The Asia-Pacific and the Royal Canadian Navy
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Executive Summary

Over the past five years, there have been repeated academic and media calls for greater Canadian engagement in the Asia-Pacific, with the Royal Canadian Navy taking the lead. Such engagement, it was claimed, was needed to reflect Canada’s increasing economic links, rapidly-growing personal ties to the area, and the deteriorating security climate, especially in the South China Sea. Despite government claims that Canada “gets it” as to the importance of the region, little of consequence has occurred and our Navy’s Atlantic dominance remains. For this and other reasons, Canada is now widely considered “absent” from the region. This paper argues that this cannot safely continue as both our security and our access to the rapidly growing Pacific economies will be at risk. The paper then examines our history in the area, the 2011 U.S. “Pacific pivot,” our own weak “mini pivot,” and the current security situation before providing detailed recommendations for greater Canadian naval engagement.
Since 2011, over fifteen academic papers and numerous newspaper articles have argued for greater Canadian engagement in the Asia-Pacific. Such engagement, it was claimed, was needed to reflect Canada’s increasing economic links and rapidly-growing personal ties to the area. It was also widely claimed that the deteriorating security climate, especially in the South China Sea, called for a Canadian security response, and frequently this centered on increasing Canadian naval engagement in the Asia-Pacific. Throughout, there was a consistent call for a published Canadian strategy to guide such trade, foreign policy, and security efforts.

Today, there is broad agreement that all this analysis produced nothing of consequence. There has been no government strategy for the Asia-Pacific, no sustained Canadian foreign policy effort there, and the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) continues to have more of its ships stationed in the Atlantic and is doing significantly less in the Pacific than it was in the 1990s. For these and other reasons, Canada is widely considered absent from the region today and this paper will argue that this cannot safely continue. To support these arguments, the first part of this paper will briefly examine our history in the area, the 2011 U.S. “Pacific pivot” and our own weak “mini pivot,” and the current security situation before recommending greater Canadian naval engagement.

1 In particular see the Center for International Governance Innovation - Australian Strategic Policy Institute (CIGI-ASPI) 2013 series on Canadian-Australian cooperation in the Asia-Pacific; the 2011 International Journal, the 2014 Canadian Foreign Policy Journal, and the 2014 Canadian Naval Review each of which is dedicated to the Asia-Pacific. In 2014-5 Matthew Fisher of the National Post provided three detailed articles on the same theme. This paper will footnote many of these.


3 Wendy Dobson, “The Middle Power and the Middle Kingdom: Securing Canada’s Place in the New China-US Economic and Strategic World Order,” SPP Communiqué, University of Calgary, School of Public Policy, Vol. 6, Is. 3 (April 2014), 11.
CANADA'S INVOLVEMENT IN ASIA-PACIFIC SECURITY

Over the last thirty years, Canada's involvement in the Asia-Pacific is probably more accurately described as erratic, rather than as absent. For example, we briefly engaged with the states of the region during the Canadian-initiated Northwest Pacific Security Dialogue (1990-1993) and then with our funding of the South China Sea Dialogues in the mid-1990s, but our attention soon drifted elsewhere. Canada’s erratic behaviour had dire results. Peter Jones notes our sudden termination of the Northwest Pacific Security Dialogue left many in the region doubtful as to Canada's “staying power,”⁴ while James Manicom argues our similarly abrupt cancellation of the South China Sea Dialogues' funding “cost Canada its reputation in East Asia.”⁵

Our military and naval engagements in the area were similarly short-term and erratic. Canada responded successfully to emerging crises by participating in the UN mission to East Timor and a series of disaster relief efforts, but this was entirely reactive. Something more resembling an engagement strategy emerged in the 1990s as the Canadian Navy began a series of biennial deployments to the region. These “Western Pacific Deployments,” or “Westploys,” sent four-ship naval formations to the area, alternating between the North Pacific and South Pacific. These were closely coordinated with our Pacific embassies and involved all the traditional confidence-building measures of personnel exchanges and local exercises backed up by Canada-hosted strategic discussions and seminars in major ports. As they soon involved brand-new Canadian patrol frigates and massively upgraded Tribal class destroyers, the Westploys were impressive, if temporary, demonstrations of Canadian interest and capability.⁶

These engagement efforts then came to a sudden halt in 2001 as the Navy and all defence funding were reprioritized to the War on Terror and Afghanistan. Soon after, the first of the RCN’s twelve frigates began entering their eighteen-month-long mid-life modernization reducing fleet availability by twenty to twenty-five per cent. Warship numbers fell further with the recent decision to decommission the aging Tribal Class destroyers and replenishment ships. As a result, maintaining ships on station for such critical deployments as those off Libya or in the Mediterranean and Black Sea after the Russian seizure of the Crimea and incursion into the Ukraine has been difficult. It now requires that the Atlantic and the Pacific fleets combine efforts to keep one single Canadian frigate on station overseas permanently. There is arguably little spare capacity today for a return to the earlier Westploy model. Understandably, the Navy has made clear it will not be following the U.S. rebalancing model any time soon and argues the current fifty-five per cent Atlantic, forty-five per cent Pacific split of the RCN continues to satisfy

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⁵ Manicom, “Maritime Security and the Canada-China Relationship,” 2.
⁶ See Mulroney, 158 for a very convincing description of these deployments' value.
the current need for European, Middle East, and Caribbean-based deployments. However, in 2018 the frigate modernization will conclude, and a more equitable distribution of warships would appear to allow for more sustained Pacific deployments while signaling to all, much like the U.S. fleet rebalance to Asia does, that Canada is backing up its Pacific aspirations with real assets.

However, the evidence is strong that the current government also had no plan to boost its contribution to Asia-Pacific security. The 2008 Canada First Defence Strategy and the Navy’s in-draft strategic guidance document, Horizon 2050, raised concerns as to the potential for future state-on-state conflict, the arms buildup in the Asia-Pacific, and the increasing danger to the sea lines of communications. These documents do not, however, consider any sustained Canadian military contribution to the Pacific area in any guise now or in the long term.

2011 U.S. PIVOT

Up until 2011, the United States, bemired in Afghanistan and Iraq, was also seen to be “disengaging” from the Pacific. Simultaneously, China became more assertive in the region as it saw an opportunity to fill the security vacuum. Since 1997, that ambition has been significantly assisted by double-digit annual increases in defence spending. Her increasing military capabilities, combined with aggressive activities at sea led, however, to dramatically heightened regional tensions, a threatened collection of American allies, and the subsequent U.S. rebalance to the Pacific. Former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta declared it “by far the most important strategic decision” of the Obama administration. This would alter the U.S. Navy’s 50-50 Atlantic-Pacific split and send sixty per cent of its fleet to the Pacific. Probably the most significant element of this rebalancing is the fact that fifty per cent of those ships and submarines would be forward deployed.

The U.S. strategy also involved a well-advertised effort to make clear the rebalance will engage China via high-level bilateral discussions, invitations to major exercises such as RIMPAC, and a code of conduct to reduce tensions at sea. The strategy also had the declared goal of reassuring old allies like Australia, Japan and South Korea, while offering support to non-aligned, but increasingly concerned states such as Vietnam, Malaysia, India and the Philippines. It sought to advance the area’s multilateral institutions, and the U.S. government most frequently focused on those led by the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN). Within the rebalance there was also a rather obvious effort to contain or balance China, but this component was not stated

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8 Mulroney, 151.


10 The Association of South-East Asian Nations, ASEAN, includes Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.
and is frequently denied. David MacDonough correctly concludes, however, that the U.S. Pacific rebalance simultaneously provides both a “soft” public engagement thrust reinforced with “hard” but unadvertised balancing against China.

2012 AND THE CANADIAN MINI-PIVOT

In 2012, there was a marked increase in the Canadian government’s interest in the Asia-Pacific which experts have termed, somewhat critically one suspects, a “mini-pivot” or “economic pivot.” This had little to do with the American rebalancing or the deteriorating security situation generally, and James Manicom of the Center for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) sensed the Canadian project was, instead, entirely trade-based. Within government, trade with Asia is especially valued, as up to now, the largest percentage of Canada’s exports have gone to the older established economies that, with the exception of the U.S., have slow or negative growth. Only eight per cent of our exports go to the regions with the fastest growth, and this of course includes the Asia-Pacific. The government’s confidential but leaked draft Canadian Foreign Policy Plan warned:

The situation is stark: Canada’s trade and investment relations with new economies, leading with Asia, must deepen, and as a country we must become more relevant to our new partners.

However, government efforts to increase our Pacific trade have been hampered by Canada’s weak presence in the region, with former Canadian Ambassador to China, David Mulroney (2009-2012), pointing out that Canada had a particularly difficult time gaining entry to the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement as a result of the fact that we were no longer considered a “player” in the region. Moreover, the ASEAN Secretary General then publicly reminded Canada in 2012 that it should not expect to join its forums without providing a sustained presence in the region. Ambassador Mulroney completely agreed and argued that Canada was excluded because

[11] ________, “America in Asia - Pivotal,” Economist, 3 May 2014, 35. Secretary of State Clinton first outlined the policy in 2011 declaring “The future of politics will be decided in Asia, not Afghanistan or Iraq, and the United States will be right in the center of the action.”
[13] The DFATD website proclaims that Canada that is “committed to playing an even bigger role in the region” and that “our engagement in Asia-Pacific has never been stronger,” See also Mulroney, 157; and Fen Osler Hampson and Derek Burney, “Asia-Pacific on a knife’s edge - what Canada should do,” CIGI/ iPolitics, 8 Apr 2013, at https://www.cigionline.org/articles/2013/04/asia-pacific-knife-edge-what-canada-should-do accessed 28 Apr 2015.
[16] Ibid.
[17] David Mulroney, 157. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) will likely involve the United States, Japan, Australia, Vietnam, Singapore, Chile, Mexico, Brunei, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, and Canada. The Ambassador also pointed out that our widely known dairy protection was less of a hindrance than our lack of a sustained presence in the region.
...we have largely been absent from the region for the last twenty years, other than occasionally showing up to key conferences and, rarer still, sending one of our few available frigates on an area visit.19

The Canadian mini-pivot that would hopefully overcome these impressions was not left entirely to the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD). Rather, much was entrusted to the Department of National Defence's (DND) Global Engagement Policy. Under this title, the department correctly focused on gaining entry to the East Asian Summit and ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus, the fora with the tightest focus on regional security.20 After announcing those goals, DND then listed its recent accomplishments in the area, noting each VIP visit made, new agreement signed, and exercise attended. The agreements are welcome, particularly the 2013 signing of the Canada-U.S. Asia-Pacific Defence Policy Cooperation Framework. Most of the rest of our efforts were temporary and involved exchanges between officials. There was only a single port visit by a sole warship to the area in 2014. The only sustained efforts were our continuing participation in Exercise RIMPAC, but these occur only every two years.21 Rather, most of the DND and DFATD Canadian mini-pivot focused on VIP visits. Ambassador Burney and Fen Osler Hampson have argued that such “carpetbag diplomacy simply won’t cut it in this part of the world,” absent Canada making an effort to be “a more reliable and engaged defence and security partner.”22 Canadian efforts in no way mirrored the U.S. pivot’s focus on the forward deployment of real assets. These signal commitment to the region like nothing else can.

So despite claims that the Canadian government “gets it” with regard to the Asia-Pacific and that “Canada is back,” there is little of substance with no declared government policy or priority, and a great deal of contradictory indicators.23 For example, in 2014 Matthew Fisher of the National Post cited an unnamed minister from Nova Scotia who told him that “as long as he was in Parliament not a single sailor would be leaving Halifax for Vancouver Island.”24 Meanwhile, our aging and much reduced fleet is now completely incapable of contributing a self-sustaining task group, and so, sadly, we are not even able to repeat our successful earlier Westploys. In view of this and our numerous other failures, it is not surprising one of our most experienced

19 Mulroney, 157-8.
21 Listed as an accomplishment is exercise Ulchi Guardian in Korea. DND proudly claims we are the largest contributor outside the 86,000 troops provided by the U.S. and Korea, but our contribution still only amounted to fewer than 30 Canadians. Thankfully it included the five officers we have on staff at the United Nations Command in Korea that will prepare the multinational response to war in Korea.
22 Osler Hampson and Burney, 1.
RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Many governments, including Canada's, may also have assumed that much of the United States' 2012 Pacific rebalancing was rhetoric as they considered their own small contributions to the Pacific. America's need to reinforce Europe post-Crimea and lead the bombing campaign against the Islamic State, coupled with the simultaneous threat of the U.S. defence budget sequestration may have reinforced this perception. As David McDonough has recently pointed out, however, the rebalancing is on track, and the U.S. Navy has been funded for a significant increase in new ship builds, adding some ten new ships per year until 2020. Moreover, the U.S. is sending its most advanced weapons to the area including the Virginia class submarines, F-22 and F-35 fighters, the V-22 Osprey, the new Zumwalt class destroyer, and the just-delivered Poseidon P-8 maritime patrol aircraft.

That the U.S. rebalancing is proceeding as planned reflects the continuing negative trend in China's actions. There are also significant changes being discussed for the region's immature security institutions by China's neighbouring states. Throughout there is a new readiness to dispense with the oblique language of diplomacy and to confront China with clear language. All of this should be of increasing interest to Canada.

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25 Mulroney, 157, where he also notes they still welcome our return in spite of this. Writing two years into Canada's mini-pivot, James Manicom concluded: “Canada is still seen to be a fair-weather Asian country and has yet to convince even like-minded countries like Australia and Japan that it has a serious interest in the regional security.” See his, “Canada must prove it's not a fair-weather friend to Asia,” Vancouver Sun, 7 Jan, 2014 at https://www.cigionline.org/articles/2014/01/canada-must-prove-its-not-fair-weather-friend-asia accessed 1 Jan 2014.

Unsurprisingly, most of the recent tensions center on the South China Sea. As Map 1 shows, China has claimed almost all of that sea up to a distance of some nine hundred miles from her coasts, even though this would remove one half of the more conventional two hundred mile Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) of her neighbours. Where before nations gave China’s massive sea claim the benefit of the doubt and diplomatically waited for her to table the legal basis for it, all patience seems to have been lost. Nothing substantive has come from China in terms of legal justification, and Indonesia, which has until now maintained a very neutral position on the South China Sea, had its President declare this year that China’s claim had no basis in international law.\(^{28}\) When the Philippines applied for UN arbitration over the large part of her EEZ claimed by China, this was reportedly met with a “furious” reaction in China, who then excluded the Philippines from an upcoming trade event while stating it will ignore the UN proceedings (without offering any reasons).\(^{29}\) Meanwhile, Chinese government vessels have blockaded a Philippine naval ship with Marines embarked aground on Second Thomas Shoal, claimed by both states and situated one hundred-sixty miles from the Philippines but eight hundred miles from China. Pushed too far, Manila has declared they will now fight “up to the last standing soldier.”\(^{30}\) Simultaneously, China is dredging millions of tons of sand around former small rocks and pinnacles, creating airfields and fortifications. Fiery Cross Reef in the

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Spratly Islands, also claimed by the Philippines and Vietnam, has been expanded by China and now has three cement factories, eighty buildings, a five-pier port, and the start of a 3,100 metre runway.\textsuperscript{31} These land reclamations are happening in the most contested areas and, while all the region’s states are doing so, the Chinese effort has been termed "a construction spree unprecedented in its scale and speed" by \textit{The Economist}. Map 2 shows this.

These activities reflect several interconnected and worrying trends. Ambassador Mulroney argued it shows an unpleasant readiness by China to either ignore international norms or, at best, use them in "cafeteria"-style, where it picks those elements useful to it while ignoring the

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\item \textsuperscript{31} \textit{The South China Sea - Standing shoulder-to-wary-shoulder}, \textit{The Economist}, 19 Apr 2015, at \url{http://www.economist.com/node/21648852/print} accessed 24 Apr 2015.
\item \textsuperscript{32} \textit{The South China Sea} \textit{The Economist}.
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rest. Dr. James Boutilier, one of Canada’s most experienced China watchers, has classified China’s recent maritime law interpretations as “aberrant.” Tied to this is Xi Jinping’s suggestion at the 2013 U.S.-China California Summit that “…the vast Pacific has enough space for two large countries like the United States and China.” Any thought that this might involve a formula for peaceful coexistence between two great powers was quickly dispelled by The Economist who argued it should be seen as a Chinese proposal to create a sphere of influence for itself in the Western Pacific while leaving the Eastern Pacific to the U.S. The fate of the smaller states in such a construct is obvious and was underscored by the Chinese foreign minister’s warning to Singapore that “China is a big country and other countries are small countries, and that’s just a fact” after China was confronted over its excessive claims. President Obama recently countered both suggestions and warned:

Where we get concerned with China is where it is not necessarily abiding by international norms and rules, and is using its sheer size and muscle to force countries into subordinate positions.

There is wide support for these views in Canada and elsewhere with some noting that China has a particularly disagreeable habit of picking fights with those states like the Philippines that are least able to defend themselves. Japan certainly will not accept China’s bullying either over the Senkaku islands or, more critically, the South China Sea. Japan remembers with clarity that it was brought to defeat in World War II primarily by the U.S. naval effort to choke off her lines of communications there. In response, it is reinforcing its already strong ties to the United States, unofficially reaching out to other states in the region like Australia, and starting work on revising its pacifist constitution that foreclosed such wider defence cooperation. Further, the Nikkei Asian Review argued this year that Japan must join up with the U.S. in patrolling the South China Sea and the Commander U.S. 7th Fleet encouraged her to do so. The Nikkei Asian Review also urged its

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33 Mulroney, 143-4.
36 Ibid.
38 “Obama: China 'using muscle” BBC News.
39 Mulroney, 147. Conversely, an extremely violent Vietnamese response to China placing an oil exploration rig in her EEZ resulted in mobs setting 15 Chinese factories alight. China withdrew.
Navy to seek a base in Singapore or the Philippines. They may be welcome as the Philippines has signaled that it now welcomes Japan’s remilitarization, and has already reopened bases to the U.S. military. Singapore has made the same offer to the U.S. Navy who has just begun basing its Littoral Combat Ships there. India too is now concerned over these same sea lines of communication and has declared an “Eastern Strategy” complete with an “Asian Pivot” to address their own defence. That strategy also involves a closer relationship with U.S. military, abetted by its own efforts to reinforce the Nicobar and Andaman islands that guard one of the principal entry points to the South China Sea. Vietnam has welcomed India playing a greater role in the region, and Australia recently signed an agreement with the former to provide training. This year, the two states who have suffered the most from Chinese incursions into their EEZs, the Philippines and Vietnam, began work on an alliance "focused on huge Chinese reclamation projects in the South China Sea" according to the Philippines Foreign Affairs Assistant Secretary. Indonesia, who has had the least fraught relations with China, now wishes to shift its joint exercise with the U.S. Navy to the vicinity of their currently undisputed Natuna Islands because they are perilously close to the Chinese claim. Indonesia will also reinforce the islands.

This surge in establishing bilateral defence arrangements amongst China’s neighbours has all occurred in the last twelve months. While there does not appear to be any visible structure over them, there are increasing suggestions that a multilateral security order may be emerging. ASEAN will not be able to do this itself as that institution continues its non-confrontational tradition, despite urgings from states like the Philippines to challenge China’s assertiveness. Yet Singapore’s Defence Minister has declared that “These challenges cannot be solved by any one nation, no matter how well resourced. Instead, countries need to take a more collaborative approach.” The United States is now calling for a South China Sea International Operations Centre in Indonesia and an ASEAN-led multilateral force to patrol the South China Sea. The latter has Singapore’s Rajaratnam School of International Studies’ (RSIS) support although they have renamed it a “multilateral peacekeeping force.” These efforts will enjoy strong U.S. reinforcement, with the Commander U.S. 7th Fleet suggesting that "if ASEAN members were to take the lead in organizing something along those lines, trust me, the U.S. 7th Fleet would be

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45 Chen, “U.S. Navy Urges South East Asian Patrols.”
47 Kapoor and Fabi, “Indonesia eyes....”
48 Fabey, “Asian elation.”
The RSIS argues that precisely this type of U.S. assistance could lead ASEAN to "greater collective resolve" as part of a broader shift from the current superpower-dominated security structure to a multipolar one. From a Canadian viewpoint, it is worth noting that the Canada-U.S. Pacific framework proposes their two militaries “support regional forums to strengthen dialogue and cooperation.” Such a combined Canada-U.S. effort to reinforce developing multilateral efforts in the South China Sea would be well timed.

The most recent Chinese reactions to all this have been mixed. On one hand, China’s 2013 Defence White Paper correctly highlights its significant contributions to multilateral efforts in peacekeeping, countering piracy off Somalia and providing humanitarian disaster relief after Japan’s tsunami, Pakistan’s earthquake, and Thailand’s floods. Their navy’s hospital ship Peace Ark is reported to have treated over 50,000 international patients. This April, the Chinese military successfully extracted Canadians and others trapped in Yemen. These positive multilateral efforts were offset, however, by its other activities at sea and its hostility to the U.S. presence in the area. Xi Jinping’s calling for “Asian security for Asians by Asians” is a rather obvious effort to exclude the U.S., backed up by the building of a formidable “anti-access area denial capability” using submarines, mines (it has an inventory of over fifty thousand), and aircraft carrier-hunting ballistic missiles, with the United States Navy as their most obvious target. Where the U.S. will add ten vessels a year, a U.S. report states China is building, launching or commissioning sixty.

A SUGGESTED CANADIAN RESPONSE

At this point it is difficult to discern whether the Chinese government will follow its own “hard” balancing or “soft” engagement trajectory with regard to the U.S. This is no clearer in the United States, but the trends are worrying. While the U.S. remains publicly dedicated to the “soft” engagement process with China, there are increasing calls for it to shift its strategy towards the “hard” balancing or containment vector. The apparent forced early retirement of the U.S. Pacific Command’s chief intelligence officer, Captain (USN) Fanell, illustrates this well as it was claimed his career was brought short for publicly stating that recent Chinese military exercises indicated Beijing was preparing for a "short sharp war" with Japan, a view not, apparently,

51 Chen, “U.S. Navy urges.”
52 Heydarian and Vu, “South China Sea.” 1–2.
shared by the administration. This spring, however, noted U.S. strategic theorist John J. Mearsheimer predicted there was “at least a good chance” that the current security competition would lead to armed conflict and that the U.S. “has a deep-seated interest in privileging East Asia and going to great lengths to contain China.”

Beyond these very worrying recent events, one can discern several reasons for Canada to be far more directly involved in Asia-Pacific security. First, the U.S. Secretary of Defense asked for our support during the Halifax International Security Forum in 2013, stating his department “looks forward to Canada’s increased engagement in the region.” Canada certainly seemed to be indicating we were on board with Minister of National Defence Nicholson adding that “both Canada and the United States share with our Asian partners an interest in promoting stability” and then signing the Canada-U.S. Asia-Pacific Defence Policy Coordination Framework that seeks to achieve this. By becoming more directly engaged in the region, Canada also signals that it is not just the United States that is concerned over tensions in the South China Sea. As one expert has noted, Canadian engagement has the potential to defuse tensions by steering issues away from simplistic views of a “Sino-American showdown” and towards a process involving all the concerned states working within a multilateral problem-solving construct.

Next, Canada’s government is fully aware that trade must be reoriented away from the slow-growth established economies and moved towards the rapidly-growing Asian economies. However, as has been repeatedly made clear by ASEAN and others, Canada can only gain greater access to much of the region’s trade if it commits to a sustained security effort in the region. This was further reinforced by the U.S. view that the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement, which will control over forty per cent of the world’s economic capacity, is now seen in the U.S. as the “economic complement” to their Pacific rebalance. Under this view, it will be hard to imagine Canada gaining U.S. support for access to the TPP without our contributing to Pacific security. Trade and security are linked.

Moreover, many of the same ASEAN states are moving rapidly towards an enhanced security regime. Joining now ensures we will have a hand in designing the security architecture. We can join it now or we can join it later, but given that ASEAN also controls much of the economic arrangements in the area, delay will mean Canada accesses the economies of this high-growth area that much later. From a military point of view, early engagement with ASEAN and U.S. forces in theatre will ensure that any Canadian units we may ultimately decide to send in an emergency will be better prepared and better integrated.

60 Mulroney, 158.
61 Colin Robertson, “Canada’s commitment to freer trade about to be tested,” Globe and Mail, 28 Apr 2015.
Canada can, of course, stand off from the deteriorating security situation in the region. The legal rights of the Philippines and Vietnam can also be ignored. This would involve a rather dramatic walking away from the assurances we recently gave the U.S. Secretary of Defense and the agreement on Asia-Pacific cooperation we just signed with his department. While the issue linkage would not be direct, such a Canadian move would also seem particularly unwise when trade agreements are approaching conclusion and the U.S. remains our largest trading partner by some considerable margin. Doing nothing would, of course, also mean that Canada, a middle power, is ready to, however briefly, cease defending the rules-based international order that has protected it and allowed it to prosper these last seventy years. Ultimately our government would then have to consider the Economist’s recent warning that a state that does not stand up for those values “will inherit a world that is less to its liking.”

Canada must also recognize that our current approach of intermittent, brief single-ship visits, VIP exchanges, and occasional exercises is going to achieve none of those goals. Overall, it is difficult to escape the U.S. argument that both engagement and balancing require forward deployment. A recent CIGI-ASPI study tartly concluded its recommendations for a Canadian government wanting entry by stating “Not surprisingly, being engaged requires Canada to actually be in the region.”

Map 3 – The Pacific Ocean

62 ______________, “British Foreign Policy - Punch and Duty,” The Economist, 4 Apr 2015, 13-14.
64 Edwards and Jennings, p. 12. The chart also makes clear that Canada is not significantly further away from some of the Asia-Pacific hot spots than Australia who is dramatically more engaged in the region.
It is also not surprising that the vast majority of authors calling for greater Canadian engagement identified Canadian naval ships as the vehicle. In part this recognizes the majority of the region’s current conflicts involve maritime boundary disputes. Map 3 underscores the fact that the Asia-Pacific is a maritime theatre and that sea-based conflict will usually dominate. Further, nothing large, be it military or economic, can go anywhere far but by sea.

Other authors have also been impressed the Canadian Navy's past success in the Asia-Pacific and see a greater need today for those same skills. Ambassador Mulroney, for one, argued “having a navy capable of operating with partners in Asia provides a compelling testimonial about Canada’s interest, engagement and quiet competence as a regional player.” In the particular case of China, ships are seen as uniquely capable of quickly shifting tasks in theatre between diplomacy, deterrence, and containment. This would allow Canadian ships to collaborate with China’s recent positive multilateral naval efforts either independently or in cooperation with the U.S. “soft” engagement effort. Those same Canadian ships could also instantly switch to reinforcing the U.S. “hard” balancing effort should the security situation continue its current decline. Their mobility also allows them to respond quickly to the area’s rapidly changing events by either surging forward or withdrawing without local upset as they operate without a base footprint. The latter also keeps Canadian costs down, an important factor given the Canadian Forces’ current tight financial circumstances at present and, perhaps, the long term. Indeed, Canada must be ready to fund the modest costs of what could be a ten to twenty-year challenge of both encouraging China’s continued integration into a rule-based world order while deterring adventurism at sea. The costs of such increased presence will be worth it if conflict is avoided. On the other hand, the costs need to be modest and sustainable so Canada does not reinforce its regional reputation as a state completely lacking in staying power by abandoning its engagement at the next budget upset.

While our current frigate and destroyer count is low, it is improving as more vessels come out of their midlife modernization. However, the current lack of a supply ship forecloses the earlier option of returning to our successful task group Westploy model any time soon. Thankfully, the navy has proven particularly successful at keeping a frigate on continuous service in the Middle East, then the Mediterranean, via on-station crew swaps. We also had an unbroken string of successful deployments by our frigates with U.S. carrier battle groups throughout the 1990s and during the War on Terror as a result of our ability to meet the United States Navy’s extremely high interoperability standards. This would suggest we should soon offer up a frigate to the 7th Fleet carrier battle group operating out of Japan on a twelve-month cycle. We would be wise to ensure a significant portion of its time is spent operating with the Japanese Navy, with many

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65 These are listed at footnote 2. Of the eleven authors listed only one, John Blaxland, devoted any significant effort to exploring non-Naval options. See his “Closer Australian–Canadian Defence Cooperation?”, 7-10 where he suggests an impressive range of security-related activities for Canada ranging from increasing its defence attachés, to various Naval, Land, and Air Force deployments and exchanges, industrial collaboration, and a tailored package of in-theatre exercises that would ensure maximum Canadian impact.

66 Mulroney, 158.

67 With acknowledgement to David Perry, via Email to Author, 30 May 2015 for this suggestion.

68 With acknowledgement to VAdm. D. Robertson (Ret’d) via Email to Author, 28 May 2015 for this argument.
noting Canada has a natural linkage with that democratic, trade-focused, technologically-advanced state.

Given the heightened concern over the threat to the sea lines of communication posed by China’s and North Korea’s large submarine fleets, the frigate we send could well be joined by temporary or full-time deployments of the CP-140 Aurora and our Victoria Class submarines. Our traditional anti-submarine warfare expertise is still valued, but that value will be significantly increased when the modernized frigates are joined by the new CH-148 Cyclone shipborne helicopter and the upgraded CP-140. Finally, we can only return to full Canadian task group deployments when we have an AOR, and even here that capability is forfeit every four years as it goes into refit. Either the building of the two Berlin class supply ships should be expanded to three, with two being on the West Coast, or we should plan on retaining one of the recently called-for interim tankers. Given the rapidly declining security situation in the Western Pacific, efforts to deliver that interim tanker should be accelerated. That supply ship would allow a return to biannual task group deployments to the region, although the permanent single ship commitment to 7th Fleet should remain our premier contribution.

CONCLUSIONS

What I have called for in increased Canadian naval participation in the Pacific is based on our current fleet with the additions and replacements outlined in the current National Shipbuilding Procurement Strategy. To achieve this in the short term, probably only one frigate needs to be transferred West and the interim tanker solution progressed. Many would argue, and the Navy currently does, that it matters not where a ship comes from but where it deploys to. Perceptions do, however, matter, and certainly the United States 60-40 rebalancing to the Pacific sent an unmistakably resolute and immediate signal to both worried allies and its own military bureaucracies.

Others, however, are calling for more from Canada. James Manicom argues our long absence and “fair-weather friend” reputation forces a monumental Canadian effort if we wish to overcome this.69 Critical Pacific allies such as Australia are also deeply skeptical of our past free riding and will expect much more before they will support our entry into the region’s fora.70 Ambassador Mulroney sums up the requirement nicely:

We can contribute to our own security, and to the security of our region, by being part of broader efforts to manage China’s peaceful rise on terms that are acceptable to us and our allies. But this is going to take a larger investment in our Navy than is currently on the books. Being able to deploy ships to the Pacific is central to Canada's aspiration to play a more significant role in Asia.71

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69 Manicom, “Canada must prove,” 2.
70 Ibid, 2 and see Blaxland, “Closer Australian-Canadian Defence Cooperation?”, 7-11 covering both Australia’s skepticism and what he suggests Canada needs to do.
71 Mulroney, 296.
Given that the government has also called for its ships and submarines to also be present in the Arctic, the Middle East, Europe and South America, a significantly larger Navy may well be justified. That, in turn, raises a series of questions awaiting further analysis that would probe how Canada should prioritize its global engagement, and why the Navy continues to receive the smallest part of the defence budget by service share by quite considerable margins.

![Figure 1 - Defence budget share by service area, 2014](https://example.com/image.png)

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72 Canada, *Fiscal Sustainability of Canada’s National Defence Program*, Ottawa, 26 Mar 26, 2015, 11 at [www.pbo-dpb.gc.ca](http://www.pbo-dpb.gc.ca) accessed 30 Apr 2015. In assessing the service shares one must keep in mind there is a strong possibility that the PBO data assigned the costs of the Navy’s shipborne helicopters and the Army’s tactical helicopters to the Air Force. This would force the Navy and Army shares slightly larger and lower the Air Force’s. The Navy share would still remain dramatically smaller than the others.
About the Author

**Eric Lerhe** was commissioned in to the Canadian Forces in 1972, and from 1973 until 1983 served in the *HMCS Restigouche, Yukon, Fraser* and *Annapolis*. He then went on to command *HMCS Nipigon* and *Saguenay* between 1987 and 1990. He then served as Director Maritime Force Development and Director NATO Policy at National Defence Headquarters. He earned his MA at Dalhousie University in 1996 and was promoted to Commodore and appointed Commander Canadian Fleet Pacific in January 2001. In that role he was a Coalition Task Group Commander for the Southern Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz sector during the War on Terror in 2002. Lerhe retired at the rank of Commodore from the Canadian Forces in September 2003 and commenced his doctoral studies at Dalhousie. His PhD was awarded in 2012 and his thesis on the sovereignty implications of Canada-U.S. interoperability was published by the Centre for Foreign Policy Studies. He serves as a Doctoral Fellow at the Centre.
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