

24. That the Hercules fleet be modernized in order to ensure that it can continue to support humanitarian assistance operations and Canadian troop contingents in UN operations.

As for the Navy, its participation in peacekeeping operations goes back to the 1950s when its aircraft carrier was used to transport army vehicles and personnel taking part in UN operations in the Middle East. The presence of HMCS Preserver off the coast of Somalia in early 1993 and its major contribution to the deployment of Canadian contingents in that country have underscored the important role which the Navy can play in supporting UN operations.

The Preserver's three Sea King helicopters carried food, munitions, and other supplies from the ship to bases ashore. The ship's helicopters were also used for surveillance missions over land in support of Canadian ground troops during their deployment to various areas of Somalia to help restore order and facilitate the provision of humanitarian aid. Furthermore, medical units from the ship visited a number of villages to treat sick and wounded civilians.

However, the Navy could contribute even more to peacekeeping operations if it could provide greater troop and vehicle transport capability. Transport aircraft can ship much of the materiel required by peacekeepers, but sea transport, particularly aboard commercial ships, nevertheless plays an important role. Reliance on commercial shipping to transport equipment to a new peacekeeping operation sometimes causes delays. For example, during the UN operation in Namibia in 1989, Canadian peacekeepers who arrived by air transport, had to wait a few weeks until the arrival of a commercial ship carrying their equipment.

The Navy has very limited transport capability with only three operational support ships, one of which is to be withdrawn from service in the mid-1990s. Studies are currently under way in the Department of National Defence on the possible future purchase of new operational support ships. The potential contribution of these ships to UN operations is one of the aspects under consideration. Both Martin Shadwick and David Cox mentioned that an increased maritime transport capability would be useful in transporting and supporting Canadian contingents taking part in peacekeeping operations. The Committee therefore recommends:

25. That study of the replacement of the operational support ships take into account the usefulness of such ships in supporting Canada's participation in UN operations.