

# **An empowered Coast Guard is needed**

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Embassy  
June 22, 2011

Contrary to what one might expect, the Canadian Coast Guard does not guard Canada's coasts. It is responsible for marine safety and navigation and has never been an armed enforcement agency.

Transport Canada takes care of marine security, but focuses on things like boating regulations.

Law enforcement off the coasts falls to the RCMP, an organization with few boats and certainly no ships or ice breakers. If there is a threat off our coasts, the Coast Guard transports RCMP officers to the scene of the crime to carry out its law enforcement role.

Further offshore, the Canadian Navy can transport RCMP officers. And if the incident is far enough out, the Navy will take care of it itself—unless the threat is in the Arctic, because the Navy currently has no ships that can operate in ice.

Confused? Consider that in the United States all of the above is the mandate of one organization: the US Coast Guard.

A recent report by the Strategic Studies Working Group takes issue with Canada's ad hoc approach to maritime security. In "The Canadian Navy and the Canadian Coast Guard: Co-operating Sea Services or Co-existing Federal Fleets," JY Forcier, a retired vice-admiral, points out that there is no one organization in Canada with a clear security mandate off our coasts and the resources to fulfil it. He argues our government must produce an overall Maritime Policy for Canada to determine the balance of responsibilities between the Navy and Coast Guard, and that the Coast Guard could play a vital role in national security.

Canada's ad hoc approach would not matter if the threats were not increasing. To the traditional concerns for drug smuggling and criminal activity off our East and West coasts we must now add terrorist activity. The crew of a ship that arrived in Vancouver last summer carrying hundreds of Tamil migrants, for example, have been identified as members of the Tamil Tiger terrorist organization.

More than anything, it is the melting Arctic that makes Canada's existing practice unsustainable.

A warmer Arctic is bringing increased natural resource exploitation in the North, inviting criminals and possibly terrorists. Warming trends in the Northwest Passage will prompt cruise ships to take in the sights, and commercial ships to take thousands of kilometers off their shipping routes.

Environmental incidents, search and rescue situations, and security threats are inevitable. Oil and gas reserves are thought to be abundant on the Arctic Ocean floor. Just who owns what has yet to be determined and Canada will want to be able to exercise control over its claimed areas.

Determining the right balance of responsibilities involves looking at ships, experience and missions. Canada's Navy has frigates, old destroyers and maritime coastal defence vessels used mainly to train reservists. None of these vessels are ice-capable.

Later this decade the Navy will get a half dozen Arctic Offshore Patrols Vessels, a lightly armed, mid-size ship capable only of going through new ice. The Navy will also get new destroyers and frigates, roughly a dozen in all, but these will not be any more ice capable than the patrol vessels.

Meanwhile, the Canadian Coast Guard has about 35 medium-to-large vessels, including six icebreakers. Many of these are aging, but by the end of the decade the Coast Guard is to receive a new Polar icebreaker and eight new patrol vessels.

The Canadian Coast Guard has years of experience operating along Canada's coasts and in the Arctic. It is the Canadian agency that best knows our coastal and Arctic areas.

The Navy will be able to support an armed security role once its patrol vessels arrive; however, it can hardly take the lead when it has no ice breakers, and when it will continue to be asked to defend Canadian interests abroad, conducting missions like those off the coasts of Libya and Somalia today.

The security environment is changing. The status quo will not be acceptable going forward. On the Canada-US land border, customs agents, previously concerned with cross border shopping, have now been armed to interdict threats. It is time for the government to institute a similar change in the mandate of the Canadian Coast Guard.