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ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY TASK GROUP OPERATIONS

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AIM

1. The aim of this paper is to provide a vision on the re-establishment of a Canadian Naval Task Group (CATG) concept and its impact during domestic and international operations. By directing its effort on establishing the appropriate capabilities required for the task, the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) will empower a greater contribution to a Joint and Combined forces. By doing so, it will guarantee that the RCN will remain a capable and efficient “Medium Global Force Projection Navy”¹ operating within Canada’s present and future operations. It will also be fulfilling the core missions stated in the *Canada First Defence Strategy* (CFDS).² This paper will outline a number of topics that require consideration.

INTRODUCTION

2. The earth is made of many natural resources. Water, being one of them, is the most significant one as it covers approximately 70 percent of the globe’s surface. Additionally, more than 80 percent of the population live within littoral areas and “around 90 percent of world trade is carried, [through the waterways] by the international shipping industry.”³ These realities are an indication that the maritime environment will remain important both at home and abroad, which will have a significant impact on strategic decisions. In the past two decades, we have seen fundamental changes in the global security environment. This has created an evident requirement for naval operations to focus their efforts on specific areas. These areas can be defined as littoral regions and multi-threat environment, which both could potentially expand in a full-spectrum of

¹Department of National Defence, *Leadmark: The Navy’s Strategy for 2020* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2001), 44.

²Department of National Defence, *Canada First Defence Strategy* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2009).

³International Chamber of Shipping, “Shipping and World Trade,” Accessed 2 February 2016, http://www.ics-shipping.org/shipping-facts/shipping-and-world-trade_

conflict. As a nation surrounded by three oceans, it is expected that Canada will be called upon to assist in the global security as stated in *The Future Security Environment 2008-2030 Part 1: Current and Emerging Trends*: “With the world’s longest coastline, the impending opening of the Northwest Passage, and the increased movement of goods and resources by sea...Canada will have to place more importance on maritime security.”⁴

3. Throughout history, more pre-eminently during war time, naval power was known as the supporting element to the Army and Air forces. However, over the years, sea power has proved to have a tangible diplomatic effect enabling the achievement of strategic objectives. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the RCN has proven its diplomatic abilities and strategic effectiveness in conducting mission such as support to the United States (US) operations in Afghanistan-OP APOLLO (2001), humanitarian assistance relieve-OP UNISON (2005) and OP HESTIA (2010), counter-piracy operation-(2005), escort to the World Food Program-(2008) and regional maritime security operations-OP MOBILE (2011). In looking at the present and the future, the RCN must endeavour to create “maritime concepts [which] can support specific requirements and functions that contribute to Whole of Government [WoG], Joint and Combined operations.”⁵ Conversely, despite the available resources, it is unthinkable to expect the RCN to always provide the entire fleet and capabilities to conduct domestic and international operations. A naval task group concept, with the appropriate capability for the mission, would enable Canada to contribute to a Joint and Combined forces. The success and effectiveness of a TG relies on a fleet that has a sufficient and a balance range of capabilities. This paper will begin by looking at the *1994 White Paper on Defence*. It will then examine the CATG structure. An

⁴Department of National Defence, *The Future Security Environment 2008-2030 Part 1: Current and Emerging Trends* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2009), 18-19.

⁵Chief of the Royal Canadian Navy, *Maritime Concept Development Guide* (Ottawa: DGMFD, 1996), 7.

examination of the strategic effect will follow. The last section will discuss the limitations and requirements of the CATG. Together, these sections will provide a vision on the re-establishment of a CATG concept focusing on a mixed capability package.

DISCUSSION

1994 White Paper on Defence

4. In 1994, the *White Paper on Defence* was published to “fulfilled [the government]...obligation to provide Canadians with an effective, realistic and affordable defence policy.”⁶ The aim of the *White Paper on Defence* was to “reviewing carefully every aspect of Canada’s defence policy so that it could make reasoned judgements on how best to ensure the nation’s security and well-being.”⁷ It also defines the need and the requirement for Canada to have “a naval task group [which should] comprised of up to four combatants (destroyers, frigates or submarines) and a support ships, with appropriate maritime air support, [on each coast]...”⁸ Twenty-two years later, the *1994 White Paper on Defence* is still in force, however, resources are much more limited.

CATG Structure

5. The *Leadmark: The Navy’s Strategy for 2020* defines a Task Group (TG) as: “[a] grouping of units under one commander subordinate to a task force commander, formed for the purpose of carrying out a specific function or functions.”⁹ The TG concept is imbedded into Canadian, US and NATO doctrines and is fundamental to naval operations. Being the sub-

⁶Department of National Defence, *1994 Defence White Paper* (Ottawa: Canada Communication Group, 1994), 36.

⁷*Ibid.*, 6.

⁸*Ibid.*, 4.

⁹Department of National Defence, *Leadmark: The Navy’s Strategy for 2020* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2001), GL-121.

component of a Task Force (TF), TGs are often part of a coalition-led Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF). Normally, a TG is made of a command and control, combatant and support component. Ultimately, the combatant should empower the TG with situation awareness and sea power to exercise Sea Control. The assets usually assigned to a TG should vary depending on the capability required for the mission. In term of Canadian's assets, a composition of a blend of any warships and aircraft such as Canadian Patrol Frigates (CPF), long range patrol submarines, Maritime Coastal Defence Vessels (MCDV), destroyer, helicopters and Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) could be the makeup of a CATG. Additionally, the CATG should also have a Command and Control element, known as the Commander of the Task Group (CTG). Furthermore, the Arctic Offshore Patrol Ships (AOPS), the Joint Support Ships (JSS) and the Canadian Surface Combatants (CSC) will be assets that will need to be incorporated into the CATG in the future. The *Securing Canada's Ocean Frontiers* highlight well the necessity to have an “adaptable CATG [as it] will...offer a mix of assets and capabilities to project influence internationally, whether it is combat, stabilization and humanitarian operations, while leading in defence at home at our maritime borders.”¹⁰

Strategic Effect

6. Re-establishing the TG concept for Canadian naval operation is a necessity for the RCN in order to maintain a “Medium Global Force Projection Navy.”¹¹ Since the early 2000, the discussion of the TG concept has largely taken place in RCN strategic documents. The *Leadmark* and the *Securing Canada's Ocean Frontiers* both RCN strategic documents, conferred the TG as

¹⁰Department of National Defence, *Securing Canada's Ocean Frontiers: Charting the Course from Leadmark* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2005), v.

¹¹Department of National Defence, *Leadmark: The Navy's Strategy for 2020* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2001), 44.

a deployable asset depending on the operation requirements.^{12,13} Both documents also emphasised on the essential adaptability of the concept and identified it as a foundation upon which the RCN would continue to build.¹⁴ According to the Canadian Security in Global Partnership Senior Research Peter Haydon, “navies are still [an] effective extensions of the state over the ocean. When things go wrong... navies are well suited to such a concept of crisis management...[and] the naval task group, is the right concept for now and for the future....”¹⁵ Doctor Eric Lerhe noted: “task group...provides a form that combined differing units with different capabilities...to provide something more than the sum of its parts. It also implied a readiness to add and subtract elements to suit each naval task.”¹⁶ Both Lerhe and Haydon view the TG concept as retaining strategic and operational relevance.

7. The unique flexibility of a TG gives Canada a great diplomatic and strategic advantage. It is versatile, combat capable and ensures strategic effect for a medium power navy. Being able to deploy a CATG, with the appropriate capabilities, guarantees that Canada’s naval assets are not split among our allies and partners. A national-led TG will maximise Canadian government influence over operations. Conversely, the TG concept is the only way that the RCN can effectively deal with the array of threats identified in the *The Future Security Environment 2008-2030 Part 1: Current and Emerging Trends (FSE)*. Furthermore, it will accomplish the missions identified in the RCN strategic guidance, which are: maritime interdiction operations, sea control, sea denial, influence events at a distance and being a joint enabler.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³Department of National Defence, *Securing Canada’s Ocean Frontiers: Charting the Course from Leadmark* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2005).

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵Canadian Naval Review, “The Canadian Naval Task Group,” accessed 2 February 2016, <http://www.navalreview.ca/2007/05/the-canadian-naval-task-group/>.

¹⁶Canadian Naval Review, “The Canadian Naval Task Group (II),” accessed 2 February 2016, <http://www.navalreview.ca/2007/05/the-canadian-naval-task-group-2/>.

8. On many occasions, the RCN has excelled in its ability to exercise command and control (C2) of formations of coalition warships and air assets. The RCN capabilities in C2 have been often demonstrated in complex operations which were empowered by an underway CTG and staff. Having command and control of formations enable the CTG to influence decisions and invoke national goals. This effect alone extends beyond a simple operational employment. Strategically, it enables coalition building and provides a level of international influence, out of proportion, for a medium power naval force such as the RCN.

9. The author of *Geopolitical Integrity*, Hugh Segal, notes: “The fundamental assets that the C[A]F requires for international [and domestic] operations is what may be termed a tactically self-sufficient unit (TSSU).”¹⁷ While it may vary in composition from a single platform to an entire TG, no single vessel possesses the range of capabilities needed to deploy in any and all environments. A TG is, therefore, the minimum TSSU that can carry out the entire spectrum of naval operations and “must be capable of integrating into a Combined Force package as a “task-tailored” component.”¹⁸ Significantly, in order to conduct semi-independent or independent operations, a TSSU must be capable of defending both itself and any units under its control which, is “vitaly important, highlighting the importance of military strategic level command capability in the CAF.”¹⁹

Limitations and Requirements

10. Notwithstanding the importance of the TG concept, there are occasion where it may not be the best course of action. In some instance, deploying the CATG may not meet the level of

¹⁷Hugh Segal, *Geopolitical Integrity* (Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy, 2005), 168.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹*Ibid.*

strategic effect require. In those cases, a single ship may offer just the right amount of forward presence and would be available for discrete and smaller scale operations. Single ship operations are also, in some aspect, easier to sustain and provide a greater surge capability should it become required. For these specific reasons, it is critical to understand that the deployment of the CATG might not always be the most appropriate response to a crisis. Therefore, the size of the naval commitment should be dependent on the requirements of the mission, the national interest and the resources availability. The RCN's ability to deploy a CATG is clearly affected by the number and types of required assets, the length of the mission, the level of readiness and the sustainability. Being able to deploy a TG when situations arise is a basic operational requirement. It reflects the RCN's goals to remain a "Medium Global Force Projection Navy"²⁰ and the government intent to "ensure the nation's security and well-being"²¹ at home and abroad.

11. The CATG concept does not come without requirements. The TG must have specific capabilities and be trained accordingly in order to be effective. The CATG must be capable and enable to effectively exercise C2, Above-Water Warfare (AAW), Anti-Surface Warfare (ASuW), Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW), Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR), support to Land Forces, replenishment at sea and support to Special Operations Forces (SOF).

12. On the subject of AAW, the CATG should have the ability to build a Common Operating Picture (COP), defend and protect all assets assigned to the TG against anti-ship missiles. The building of the COP comes hand in hand with ISR capabilities. Maritime helicopters and patrol aircrafts are the assets that will empower the CATG with an extended coverage of the surface

²⁰Department of National Defence, *Securing Canada's Ocean Frontiers: Charting the Course from Leadmark* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2005), 44.

²¹Department of National Defence, *1994 Defence White Paper* (Ottawa: Canada Communication Group, 1994), 36.

and air surveillance area. As for the ASuW, the CATG shall have the ability to protect any friendly assets, be armed with resources to retaliate against surface threats and have the capability to provide land attacks as deemed necessary. Additionally, the likelihood of ASW threat in littoral environment can be expected. As such the RCN must ensure that the CATG, including helicopters and maritime patrol aircraft are well equipped to successfully combat such a threat.

13. For any TG, replenishment at sea is not only a vital capability, but also a force multiplier. A replenishment oiler guarantees strategic independence to conduct operations worldwide. Such capability separates a coastal navy from “Medium Global Force Projection Navy”²². In combat or in peacetime, the CATG must be a sustainable force and be ready to provide logistic support to allied forces and non-military organizations.

14. Moreover, the CATG should be capable to contribute to a Joint and Combine environment by providing protection or support to Land Forces, including SOF, in both defensive and offensive capability. Such capabilities could be shown as delivery of Naval Fires Support to Land Forces, transport for amphibious troops and support to Humanitarian Operations/Disaster Relief (HO/DR) operations. Ultimately, the TG should have the capacity to deploy with mission specific equipment, personnel and resources to provide the means to the mission.

15. *The Integrated Capstone Concept* “provides...an over-arching concept, informing a body of operating, integrating, and enabling concepts that will shape how the CAF will meet the

²²Department of National Defence, *Securing Canada's Ocean Frontiers: Charting the Course from Leadmark* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2005), 44.

challenges of the complex future security environment.”²³ To this end, the CATG capabilities, prior to a deployment, should be tailored based on the five operational functions; Command, Sense, Act, Sustain and Shield. It will ensure the efficiency, effective and proper capabilities are assigned to the CATG to provide the best defence for the operation.

CONCLUSION

16. Building upon the direction of the CFDS, the RCN strategic documents call for a navy that can be self-sustained and act autonomously from other nations. It needs a navy that is able to defend Canada, that can contribute to the defence of North America by partnering with the US and that can meaningfully integrate into large and complex coalitions in response to an international crisis. The RCN must be able to sustain domestic and abroad missions simultaneously, while keeping the CATG ready for any type of world-wide contingencies.

17. *Leadmark* calls for “combat capable forces that are responsive, rapidly deployable, sustainable, versatile, lethal and survivable, ready to provide the government ...policy options across a continuum of domestic and international contingencies.”²⁴ It has been stated that: “[the RCN]...must be fully capable of bringing the battle to the enemy... assisting the Army on the ground, the Air Force in the skies, its allies and coalition partners on the high seas or in the littoral waters of a hostile nation.”²⁵

18. While the *1994 White Paper on Defence*, the CFDS and the RCN strategic documents all elaborate on the employment of the Canadian Navy; the need to re-establish a CATG concept is

²³Department of National Defence, *Integrated Capstone Concept* (Ottawa: Canada Communication Group, 2009), iii.

²⁴Department of National Defence, *Leadmark: The Navy’s Strategy for 2020* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2001), 49.

²⁵Department of National Defence, *Securing Canada’s Ocean Frontiers: Charting the Course from Leadmark* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2005), 49.

a notion that Canada should endeavour to better contribute to Joint and Combine operations. The CATG concept will provide the RCN with the flexibility and capabilities required for the task, either at home or abroad. Thus, embracing the CATG concept coupled with a broad range of capabilities will enable the Canadian Government to use the RCN as a diplomatic instrument which would be “otherwise unavailable to advance the country’s national and strategic interests.”²⁶

²⁶David G. Haglund, “What Missions for Canada’s Armed Forces in the 21st Century?” *Security and Defence Forum Consultation*, (Montreal, 2000).

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