfaltzgraff, 155-161 (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 2000), 155.

fiscal and budgetary constraints, political unwillingness to commit to a hard power amphibious platform, or perhaps to Canada's most recent engagement in the land locked country of Afghanistan, where an amphibious platform would not have provided any operational contribution.

It would be both irresponsible and a strategic error for the Government of Canada and the CF to rely on recent combat operations in Afghanistan as the basis for determining the future acquisition of an amphibious capability. As noted by Couturier, "...an amphibious element could have been employed in situations such as Somalia, East Timor, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire and Haiti."¹³ These areas of past CF operations fall within the littoral definition provided by Vego and demonstrate missions where the CF could have effectively employed an amphibious capability had one existed.

What benefits would a CF amphibious capability have brought to bear in such operational environments? The answer, quite simply put, is flexibility. An amphibious force can deploy without actually infiltrating another state. Its flexibility is achieved through its inherent mobility and trans-littoral manoeuvre.¹⁴ The flexible nature of an amphibious capability has also been highlighted by Messenger who states that, "Once committed, it [the amphibious force] conducts operations at the tactical level but, by re-embarking and redeploying, it can revert to the operational level."¹⁵ In addition to its ability to revert to and from offensive operations ashore, an amphibious capability would establish a forward operations base or headquarters for all elements of the CF that is: a.

¹³ Gilles Couturier, "The Need for an Amphibious Force for Canada", in *Marines: is an Amphibious Capability Relevant for Canada?*, ed. Ann L. Griffiths and Kenneth P. Hansen (Halifax: Dalhousie University Centre for Foreign Policy Studies, 2008), 54.

¹⁴ Jon Allsopp, "Beyond JSS: Analyzing Canada's Amphibious Requirement" (Joint Command and Staff Program Master in Defence Studies, Canadian Forces College, 2007), 44.

¹⁵ G.K. Messenger, "Flexible, Capable and Relevant: An Amphibious Force for Canada" (Command and Staff College New Horizons Paper, Canadian Forces College, 1995), 9.

already established through joint training; b. provides mobility for ever changing circumstances; and c. is prepared to meet the challenges of the “3 block war” outlined in the 2005 DPS.¹⁶

There are those, however, who feel that the addition of an amphibious capability to the CF order of battle (ORBAT) would weaken the ability of the CF to counter conventional threats. Plaschka, for example, indicates that the introduction of an amphibious capability would have detrimental effects on the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) that would “...necessitate a change in fleet role.”¹⁷ Regrettably, Plaschka’s argument, although provided in 2007, provides further amplification of the resistance of elements of the CF to change current mindsets with regards to conventional threats that can only be countered by the army, navy or air force. Although Plaschka delves into great detail as to the detrimental impact an amphibious capability would have, on the navy in particular, he fails to consider how a platform would enhance operations in a joint capacity or the mobility such a platform would provide the CF. An amphibious capability would not be a navy capability; it would be a joint capability that would require ownership and support from all services of the CF. Although an amphibious platform floats, it also flies and lands ground forces ashore.

In conclusion, the cost versus benefit of an amphibious capability for the use of hard power requires further investigation. Is it more worthwhile to have a joint force capable of delivering effects ashore with an established joint headquarters already in place, or more worthwhile to continue to reinvent the wheel ashore in areas of conflict

¹⁶ Elinor C. Sloan, *Security and Defence in the Terrorist Era: Canada and North America* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005), 113.

¹⁷ M.F. Plaschka, “The Proposed Amphibious Ship Purchase – A Strategic Misstep” Joint Command and Staff Program Master in Defence Studies Paper, Canadian Forces College, 2007), 7.

and spend taxpayers dollars building forward operating bases that offer no flexibility or mobility? Further fiscal analysis beyond the scope of this paper is required, however, evidence provided thus far, demonstrates that the benefits of an amphibious capability far outweigh the costs of such for the Government of Canada.

FROM HARD TO SOFT POWER

Mobility

In addition to the flexibility that an amphibious platform would provide the CF, it would also provide the Government of Canada the ability to rapidly deploy personnel and equipment throughout the world. Such mobility could be employed for any number of missions that could be assigned to the CF along the spectrum of conflict. As previously mentioned, Sloan has highlighted that Canada can expect to be engaged in a “3 block war” in the future that encompasses war fighting, stabilization operations and humanitarian assistance missions.¹⁸ Should Canada be engaged in such a “3 block war”, either by deliberate deployment or by changing circumstances in a mission already assigned, an amphibious platform would provide the means for the transport of CF assets within and beyond the theatre of operations.

According to then Minister of National Defence, Gordon O’Connor, in 2006, “Mobility is an essential capability that the men and women of the Canadian Forces need to get the job done.”¹⁹ Although Canada has historically relied upon commercially contracted vessels to transport CF personnel and equipment, the lack of an amphibious capability with ship to shore connectors limits the CF ability to reach or land forces in non-permissive environments. A non-permissive environment can have a range of

¹⁸ Sloan, *Security and Defence...*, 113.

¹⁹ Helicopter News, “Canada Looking To Buy Medium Lift Helicopters, Support Ships, Trucks,” last accessed 9 May 2016, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/202799446?pq-origsite=summon>

meanings, however. It could include a region where the infrastructure has never existed to land forces via commercial sea lift means, or a region where conflict or a natural disaster has damaged port infrastructure beyond the means necessary to berth commercial assets. Harper reinforces these points and states that "...we [Canada] need some kind of transport system to transfer cargo from the ship at anchor to a jetty without relying on local resources."²⁰ He goes further to state that although the CF has managed to land equipment and supplies in the past into regions such as Somalia and East Timor, Canada has done so in an ad hoc fashion and that there will be a greater need for such capacity in the future.²¹

Contrary to the arguments provided in favour of Canada's acquisition of an amphibious capability to deliver forces ashore in non-permissive environments, those such as Green state that amphibious forces are unable to enter any and all littoral environments. Green points to the US landing in Grenada in 1983 as an example, where "...the landing...had to be amended to an air assault at the last minute because the beaches were found to be unsatisfactory for an amphibious landing."²² Green also indicates that amphibious forces are vulnerable to other threats in the littoral environment, as evidenced by the Iraqi's use of sea mines during Operation Desert Storm that "...foiled[ed] an amphibious attack."²³ In addition, if the littoral environment is such a threatening and non-permissive domain, why should Canada even contemplate entering such to insert forces into a war torn or disaster stricken area, especially when the CF already possess strategic airlift capacity in the form of the CC-117 Globemaster.

²⁰ Dave Harper, "Multi-Role Sealift for Canada," in *Strategic Lift Options for Canada and the Allies*, ed. David Rudd, Ewa Petruczynik and Alexander Wooley (Toronto: Canadian Institute for Strategic Studies, 2005), 79.

²¹ Ibid.

²² G.P. Green, "Should Canada Consider an Amphibious Capability?" (Command and Staff Course New Horizons Paper, Canadian Forces College, 1996), 6.

²³ Ibid.

One need not go back too far in history to answer these questions. The non-combatant evacuation operation (NEO) that was conducted from Lebanon by Canada in 2006 demonstrated that sea lines of communication are sometimes the only means to achieve mission success. According to the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, “A decision was made by Canadian officials to conduct the evacuation by sea routes as the Beirut airport was incapacitated and land routes were deemed to be too dangerous.”²⁴ The Senate Committee also highlighted that there was significant damage to the transportation infrastructure in Lebanon at the time of the NEO that limited options for the evacuation operation.²⁵

Another factor in the NEO was the sheer volume of Canadian citizens that required evacuation. At the time of the outbreak of hostilities in July 2006, there were some 40 000 Canadian citizens residing in Lebanon. Although only 14 000 of those were eventually evacuated from the country, had the Government of Canada had to evacuate all 40 000 citizens, it would have taken a significant amount of time to do so employing strategic airlift only. As noted by Thomas, the capacity of a large vessel is “...equivalent to hundreds of flights of C-17 transport aircraft...”²⁶ and such capacity can achieve rapid means for an evacuation. An amphibious capability would have provided the flexibility, mobility, capacity and control to execute the NEO. As noted by Harper, there is no guaranteed access to leased vessels or to their agreement “...to sail into a crisis area.”²⁷ Had the littoral situation deteriorated any further off the coast of Lebanon in 2006, it is

²⁴ House of Commons, Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, “The Evacuation of Canadians from Lebanon in July 2006: Implications for the Government of Canada,” last accessed 9 May 2016, <http://www.parl.gc.ca/content/sen/committee/391/fore/rep/rep12may07-e.pdf>

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Canadian Naval Review, “Naval Support to Disaster Relief/Humanitarian Assistance?” last accessed 6 February 2016, <http://www.navalreview.ca/2010/01/naval-support-to-disaster-reliefhumanitarian-assistance/>

²⁷ Harper, *Multi-Role Sealift...*, 79.

unlikely commercial shipping could have been used for the evacuation. An amphibious platform would have almost assured that Canada could have evacuated its citizens had such a scenario occurred.

Capacity for “Sunny Ways”

It has thus far been demonstrated that the addition of an amphibious capability to the CF ORBAT would enhance the forces’ joint capacity, increase its ability to operate in the littoral, provide tactical and operational flexibility and provide the CF with the organic means to execute missions in non-permissive operating environments. As we examine the spectrum of conflict and the anticipation that Canada will be ever more involved in a “3 block war” in the future, an amphibious capacity could also provide the Government of Canada the means to execute humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations globally and at home. The addition of such a grey hull cannot be viewed solely on its ability to wage war and there have been numerous natural disasters over the past decade where nations have employed their amphibious platforms to achieve “sunny ways”. During the Asian tsunami in 2004, for example, Commodore (Retired) Lehre highlights that those nations that possessed an amphibious capability were capable of responding to the disaster the fastest.²⁸ Lehre also points out that, “...many of Canada’s allies in NATO or in the G-8 have or are about to acquire an amphibious capability,” and that if Canada wishes to contribute to global security in the future, the acquisition of an amphibious platform may very well be the answer.²⁹

²⁸ David Pugliese, “Canada Delays Special Forces Development,” *Defense News*, 19 March 2007.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

As mentioned, Canada has contributed to HADR operations over the last 30 years in an ad hoc manner by using assets available in the CF ORBAT.³⁰ During the 2005 HADR mission in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina, the RCN deployed a destroyer and two frigates to the south-eastern and gulf coasts of the US. Regrettably, at that time, the RCN's only east coast replenishment vessel, *Preserver*, "...was just emerging from refit and not available for operations."³¹ Instead, the Government of Canada deployed the Canadian Coast Guard Ship (CCGS) *Sir William Alexander* with the RCN's task group (TG) to carry the bulk of relief supplies for the operation. Of the many challenges that faced the Canadian TG and the CCG ship, two of those included the ability to transfer relief supplies ashore and the navigational uncertainty in the littoral environment. Although the TG possessed organic air assets and boats, the majority of cargo needed to be off-loaded in port. Given the devastation following Katrina, there was significant uncertainty if the entrances to the ports could be transited due to the navigational obstructions in the harbours. In addition, a significant amount of port infrastructure had been damaged in the hurricane, and it took time to confirm safe ports for berthing and off-load of supplies. Six years later, the RCN would face similar challenges off the coast of Haiti where the Canadian TG was forced to rely on their helicopters and ship's boats to get required relief supplies ashore. Yves Engler was critical of the RCN TG contribution in Haiti and indicated that the ships *Athabaskan* and *Halifax* lacked carrying capacity and carried limited relief supplies to Haiti.³²

³⁰ Harper, *Multi-Role Sealift...*, 79.

³¹ Canadian Naval Review, "Naval Support to Disaster Relief/Humanitarian Assistance?" last accessed 6 February 2016, <http://www.navalreview.ca/2010/01/naval-support-to-disaster-reliefhumanitarian-assistance/>

³² Engler, "The Ugly Reality of Canadian Aid to Haiti", *Rabble.ca* (blog), 21 August 2015, <http://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/yves-engler/2015/08/ugly-reality-canadian-aid-to-haiti>

An amphibious capability would have significantly increased Canada's contribution in the aftermath of both hurricane Katrina and the earthquake in Haiti. Such vessels possess the capacity to carry large amounts of stores and relief supplies and have large landing craft vessels that can carry stores and personnel ashore to any beachhead. In addition, most amphibious vessels carry numerous rotary wing aircraft that could also provide the ship to shore connectors required in the absence of port or airfield infrastructure.

It is highly likely that Canada will be involved in future HADR operations. In fact, there is a strong likelihood that such an operation may have to be undertaken off the west coast of Canada given Vancouver's frequent and ever increasing seismic activity. Although Canada has contributed to HADR operations in an ad hoc manner in the past in foreign states, it has relied far too much on the amphibious capacities of contributing nations such as the US to deliver effect ashore. The addition of an amphibious capability would prepare Canada for future HADR missions in the littoral, particularly should a natural disaster hit Canada's coastline. In such a case, the citizens of Canada will expect the Government not only to deliver relief but to ensure rapid and effective action is undertaken.

CONCLUSION

This paper has demonstrated that the addition of an amphibious capability would provide Canada flexibility, mobility and capacity to counter future threats at home and abroad. An amphibious platform can be employed as a hard or soft power and provides the Government of Canada a wide array of options. It can counter the threat posed in a combat operation or deliver "sunny-ways" depending on the mission assigned.

The debate continues as to whether Canada needs an amphibious capability and, given the history of the topic in this country, it does not appear that the argument will end anytime soon. In the meantime, opportunities to fill this capability gap in the CF, such as the recent availability of the French Mistral Class to Canada, come and go.³³ Hopefully, in the future, the necessity to acquire this capability will be understood in order to give Canada the smart tool it needs to face the future security environment.

³³ CBC News, “Top general and defence bureaucrat were at odds over whether to buy French warships,” last accessed 9 May 2016, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/navy-defence-ships-purchase-france-mistral-1.3435803>

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