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NEWS RELEASE

Study Calls on Ottawa to Give Navy a Leading Role in Addressing Security Threats at Home and Abroad

Now more than ever Canada needs a navy for all seas, says Joel Sokolsky.

Montreal – With Ottawa’s refusal to take part in American Ballistic Missile Defence, the US may very well shift its attention to continental maritime security. A study released today by the Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP.org) says Canada needs a navy with the capacity to safeguard national interests both at home and overseas to secure the physical and economic well-being of its people in the global war on terrorism.

Author Joel Sokolsky (Royal Military College of Canada) explains that for over a hundred years Canada and the US have engaged in the “away game,” focusing their naval capabilities overseas, where the threats to their security have originated.

But since 9/11 the US has recognized the importance of playing the “home game” and increased emphasis on guarding continental waters, ports and ocean approaches. The US is still in the process of working out how it will structure and implement this strategic shift, particularly with regard to the roles and missions of its two maritime forces, the US Navy and the US Coast Guard.

Although the Canadian Navy has intervened in fisheries protection and search-and-rescue missions, the terrorist threat and the long-standing and mutually beneficial defence relationship with the US mean it must now, in addition to supplying forces overseas, place even more emphasis on domestic maritime security.

Unlike the US, Canada does not have an armed equivalent to the US Coast Guard. It “must rely on one set of armed forces, one team, for both the home and away games. This is the approach that must be taken in setting Canadian defence policy, especially the determination of the proper roles, missions and equipment for the Canadian Navy,” says Sokolsky.

But he cautions that enhancing the navy’s role in domestic maritime defence should not be used as an excuse to abandon its overseas operations and capabilities.

What does this mean in terms of the navy’s ship improvement and capital acquisition program? Sokolsky presents several options, which all imply funding increases. They include

- maintaining and enhancing the Frigate Equipment Life Extension
- acquiring vessels to fill the gap between the smaller coastal defence vessels and the larger frigates
- developing a force mix that includes the capabilities possessed by the destroyers
- continuing and expanding the navy's collaboration with other government departments in matters related to maritime security

While much remains to be done, the author recognizes that the government has responded with a comprehensive approach that compares favourably with the widespread efforts undertaken by the US.

"Guarding the Continental Coasts: United States Maritime Homeland Security and Canada" is the latest *Policy Matters* study to be released as part of IRPP's National Security and Military Interoperability series. It is now available free of charge, in Adobe (.pdf) format, on the Institute's Web site, at www.irpp.org.

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Founded in 1972, the Institute for Research in Public Policy (IRPP.org) is an independent, national, nonprofit organization based in Montreal.

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