

Canadian CP-140 “Aurora” spy planes gathered intelligence for the U.S. military during the first four months of the Iraq war in 2003.



## *The Hunt for Moving Targets, from Submersibles to Subversives: The 2003 Iraq War as Turning Point in the Evolution of Missions for Canada’s CP-140s*

By Richard Sanders, coordinator, Coalition to Oppose the Arms Trade

In March 2003, NDP Leader Jack Layton said that, despite claims to the contrary, Canada *was* involved in the war on Iraq. He called for Canadian troops to be withdrawn and charged that Canada’s CP-140 “Aurora” spy planes were supplying information used in U.S. attacks:

“We think there’s a very strong likelihood that that information is used to assist in the bombing, that Canadians are complicit as a result, and our government is complicit.”<sup>1</sup>

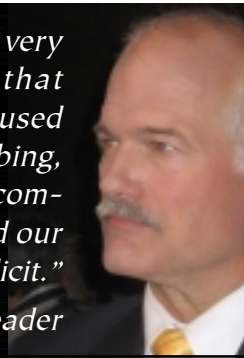
Soon thereafter, Conservative Senator J. Michael Forrestall raised the issue, although without the demand that Canadian Forces be recalled from Iraq. “Honourable senators,” Forrestall said, “a week ago it was reported that our Aurora maritime patrol aircraft in the Persian Gulf were feeding the Americans direct intelligence on Iraqi naval movements.”<sup>2</sup> His point, as always, was to expose Liberal government hypocrisy in denying Canada’s involvement in the Iraq war. He, like other Conservatives, was not demanding that Canadian Forces, like the CP-140 crews, be brought home, but just that they be recognised and honoured for their role in the Iraq war.

What is the CP-140 Aurora? Built by U.S. war-industry behemoth, Lockheed, the Aurora is described as Canada’s strategic Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance aircraft. This long-range military patrol plane is equipped with a variety of high-tech electronic imaging devices and target tracking systems that are designed to supply the data used by warships, land forces and other warplanes to carry out their bombing and attack missions.

Canada’s CP-140—a variant of

*“We think there’s a very strong likelihood that that information is used to assist in the bombing, that Canadians are complicit as a result, and our government is complicit.”*

*Jack Layton, NDP Leader*



the U.S. Navy’s P-3 Orion—was originally designed and used during the Cold War to find and destroy the latest stealth submarines. However, because of the change in perceived threats and the fact that it can fly over 9200 km without refuelling, the CP-140 has been “ideal for an evolving variety of operations.”<sup>3</sup>

In mid-February 2003, CBC News Online reported that there was “a detachment of Canadian Aurora maritime patrol aircraft” based in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), a small

country on the Persian Gulf. These Canadian warplanes, “operating from the Al Dhafra air base, have been helping enforce UN shipping sanctions against Iraq.”<sup>4</sup> According to Major Neil Tabbenor, when he and other Canadian Aurora personnel were deployed to the Persian Gulf, they were based in Dubai, UAE, and worked out of Canada’s elusive “Camp Mirage.”<sup>5</sup>

The U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), which projects America’s military might throughout the Middle East and Central Asia, mentions the CP-140s in its description of Canada’s role in the so-called “War on Terror.” CENTCOM explains that “two CP-140 Aurora long-range surveillance and maritime patrol aircraft with about 200 Air Force personnel, including flight crews and support personnel” were deployed to the Persian Gulf between December 27, 2001, and June 19, 2003.<sup>6</sup> This document goes on to explain that the primary mission of Canada’s Long-Range Patrol Detachment (LRP Det.) was to

“deliver reconnaissance and surveillance support to the maritime coalition forces. The CP-140 Aurora extended the surveillance range of maritime coalition forces to areas not accessible to ship-borne radar, and Aurora crews typically gathered information well before ships’ radar operators could. Aurora crews also contributed to the security of coalition forces by watching for vessels

of interest....

The Auroras are equipped with a sensor array that includes forward-looking infrared cameras, digital cameras and conventional radar. With speed, endurance and range of coverage, the Auroras and their crews kept a watchful eye on the myriad of surface vessels operating in the Arabian Gulf and the Arabian Sea.<sup>77</sup>

Richard Gimblett, "Command Historian of the Canadian Navy," notes that the "CF Aurora long-range patrol aircraft flew 507 missions, for a total of 4,375 hours" during the 530 days of their mission under Operation Apollo.<sup>8</sup>

This is also confirmed by the official Canadian Air Force website which states that CP-140 aircraft were deployed to "the Persian Gulf from late 2001 to mid-2003" where they "flew 500 air patrol sorties as part of Canada's role in the international campaign against terrorism."<sup>9</sup>

### Supporting the U.S. 5th Fleet in the "War on Terror"

Canadian Forces' photographs of CP-140s in the Persian Gulf just before the official start of the Iraq war in March 2003, have captions that sum up the role of Canada's Long Range Patrol Detachment (LRP Det.) in America's so-called War on Terror. For example:

"LRP Det. members provide maritime surveillance support and intelligence-gathering in support of Operation Apollo, Canada's military contribution to the Campaign Against Terrorism."<sup>10</sup>

"The mission of the LRP Det is to work with the U.S. Navy 5th Fleet to deliver reconnaissance and surveillance support to the U.S.-led maritime coalition forces."<sup>11</sup>

According to its official website, the mission of the American Navy's 5th Fleet is to conduct

"persistent maritime operations to forward U.S. interests, deter and counter disruptive countries, defeat violent extremism and strengthen partner nations' maritime capabilities."<sup>12</sup>

To this end, the 5th Fleet oversees all U.S. naval forces and their mili-



Canadian Forces photo by Corp. Henry Walli.

From under the wing of a CP-140 "Aurora" spy plane, four CC-130 "Hercules" are seen in the background.

This photograph was taken on April 4, 2003, at an undisclosed location in the "Arabian Gulf Region" (most likely at Canada's "Camp Mirage," UAE).

tary operations. These operations are carried out as if the U.S. and its allies had impunity from the laws of the 27 countries that front on "2.5 million square miles of water area" in the Central Command so-called "area of responsibility." Under the 5th Fleet's self-anointed jurisdiction are the "Arabian Gulf, Red Sea, Gulf of Oman and parts of the Indian Ocean."<sup>13</sup> Its self-described mission includes "Combat Operations" which are defined in this way "Maritime forces maintain the capability to project power ashore, to conduct sustained combat operations in support of coalition land commanders, provide air support to multinational forces on the ground as well as conduct long range strikes with aircraft and Tomahawk Land Attack Cruise Missiles against enemy targets."<sup>14</sup>

Among the 5th Fleet's most regular activities are what they euphemistically call Maritime Interdiction Operations (MIO). A subcategory of these are so-called Leadership Interdiction Operations (LIO).

In a 2003 paper on "The Perception versus the Reality of Canadian Military Involvement in the Iraq War," professor Sean Maloney—an avid militarist at Canada's Royal Military College—noted that the "initial Canadian contribution" to the Afghan War's "Operation Enduring Freedom" included not only "six ships (four frigates, a de-

stroyer and a support ship)" and "three C-130 transport aircraft," but also a "pair of Aurora maritime patrol aircraft." "These forces," he says, were "operating alongside coalition forces" to conduct "leadership interdiction operations... to prevent Al Qaeda and Taliban leaders from escaping by sea."<sup>15</sup>

Maloney, however, does not discuss the important issue of "double-hatting" which refers to how these Canadian operations were clearly designed to assist both the Afghan and Iraq wars. (For more details on Canada's role in Persian Gulf naval operations that were intent on the capture and "rendition" of Iraqi suspects to U.S. custody in 2003, see p.11.)

The involvement of Canadian CP-140s in these naval interdiction operations is confirmed by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). A CRS report for the U.S. Congress provides a list of Canadian contributions to the so-called War on Terrorism. It notes that "Two CP 140 Aurora aircraft are conducting MIO/LIO operations as part of Carrier Task Force [CTF] 57."<sup>16</sup> CTF 57 is the "Maritime Patrol Force" of the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet. Although its basic goal is to conduct "maritime surveillance and reconnaissance operations region wide,"<sup>17</sup> this mission has been changing as spy technologies aboard CP-140s have continued to advance.

## The Operational Shift from Sea to Land Operations

The evolving nature of CTF-57 operations became especially apparent during the opening salvos of the Iraq war.

“In March 2003, CTF-57 demonstrated groundbreaking employment of [Maritime Patrol Reconnaissance Aircraft] MPRA aircraft overland [in] Iraq in support of Operation

along and communicate with the troops on the ground.”<sup>19</sup>

As Air Warfare Systems Operator 2nd Class, Cheryl Campbell explained, airborne camera operators aboard P-3s now “have the ability to watch ground operations, and relay information to the troops about activity in the area.”<sup>20</sup>

Clearly, 2003 was a watershed moment for the overland use of these “maritime” aircraft. As the Commander

“Auroras have been fitted with upgraded equipment that will allow the airplanes to conduct increased and more detailed surveillance over land.

Using the aircraft for overland intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance is a new role for Auroras, say the documents, which note the planes may need an army liaison officer to be part of the on-board crew.”<sup>22</sup>

These enhancements to Canada’s fleet of CP-140s were part of the \$1.67 billion Aurora Incremental Modernization Project (AIMP) which began in 1998. Among many other additions and improvements to the CP-140, the AIMP has included these contracts:

- Upgrades to navigation and flight instruments (CMC Electronics),
- New electro-optical and infrared sensors (L-3 Communications),
- New MX-20 long-range multisensor imaging system with electro-optical, laser-illuminated, see-in-the-dark surveillance cameras<sup>23</sup> (L-3 Wescam),
- APS-508 radar project which integrates maritime patrol and overland air-to-ground, Synthetic-Aperture Radar/Ground Moving Target Indicator<sup>24</sup> (MacDonald, Dettwiler and Assoc, and Alliant Tech Systems).

Probably the most important phase of AIMP began in 2003. That’s when they began to add

“a new airborne radar surveillance solution... [to] give Canada’s fleet [of CP-140s] the ability... to detect, track, and image objects moving on land as well as at sea.”<sup>25</sup>

Armed with this and other new ground-breaking, “over-land” technology, Canada began using CP-140s in Afghanistan in 2009. This “deployment of the Auroras and their highly specialized sensor equipment,” said Defence Minister Peter MacKay, “will produce valuable digital aerial imagery to improve awareness of the situation on the ground for deployed Canadian Forces and allied troops.”<sup>26</sup>

Lt.-General Angus Watt, Chief of Canada’s Air Force, also commented on this expanded role for the CP-140 by saying that the deployment of Auroras to Afghanistan “represents an expansion from its long-time role of maritime patrol.”<sup>27</sup>

Corp. Chris Buglar, member of the Long-Range Patrol Detachment (LRP Det), Greenwood, NS, washes a CP-140 at an undisclosed air base in the “Arabian Gulf Region,” probably Canada’s “Camp Mirage,” United Arab Emirates.

The caption for this Canadian Forces’ photograph states that:

“The mission of the LRP Det is to work with the US Navy 5th Fleet to deliver reconnaissance and surveillance support to the US-led maritime coalition forces.”

When the “shock and awe” bombardment of Iraq began in March 2003, Canada’s LRP Det. was not withdrawn. Canadian CP-140s and their crews continued to aid the Iraq war.



Source: Canadian Forces’ photo by Corp. Henry Wall, February 12, 2003. APD03-0512-15

Iraqi Freedom. P-3s [the U.S. equivalent of Canada’s CP-140s] flew armed surveillance and reconnaissance missions, both overland and in maritime roles.”<sup>18</sup>

This “overland” use of MPRA aircraft is also discussed in a September 2003 article celebrating the CTF-57’s role in Iraq. In this article, “Journalist 1st Class” Dennis J. Herring, from 5th Fleet Public Affairs, says the CTF 57’s

“two primary missions are supporting ground troops in Iraq and performing [Operation Iraqi Freedom] OIF maritime interception operations (MIO) as part of the coalition’s effort to stop illegal smuggling of oil.”

He then quotes the CTF-57’s deputy commander, Capt. David Mitchell, who explains that the Task Force’s

“overland mission has been primarily in support of Marine Corps troops on the ground, but also Army ... During these missions, we usually have one of their officers ride

of CTF-57 Public Affairs said

“The mission of the P-3 has evolved even further inland during this conflict, and has continued to make the Orion the ‘asset of choice’ for real time imagery that Marine units need for success on the battlefield.... As new targets or potential targets would emerge... the P-3 provides a mix of imagery [including] high resolution infrared images which provide the ‘big picture’ to those on the ground....

The P-3 continues to move forward and evolve as a package, giving the operational commander flexibility and options for both target identification and neutralizing threats to ground forces.”<sup>21</sup>

According to documents obtained by the New Democratic Party in 2006, upgrades to the sensor technology aboard Canadian CP-140s had already been done to allow these sorts of new, land-surveillance operations to assist military units fighting on the ground:



## The CP-140s Latest Targets: Overseeing “Security” in Vancouver and Toronto

The CP-140’s warfighting role has continued to expand and evolve for decades. It has been used to track Russian submarines, to pursue elusive Iraqi leaders fleeing aboard ships in the Persian Gulf, and to target insurgents fighting the occupation of Afghanistan. Now there is a new target in the Aurora’s sights. Canada’s CP-140s have been used to carry out surveillance work during two huge domestic “security” operations within Canada, namely, at the Winter Olympics and during the G8-G20 extravaganza in Ontario.

The first of these—Operation Podium—took place during the Olympic/Paralympic games, in February and March 2010. Canada’s Air Force has described Operation Podium as “the most complex domestic operation ever undertaken in Canada,” and says it was “the largest [Canadian Forces] CF and Air Force deployment in recent memory.”<sup>28</sup> It was also “the first time in Canada” that “video streaming from CP-140” was “operationalised,” i.e., used in a “real world” operation outside a military exercise. And, the Air

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Battle tested over Yugoslavia, Iraq and Afghanistan, CP-140 spy planes also spied on 2010 protests in Vancouver and Toronto. As the VP of Canada’s L3 Wescam proudly reports, they provided “persistent surveillance in an overview capability to keep an eye out for **anyone who might want to cause trouble.**”

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Force also described it as a “world first,” in terms of using “integrated data links from the Air Force, Navy and [Canadian NORAD Region] CANR, as well as the U.S. Navy, U.S. Air Force and U.S. Coast Guard, into one coherent air and maritime picture.”<sup>29</sup>

Cutting through such technical descriptions, the vice president of Canada’s L-3 Wescam—which makes high-tech spy cameras and sensors for the CP-140—summed up its role at the



### MX-20 Imaging Turret

Combining highly accurate gyro-stabilization with multiple, high-magnification, day and night vision sensors, this long-range imaging system is mounted under the nose of the CP-140. It contains electro-optical, laser-illuminated, see-in-the-dark surveillance cameras. It is manufactured by L3 Wescam in Burlington, Ontario.

Olympics in this way:

“They were used at the Winter Olympics in Vancouver this year providing persistent surveillance in an overview capability to keep an eye out for anyone who might want to cause trouble.”<sup>30</sup>

A few months later, the CP-140 was at it again, this time over the turbulent downtown streets of Toronto, during protests against the G8-G20 summit. On June 26<sup>31</sup> and June 27,<sup>32</sup> an Aurora aircraft was seen continuously circling over Toronto’s downtown core as thousands of citizens assembled to express opposition to government policies, including the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. (See photograph above.) An Aurora was also spotted flying nearby over Burlington and Hamilton, Ontario, on June 23,<sup>33</sup> just as excessive “security” restrictions descended upon citizens of the entire region.

The CP-140 that was on the lookout over Toronto was part of what the military called Operation Cadence. Col. Eyre, Commander of a Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group at Canadian Forces Base Petawawa, described it as “the largest security operation in the history of Canada.”<sup>34</sup> It was also a

first, said Maj. Kael Rennie and Capt. Matt Crosbie, in that “a Tactical Air Control Party (TACP) saw its first ever major domestic operation in Canada.” This was unusual, they continue, because

“Normal TACP duties included the employment of fixed wing and attack helicopters in the employment of air-to-ground munitions. While that works well in Afghanistan, it was obviously not the desired effect for the G8/G20.”<sup>35</sup>

Canada’s new, battle-tested technology is referred to as the “Overland Equipment Mission Suite” and the “Tactical Common DataLink.” Using L3 Wescam cameras affixed to the CP-140s, these new systems provide “full motion video imagery” for the immediate use of army and/or police units on the ground, whether they are battling the Taliban or ban-the-bomb protesters. As Major CMR Larsen puts it:

“In plain speak: the Aurora can now use its powerful camera system efficiently, and while airborne can actually transmit video to a supported unit.... What we can see from the air, a tactical commander can see on the ground. It is not hard to imagine how this capability greatly adds to the ‘big picture’ required by operational commanders.”<sup>36</sup>

In an even 'bigger picture' view of this 'technological advancement,' what this means is that the militarisation of policing in Canada has reached phenomenally new heights.

The CP-140 aircraft overflying the government's highly-militarised, \$1 billion response to G8/G20 protests, was operating out of a Canadian Forces Base (CFB) in Trenton, Ontario. Two RCMP officers very-happily took turns working 12-hour shifts doing "air services" aboard the CP-140. As RCMP Cpl. Bob Thomas describes it:

"We did flight observation for the security on the ground.... Just before both Summits started I moved to CFB Trenton and did all my flying from there as the Summits were going on."<sup>37</sup>

Thomas was chosen for the job because of his experience with "aerial flight observation and infrared camera training." He was

"one of just two RCMP officers assigned to fly with the...surveillance aircraft, a CP-140 Aurora. It was that opportunity that Thomas found most memorable. 'It was an awesome experience.'"<sup>38</sup>

### What Next?

In the "old days," Canada's CP-140 Auroras were used primarily for hunting Soviet submarines. Those days have long gone. The Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance technology that became operational aboard America's P-3 Orion warplanes during the 2003 Iraq war, is now being used by the Canadian CP-140 versions of these long-range, U.S. patrol aircraft, to conduct overland missions in rural Afghanistan and to spy on major protests such as those which occurred in Toronto and Vancouver this year.

The dramatic evolution from the CP-140s role in "leadership interdiction" missions over the Persian Gulf in the early 2000s to their "leadership protection" missions above Toronto's summit meetings in 2010, took a dramatic turn in 2003 due to "advances" in airborne surveillance technologies that occurred during the height of the air war against Iraq. Canada's military caught the wave of those "advances" and is now riding it rapidly forward aboard modernized, battle-hardened CP-140s.

What does this bode for the future use of CP-140s in foreign wars and domestic operations? There is definitely a cross-fertilisation occurring between Canada's military and police forces. The technologically-enhanced experiences of warriors who use airborne surveillance platforms like the CP-140 while fighting insurgents in foreign battlezones is being increasingly used to enhance and inform major "homeland security" operations against dissidents on Canadian streets. Canada's Air Force says it is planning to further "capitalize" on this cross-fertilisation:

"With the wrap up of Op Cadence, the 9-member [Tactical Air Control Party] TACP team will dissolve and each member will return to their home units. The Air Force, however, is planning to expand the capability of the TACPs within each Brigade beginning in the summer of 2010 in order to capitalize on the hard-earned successes not only in the skies and on the battlefields of Afghanistan but also here at home in Canada."<sup>39</sup>

Canadian crews operating CP-140 Auroras at the Comox Air Force Base on Vancouver Island, BC, aptly call themselves the "Demon Squadron." In their "vision" statement, they recognize the changing nature of the CP-140's role, saying: "The Demons will be leaders in a dynamic environment. In our quest for excellence, we will embrace and pursue technological change."<sup>40</sup> And, in their "mission" statement, Canada's "Demon" warriors express their willingness to embrace their future wherever it leads, including "to project air power at home and abroad": "The 407 Demon Squadron mission is to provide regional, national and expeditionary commanders with a rapidly deployable, self-sufficient, combat [Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance] ISR and [Anti-Submarine Warfare] ASW attack capability to enable them to project air power at home and abroad."

The "Demon's Creed" concludes:

"The Demons are proud warriors.... We are the eyes, ears and fists of commanders over the land and sea.... We are proud to be recognized as Demons."<sup>41</sup>

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## CP-140: Not Just a Spy Plane!



Toronto International  
Air Show,  
September 4, 2005.

A CP-140  
with  
wide-open,  
bomb-bay  
doors.

## The "Aurora's" Weapons Capabilities

By Richard Sanders, coordinator, Coalition to Oppose the Arms Trade

The Canadian Air Force website states that the following "weapons systems" are used by CP-140s: "Mark 46 Mod. V anti-submarine torpedoes; signal chargers; smoke markers; illumination flares."<sup>1</sup> This official military source then notes that the CP-140 can "be retrofitted to carry anti-surface air-to-surface missiles."<sup>2</sup>

The CP-140 can also "be fitted after a minor retrofit" to carry "air-to-surface rockets or conventional bombs. Virtually any armament cleared for use on the P-3 series can be fitted for [CP-140] use based on airframe similarities."<sup>3</sup> (The P-3 "Orion" is the U.S. Long Range Patrol aircraft from which Canada's CP-140s are derived, and they are "virtually identical externally."<sup>4</sup>)

The fact that CP-140s can carry the same variety of weapons as P-3s is also indicated by the type of "weapon shackles" that these two aircraft employ. These "shackles" or "bomb racks" inside CP-140 bomb bays, are the pylons to which weapons are affixed or mounted during flight. These racks allow bombs to be "safely" and efficiently dropped from the aircraft. The Canadian CP-140 "Bomb bay uses BRU-12A Weapon shackles; Bomb bay and wing stations [are] fit-

ted with BRU-15A shackles."<sup>4</sup> These two varieties of BRUs (Bomb Release Units) are also used aboard America's P-3 "Orion" warplanes.<sup>5</sup>

A 1987 source on weapons systems states that the CP-140's "lower fuselage weapons bay [is] capable of taking 4,800 lb (2177 kg) of stores on eight stations or 6,350 lb (2427 kg) on three stations.... Among the weapon types which can be carried are depth bombs, mines, torpedoes and missiles such as the AGM-84 Harpoon anti-ship missile."<sup>6</sup>

### References

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