

There was also considerable debate about the possibility of Canada buying nuclear submarines. Liberal member Doug Frith asked the Secretary of State for External Affairs to reassure the House that if a decision was made to purchase nuclear-powered submarines it would not adversely affect the Patrol Frigate programme.¹⁶

Considerable debate occurred during hearings before SCND. Questions were raised about the alternatives to nuclear submarines and how nuclear submarines would enhance Canadian sovereignty in the north. DND officials maintained that the advantage of nuclear submarines was their ability to operate under the Arctic ice cap. Robert Fowler, ADM (Policy) from DND stated:

...while nuclear submarines were uniquely capable of operating under the ice in the Arctic, this was by no means their only value. They have enormous value in both other oceans...[and it is] generally recognized as the best anti-submarine warfare platform that exists....The SSN gives you a flexible response. It is a movable platform, it is a highly effective platform and it allows you to exercise much greater discretion.¹⁷

DND officials stated that the underwater threat that needed to be guarded against in the Arctic primarily stemmed from Soviet attack submarines and cruise missiles carrying submarines.

...we do not envisage the Soviet ballistic missile submarines would wish to enter Canadian archipelago waters....we would presume one of the first things they would wish to do would be to prevent any allied submarine from entering the Arctic Basin and transiting toward their bastions....they would [also] wish to...patrol and station choke-off

¹⁶ Commons Debates, 27 Apr. 1987, p. 5233.

¹⁷ SCND Proceedings, 26 March 1987, p. 5.