

volunteers. The British had the resources and a plan to mobilize them. As the report of the British Ministry of Defence states:

The smooth and rapid implementation of existing contingency plans to use merchant shipping . . . was a major success story of the Campaign. Some 45 ships . . . taken up from trade, from passenger liners to trawlers . . . , provided vital support across the entire logistic spectrum. Tankers carried fuel for ships, aircraft and land forces. Liners such as the QE2 and Canberra, and ferries gave service as troop carriers. Cargo ships, such as the Atlantic Conveyor, carried helicopters, Harriers, heavy equipment and stores. Other vessels were taken up as hospital ships, repair ships or tugs. All . . . were manned by volunteer, civilian crews, supplemented by small Naval or RFA parties.¹²

The critical role played by civilian assets in the Falklands may be among the most important lessons of the campaign for Canada, because of the limited resources this country is willing or able to devote to defence.

Other lessons of the Falklands

The need for a demonstrated resolve is another lesson which Canada would do well to take to heart. Most observers agree that Argentina would not have invaded the islands if Britain had continued to maintain a naval presence in the area, in the form of a frigate or perhaps a nuclear submarine. Further, while Britain's remarkable success in mounting a combined operation so far from her own shores has been duly noted, the fact that a small nation possessing only limited military resources could come close, at sea at least, to defeating a ranking global power and the third major fleet in the world should not escape Canadians.

Finally, there is the lesson of the failure of the planners. Following its June 1981 white paper on defence, Britain had begun to dismantle precisely the kind of fleet needed to fight limited conventional engagements. It has been argued with some persuasiveness that, had Argentina waited a further six months or a year before invading, the British government would have experienced difficulty in assembling the task force it needed. However, this kind of experience with defence planning is certainly not unique to the British. In his comments to the sub-committee, VAdm Porter observed that predicting the future is a risky business:

Planners do the best they can, but as you are well aware, predicting the future from a military viewpoint is an almost impossible task. About the most certain thing you can say is that the future will not unfold in accordance with the plan. The last conflict in which the Canadian Navy took part was the Korean War. That war was not foreseen in the defence plan of that time. It called up requirements such as naval gunfire support and interdiction which were not in the plan. Fortunately our ships had the capability to respond.¹³

Given the limitations of planners' powers of clairvoyance, Canada should ensure that the future capabilities of its maritime forces are not determined by the requirements of a single scenario. By making balance and flexibility — a capacity to contend with the unexpected — key elements of fleet planning Canada will be better positioned to respond to whatever eventualities arise.

¹² *Ibid*, para. 246 (emphasis added).

¹³ *Proceedings of the Senate Sub-committee on National Defence*, 22 March, 1983, p. 43A:4.