

New naval vessels were scheduled for the late 1980s and 1990s, beginning with a first batch of six patrol frigates -- authorized in 1977 and contracted in 1983 -- and then going on to additional frigates, plus submarines, new ship-borne helicopters and other items.

Considering the cost of modern naval vessels, there would certainly have to be limits on Canada's maritime ambitions. A debate arose over the kind of fleet that should be created, with some experts emphasizing the need for more ASW frigates while others stressed the requirement for lighter vessels including off-shore patrol boats. The Senate Sub-committee on National Defence argued in 1983 for a balanced, mixed fleet including, by 1996, 16 patrol frigates, 36 long-range patrol aircraft, 18 coastal patrol aircraft, 20 conventional submarines, 13 minesweepers or mine-hunters, and 12 fast patrol boats. The aim of the committee's report, entitled *Canada's Maritime Defence*, was to set out realistic proposals for a fleet that would serve well Canada's own sovereignty requirements while also enabling this country to contribute effectively -- to reasonable levels -- to the joint naval defence of North America, to the conduct of certain NATO naval activities in the North Atlantic, and to the performance of such United Nations or similar tasks as might arise.

The Senate Committee's proposals appeared to have the support of a broad range of interested opinion across the country, and evidently played an important part in the development of the new Defence White Paper that was published in 1987. Probably the White Paper would have benefitted, moreover, if the parts dealing with naval requirements and programmes had stuck even more closely to the Senate Committee's recommendations, since the overall approach they reflected was essentially a "moderate" one seeking to balance vital national requirements with increased, but not exorbitant, expenditures. However, one part of the naval section of the White Paper went well beyond anything envisaged by the Senate Committee, and this eventually contributed to destroying the consensus in favour of the new fleet that was being proposed, as well as for the White Paper as a whole.