

Canada's Navy under Harper is just not seaworthy?

Recent reports in Maclean's and the Ottawa Citizen have shed light on the fact that Canada's Flagship destroyer, HMCS Athabaskan, is so unseaworthy that it is unable to cross the North Atlantic.

As Ken Hansen, a Research Fellow at Dalhousie University's Centre for Foreign Policy Studies and former Naval officer, explained: "The problem is that you couldn't send Athabaskan anywhere and reliably expect her to get there, or get home again."

The MacLean's article also highlights that Canada will not be able to deploy the HMCS Athabaskan to participate in an important NATO exercise designed as an "explicit response to Moscow's increasingly belligerent pressure on the alliance's eastern borders" (Macleans).

For those who are far away from Canadian shores or have little to do with our military, you may be tempted to ask, "So what?" As an ex-military officer, I can tell you that these reports are downright alarming not just for the Navy but for the Canadian Forces and the security of our country as a whole.

None of us expect Canada to have the largest Navy in the world. However, during the last 100+ years, we decided that our security and our role in the world would be shaped by a certain level of military capability to honour our alliances.

For the Navy, we committed to a "blue water navy"; one capable of operating across deep waters and open oceans. The Todd/Linberg classification system ranks navies on a scale of one to nine (nine being the lowest). Having lost command and control, and our naval resupply abilities, the Canadian Navy has dropped from a level three to a level six.

We now have an "inshore coastal defence" Navy on par with Vietnam, worse than Malaysia and Bangladesh!

While I served at Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Comox, I was responsible for the procurement of everything from aircraft spares to fuel, lumber and pens. Then at National Defence Headquarters in Ottawa I was part of an aerospace industry/DND initiative to transform large-scale government contracting to a performance-based system.

The general perception is that the military purchases expensive toilet seats and \$1,000 hammers. In the Canadian military experience, nothing could be further from the truth. Our military extends every dollar to its maximum. We treat taxpayers' money with prudence. It's not that our military doesn't understand how to manage its budget. Rather, the Harper government has not allocated the necessary funds, period.

Without doubt, our current government is solely responsible for the mess our Navy finds itself in. The Conservatives are so fixated on giving micro-targeted tax cuts and spending an additional \$125M on an extended election for pure partisan gain, that they have ignored the real work of government. Now, our Navy is in serious trouble.

Stephen Harper has attempted to deceive the Canadian public into believing that he's strong on the economy and strong on Canada's military. As we enter our second recession since 2008, with the lowest economic growth rate since the Great Depression, it is obvious that the economy has been mismanaged. A Navy without a single destroyer, without supply ships and an ineffective defense procurement system puts Canada's military and peace and security at risk.

We need a government that can deliver more than rhetoric and empty promises. We need a government that prioritizes actions over words by giving our men and women in uniform the equipment that they need.

Canadians deserve better.

Leona Alleslev (Capt Ret'd)
Federal Liberal Candidate
Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill