

THE ADMIRAL'S VIEW

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The Coming Maritime Century

On Wednesday March 2, with only 48 hours of preparation, 240 sailors said goodbye to family, friends and neighbours, as they set sail on HMCS CHARLOTTETOWN for a six-month deployment as part of the Canadian government's response to the humanitarian mission unfolding in the Middle East and North Africa.

I can think of no better illustration of the discussion we have had over the past few months about Canada's role in the World and the part your Navy plays. I would also add that events such as those we now see in North Africa and our consequent naval response may increase, as we enter an uncertain future, in what many are referring to as the "Maritime Century".

In my career I have witnessed the Cold War, the fall of the Berlin wall and the ensuing brief period of Glasnost, followed by the first Gulf War, and the tumultuous period of nation building that occurred during the 1990s - towards democracy or descending into chaos. This was eclipsed by the events of September 11, 2001, when Al Qaeda brought terror to the American homeland - forever changing our sense of security and well-being. In each of these cases, HMC Ships were deployed on short notice to provide the initial Canadian response.

The broader geopolitical changes resulting from these events have contributed to a new, dynamic international landscape that is also being influenced by, and having influence upon, the sea. First and foremost of these factors is that almost 90% of the world's population now lives within 100 miles of the world's coastline, increasingly in densely-concentrated and rapidly growing urban centres. As a consequence of the increasing demand for food, resources and energy, combined with the increasing concentration of pollutants, the adjacent ocean estate is experiencing severe marine environmental pressures.

It is also becoming evident that we are experiencing an increase in severity and frequency of weather related events adversely affecting these same coastal zones. The hurricanes in Haiti and New Orleans, the typhoons in Australia and Asia and the tsunami in Thailand are just a few of the most recent examples. In the worst cases, the consequences of environmental and severe weather events, such as massive and/or sudden population migration, can



quickly spread into adjacent nations, causing regional instability. This instability also spills over into coastal and international waters, as global illegal immigrants seek refuge in neighbouring countries.

Many of these fragile coastal states do not have the means to enforce their maritime sovereignty nor protect the economic prosperity of their coastal waters. "Failing states" can not only cause people to resort to piracy and other illegal activities in order to survive but they can also become a safe haven for organized criminals and terrorists. A secondary effect can occur when this state closely borders strategic choke points for international trade, and the effect can disrupt the efficient operation of global trade through activities such as piracy. As a result, the instability in these coastal regions can threaten the prosperity, security and well-being of Canadians because our maritime backyard does not stop at the Grand Banks. The oceans that used to insulate Canada from the rest of the world, may serve in the future to enable the flow of illicit goods, displaced persons and marine pollution, if left unchecked.

In the midst of these coming challenges, Western navies are shrinking due to budgetary pressures, while many others are growing their maritime forces to counter global maritime instability. A case in point is China, a formerly land-centric nation that is aggressively developing and deploying an oceangoing Navy to support her maritime trade interests. We are witnessing an increase in warship construction and conventional submarine proliferation. This means that when HMC Ships deploy in the future, as they have traditionally done in the past, and as HMCS CHARLOTTETOWN has most recently done, they will likely encounter new partners and new challenges as certain nations increase their capabilities and presence in the maritime commons.

In my next article, I will discuss how we are preparing to respond to these and other trends in the coming Maritime Century.