



## MARITIME THREATS TO CANADA

What are the threats to maritime security? And why would Canadians care about them? Why care about piracy that occurs off the east or west coast of Africa, or in Asia? Why would we care if criminals smuggle goods and people on the oceans? What difference does it make to Canada if Iran closes the Strait of Hormuz? We live miles away, why would we care? This briefing note examines these questions.

There are threats *to* the oceans (e.g. climate change, pollution, over-fishing) and threats *coming from* the oceans (e.g. competing naval forces, disruptions to shipping, illegal migration, piracy, criminal activity). In this briefing note, we'll focus on threats coming from the oceans. Although Canada is in an enviable location, thousands of kilometres away from states at war, it isn't immune from threats that happen in faraway places.

Threats to maritime security are threats to Canada's sovereignty and economic wellbeing. If you've read Briefing Note #1 about Canada as a maritime state, you'll know that virtually all of Canada's imports from countries other than the United States come via the oceans. Check the labels on the clothes you're wearing – most will have been made in China, Bangladesh, Vietnam or perhaps Turkey. Goods don't magically appear in Walmart. They are shipped here via the ocean.

We also import energy via tankers. Although Canada is an energy exporter, it is also an energy importer. According to the National Energy Board, OPEC supplied just under 33% Canada's oil in 2016 from countries including Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Nigeria and the United Arab Emirates.<sup>1</sup> These products come by sea.

Canada's exports, other than to the United States, also travel via the oceans. Canada exports grain, lumber, ore, seafood, etc., and these materials are transported by ships. As well, in the future Canada may be exporting energy products to Asia via tankers.

Unless we plan on trading only with the United States, we need to ship goods via the oceans. International shipping requires freedom of navigation. It requires good order at sea. If that order is disrupted, then trade is disrupted – and the shelves in our stores will quickly become empty.

### Maritime Threats

The biggest threats on the oceans come from the naval forces of other states. With the end of the Cold War, many Westerners believed that the era of Great Power confrontation was over. They were wrong. We are heading back to a time when state-on-state conflict looks possible. Russia and China are building their naval forces.<sup>2</sup> In response, other states build up their own navies and look to navies to defend themselves.

To illustrate a threat to good order at sea let's look at Asia. China has claimed the entire South China Sea (SCS) and the East China Sea, and both these claims are challenged by other states in the area. China is in the midst of a major program of naval shipbuilding. It has just launched its second aircraft carrier, with a third in the works. It has developed anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) weapons which can target naval forces that attempt to travel through the international maritime regions that China claims. It has built up islands (and islets) in the SCS and has been rapidly militarizing them by building runways and military surveillance facilities. In July 2018, it started testing electronic warfare equipment which can jam the navigation and weapons systems of ships passing through the area. The US Navy has been the guarantor of freedom of navigation (FON)/freedom of the seas since WW II, but its FON patrols in the SCS and near Taiwan are loudly protested by China and watched carefully by Chinese military forces. Why do Chinese actions matter? Trillions of dollars of merchandise travel through these seas each year, there are vast undersea energy resources, and Canadian friends (Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, for example) have serious concerns about China's expansive claims.

Russia too has been rebuilding the naval forces that deteriorated in the years after the Cold War. Its submarines are patrolling again in the north Atlantic and the Arctic. In one example of how maritime security considerations affect political actions, in 2014 Russia broke international law and took Crimea, a part of Ukraine but formerly part of the Soviet Union. One of the reasons for this was that the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Navy was based in Crimea. A newly assertive Russia saw it as unacceptable to have part of its navy based in another country!

A Russian submarine planted a flag on the bottom of the sea floor at the North Pole in August 2007. This had no meaning in law, but it illustrated Russian thought about the extent of Russia's territory. In the future the Arctic may be increasingly contested in terms of sovereignty and resources. And as more shipping, resource extraction and tourist cruises occur in the Arctic the potential for deadly accidents – the area is not well mapped – and environmental spills will increase, threatening the livelihood of Canada's northern peoples.

Piracy off the coast of Somalia was very disruptive to trade a few years ago, and now piracy is affecting trade in the Gulf of Guinea on the west coast of Africa. To mitigate the risk of piracy, cargo ships and tankers must vary their routes and schedules, increase their speed in dangerous areas, hire security guards, adopt systems to repel people trying to board their ships, build safe rooms and increase their insurance coverage. All these things cost money, which means increased rates for shipping, and increased costs for the end consumers of the products.

We have just noted the effects of Somali piracy on shipping. The piracy off Somalia, and in West Africa to some degree as well, began because of governance problems on the land. Part of the problem was illegal over-fishing in Somalia's waters by foreign fishing ships. Because there was no government in Somalia, that meant there were no government forces – i.e., no coast guard, no navy – patrolling the waters. Fishermen took the matter into their own hands. And once they discovered that piracy made money for them, there was no one to stop it. That piracy is rooted in causes on land – like lack of governance in Somalia, and bad governance, inequality or unemployment in Nigeria – does not make the threat at sea any less of a problem.

Other activities on land have consequences for maritime security. Yemen which is in the midst of

an ugly conflict, is located beside a busy shipping lane – the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden – where tankers and cargo ships pass in transit to/from the Middle East, Europe, Asia and India through the Suez Canal. In the conflict in Yemen, missiles have been fired from shore at ships. Since the maritime area is narrow, even short-range missiles can do damage. Another example of political conflicts on land having security implications on water is the dispute between the United States and Iran. The United States withdrew from the nuclear deal with Iran in May 2018, and re-imposed trade sanctions on Iran. In response Iran threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz, a strait through which millions of barrels of oil pass on the way to market. In May 2019, three ships were attacked in the Persian Gulf, apparently by Iranian forces or Iranian-allied forces. Two more ships were attacked in June.

Conflict on land has led to another maritime security concern. As fighting or disorder spreads on land, other countries try to evacuate their citizens from the area. As a multicultural country, Canada has many citizens who live in a variety of countries. There have been occasions when thousands of Canadian citizens needed evacuation – for example from Lebanon in 2006 – and this often occurs via ships.

Populations are on the move these days. Partly because of climate change or economics, and partly because of conflicts, more people are displaced now than at any other time in history. And, as we've seen in both Europe and Asia, displaced populations are taking to the water to try to relocate and rebuild their lives elsewhere. Whether you see this as a threat to national security or a humanitarian disaster, displaced populations are now often transiting via the oceans.

Climate change will affect the oceans and coastal areas. If the polar ice melts, sea levels will rise. Since, according to the United Nations about 40% of the world's population lives within 100 kilometres of the ocean, this will mean big problems for big populations. Think of the major cities located on the coast – New York, Rio de Janeiro, Hong Kong, Mumbai, Shanghai and Tokyo to name a few. In addition to the sea level rise, there will be ever-more severe storms coming off the oceans. Who will be able to deal with the relief operations when cities are inundated with water?

Crime has become increasingly international. Drugs, weapons and people smuggling is common, and the smugglers are moving longer distances. As land travel gets more difficult because of closed borders, the oceans have become attractive routes for transit. Instead of trafficking drugs over land from Latin America to the United States, for example, some traffickers cross the Caribbean via small fast boats and even small submarines. The money from drugs is unimaginable, and this money corrupts everywhere it spreads.

### Addressing Maritime Threats

How are maritime threats to be addressed? The most effective way to address these threats is by state forces – navies and coast guards. State-based naval forces can deter/dissuade or repel attacks by other naval forces. As well, naval forces have great capacity to assist in the aftermath of natural disasters. Ships can transport far more lifesaving equipment, and more cheaply, than airplanes, and navy ships can operate without the need of shore facilities and accommodation, which may be in short supply after a disaster.

Why would Canada want to help address maritime threats? Canada isn't experiencing maritime migration and piracy at home, but its allies are. Already several countries in Europe have experienced major political upheaval because of the issue of migration. Making sure there is political stability in Europe and addressing maritime migration is important to Canada. Piracy matters because it affects goods destined for Canada. Cargo shippers rely on naval ships to patrol the waters off east and west Africa and in other pirate hotspots.

To help address these threats, Canadian naval forces have participated with NATO forces in counter-piracy operations off Somalia and counter-terrorism operations in the Mediterranean. Every year the Canadian navy participates in *Operation Caribbe*, a counter-drug operation in the Caribbean. Canadian ships have traveled to Asia to show the flag on freedom of navigation, support United Nations sanctions against North Korea, and they've participated in exercises to rebuild the West's maritime warfare skills that had atrophied since the end of the Cold War.

Threats to maritime security come in many forms. Threats can come from pirates or the navies of other states which disrupt trade and shipping. Threats could come from extreme weather or rising sea levels that would affect the millions of people living on or near the coast. Threats also come from criminals who threaten good order by smuggling people, drugs and weapons. Whether Canadians live near the ocean or not, disorder and conflict at sea affect them.

## Notes

1. Geoffrey Morgan, "OPEC Oil Comes Roaring Back into Canada: Cartel Supplies a Third of Imports, Displacing U.S. Shale," *Financial Post*, 21 February 2017, available at <https://business.financialpost.com/commodities/energy/opec-oil-exports-to-canada-rebound-in-2016-as-u-s-producers-look-for-new-markets>.
2. See for example, "Russian Navy to Accept 19 New Warships for Service by Year End," TASS, Russian News Agency, 10 July 2018; "The Navy has Already Received 12 Warships and Combat Boats since the Beginning of this Year," *Military & Defense*, 10 July 2018; Ronald O'Rourke, Congressional Research Service, "China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities – Background and Issues for Congress," 21 May 2018, available at <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33153.pdf>; WhiteFleet.net, "The Rise of the People's Liberation Army Navy: Chinese Naval Modernization from 1990 to 2018," Posted by Alex Hempel, 25 March 2018, available at <https://whitefleet.net/2018/03/25/the-rise-of-chinas-peoples-liberation-army-navy-modernization-from-1990-to-2018/>; David Tweed and Adrian Leung, "How China's Growing Naval Fleet is Shaping Global Politics," Bloomberg, 31 May 2017, available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-05-31/china-s-growing-naval-might-challenges-u-s-supremacy-in-asia>.