

Canadian Navy's Role in Maritime Trade

I have decided to focus my first article of the New Year on prosperity and the impact your Navy has on contributing to ensuring the freedom of movement of trade on the oceans transit ways and through our contribution to maintaining international maritime law.

What may be of surprise to many Canadians is that 90% of global trade travels by sea. In fact, the oceans are so important to our current global economy that they are considered the modern commons, owned by no one nation yet available to all, and the foundation upon which globalization now occurs. Although most Canadians tend to view Canadas trade as a North-South relationship that travels by truck, the fact is that 42% of Canadas trade travels by sea.

The very system that supports the global interdependence of trading nations can also become its greatest vulnerability. In this day and age of just-in-time deliveries of energy and goods, it would not take long for delays due to weather, congested ports or, worse yet, criminal acts of piracy near strategic chokepoints such as the Straits of Hormuz or the Panama Canal to disrupt global trade. In the private sector this risk of delay translates into increased costs, whether for insurance or paying ransoms, which increases the price that consumers must pay. As a result, an act of piracy by a group of economically disadvantaged pirates off the shores of Africa can affect the pocketbooks of Canadians by increasing the cost of goods that come from that area or must transit through those dangerous waters. One only needs to imagine the flow of coffee beans being disrupted from South America and the impact that would have on the price of coffee.

So when we talk about prosperity coming from the maritime domain, we must consider more than just the value of extracted renewable and non-renewable resources. We must also realize that much of our land-based prosperity depends upon the movement of goods within the global economic order, which in turn, relies upon the free and unfettered access to the global ocean commons.

Facilitating and protecting this access on the high seas is one of the most important and critical roles for a nations navy, and this is especially true for Canada, a maritime trading nation. The Canadian Navy plays a key role both at home and abroad ensuring a seamless transition between the domestic and foreign waters, commonly known as the home and away game.

In our own waters and in collaboration with other government security partners, we maintain a constant vigilance by ensuring that we know who is in our waters and what they are doing there. We also maintain the capability to respond to a broad spectrum of threats in order to protect the sea lines of communication. To appreciate the need for a strong and potent maritime force in our own waters, one must take into

account the impact to the Canadian economy if our own strategic chokepoint, the St Lawrence Seaway, was impeded for any length of time.

As was highlighted earlier, it is not enough to secure our own waters as events across the world can still have an impact at home. Hence, we must also maintain our naval capabilities for use around the world, wherever those that wish to do us harm may gather and operate. The great oceans to our east and west that once served to provide a buffer between Canada and the World now connect us to the ocean commons, the foundation for the present-day global economy. They will soon be joined by the promises and perils of the ocean to our north as the impacts of climate change become more prevalent. Our collective responsibility is to ensure that we enable the security and prosperity for future generations of Canadians.

In my next article, I look forward to discussing two recent missions the Canadian Navy has undertaken which directly support Canada's security and prosperity. I hope that this will provide you a small insight into some of the complex operations that your Navy conducts 365 days of the year.

I wish you all a happy and safe 2011.