

THE PURPOSE OF MARITIME FORCES

Defence commitments

In the 1971 white paper on defence, *Defence in the 70s*, the commitments of the Canadian Armed Forces were listed as the protection of Canadian sovereignty; the defence of North America; contributing to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization; and peacekeeping. In the twelve years since the defence white paper was published, nothing has happened to render any of these general commitments inappropriate. Indeed, nothing indicates that Canada may soon be able to abandon any of them.

To a large extent, the four commitments can be seen as a continuum. Peacekeeping operations may prevent a situation from growing into a general conflict which would present a direct threat to Canada. The contribution Canada makes to NATO serves to provide forward defence of its territory, institutions and way of life, together with guarantees of assistance in the event of a direct threat to this country or continent. Contributing to the defence of North America helps to maintain the deterrent capability of U.S. forces and to extend their defensive umbrella over Canada in a form and a fashion consistent with Canadian sovereignty. As for the protection of Canadian sovereignty, it is simply the basic element of the total defence effort.

However, commitments provide only broad indicators of what the armed forces are expected to do. They also need up-to-date priorities and tasking instructions. The problem is that the world has changed since 1971 and military technology has gone through a revolution. The tasking of the Canadian Armed Forces is, nonetheless, still predicated upon a 1971 assumption, dubious today and perhaps seriously inaccurate twenty years hence, that: "the only direct external military threat to Canada's military security today is that of a large scale nuclear attack on North America".¹ It was a short step to the further assumption that defence, unlike protection of sovereignty, would always be conducted in conjunction with allies — primarily with the United States through NORAD, and secondarily with NATO.

Of course, the authors of *Defence in the 70s* recognized that Canada needed the capacity to perform certain sovereignty-protection duties without foreign assistance. But they failed to acknowledge that the assertion of sovereignty

¹ *Defence in the 70s*, *op. cit.*, p. 25.