

AFAC POSITION PAPER 07/2007

Issue: Air Power and Canadian Sovereignty

Background

- The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 drew renewed attention to the capabilities of NORAD (the North American Aerospace Defence Command) after years of relative apathy. The continuing need for proper surveillance, fighters positioned to respond on short notice, along with the necessary procedures for the Government to deal with an airborne threat became glaringly obvious.
- Global warming has raised the alarm regarding access to Northern waters, identifying concerns related to security, the economy and the environment. The requirement to be able to monitor activity in the North has been repeatedly identified by the Government and others who are concerned about Canada's ability to exercise sovereignty in these remote areas. To bolster a physical presence, plans are in the works for a deep water port, Arctic offshore patrol ships, and a training centre. In addition to current airborne capabilities, uninhabited aerial vehicles (UAVs) are being considered for domestic employment.
- Russia has recently reinvigorated long range patrol flights from their Northern airfields towards the West. In addition to the North Atlantic, bombers have flown into airspace around North America, approaching Alaska and Canada. Canadian and American fighters, working with air-to-air refueling aircraft and airborne warning and control system (AWACS) aircraft, have repeatedly deployed to forward operating locations to monitor these activities and to intercept bombers in the assertion of sovereignty.
- Illegal fishing and smuggling activities off the coasts of Canada represent continuous threats to the economy and well-being of Canadians. The ability to support the Canadian Coast Guard and police authorities in interdicting suspected perpetrators is an everyday role for air assets located in the coastal areas, be they fixed or rotary-winged aircraft. The speed and coverage of an aircraft with the appropriate sensors, operating from land or from ships, greatly enhances the effectiveness of surface resources.
- In addition to those air force assets dedicated to search and rescue, all Canadian Forces aircraft have a secondary responsibility to participate in such a mission when required. While search and rescue may not normally be thought of as a sovereignty issue, the reality is that Canada has



assumed the responsibility to provide an effective service over a large area covering our land mass and sea approaches. This is an international responsibility which provides a service to non-Canadians as well as our own citizens. As a sovereign nation, we assume this role and expect others to reciprocate in their areas of responsibility.

AFAC Position

- Canadian sovereignty is important and air force resources are essential to its protection in a number of ways. While some are more frequently and directly employed in sovereignty-related roles, the majority of aircraft have at least a secondary capability.
- In addition to ground-based radars (the North Warning System and the coastal High Frequency Surface Wave Radars), surveillance is provided by airborne assets. The Aurora maritime patrol aircraft has the endurance and sensors, especially with the modernization program underway, to provide a manned capability which can cover vast land and sea areas. The CF-18, especially when supported by AWACS aircraft, can provide a 'roaming' capability in a specific area of interest.
- The ability to prosecute a potential airborne threat rests with CF-18 fighters, who can intercept, identify and engage a target if necessary. This provides a deterrent (along with a force projection capability that can be employed if and when needed) which is effective in protecting our sovereignty. The limited numbers of fighters, and the huge area of responsibility involved, demand that this capability be used carefully and precisely. Our continued partnership in NORAD gives Canada access to intelligence and a wide variety sensors and systems, some of which are owned by the US, to provide assistance during times of crisis. This cooperation is reciprocated as well, such as a recent instance where CF-18 fighters held alert in Alaska while US F15 aircraft were grounded.
- The operation of maritime helicopters off existing Canadian ships, and Arctic offshore patrol ships in the future, vastly increases the area which a surface vessel can survey and influence. The introduction of the CH-148 Cyclone maritime helicopter over the next few years will provide an enduring and much-increased capability for the longer term. This will be absolutely essential for the protection of sovereignty of Canadian waters and to enable the application of force if needed.
- In the event of the need to deploy troops to a remote Canadian location to provide a physical presence 'on the ground', the use of airlift is often the only means. C17 strategic and C130 tactical airlift aircraft are essential for these missions. In addition to landing troops, supplies and support



equipment into remote airfields, they can also conduct air drops if needed. If local rotary-wing support is needed, the fleet of tactical Griffon helicopters, or other rotary-wing resources, is available for this unique role. These airlift capabilities apply equally to the support of an air force, or even navy, deployment as it does to one by the army.

- Investments currently identified to enhance and expand ground-based surveillance should continue. The deployment of future capabilities -- UAVs and sophisticated space-borne assets -- is supported as it will significantly enhance Canada's ability to protect its own sovereignty over a large area. Even with the physical limitations in communication and data relay capability due to satellite coverage in extreme northern latitudes, a fully-capable surveillance system consisting of these 'force multipliers' can be used to cue manned resources effectively to execute a mission when needed, be they air, land or seaborne.

Messages

- The protection of Canadian sovereignty is important.
- The air force currently has a number of capabilities which are essential to the effective assertion of Canadian sovereignty over its large area of responsibility. These need to be maintained and modernized over time.
- In addition to surveillance and force projection, the air force provides essential support to army and navy sovereignty operations.
- Future enhancements to air force related capabilities, such as the procurement of uninhabited aerial vehicles and access to improved space surveillance, should be pursued as priorities to enable sovereignty operations.

Developed by: Aviation Affairs Committee

Points of Contact:

George Macdonald, gmacdonald@cfncanada.com, (613) 232-1576

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