

ASSESSING THE ICE-PACK RATIONALE

Canada should forego its unsound commitment to purchase nuclear submarines and create a maritime version of the Canada-US air defence agreement.

BY JAMES EAYRS

WITHIN HOURS OF *The New Zealand Nuclear Free Zone, Disarmament, and Arms Control Act's* passage through New Zealand's House of Representatives, the House of Commons in Ottawa accepted *Challenge and Commitment: A Defence Policy for Canada* – the first white paper in sixteen years and, as such, a tribute to the negotiating skills of the Minister of National Defence, Perrin Beatty, under whose auspices a rationale has been devised and a consensus formed around it. The coincidence is telling, for the doctrine by which the two documents are underpinned could scarcely be more at odds.

For the government of Canada, nuclear strategic forces are the solution to the central problem of security, "a Soviet nuclear attack on North America." It sees the "survivability of United States strategic nuclear forces" as "the keystone of NATO's assured retaliatory capability." To ensure its survival, Canada is prepared to continue to contribute personnel, weapons, funds, technology and territory. "The structure of mutual deterrence today is effective and stable. The Government believes that it must remain so."

For the government of New Zealand, nuclear strategic forces are the problem, not the solution. Its doctrine is articulated by Prime Minister David Lange:

The nuclear arms race can only be brought to an end by an act of political will. Governments must decide for themselves that they will no longer submit themselves to nuclear escalation but will instead commit themselves to the limitation of nuclear weapons.

New Zealand has made that commitment. New Zealand cannot be defended by nuclear weapons and does not wish to be defended by nuclear weapons. We have disengaged ourselves from any nuclear strategy for the defence of New Zealand.

Viewed, then, from "Godzone," (a Kiwi contraction of 'God's own country') where a majority of New Zealanders (seventy-three percent to be precise) recoil from a small nuclear research reactor – never mind a nuclear warhead – as one of "Einstein's monsters," the White Paper's proposed acquisition of ten to twelve conventionally-armed but nuclear-powered submarines (SSNs) seems unreal, even inane. It is the most bizarre decision in Canadian weapons policy since the premier of British Columbia bought two submarines originally built in Seattle for Chile.

But bizarre is not necessarily inane. In 1915, the premier's submersible navy protected B.C. passengers on coastal ferries from depredation by German raiders. What is the rationale for Canada's submersible navy?

According to *Challenge and Commitment*, Canada needs SSNs because "they are the only proven vehicle, today or for the foreseeable future, capable of sustained operation under the ice . . . The SSN is the only vessel able to exercise surveillance and control in northern Canadian ice-covered waters." Made aware by instant ridicule of the inadequacy of this "ice-pack rationale," the Minister informed the House some days later of an additional desideratum of his Navy planners: "We would like to have nuclear powered submarines

to be able to do the job better in the Atlantic and the Pacific."

But what, exactly, is the job? What conceivable missions might HMCS SSN perform for Canada in future and how well may she be expected to perform them?

Here are half-a-dozen possibilities.

CONTRIBUTING TO GENERAL DETERRENCE. Years ago, Winston Churchill spoke of "that vague menace which capital ships of the highest quality, whose whereabouts are unknown, can impose upon all hostile naval calculations," and the White Paper follows this idea: "Through their mere presence, nuclear-powered submarines can deny an opponent the use of sea areas." It does not say how – short of starting the war they are intended to deter. (In the event of war they could add to convoy capability – except that in the event of war there is likely to be nothing to convoy.) It is hard to see how a few additional boats – at most three in each ocean, three in refit – would make much difference to the Soviet planners' calculation of the overall 'correlation of forces.'

CONTRIBUTING TO IMMEDIATE DETERRENCE. During severe superpower confrontation of the Cuba missile variety, the major Canadian naval base is peculiarly at risk: Halifax, with few inhabitants relative to many major installations of vital use in wartime (dockyards, container ports, refineries, communications facilities, ammunition dumps), is a tempting target of opportunity for Soviet strategists to test a US president's resolve. No number of conventionally-armed SSNs can help to provide what is required

to deter this dire eventuality, namely, a credible threat to retaliate likewise against Murmansk or Vladivostok. For this purpose the Navy would be better advised to acquire some second-hand Polaris ballistic missile submarines from the British as their boats give way to Tridents.

SURVEILLANCE AND CONTROL In the Defence White Paper, these two separable functions are too glibly linked. It looks towards "a credible navy capable of monitoring activity in its three contiguous oceans and of deterring their use by adversaries." But being there may as easily lead to adventurous attempts at entry as to keeping trespassers away. What does a Canadian SSN skipper do when he hears a Soviet missile sub throbbing on his sonar beneath the Arctic ice? Is he to make his ship audible to the enemy, the sonic version of a shot across the bow? What then? Is he to order the enemy to surface? What then, short of risking World War III – or risking the spreading of radioactivity all over the "true North, strong and free," an unimaginable ecological disaster. Someone has yet to think this thing through.

What then to do about the nuclear missile submarine force of each superpower on whose present invulnerability – invulnerable because undetectable – mutual security is held largely to depend? Years ago I tried unavailingly to convince a conference of NATO nabobs that as a policy of deterrence by Mutually Assured Destruction requires an indestructible strategic nuclear force for each side, the prudent and self-interested superpower will strive for a moratorium on anti-submarine warfare research