

Defense Minister unveils

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In June 1987, when Canadian defence minister Perrin Beatty unveiled his fifteen year, \$200 billion plan for the country's armed forces, the most powerful symbol of military commitment was a fleet of 10 to 12 nuclear-powered submarines.

The hunter-killer attack subs would solve a number of problems for the Canadian navy, or so the youthful minister thought.

Beatty argued that the fleet, coupled with other forces, would patrol the Atlantic, Pacific and especially the Arctic, where conventionally powered subs cannot venture under the ice.

And like the new uniforms awarded in the previous Conservative defence budget, the subs would give the navy a new sense of pride and purpose, replacing older vessels on the verge of "rust-out".

In a single daring move, the Canadian Navy would move from the embarrassment of owning fewer submarines than the West Edmonton Mall to joining the world's five great military powers in an exclusive sub club.

While the Canadian vessels would not be nuclear armed, the plan has drawn sharp, continuing protest. Writing in the fall issue of Peace and Security magazine, Dalhousie political science professor James Eayars calls the fleet "the most bizarre decision in Canadian weapons policy since (1915, when) the premier of British Columbia bought two submarines, originally built in Seattle for Chile."

In the political arena, both the Liberals and the New Democrats strongly oppose the subs, indicating the fleet deserves to stand alongside free trade as an issue in the next federal election.

Liberal defence critic Doug Frith says the subs could be a destabilizing factor in the con-

tinuing submarine confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, and recommends a combination of underwater sensors, increased air patrols and surface ships instead.

NDP defence critic Derek Blackburn goes further, accusing Beatty of a "mindless lust for nuclear submarines". Like some experts, Blackburn believes the Canadian fleet would become involved in a dangerous U.S. strategy to attack Soviet subs in their home ports.

And like the Liberals, Blackburn supports a range of surveillance equipment, aircraft and surface ships to meet Canada's legitimate defence needs, as well as advocating a fleet of cheaper, conventionally powered subs.

Other critics are numerous. Despite government claims that nuclear subs have a worry-free operating record, some opponents fear a Chernobyl-type accident at a base — probably Victoria or Halifax — or in treacherous Arctic waters.

Arms control specialists such as United Nations advisor William Epstein say the highly enriched, weapons-grade uranium used as fuel would violate the spirit of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which Canada signed in 1968. Thus, the fleet would set a bad example to Third World countries — like Libya and North Korea — which may be looking for an excuse and means to develop nuclear weapons programs.

But the two most serious objections deal with strategy and cost.

Michael Wallace, a political science professor at the Univer-

sity of British Columbia, is worried the Canadian subs will become drawn into U.S. nuclear war fighting plans, in oceans where the Soviets are challenging U.S. superiority and American forces are operating at a higher tempo than during the Vietnam War.

For example, the strategy of forward deployment directs American hunter-killer subs to penetrate Soviet subma-

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rine sanctuaries in the Barents Sea in the Arctic and the Sea of Okhotsk near Japan.

"As each side deploys more submarines in a given area, the probability of a chance confrontation increases quite substantially and quickly," says Wallace, who specializes in the study of accidental nuclear war.

In a time of international tension, like the Cuban missile crisis, the Soviets would send their large ballistic missile-firing subs from northern home ports to deep water sanctuaries — usually this would help stabilize against nuclear war, as the U.S.S.R. would have a secure retaliatory force and would feel no immediate need to attack.

But the U.S., depending on

its confidence in launching a first strike, could attack the Soviet subs and ask the new Canadian fleet to join in. Canada's participation would come from a previously defined operational plan, like NORAD, or as a last minute okay from Ottawa.

In these situations, however, the Soviets might feel so nervous they would send their missiles towards North American cities first, rather than waiting for an American attack.

"If we are to buy these subs and operate them in the way I suspect they will be operated — in conjunction with the American doctrine of escalation domination — then what we are doing is increasing the risk of strategic nuclear war," says Wallace.

Therefore "this policy is wrong — not just a little bit wrong, but 180 degrees against the national interest of Canada," he argues.

While defence analysts, including those at the Canadian

Centre for Arms Control and Disarmament in Ottawa and the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, believe the Canadian fleet risks becoming involved in strategies undermining the nuclear balance, the government did not give it a second thought. Admiral Charles Thomas, chief of maritime doctrine for the Canadian Navy, admitted that his department had not done a single detailed study on how U.S. strategy would affect Canadian submarine operations.

Even without Wallace's disaster scenario, other analysts object to the subs' hefty price tag, which has risen from Department of National Defence estimates of \$5 billion in February, to a current \$8 billion.

Independent sources say it will be much more.

Scarcely a week after the white paper was released, British naval experts Roy Corlett and John Moore scoffed at the Canadian estimates, saying they grossly underestimated real costs which would include bases, as well as facilities for re-

