

CONTINENTAL DEFENCE AT SEA- THE CANADIAN CHALLENGE

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The traditional view of Continental Defence of North America is dominated by air and space concerns. With the allied victory over Germany and Japan, the fear of an invasion of North America by hostile land and maritime forces disappeared. Even as the military threat to North America re-emerged from a hostile USSR, American and Canadian efforts remained fixated on the skies. While periodic consideration was given to the extension of the various air-based cooperative arrangements to the seas around and lands of North America, there were no formal arrangements developed throughout the Cold War. It was only after the Cold War ended and the new threat of fundamentalist Islamic terrorists arrived that serious consideration has been given to developing formal arrangements which extend continental defence to include maritime elements.

The United States and Canada have been moving towards formal cooperation in defence since the darkest days of the Second World War. The question that this paper attempts to address is why has it taken Canada and the United States this long to reach the stage of formal discussion on naval defence when they have faced mutual maritime threats since the early 1940s? What have been the factors that have shaped existing maritime cooperation between the two states? In order to provide an understanding of this seeming dichotomy, this paper will examine the three main dimensions of the North American maritime cooperative framework: political, historical, and geographic.

POLITICAL DIMENSION

At its simplest level, Canadian political leaders since the Second World War have been very willing to use Canadian seapower but reluctant to acknowledge it. This trend has been accelerated since the end of the Cold War to the point that the Canadian Navy almost required a stand-down in order to recover from its recent worldwide deployments.

During the Second War, the Canadian Navy developed into the third biggest navy in the world. It played a central and hard-learned position in the defeat of the German submarine threat. As soon as the war ended, Canadian political leaders moved to demobilize all of the Canadian forces including the navy. As the Soviet Navy emerged as a threat to North American security, the navy was once again rebuilt to address the new submarine threat. Throughout the Cold War, the anti-submarine role remained the primary function of the navy. Once the decision was made to maintain this role, Canadian decision-makers did not have to question how to use the navy. Canada and the United States were cooperating in the defence of North American waters but in the greater context of the NATO defence against the USSR.

Following the end of the Cold War, Canadian decision-makers became even more willing to use the Canadian navy as a instrument of foreign and defence policy. Thus the Mulroney administration immediately decided to send three warships following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. This practice continued throughout the 1990s, culminating with the deployment of almost the entire navy in waters close to Afghanistan during operation Apollo. While these deployments varied, each incorporated some form of cooperation with American naval units, whether through shared communications and intelligence or

the use of American logistic support. Ultimately, the two navies have cooperated very closely since the Second World War. But there has been a minimal of political direction between the two.

Canadian decision-makers have almost instinctively understood the power of Canadian seapower. Furthermore they have also understood that Canadian seapower is best applied in cooperation with its stronger allies. Thus, up to and during the Second World War, the Canadian Navy operated closely with the British Navy. After the Second World War, it was the partnership between the USN and the Canadian Navy that took precedence. From the build up of the Canadian Navy at the end of the Second World War to the deployment of the Navy to operations in Korean or Egyptian waters, Canadian elites have understood that Navies can be used with particular flexibility. However, Canadian Governments have never acknowledged their use of seapower. Instead it would appear that a normative negativity associated with the use of seapower has made Canadian governments reluctant to admit what they are doing. As such, there successive Canadian Governments since the second world have been willing to let the Canadian navy cooperate with the American navy on a number of fronts, but not to acknowledge that they were doing so, or take any steps to formalize the relationship.

HISTORICAL DIMENSIONS

One of the most significant impacts of the Second World War on the Canadian Navy was the manner in which it moved from being a junior partner to the Royal Navy to that of the United States Navy. Prior to the Second World, the Canadian Navy relied almost exclusively on the British Navy for its equipment training and senior officers. As

the war progressed, the Canadian navy began to operate much closer with the United States Navy. While it did not entirely forsake its relationship with the British, the Canadian navy increasingly developed linkages with the USN. This relationship was further developed as the Cold War developed. However, the creation of NATO in 1949 and the dedication of the RCN to the protection of convoys to Europe meant that the Canadian Navy and American navies were working closely together, but through a multilateral rather than bilateral fashion. In reality the Canadian and American navies were working together to support the protection of North America in the event of hostilities, but not in the context of a formal commitment to protect the North American maritime regions.

Towards the end of the Cold War, the continued development of the Soviet submarine threat led Canadian and American naval leaders to consider the possibility of a maritime variation of a underwater NORAD. Referred to as the "Arctic Straw Man", the initial discussions focussed on the creation of a shared underwater management scheme. While much of this project remains classified, the gist of it was to provide a shared warning capability in the Canadian north to deal with the threat posed by Soviet Submarines that may have attempted to transit Canadian northern waters in order to get close to North American targets for their nuclear armed cruise missiles. However, when a northern sovereignty crisis developed between the United States and Canada over the voyage of an American ice breaker the *Polar Sea* in 1985, all efforts to develop this agreement ended. The subsequent efforts of the Canadian Government to acquire nuclear powered submarines for use in its Arctic waters then kept any further discussions off the table until ultimately, the Cold War ended.

The next efforts to improve relations between the USN and Canadian Maritime Command came in the mid-1990s. As part of close relations between the commanders of the American and Canadian west coast fleets, a Canadian frigate was sent to operate closely with an American carrier battle group. The Americans were feeling the effects of the post Cold War cost defence expenditure reductions that had led to fewer number of escort vessels. For Canada, the opportunity to operate with a battle carrier group gave them otherwise unavailable training opportunities. Thus both sides stood to gain from this venture. In the summer of 1998, the HMCS *Ottawa* sailed with the USS *Abraham Lincoln* battle group. While there were initial challenges related to the sharing of classified communications, these problems were soon worked out. The ultimate flexibility of the arrangement was proven when this same battle group was given the task of responding to Al-Qaeda's attack on the two American embassies in Africa. Because Canada had not yet joined the "war on terrorism" at that point, the *Ottawa* disengaged from the group when it fired cruise missiles at Taliban and Al-Qaeda targets in Afghanistan. Once the mission was completed the Canadian vessels rejoined the group.

The deployment was deemed to be successful. As a result, there have been continued deployments of Canadian vessels with other battle groups. Over time, this has resulted in the closest operational integration that exists between the American navy and an allied navy. The association has also resulted in an American confidence in its Canadian partner. Thus when the various allied maritime operations were conducted off the coasts of Iraq and Afghanistan, American commanders were always willing to assign Canadian naval commanders increasingly complex cooperative tasks.

There is little evidence to suggest that the development of this close operational cooperation was the result of any policy directive at senior political levels. Instead, navy leaders saw shared opportunities for practical steps to cooperate and took them. In the beginning these steps were not taken with the idea of improving continental defence but, rather, to improve the capability of both Canada and the United States to operate overseas. But as the threat from international terrorism developed, the need to respond to threats to North America from maritime locations around the Middle East became more apparent. Thus the shared capability of the Canadian and American navy to operate closely occurred through luck rather than foresight. But once the threat to North America was established by attacks on September 11, 2001, this capability has been fully exploited.

GEOGRAPHIC DIMENSION

One of the more challenging elements facing both American and Canadian naval leaders is the geographic realities of defending North American waters. Both Canada and the United States must defend three separate oceans. Further complicating this task are the different political arrangements that have developed for the defence of each of ocean.

Cooperation between Canada and the United States in the Atlantic Ocean is contained within the NATO alliance. Both from an operational and practical perspective, the ability of Canada and the United States to cooperate has been developed through the offices of the Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic (SACLANT). By convention this position is always filled by an American, whose main concern during the Cold War was

to ensure that the Soviet Submarine threat was contained and conveyed from North America reached Europe in the event of conflict. Over the period of the Cold War the need to co-ordinate the activities of a large number of allied navies saw the creation of numerous layers of bureaucracy.

The second outcome of the allied relationship was the ability of the Canadian navy to operate in operations far from the Canadian coast line with the support of allied navies. NATO also maintained a standing naval force Atlantic (STANAVFORLANT), (now known as Standing NATO Response Force Maritime Group 1 (SNMG1)) as a sign of its commitment and to allow the training necessary to operate together. Over the years, this has meant that both navies have learnt how to operate together, but not necessarily on a bilateral basis or for continental defence.

The relationship between the fleets on the west coast has developed in a different way. The threat from the Soviet Pacific threat was substantially less than was the case in the Atlantic. There was also no formal multi-lateral treaty system similar to NATO arrangements. Thus the relationship between the West Coast commanders has tended to be bilateral and informal and the two navies have operated more closely than has been the case on the east coast.

The relationship in the Arctic region has been even more complicated. Throughout the Cold War, the USN could operate naval vessels in Arctic waters. Canadian vessels could only visit the region for a very short time period in the summer months. Furthermore, any such deployments were more symbolic than operational. However, underlying the relationship was a Canadian sensitivity to American incursions on its Arctic sovereignty. Thus, while the Canadian government and naval leaders knew

that American submarines were operating in Arctic waters and presumably Canadian arctic waters, they did not publicly acknowledge this activity. Some consideration was given to the development of an arctic maritime NORAD-like agreement, but nothing came of this effort.

Overall, the requirements for each of the three oceans have created a situation that significantly complicates any effort to develop a coordinated maritime continental arrangement. Any effort to extend or expand the existing NORAD agreement needs to reckon with this complexity.

CONCLUSION

While this paper is hardly a conclusive study of continental maritime defence, three main conclusions can be drawn from it. First, since 1941 there has been an ad hoc bilateral development of maritime defence of North American waters. Unlike the formal adoption of a aerospace formal treaty process, the two navies tended to cooperate on a ad hoc basis that has focussed on responding to specific threats, whether from German U-boats or the subsequent Soviet submarines. It has been in the interests of both navies to meet the threat as far away as possible from the North American coast line. In turn, this has allowed Canadian political leaders to be able to avoid formalizing any arrangement. In fact, it appears that they seem content to avoid any closer formal maritime relations with the US while being very willing to enjoy the benefits of the existing relationship.

The emergence of the threat posed by international terrorism is now causing Canada and the United States to consider a more formal process of providing for

continental maritime security. The two navies have a long history of working together. The challenge is how to develop a formal arrangement that will reflect the political, historical and geographic realities facing the two countries.