

# THE CANADIAN NAVY - CONTINENTAL MARITIME SECURITY AND BEYOND

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## **Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to consider the maritime dimension of the Canada-US security relationship in the wake of September 11. Since the attacks, Maritime Command has been working almost seamlessly with the United States Navy.<sup>1</sup> It has committed almost its entire operational capability to the war on terrorism.

New demands have been placed on the Canadian Navy since September 11<sup>th</sup>. However, as the war on terrorism continues, Maritime Command still needs to meet its other, ongoing commitments. It will have to do so in the context of a political landscape that tends to ignore the contributions of the branches of the Canadian Forces, particularly the navy. This despite the fact that since well before the end of the Cold War, the Canadian Navy has been deployed as the first instrument of response to international crises.

Most Canadians are unaware that the Canadian Navy is a modern, well trained force that has a close working relationship with the United States Navy.<sup>2</sup> During the Cold War, NATO commitments provided an opportunity for the two navies to train and to work together. The Canadian Navy has continued to develop many core competencies, such as anti-submarine warfare that was developed during the Second World War, which gives it a “blue water” capability; the Canadian Navy is one of the few navies that is able to deploy to almost any ocean.

After the end of the Cold War, the navy received 12 Halifax-class frigates and re-commissioned four rebuilt tribal destroyers. The subsequent purchase/lease of the 4 Upholder class submarines means that with the exception of having ship-borne helicopters and replenishment vessels, in 2002 the navy is an up-to date, modern force. Except for polar waters, it has the capacity to operate almost anywhere on the globe.

While the importance of Canadian naval cooperation in NATO diminished with the end of the Cold War, the close cooperation between the Canadian and American navies continued. This is best indicated by the level of cooperation during the Gulf War and by the subsequent attachments of Canadian frigates to American carrier battlegroups. During the Gulf War, the commander of the Canadian taskgroup was given operation command in his area of operation.<sup>3</sup> He was the only non-American to be given such responsibilities. In 1995, MARPAC arranged for one of its frigates to be attached to an American carrier battlegroup as a complete integration of the Canadian vessel. This successful integration has resulted in an annual attachment, except for one year when it did not occur. The American Navy benefits by being able to reduce the number of deployed frigates while the Canadian Navy has learned how the American Navy operates at its most intense level. Part of the Canadian commitment to the war on terrorism has been the commitment of frigates to serve with a battlegroup off the coast of Afghanistan.

## **The Changing International Environment**

While the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> are generally perceived to be a new threat against North America, the reality is that attacks were the continuation of a trend that began with the end of the Cold War. Bin Laden had begun his attacks on western targets in 1992. Canada was targeted by international terrorists as early as 1985.<sup>4</sup> However, the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> changed the perception of the seriousness of the threat and of the need to respond. The North American maritime dimension of this threat can be divided into three main typologies: target, prevention and response.

**Target:** As the attack on the USS *Cole* demonstrates, maritime forces can be targets of terrorist activity.<sup>5</sup> While it is unlikely that a an attempted repeat of the attack in Yemen would be successful, the symbolic nature of warships, plus the fact that both Canada and the United States continue to deploy their vessels to the Middle East, means that they will still be a potential target. The two navies already share information and it is difficult to see what else can be done to avert attacks besides constant vigilance when visiting foreign ports. This will be of particular significance if the war on terrorism expands in the Middle East.

**Prevention:** There is a limited, but important, role that the two North American maritime forces have in protecting North America from future terrorist attacks.<sup>6</sup> It is necessary to tighten security over the entry into North America of foreign goods as concerns have been raised that terrorist organizations could attempt to smuggle dangerous materials such as explosives and even nuclear weapons into North America.

The attacks on and the subsequent destruction of the World Trade Centres demonstrated that the enemies of the west do not hesitate to wreak severe damage in North American cities. However, the attacks and the prior arrest of Ahmed Ressam also demonstrate that it is easier to obtain the necessary weapons within either the United States or Canada rather than to smuggle them in. In the two well known uses of weapons of mass destruction, i.e., the 1995 Sarin Tokyo Subway attack and the use of Anthrax in the fall of 2001, the weapons were probably obtained in the country that was the focus of the attack. Both attacks demonstrate that tighter controls within the state are necessary.

It would be extremely difficult to acquire a nuclear weapon within Canada or the United States. While it cannot ever be assumed that a nuclear weapon cannot be stolen from an American base, it is highly unlikely. If a nuclear weapon was smuggled in, the most likely means of transport would be by sea.

With globalization, both Canada and the United States experience tremendous increases in the amount of maritime traffic entering their major ports and, consequently, difficulties in monitoring the traffic. There are several factors that complicate the task of monitoring. First, the containerization of maritime trade makes it very difficult to physically inspect all maritime cargo. Tactical nuclear weapons, given their relatively small size, could be hidden within the containers. It is very unlikely that any inspection system could ensure that all cargo would be inspected.<sup>7</sup> In addition, there has been a trend in the United States and Canada to deregulate and/or privatize Port Authorities. Thus, security measures that were in place in the 1970s and 1980s have in the 1990s been scaled back and, in some instances, eliminated from most North

American ports. While it is unlikely that a maritime route would be used to transport weapons or explosives into North America, it is becoming increasingly difficult for maritime forces to monitor and avert the potential risk. There is no question that the Canadian and American Navies and Coast Guards simply do not have the capabilities, let alone the mandate, to allow for proper surveillance of container traffic. Increased surveillance capabilities and greater shared intelligence are required.<sup>8</sup>

**Response:** Maritime forces will play a pivotal role in North America's responses against states that support terrorism as well as in overseeing bases of operations. For example, almost the entire operational capability of the Canadian Navy has been deployed to Afghanistan. Likewise, if the United States decides to attack Iraq, Canadian participation will likely be in the form of maritime assistance. Many Canadians are unaware that even before the war on terrorism had begun, a Canadian vessel almost fired against terrorist targets. In 1998, following the attacks on the American embassies in Africa, President Clinton ordered an attack on targets in Afghanistan and in Sudan. The cruise missile attack was launched by an American carrier battlegroup which included a Canadian frigate. At the time, the Canadian Government had not yet endorsed its commitment to the war on terrorism. The Canadian vessel and a British frigate that had temporarily joined the battle group detached when the missiles were fired and then subsequently reattached to the group.

Following the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, the Canadian Government's first commitment was to dispatch a Canadian naval task group consisting of two frigates, a destroyer and a replenishment vessel. At the same time, a Canadian frigate was attached to an American battlegroup that was deployed to the region. An overall deployment of five vessels out of a total of 18 vessels is almost the entire operational fleet. A general rule of thumb for most navies is that for every vessel that is in a state of operational readiness, one vessel will be entering a refit while another will be leaving and undergoing training. As such only 1/3 of a navy is ever actually ready for deployment. The initial Canadian deployment has already been replaced by a second deployment.

The main duty of the Canadian task group is to search for Taliban or al-Qaeda members who are attempting to flee by ship.<sup>9</sup> Few have been caught but it is important to convey the message to these various organizations and their members that they do not have an escape route through the sea.

The next attack against international terrorism is unknown. However, American leaders have indicated that Iraq will be the next target. How and when such an attack will occur is unknown. It is becoming clear that international support for such an attack is limited. Considerably fewer bases will be made available to the United States than was the case during the first Gulf War. It appears that Saudi Arabia will not allow its bases to be used by the Americans. These limitations will amplify the need for using maritime forces. Canada can play a role in the use of such forces; however, it remains to be seen whether or not the Canadian government will agree to participate.

### **Canadian Maritime Forces and the Evolution of North American Security Relations**

Having briefly considered the nature of the maritime relationship following the events of September 11, this analysis will now consider some of the costs and benefits to the Canadian

Navy.

Of the three main branches of the forces, Maritime Command is best able to provide an independent contribution to the war on terrorism in overseas regions. Its units can proceed to any point on the globe that is bordered by an ocean and it does not depend on the assistance of others. Furthermore, it has the ability to maintain a sustained presence on its own. However, this ability is time sensitive in that the Canadian Navy's two remaining replenishment vessels are old and will be taken out of service soon. While some discussion regarding their replacement has taken place, the Canadian Government has made no decision. When both vessels are withdrawn from service, the Canadian Navy will lose its ability to independently proceed overseas. The frigates and destroyers will be deployable only if allied refuelling arrangements are made, primarily with the United States by virtue of geography and the size of the American tanker fleet. Thus, any such deployment can occur only when the Americans have a tanker available in the proper location for Canadian use. This will severely restrict Canadian mobility .

The issue of replacing the two replenishment vessels raises the possibility of developing new force capability. Any replacement vessels would likely have a greater troop carrying capability, which would allow these vessels to be used in an indigenous, Canadian, strategic, sealift role. However, this capability would reduce the replenishment capability of the vessels. The ship designer would be challenged to achieve a workable balance between these different requirements. Ideally, more than two of these vessels would be purchased, but it is unlikely given the traditional reluctance of the Canadian Government to engage in such expenditures.

Nevertheless, if new vessels are approved and built with a more robust, strategic, sea-lift capability, in the long term, Canada will have greater independence in deploying its ground troops in any future overseas operations. Canada could send its troops in accordance with its own agenda rather than having to wait for American assistance. This benefits Canada in two ways. First, it allows Canada to have the option of deploying its troops overseas even when the United States is not involved. While this scenario is presently unlikely, it is not impossible. At the same time, the United States would find a Canadian sea-lift capability to be to its own benefit. It would reduce the strain on American capabilities in a time of crisis. It is also conceivable that, in certain circumstances, the Americans would prefer that Canada use its own resources for the sake of appearance. For example, during the East Timor crisis, the United States did not want to appear as a major player preferring to have Australia take the lead. Presumably, Canada could find itself in a similar role in the future.

As mentioned earlier, the current Canadian naval deployment in the war on terrorism is a combination of direct integration into the USN and of independent action. The Canadian frigate that operated with the carrier battlegroup provided direct assistance to the American Navy. The task group allows for greater independent action with a Canadian identity. In terms of the attached frigate, such interoperability requires that its crew and its communications equipment be completely compatible. The major cost of such a deployment is the elimination of that particular ship from other duties. Once committed, the training and actual deployment can mean that the Canadian vessel is unavailable for up to eight months. With other factors such as refit time when the ship returns, the length of time where the ship cannot be used for other duties can be up to over a year.

There is also a political cost. Canada reserves the right to pull the vessel from the battle group at any point. However, since the integration is not a token act, such a withdrawal would create significant problems for the battlegroup. Therefore, any withdrawal from the battle group could not be made for frivolous reasons. Thus, when Ottawa decides that one of its vessels is to be used in this manner, it must be willing to accept the missions that have been forecast for the battlegroup. With the changing nature of the war on terrorism, the question must be asked: what would Canada do in the case where the United States wished to use the battlegroup to attack a new target? For example, under what circumstances would Canada allow its frigate to be used in an attack on Iraq? Canada would obviously need to make a decision about its participation. It could try to hide its participation as it did with the 1998 missile attack on Afghanistan. By disengaging for the actual firing, the frigate was able to pretend that it was not involved. But a war in Iraq would not be a short-term affair. If serving with a battlegroup, a Canadian frigate would be expected to perform its duties or would be replaced. This is not to suggest that this is an insurmountable problem, but it does require political decisions to be made on operational issues. Any withdrawal would come with a cost.

Canada will incur other costs for continued cooperation between the two navies. The USN is the most technically advanced navy in the world and it has no intention of slowing its rate of technological development. Canada will need to ensure that the technology on its vessels continues to be updated. In particular, the Canadian Navy will need to ensure that its C<sub>4</sub>I (Command, Control, Communication, Computer, Intelligence) remains compatible with the United States Navy. This will not be easy or inexpensive. But doing so will provide Canadian decision-makers with the widest range of options for future operations either with or without the United States.

Canadian maritime forces will also need to stay abreast of current naval weaponry technology. If Canada is going to continue to send its warships into missions with the United States, it needs to ensure that its vessels are capable of responding to all threats. This means a willingness to maintain a general combat capability for its maritime assets. A continued willingness to engage with the United States is probably the most inexpensive and efficient way to gather the necessary intelligence on new threats.

Close cooperation with the American Navy will create opportunity costs. The overseas deployment of Canadian warships means that those particular vessels are unavailable for use in Canadian waters. For example, Canada recently re-engaged in northern waters sovereignty patrols for the first time since 1989. The intent originally was to send at least one Canadian frigate, if not more. However, with the demands placed on the Canadian Navy through its commitment to the war on terrorism, no frigates were available for "Operation Narwal." Instead, two coastal patrol vessels were sent. Although the navy was still able to deploy, it did so in a much smaller fashion. However, the ability to still send naval units to the north underscores the fact that the Canadian Government was able to maintain its substantial maritime commitment to the war on terrorism and was able to engage in Canadian coastal patrols only because the navy is currently relatively robust.

The deployment of the two coastal patrol vessels to the north raises the one issue where

Canadian maritime interests differ from those of the United States. There has been long-standing disagreement between Canada and the United States over the international status of the Northwest Passage. While both sides have agreed to disagree, current ice conditions have generally allowed the issue to be ignored. Scientists now believe that climate change will lead to a melting of the ice cover for some part of the year.<sup>10</sup> The USN has already begun considering how its surface fleet will operate in an ice-free Arctic.<sup>11</sup> It is possible that this disagreement could be renewed in the near future. If this is the case, closer cooperation with the United States on the war on terrorism could be levered to reach a deal on the Northwest Passage that is acceptable to both states. Traditionally, the United States has been concerned with the precedent that would be set with Canadian control over the Northwest Passage. However, given the new concerns about the security of North American boundaries, it would appear that the current American administration might be convinced that internationalization of the Passage would run counter to its security. Although it is unlikely that the United States would formally withdraw its claim that the Passage is an international strait, it may be more willing to reach a compromise agreement. In return for the Canadian commitment to ensure that its northern boundaries are properly guarded with modern surveillance means, the United States would agree not to press its position in International Court. Canada would gain security for its claim and the United States would gain assurances that the northern tip of North America was properly monitored.

### **Conclusion**

Does Canadian maritime cooperation with the United States impact on Canadian sovereignty? From the above discussion it should be apparent that as Canada develops closer maritime cooperation with the United States, Canada's ability to act independently is actually enhanced. In order to cooperate with the United States in a meaningful manner, Canada requires a navy that is modern and combat capable. Such a navy, by virtue of the unique nature of maritime forces, means that it can easily be used by itself or in combination with other Canadian forces. The Canadian Navy is not dependent on foreign support or logistics to the degree that Canadian land and air units are. However, such forces are expensive.

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1. Officially there is no Canadian navy. Instead the maritime elements of the Canadian Forces (CF) are under the control of Maritime Command. For the purpose of this paper, the terms Maritime Command and Canadian Navy will be used as the same.

2. For an official and exhaustive review of Canadian seapower see Department of Defence, *Leadmark: The Navy's Strategy for 2020*, (Ottawa: Directorate of Maritime Strategy, 2001).

3. For a discussion of Canada maritime role see Jean Morin and Richard Gimblett, *Operation Friction: The Canadian Forces in the Persian Gulf, 1990-1991*, (Toronto: Dundurn, 1997).

4. In 1985, over 200 Canadians were killed and several hundred s other narrowly escaped death when bombs planted on an Air India and Air Canada plane exploded. The Canadian response to this act of terrorism has been universally seen as very weak.

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5. One interesting aside is that prior to the attack on the *Cole*, the Canadian Navy had been offered fuelling rights in Yemen, but had declined them on the grounds of security. The American Navy considered the risks but had viewed them as acceptable.

6. This would include not only the naval forces but also the coast guards of the two countries.

7. It is assumed that if terrorists are able to acquire such weaponry it would be in the form of an ex-Soviet tactical weapon since they were more numerous and controls over them were weaker.

8. Roger Pike, "International Terrorism Comes to the Neighbourhood," *Maritime Affairs* (Winter 2002).

9. Jeremy Stocker, "Canada Interdiction Mission to Arabia," *Warships International: International Fleet Review* (August/September 2002).

10. Rob Huebert, "Climate Change and Canadian Sovereignty in the Northwest Passage," *Isuma* vol.2 no.4 (Winter 2001).

11. Office of Naval Research, Naval Ice Center, Oceanographer of the Navy and the Arctic Research Commission, *Naval Operations in an Ice Free Arctic - Final Report*, Naval Operations in an Ice-Free Arctic Symposium April 17-18, 2001.