



WHAT DOES THE RCN DO?

Canada is a maritime country with diverse economic and security interests tied to the sea. (See Briefing Notes #1 and #2 which discuss how Canada is a maritime country.) The country's maritime requirements are complex and extend beyond traditional defence; as such the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) takes on many different tasks, stretching from constabulary and diplomatic missions to interdiction and warfighting roles. (Briefing Note #3 discusses the classic roles of a navy – constabulary, diplomatic and warfighting, the three elements of Booth's Triangle.) In defence of Canada's national interests, the RCN guards Canada's coastline and its vast exclusive economic zone while also deploying around the world to ensure secure global sea lanes and protect Canada's interests abroad. This Briefing Note offers a snapshot of some of the RCN's major exercises and operations in 2020 to illustrate both the kinds of missions that the Canadian Navy undertakes and the demanding deployment schedule of the fleet.

Domestic Support

The RCN's versatile platforms make it a critical partner for many of Canada's civilian agencies, with mandates such as fisheries enforcement, pollution prevention and hydrographic research. Canadian warships routinely carry out fisheries patrols (FISHPATS) in support of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and aerial surveillance using CP-140 Aurora aircraft to build a recognized maritime picture and facilitate the enforcement of Canadian jurisdiction. The RCN also accepted its first Arctic and Offshore Patrol Vessel – HMCS *Harry DeWolf* – which was purpose built to support civilian agencies in the North and the offshore environment.

A comprehensive approach to Canadian security is important and whole-of-government (WoG) operations regularly link the navy and other assets of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) with civilian teams to generate a more robust response to a wide array of threats. The country's premier WoG exercise is *Operation Nanook*, which runs across the Canadian Arctic and incorporates several government departments and agencies, training continuously to respond to everything from pollution events to natural disasters while familiarizing personnel with northern conditions. In 2020, HMCS *Ville de Quebec* and *Glace Bay* joined MV *Asterix* in search-and-rescue training and exercises centred around response to a stricken cruise ship. This year the RCN was joined by the American *Arleigh Burke*-class guided-missile destroyer USS *Thomas Hudner* as well as the US Coast Guard Cutter USCGC *Tahoma*, the French patrol vessel FS *Fulmar*, and the Royal Danish Navy frigate HDMS *Triton*.

Global Security and Working with Allies

The most important mission of the RCN is the protection of Canada and Canadian interests abroad, a task linked to the strength and unity of the North American Aerospace Defence (NORAD) Command, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and Canada's partnerships around the world. For that reason, the RCN regularly participates in and conducts joint exercises with its partners to enhance cooperation and improve communication and

interoperability. Regular overseas deployments with allies familiarize crews with other countries' procedures and provide a chance to practice working together. These exercises are valuable training opportunities but are also undertaken to demonstrate capacity and presence in strategically important areas, project Canadian sea power in support of NATO, and enhance regional stability.

In 2020, Canada participated in several major multinational operations around the world. An example is *Operation Reassurance*, one of the RCN's recurring deployments. This operation, which takes place in Central and Eastern Europe as well as the Mediterranean, is an element of NATO's program of deterrence, established after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. The operation aims to reinforce NATO's collective defence, show allied solidarity and deter aggression. In July 2020, HMCS *Toronto* deployed to Standing NATO Maritime Group 1 in Central and Eastern Europe. Tracking increased Russian activity in the region, the frigate was part of a NATO fleet shadowing nine Russian warships in August as they sailed close to the English Channel. *Toronto* also patrolled the Baltic Sea, paying a port visit to Riga, Latvia. Further south, HMCS *Fredericton* deployed in early 2020 to the Mediterranean as part of Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 (and, for a time, in Group 1) for a similar six-month mission as part of NATO's continuing efforts to maintain a presence and monitor Russian submarine operations in that area. In April 2020 tragedy struck the ship when a Cyclone helicopter crashed while exercising with the Italian and Turkish navies. Six Canadian crew members were killed in one of the RCN's worst aerial disasters in years.

RCN ships have also participated in *Operation Projection West Africa* fostering relationships with partner navies and working to enhance maritime security and stability in the Gulf of Guinea and North Africa regions. Their deployments have included engagements to build partner capacity, promote maritime security and foster relationships in the region. In 2020 HMC Ships *Glace Bay* and *Shawinigan* travelled to West Africa but returned early because exercises had been cancelled based on concerns about Covid-19.

In the Pacific, Canadian warships took place in the major Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise. Hosted by the US Navy every two years in and around the Hawaiian Islands and Southern California, RIMPAC is the world's largest international maritime exercise. The event strengthens military-to-military partnerships and enhances the ability of allies to communicate and operate together. Canada deployed HMCS *Winnipeg* and *Regina* which participated in a sinking exercise (SINKEX) in which they sunk a decommissioned hulk with harpoon missiles.

Having completed their participation in RIMPAC in September 2020, HMCS *Winnipeg* transitioned to *Operation Projection Asia-Pacific*, an ongoing effort to strengthen relationships and promote maritime security in the region. *Winnipeg* then moved to *Operation Neon*, Canada's contribution to a coordinated multinational effort to support the implementation of United Nations Security Council sanctions imposed against North Korea.

Support for Law Enforcement

Assisting law enforcement in stopping smugglers, pirates, terrorists, and the transport of dangerous substances on the seas is an important navy role in support of broader national

security objectives. One of the most important regions for this is the Caribbean, where drugs from South America are smuggled to the United States and Canada. The Canadian Navy regularly deploys on *Operation Caribbe* and has been doing so in partnership with the US Coast Guard and American law enforcement agencies since 2006. In mid-March 2020 HMC Ships *Whitehorse* and *Nanaimo* deployed to the Caribbean for a three-month deployment to support the American Coast Guard in its interdiction efforts. The mission was cut short, however, out of caution and concern about the Covid-19 pandemic.

A Versatile Force

This snapshot offers a quick look at some of the major deployments and tasks undertaken by the Royal Canadian Navy during a typical year. While far from a comprehensive account, the diverse set of missions and operational locales provide some insight into the flexibility and pace of Canadian naval operations.