

# Want a slice of sky pie?

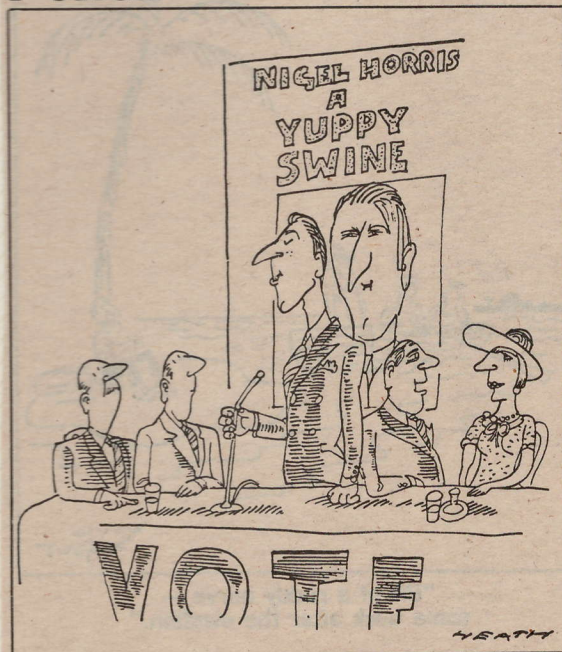
Canada's new defence white paper makes dandy reading. But, as I said in a recent column, it all seems like so much pie in the sky. I doubt any of us will live to see the fleet of subs, the tanks, the war stocks, aircraft or ships that are being proposed. Face it, daycare advocates are a bigger scare to Ottawa politicians than the Russians.

While Canada is talking about buying new subs and more anti-submarine aircraft and ships, NATO is facing a huge new headache. Until recently, Soviet subs were noisy and could be easily spotted and tracked by NATO sonar systems. The U.S. SOSUS underwater system off Virginia can, for example, pick up a Soviet Yankee class sub transiting the Strait of Gibraltar and identify it by its sound signature.

Now, however, the Soviets have introduced new classes of extremely quiet subs, such as the Mike, Sierra and Akula boats, that run just about as silently and as stealthily as American subs. What this means is that NATO's sonar sensing equipment will have a most difficult time picking up the quieter Soviet subs. Some experts fear that even with the addition of new and expensive signal processing systems that NATO sonar — at least of the passive type — will no longer work.

To find the new Soviet subs, NATO will have to use active sonar that sends out waves of sound. Doing so also precisely identifies the location of the emitting sub. Not surprisingly, submariners hate to use active sonar. Today, the Soviets have the devil of a time spotting U.S. nuclear subs; soon, NATO will have just as much trouble locating Soviet subs. New anti-sub technologies, like blue-green lasers and wake turbulence measurement, are still in the concept stage.

## Punch



"Well, at least he's honest."

ERIC MARGOLIS



Not only are Soviet subs growing quieter, they are also getting more robust. New classes have double hulls of super-hardened alloys, including titanium. Some, such as the giant Oscar class, may even have three hulls. Naval strategists are now deeply worried that NATO's light torpedoes, the ones carried by helicopters and frigates, won't even penetrate the hardened outer hulls of the Soviet subs. Some experts also doubt that NATO heavy torpedoes will be able to penetrate double hulls and sink enemy subs. Even shaped warheads may not do the job. A growing number of naval experts fear that only nuclear-armed torpedoes will sink the Red Navy's tough subs.

Add to this problem recent Soviet advances in sound-absorbing anechoic coatings. Lately, the Soviets have also begun to deploy a new generation of underwater countermeasure systems that decoy, spoof or jam NATO sonars and acoustic homing warheads. In fact, submarines have now fully entered the incredibly complex world of electronic warfare, countermeasures, stealth and counter-countermeasures. Costs, as usual, are soaring as submarines become floating electronic laboratories.

What does this mean for Canada's white paper? First: Planning to buy a fleet of good but certainly not even current state-of-the-art submarines means that when and if these boats ever sail, they will likely be obsolete. We are now undergoing one of the most turbulent periods of change in anti-submarine warfare technology (ASW) in recent years. It's no time to start buying technology that is in such flux.

In truth, why invest billions in ships, subs and aircraft that may not be able to spot their quarry? And even if they do, will Canada's proposed ASW units be able to sink hard-skinned Soviet subs? Mining at the outbreak of war is far cheaper and far more effective. Canada does not need to patrol the underwater Arctic seas — only to block choke points with mines.

By trying to police the Arctic, buy more ships and planes, add troops in Europe and build reserves, Canada's civilian defence planners are making a classic error that cadets learn to avoid early in military school. Frederick the Great put it best: "He who tries to defend everything, defends nothing." This is exactly what Ottawa is proposing to do. Our puny defence budget might be up to any one of these missions, like defending our coasts, our airspace or convoys in wartime. Buying mine-sweepers for example, or an AWACS system, makes excellent sense.

Doing it all, with no increase in taxes, is not only political pie in the sky and downright flim-flammery, it is a disturbing sign that our political masters have truly lost touch with reality.