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HMCS Toronto's mission misunderstood

By Tim Dunne

There are some columnists, correspondents and commentators I call RAVEs — reporters against virtually everything — who believe that Canada's engagement in international operations is a waste of tax dollars. Operations such as the RCN's participation in the 28-nation Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), they say, are unnecessary and expensive.

Canada's current contribution to the CMF, named Operation Artemis, is Halifax-based frigate HMCS Toronto. Since March 29, the ship has made three major drug busts, totalling almost 1,000 kilograms of heroin, in an area of the world internationally recognized as one where drug revenues contribute to terrorism.

The RAVEs tell us there is no proof these narcotics have anything to do with terrorism. However, CMF leadership disagrees. "The destruction of this cargo strikes at the financial heart of global terrorist organizations," says the Royal Australian Navy's Commodore Charles McHardie.

Illegal narcotics have other impacts. "Heroin, cocaine and other drugs continue to kill around 200,000 people a year, shattering families and bringing misery to thousands of other people, insecurity and the spread of HIV," Yury Fedotov, executive director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, told the UN General Assembly last June.

This office reports that production, trafficking and sales of illicit drugs is a \$400-billion-

a-year industry. In its 2012 annual report, it says that \$200 billion to \$250 billion US could be needed for drug treatment, and an equivalent cost in productivity losses resulting from illicit drug use.

Removing these drugs from the global narcotic marketplace performs a service for Canada and the world.

HMCS Toronto is part of a responsive international force providing maritime security in an area where freedom of the seas is critical to international trade. The U.S. Energy Information Administration reports that the Strait of Hormuz, for instance, is the world's most important petroleum transit choke point, through which 16 million barrels of crude oil, 35 per cent of the world's petroleum supply transported by sea, pass each day.

The Indian Ocean and its major maritime choke points — the straits of Malacca, Sunda and Lombok — are also increasingly critical gateways for energy, manufactured goods and produce between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea.

Much of the manufactured goods that Canadians purchase pass through here. The Baltic and International Maritime Council estimates that if maritime piracy off Africa's east coast and in the Gulf of Oman forces mercantile shipping to abandon the Suez Canal and head south, around the Cape of Good Hope, it will add at least 5,600 kilometres to shipping times, increasing fuel costs and salaries for each shipment, which will be passed to the consumer.

The deployment of HMCS Toronto and her predecessors places a Canadian warship in an area where the RCN can flexibly respond to any number of missions across a broad spectrum of potential operations, including humanitarian assistance, counter-terrorism, regional military engagement, and international diplomacy.

HMCS Ville de Québec, in 2008, was the naval escort for 10 ships contracted by the UN World Food Program when these ships were the targets of pirates. This Canadian warship ensured the safety of these ships as they delivered 36 million kilograms of food aid to Somalia, enough to feed 400,000 people for six months.

Naval deployments such as Operation Artemis have other benefits. Seamanship, like all other professions, is not a natural skill, but one that is learned, honed and perfected. The more time our naval personnel are at sea practising their profession, the more capable they become, and the better they are at defending Canada's international interests.

This is a lesson that Great Britain learned in the 17th century that allowed her survival and sovereignty, and protected her status as a trading nation.

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