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ROLE SPECIALIZATION: A WAY AHEAD FOR THE RCN?

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ROLE SPECIALIZATION: A WAY AHEAD FOR THE RCN?

AIM

1. This service paper will discuss the concept of *Role Specialization*¹ and its applicability for the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN). It will analyze the concept and present arguments as to whether or not the RCN should focus on certain warfare areas or activities² to the detriment of all remaining ones. For the purpose of this service paper, only the capabilities that are already present within the RCN will be considered. It will not speculate about possible implementation of future capability³ or capabilities offered by other services.⁴ Also, it is outside of the scope of this service paper to determine which specific niche should be adopted. It will only discuss the validity of the concept.

INTRODUCTION

2. Traditionally, the RCN senior officers believed the Navy's contribution to Canada's security and strategic objectives necessitated a Fleet which included a combination of balanced capabilities in all areas of warfare. Since the decommissioning of Her Majesty Canadian Ship (HMCS) *Bonaventure* in 1970,⁵ the RCN operated a Fleet of multi-purpose warships supported by Auxiliary Oil Replenishment (AOR) vessels, submarines and a limited mine-countermeasure capability. With the increase complexity of naval construction and the rising cost of modern warfare technology, fleet modernization and new procurement projects have become a

¹ *Role Specialization* is also known as niche capability. Both terms will be used throughout this service paper.

² In the context of this paper, eight types of warfare or activities were considered. Included in this selection is Area Air Defence, Anti-Air Warfare (AAW), Anti-Surface Warfare (ASuW), Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW), Constabulary role including Maritime Interdiction Operations, Mine Warfare (MW), Logistical operations including Replenishment at Sea (RAS) and Submarine operations.

³ Activities such as Anti-Ballistic missile defence, Amphibious operations or Carriers operations.

⁴ Capabilities offered by other services includes assets such as Maritime Helicopters (MH), Long Range Patrol Aircraft (LRPA) or Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV).

⁵ Veterans Affairs Canada, "The Post-War Years," Last modified 08 December 2014, http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/canadian-armed-forces/royal-canadian-navy/post_war.

significant issue for the GOC. An August 2014 Defence Research and Development – Canada (DRDC) report stated that:

The procurement of naval vessels is an immensely complex undertaking. The multi-year process involves the exploration of capability requirements, the assessment of new and emerging technologies, and the application of these and other considerations to an evolving strategic maritime landscape. The process is often characterized by fixed funding envelopes and pressure to preserve indigenous industrial capability, thereby maximizing value for domestic suppliers. The costs associated with building a new generation of naval vessels is a matter of deep concern for the Government of Canada (GoC) and the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN). While the 2008 Canadian First Defence Strategy (CFDS) calls for the renewal of the RCN's surface fleet, concerns have been recently raised about the feasibility of these plans given expected resources.⁶

This increase in cost and complexity led critics to express concerns with the direction taken for Fleet renewal.

3. For example, Bernard J Brister wondered if it is not time for Canada to “consider the development of certain *niche capabilities*”.⁷ Other such as Andrew Harmes stated that the GOC's plan to proceed with the acquisition of conventional warships and AORs as well as maintaining a fleet of submarines was an error in judgement. He suggested an approach that would include a more robust Joint Support Ship (JSS) Capability and a fleet of Hybrid Coastal vessel.⁸ Other critics such as Craig Hooper even stated that:

The current global crop of “conventional” frigates ... has reached something of a developmental dead end... [and correspond to an] investment...that is totally out of proportion to any subsequent gains in the platform's overall combat capability/survivability.⁹

When considering the different opinions stated above and the fact that reducing cost of acquisition is an extremely attractive proposition for GOC, the option of niche capability must be

⁶ David Rudd, *Military Off-the-Shelf*, (Ottawa: Defence Research & Development Canada - CORA, 2014): 1.

⁷ Bernard J. Brister, “Canadian Special Operations Forces: a Blueprint for the Future,” *Canadian Military Journal*, (Autumn 2004): 30

⁸ Andrew Harmes, “Navigating the NSPS: A Case for the JSS and Hybrid Coastal Vessels,” *Canadian Naval Review* volume 10, no. 1 (2014): 22.

⁹ Craig Hooper, “Conventional Frigates are Dead Ships Sailing,” Next Navy, Future Maritime Security (blog), 19 May 2014, <http://nextnavy.com/conventional-frigates-are-dead-ships-sailing/#>.

evaluated. In doing so, this service paper will first provide a quick definition of what is intended by *Role Specialization*. Next, it will establish some assumptions regarding the Ambition of GOC, the Future Security Environment and the capabilities needed for future RCN missions. Finally, this service paper will discuss some advantages and disadvantages of niche capability as it applies to Canada and from this discussion derive a recommendation.

DISCUSSION

4. In order to properly discuss this issue, the first step is to understand exactly what is meant by *Role Specialization*.

Definition

5. When discussing the subject, one must be clear about the intended meaning of *Role Specialization*. There are some defence analysts, such as Bryan McGrath, who believe Canada already possess a niche navy as they lack the ability to conduct power projection. In an article he wrote for the American Enterprise Institute, he made the following statement regarding the German Navy:

Examining the major navies of America's European allies reveals a general desire, with the exception of Germany, to maintain a broad spectrum of naval capabilities, including carriers, submarines, and surface combatants... The Germany Navy—unlike the Royal and French Navies—does not have a desire to be a balanced force capable of significant power projection, amphibious operations, and strategic deterrence. As its aims have been historically more modest, they have been more capable of being supported. And to the extent that Germany continues to support NATO maritime operations of a largely constabulary nature, Germany's contributions to NATO remain consistent.¹⁰

When considering the similarity between German and Canadian naval capabilities, anyone sharing his opinion would conclude the RCN is already a niche navy. If we compare the RCN to some of the larger navies in the world, it is obvious it is lacking in capabilities. However, this

¹⁰ Bryan McGrath, "NATO at Sea: Trends in Allied Naval Power," *American Enterprise Institute*, (18 September 2013): 2, 8, <https://www.aei.org/publication/nato-at-sea-trends-in-allied-naval-power/>.

argument is taken outside the Canadian context. Factors such as demographic baseline, geographic conditions as well as economic, social and political factors determines the personnel and material requirements of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF). If this service paper is to compare the RCN to those larger navies, it would disregard Canadian perspectives. Therefore, this paper will use the concept of *Role Specialization* that disregard comparison between the RCN and other navies. It will focus on the requirement to eliminate one or more of the RCN warfare capabilities considering only the Canadian context. Next, with this definition in hand, this service paper will establish some key assumptions.

Assumptions

6. In this section, this paper will extrapolate on the possible operations that might be conducted by the RCN in the future. In order to do so, it will make some assumptions concerning the GOC level of ambition, the Future Security Environment, and the minimal needs for operations.

GOC's level of ambition

7. When trying to determine the GOC's level of ambition concerning foreign policy and use of military forces, looking at the most recent policy statement is a useful beginning. The latest CAF policy paper, the Canada First Defence Strategy (CFDS), specifically establish three priorities: Defending Home, Defending North America and Contributing to International Peace and Security.¹¹

8. But policies can change over time especially when new political parties assumed power. In order to better forecast the future level of ambition, one must take the additional step of analysing past government decisions and try to distinguish any similar patterns that will likely predict

¹¹ National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, "Canada First Defence Strategy - Summary," last modified 20 August 2013, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/about/canada-first-defence-strategy-summary.page>.

future political intentions. When considering defence and foreign policy decisions taken since the beginning of the 20th century, in addition to defence of Canada and North America, a strategic tradition of Forward Security is evident. As explained by Sean M. Maloney, “Forward Security involves the deployment of Canadian Military forces oversea to ensure that violent international activity is kept as far away from North America as possible and that Canadian interest overseas are protected”.¹² Based on these observations, one can assume that the RCN will require both a domestic and expeditionary capability. One can also assume that GOC will require the RCN to be deployable across the globe. Next, this service paper will review the different references concerning the Future Security Environment to determine justifiable assumptions.

Future Security Environment

9. Since the beginning of 21st century, the world has significantly changed. As stated in the 2005 update to *Leadmark*, “the security environment is defined by two characteristics: surprised and uncertainty”.¹³ The last two decades saw a change from conventional warfare to asymmetric threats. The event of 9/11 and follow on military interventions involved “primarily guerrilla conflicts in traditional societies... [that] are often partially sponsored or inspired by transnational extremist groups”.¹⁴ However, the possibility of state on state conflict still remains present as Chief of Force Development (CFD) stated:

The geopolitical changes described...underscores the continuing strategic relevance of interstate conflict. Some studies of conflict trends argue that the likelihood of interstate war has declined: some go so far as to suggest that the era of state-on-state violence might be nearing its end. Alongside empirical evidence of such a trend, there are indications to the contrary. Perhaps the most salient is that governments themselves do not seem to accept that the trend-line is certain to continue and,

¹² Sean M. Maloney, “The Canadian Tao of Conflict,” In *Forging a Nation: Perspective on the Canadian Military Experience*, ed. Bernd Horn (St-Cathrines: Vanwell Publishing, 2002), 275.

¹³ Royal Canadian Navy, *Securing Canada’s Ocean Frontiers: Charting the Course from Leadmark*, (Ottawa: National Defence Head Quarter, 2005), 13.

¹⁴ David, Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla, Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York:Oxford University Press, 2009), XIV.

indeed, some very powerful states have deviated from what the trend indicates. As the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia demonstrate, states will wage war when it is determined that the ends justify the means.¹⁵

That being said, CFD also states that “irregular warfare will continue to feature heavily”¹⁶ in future conflicts and that the CAF should expect a combination of conventional, irregular and hybrid¹⁷ warfare. In addition, the RCN should expect to conduct non-combat mission such as humanitarian assistance¹⁸ and support to civilian authorities or Other Government Departments (OGDs) as part of the *whole-of-government* approach.¹⁹ These types of mission will cover operations across the full Spectrum of Conflict²⁰ as defined in *Land Operations*.²¹ Based on the information presented above, this service paper will assume the RCN roles and functions for the 21st century as expressed in the latest revision of Leadmark (see figure 1) remains valid. Next, the service paper will make assumptions regarding capability requirements.

¹⁵ Chief of Force Development, *The Future Security Environment 2013-2040*, (Ottawa: National Defence Head Quarter, 2014), 90.

¹⁶ Ibid, 93.

¹⁷ Hybrid warfare is defined as the blending of conventional and irregular (or asymmetric) approaches to warfare. See *The Future Security Environment 2013-2040* p. 93.

¹⁸ Chief of Force Development, *The Future Security Environment 2013-2040*, (Ottawa: National Defence Head Quarter, 2014), 27.

¹⁹ Royal Canadian Navy, *Securing Canada's Ocean Frontiers: Charting the Course from Leadmark*, (Ottawa: National Defence Head Quarter, 2005), 16.

²⁰ Ibid, 15.

²¹ Canadian Army, *Land Operations*, (Kingston: Chief on Land Staff, 2008), 3-9.

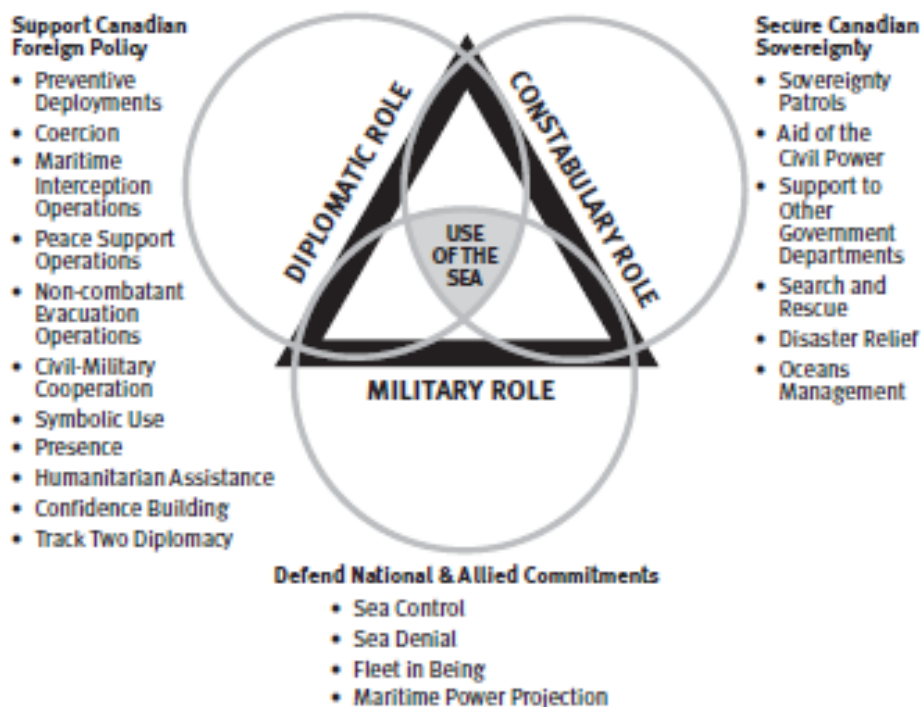


Figure 1 – Canadian Naval Role and Functions for the 21st Century

Source: Royal Canadian Navy, Securing Canada's Ocean Frontiers: Charting the Course from Leadmark, 18

Capabilities needed for future RCN missions

10. In a previous section, there was mention of eight primary warfare areas and activities essential to mission success at sea. Based on CFD's assessment in *The Future Security Environment 2013-2040*, the characteristic of operations at sea, the key geographic features of the Canadian's ocean frontiers, and the present and forecasted GOC's foreign policies, it is expected that all these warfare areas and activities will remain essential in the foreseeable future.

11. Therefore, the RCN will need to conduct operations in all warfare areas and activities. In order to do so, it will either need to possess the necessary equipment to carry out its missions or request assistance from an ally (US, NATO or five eyes) using the concept of share capabilities

as defined by Antonin Novotny.²² The use of a civilian contractor or OGDs to provide missing capabilities will not be considered in this service paper as this would require additional financial investment by GOC and not meet the need for budget saving.²³ Now that all assumptions have been established, the next section will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of niche capability.

Advantages and disadvantages

12. Based on the assumptions made above, one of the key points that need to be established when discussing *Role Specialization* is where the RCN would acquire the missing capabilities. Of all of Canada's allies, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)²⁴ is the only one that has specifically discussed *Role Specialization*. At the Munich Security Conference in 2011, NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen presented a new approach to defence spending in a time of economic uncertainty.²⁵ This approach is known as the Smart Defence.

13. Smart Defence is an amalgamation of different ideas and initiatives designed to help NATO allies achieve maximal use of their defence budget. Some of these initiatives include common training opportunities and cooperation in Research & Development to name but a few.²⁶ But the one that is of interest to this paper is *Role Specialization* (or also called *Specialization* in

²² Antonin Novotny, "Smart Defence – A New Way of Looking at the Capabilities of the Alliance," *Centre of European and North Atlantic Affairs*, (2012): 6-7, http://cenaa.org/analysis/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Novotny_final.pdf.

²³ It is understood that on some occasions, using a contractor to provide a service even if it necessitate additional investments may result in long term savings. But, as the author did not have access to the required financial data, it was assessed as falling outside the scope of this paper. The subject of use of contractors would be worthy of further study.

²⁴ The use of the words NATO allies specifically focus on the European allies within NATO. It is understood that the US is also part of NATO but due to the special relation between Canada and the US and the size of US forces, niche capability using US forces will be discuss in its own section.

²⁵ NATO Multimedia Library, "Smart Defence: Home," last modified 30 January 2016, <http://www.natolibguides.info/smartdefence>.

²⁶ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Smart Defence," Last modified 01 September 2015, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-92D4EB92-8C07135F/natolive/topics_84268.htm.

NATO terminology). The idea is not new as it has been debated in one way or another since the early 1990s.²⁷ But as part of Smart Defence, *Specialization* is defined as follow:

With budgets under pressure, nations often make unilateral decisions when shaping their equipment plans. When this happens, other nations can fall under an increased obligation to maintain certain capabilities. Such specialisation "by default" is the inevitable result of uncoordinated budget cuts. NATO should encourage specialisation "by design" so that members concentrate on their national strengths and agree to coordinate planned defence budget cuts with the Allies.²⁸

So, using this concept the RCN could focus, for example, on ASW and rely on its NATO Partners for AORs services allowing the GOC to terminate the JSS project and save the initial purchase cost of \$2.6 billion and the additional \$1.9 billion for the 30 years in-service support contract.²⁹

14. This approach could prove beneficial for many reasons. First, this would give NATO allies a better chance to rebalance their defence budget.³⁰ In addition, it would allow NATO navies “to reduce the gap with the United States by equipping themselves with capabilities that are deemed to be critical, deployable and sustainable... [as well as demonstrating] political determination to achieve that goal”.³¹ By focussing everyone efforts, NATO would also potentially acquire some capabilities such as Anti-ballistic defence and precision ammunitions it did not have without the involvement of the United States (US) forces.³²

²⁷ Antonin Novotny, “Smart Defence – A New Way of Looking at the Capabilities of the Alliance,” *Centre of European and North Atlantic Affairs*, (2012): 6-7, http://cenaa.org/analysis/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Novotny_final.pdf.

²⁸ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “Smart Defence,” Last modified 01 September 2015, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-92D4EB92-8C07135F/natolive/topics_84268.htm.

²⁹ David Pugliese, “DND document suggests rising costs put new navy support ships at risk,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 24 June 2015.

³⁰ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “Smart Defence,” Last modified 01 September 2015, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-92D4EB92-8C07135F/natolive/topics_84268.htm.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

15. But as enticing these benefits could prove, there are major limitations GOC and the RCN must consider first. In his essay on Smart Defence, Antonin Novotny dress a list of some of these consequences:

By specialization the Allies will risk the following consequences:

- Significant reduction of their long-term strategic flexibility;
- Even greater transfer of their political freedom to act into the hands of other states;
- Inability to continue providing highly visible (“sexy”) capabilities to NATO’s international missions;
- Suffering of their defence industries;
- Loss of their ability to join non-NATO operations, led for instance by the UN or the EU; [and]
- Loss of their ability to prepare officers with proper qualifications to function in an operational environment in NATO’s various headquarters – thus leaving it to only the big member states to man the posts concerned in a qualified way.³³

In addition, the RCN may not be able to count on NATO support all the time. For example, there have been cases when close NATO allies have been at odds with the GOC position. This was the case in 1995 during the Turbot War which saw Spain and Canada in a political struggle over fishing stock off Newfoundland.³⁴ If a situation as such would happen again, it is unlikely NATO would intervene to support either side which means RCN would face some significant limitation.

16. Finally, even if there was no issue getting NATO support, this concept is far more attractive to European allies based on their close proximity. In the event of a domestic situation requiring a missing capability, the RCN would need to wait for the European assets to cross the Atlantic in order to receive help. This wait might be manageable in the Atlantic but would have

³³ Antonin Novotny, “Smart Defence – A New Way of Looking at the Capabilities of the Alliance,” *Centre of European and North Atlantic Affairs*, (2012): 4, http://cenaa.org/analysis/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Novotny_final.pdf.

³⁴ Lisa Anderson, “Depleted Fish Stocks Spark Canada's Turbot War with Spain,” *The Chicago Tribune*, 19 March 1995.

devastating consequences for the Pacific and the Arctic. This delay would likely be the difference between success and failure making it an unacceptable risk to the GOC.

17. But some of the proponents of niche capability will likely point out our close proximity and political link with our southern neighbour, the US. As the country which “far outspends the next six highest spending nations,”³⁵ the US is not considering reducing warfare capabilities any time soon. The US Navy (USN) is the largest naval force in the world³⁶ and it may be attractive for GOC to rely on them to reduce some of the RCN capabilities.

18. That being said, this concept of relying on the USN for support is flawed and comes with a cost that is not politically acceptable. One of the reasons it would not work is the fact that US government may have their own priorities that will not coincide with those of Canada. It is likely that the US “would involve itself in the defence of Canada, if only for its own self-interest.”³⁷ An example of this situation happened between NATO (specifically the United Kingdom) and the US in 2011 during the Libyan conflict:

The decision by Washington to make a relatively modest naval contribution to the overall effort has challenged one of the RN’s most basic assumptions: that when faced with an operation at the higher end of the conflict spectrum, Britain would be supporting a US lead rather than the reverse.³⁸

19. The close proximity to the US is another reason why Canada cannot strategically afford reduction in RCN’s core capabilities. As early as the years leading to World War II (WWII), the cost of the US support to Canada was well known as evidenced by Nicholas Tracy:

The transformation of the United States into the champion of democracy, and guarantor of Canadian security, was of vital importance but even before the United

³⁵ Skye Gould and Jeremy Bender, “These charts show the immensity of the US’ defense budget,” *Business Insider* (31 Aug 2015), <http://www.businessinsider.com/the-us-defense-budget-is-massive-2015-8>.

³⁶ Kyle Mizokami, “The Five Most-Powerful Navies on the Planet,” *The National Interest* (6 June 2014), <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-five-most-powerful-navies-the-planet-10610>.

³⁷ Royal Canadian Navy, *Leadmark: The Navy’s Strategy for 2020*, (Ottawa: National Defence Head Quarter, 2001), 112.

³⁸ Ben Lombardi and David Rudd, *Naval Force Structure in a Time of Fiscal Uncertainty: Downsizing, innovation and Change*, (Ottawa: Defence Research & Development Canada - CORA, 2011): 12.

States became a belligerent [in WWII] it was also recognized that American support came at a price, which could only be managed if Canada were able to provide significant defence of her own territory and seas.³⁹

As this quote exemplifies, the US government is more than willing to provide Canada with assistance in the territorial defence of North American. However, they expect the GOC to equip its military with enough capabilities to provide an adequate level of support to the fight. This was also noted in the RCN *Leadmark*:

The US will also provide the floor for Canadian defence spending, in that the needs of North American security will require a certain minimal capacity to contribute to what will continue to be regarded as the “common” defence, whether close to home or in forward deployments.⁴⁰

Since early 20th century, positions taken by GOC regarding military procurement and foreign policy have balance Canada’s own needs and the requirement to manage the relationship with the US.⁴¹ In the event that the RCN would eliminate a specific warfare area and have to plea for help from the USN, it is likely that the US would, from that point on, take unilateral decision in the Canadian territorial water and GOC would have to accept the US positions and interventions without a say.⁴²

20. Another issue to consider when discussing niche capability is the time require for naval project, especially the ones involving the acquisition of major warships. In the event that a decision of reducing a warfare capability is taken in error, it will likely take years for the RCN to recover from such a mistakes, as evidenced by Ben Lombardi and David Rudd:

Threats to international stability have assumed new and complex forms, often requiring responses for which existing capabilities might not have been designed or can easily be adapted. This is certainly the case with regard to modern navies, where

³⁹ Nicholas Tracy, *A two-Edged Sword, The Navy as an Instrument of Canadian Foreign Policy* (Montreal&Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2012), 300.

⁴⁰ Royal Canadian Navy, *Leadmark: The Navy’s Strategy for 2020*, (Ottawa: National Defence Head Quarter, 2001), 112.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 300.

⁴² *Ibid*, 302.

build programs, once committed to, can lock in the user for the better part of a generation.⁴³

This example reinforced the concept that adaptability and flexibility are key requirements when facing an uncertain Future Security Environment. *Role Specialization* by its nature represents the antipode of these two characteristics.

CONCLUSION

21. Ultimately, when it comes to procurement projects such as major warships and combat systems, the GOC will make the final decisions. But, they will seek input from subject matter experts such as Chief of Defence Staff and Senior RCN Officers. With this understanding, this service paper is purely design to inform Senior Staff Officers on the subject of *Role Specialization* and to present an opinion based on research and evaluation of facts. By reviewing the definition of *Role Specialization* in the RCN context, making some key assumptions and discussing advantages and disadvantages, this service paper presented what the author believes are the main arguments that must be considered when discussing *Role Specialization*.

RECOMMENDATION

22. Based on the information collected and presented, it is the recommendation of this service paper that the RCN does not adopt a niche capability for the foreseeable future. That being said, in order to address escalating costs and budget pressures, further research in subjects such as automatization, ship's manning, procurement strategy, civilian contracting and modularization should be conducted in order to better prepare the Fleet of tomorrow.

⁴³ Ben Lombardi and David Rudd, *Naval Force Structure in a Time of Fiscal Uncertainty: Downsizing, innovation and Change*, (Ottawa: Defence Research & Development Canada - CORA, 2011): 2.

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