



The Royal Canadian Navy and Naval Diplomacy

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The Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) plays an important role in Canadian foreign policy by offering a unique national instrument of both soft and hard power. For a middle power such as Canada, it is especially critical that policy-makers fully understand that having a capable navy presents them with a range of potential policy options. Navies have traditionally sought and had diplomatic effect through their operations, activities and very existence. However, this important aspect of naval tradition is little understood and often seen only through the lens of ‘gunboat diplomacy.’ In reality, modern navies such as the RCN currently undertake a wide spectrum of activities that generate political and strategic influence, from operations, port visits, exercises, engagement in international organisations, or personnel and technology linkages with other countries. In an international system trending toward more competition in the maritime sphere, navies make sizeable contributions to strategic government objectives. In order to signal this within government, navies must have a coherent concept of their own role as diplomatic influencers.

This article briefly places navies in the current international context, examines the unique role of navies, discusses academic literature and existing doctrine on naval diplomacy, and notes the various diplomatic activities of the RCN. As well, it offers an updated definition and typology of naval diplomacy, identifies some key factors in improving outcomes, and proposes some areas for further discussion.

The article is not prescriptive and does not argue that the primary role of the RCN as an organisation built upon martial traditions, designed to fight and win against any adversary in combat, should be diminished, but that its role in naval diplomacy should be given greater recognition and utilized as much as possible.

The RCN and the Current International Context

The RCN has a proud history and is part of the fabric of modern Canada. Canadian culture contains memories of heroic naval actions past, whether they are from grainy black-and-white footage of the Battle of the Atlantic, or modern-day drug interdictions or counter-piracy operations. These are often the typical images of the navy that come to mind for many people outside of the RCN or Canadian Armed Forces (CAF).

The RCN is often the force of first response of Canada to a crisis. For example, the navy sailed within days after both the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 and the terrorist attacks on the United States in 2001. However, because the navy usually acts out of their sight, many Canadians are unfamiliar with what the navy actually does on a day-to-day basis outside of direct war fighting.

The RCN conducts a wide spectrum of diplomatic missions. These may be of an operational

nature, for example the deployment of HMCS *Winnipeg* in the fall of 2020 to the Asia-Pacific region upholding United Nations sanctions against North Korea and, by its presence, showing Canada's ongoing interest in the region. Other diplomatic missions include regular port visits, operations and multilateral exercises by *Halifax*-class frigates across the world, capacity-building efforts in West Africa often led by *Kingston*-class vessels, or more prosaic organisational activities such as recent staff talks with the Royal Australian Navy (RAN).

As the RCN continues its fleet recapitalization in the coming years, new platforms such as the Canadian Surface Combatant will have a significant diplomatic role. Other new vessels, such as the *Harry DeWolf*-class offshore patrol vessels and the *Protecteur*-class supply ships, will bring significant capabilities to bear that could be useful across a range of circumstances, including humanitarian assistance and disaster relief and search and rescue.

The impact of these RCN activities on successful foreign policy outcomes, maintaining the international maritime order and building the perception of Canada held by other countries, is often unrecognised or underestimated. These value-added aspects of RCN activities are particularly important to emphasize during this time of fleet renewal and the likely long-term economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the past decade there have been fundamental shifts in the global security environment. The international system – much of it still derived from an international consensus created in the aftermath of the Second World War – has been subject to challenge by the actions of both states and non-state actors alike. Such developments as Russia's invasion and annexation of Crimea, China's island-building and increasing militarization of the South China Sea, and the rise and fall of Daesh in Syria and Iraq are the most obvious examples of an international order that is fraying at the seams.

However, international orders are inherently dynamic. The emerging world order is characterised by a type of great power competition that many mistakenly thought had been consigned to the history books. Whatever form it may take, competition and contestation between states is a constant, but it is now pan-domain – i.e., it has changed from traditional air, sea and land to include also the cyber, information and space realms. This 'gray zone' conflict, describing a generalized state of intensified competition between states, is nothing new but some argue that this 'below the threshold' activity is reaching levels of intensity and capability hitherto rarely seen outside of the era of declared wars.

The amplified maritime competition we have seen, for example in the South China Sea, are a symptom of geopolitical developments and thereby have significant implications for navies. Additionally, the nature of maritime threats is shifting and technological advances are bringing both new challenges and new opportunities. Exploitation of the oceans – for trade and commerce, tourism, resource extraction, national security – is likely to continue to grow over the course of the century and will intensify due to new technology and climate change, especially in the Arctic.

Oceans are once again at the heart of the international system. This is particularly relevant in the Canadian context as Canada borders on the vast Arctic Ocean, which is increasingly becoming open to maritime activity. Additionally, the shifting balance of global economic and military power toward the Indo-Asia-Pacific region, and the inherent maritime character of that region, underscores the increasing strategic importance of the world's oceans. In recent years, the massive growth of China's navy (the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN)), retooling of the Russian Navy, and the fleet capitalization plans of navies across the world would suggest this idea is widely shared.

While outright conflict at sea is mercifully rare, it is clear that Western navies must be prepared

actively to ‘contest at sea’¹ in order to uphold the rules-based maritime international order upon which the global economy depends. The maintenance of the international order at sea might be seen as a key task for the RCN, somewhat akin to ‘peacekeeping at sea.’ Through the work of the RCN, Canada contributes as a security provider, not as a free-rider. Given the economic importance of Canada’s exports of bulk commodities, import of manufactured goods, integration in various global supply chains, and the expectations of the marine shipping industry, Canada must pull its weight. It should not be seen solely as the job of dominant powers or hegemon – it is incumbent upon all those who believe in and benefit from the international rules-based maritime order to protect it. In this, small and medium navies can have meaningful effect.

Therefore, navies are a critical enabler for the pursuit of national interests in the current international system (as they have been for many years). The RCN’s diplomatic work has rippling effects that spread outward and intensify the efforts of others. This work ranges from maintaining the right to peaceful access to the high seas, enforcing multilateral sanctions regimes, strengthening the deterrence of aggression, combatting terrorism and piracy, to capacity-building and enabling partners to do their bit. It also includes normative elements such as maintenance of the order, of being seen to follow the rules of an established order or norms. Such activities combine to make something bigger and are part of the daily contestation of the global commons. In short, the RCN defends the maritime order so vital to the livelihoods of millions of Canadians.

In this context, the world needs more navies. It is reasonable to assume that demand from decision-makers will grow for maritime security solutions of the type that navies are uniquely able to provide. Canada and the RCN cannot be successful in this strategic environment without a strong network of allies and key partnerships across the world. To build such relationships requires a coherent and sustained effort based on the realization that diplomatic efforts are enhanced by incrementalism, consistency, flexibility and pragmatism.

Navies and Diplomacy

Navies are the maritime armed forces of a state. Warships are defined in international law as extensions of their home state. States build navies for self-defence, to project power, for diplomatic effect and to enhance prestige by showing their flag around the world. It should be remembered that the primary mission of navies must ultimately be to fight and win in combat. Therefore, naturally navies spend much of their time training and exercising to ensure that they can be most effectively deployed across the spectrum of conflict. However, given that navies spend most of their existence in peacetime, they must also consider how they can be used across the spectrum of diplomacy.

It is important to nest naval diplomacy in its larger context. It is an element of wider defence diplomacy, itself an instrument in a state’s foreign policy toolbox. Defence diplomacy is the use of armed forces and defence organisations, outside of a combat role, to support wider strategic policy goals. Overall, it can be used in an attempt to create a favourable political environment or strategic outcome vis-à-vis a particular country, region, organisation, or issue.

From a strategic perspective, navies provide a physical manifestation of a state’s power and interest. As former Royal Australian Navy (RAN) Chief of Navy Vice-Admiral Ray Griggs stated “this idea of giving practical expression to a nation’s policy direction is important. It distinguishes good intentions and substantive action.”² Ultimately actions often speak louder than words.

Overall, diplomacy is often the least understood yet among the most regular activities of

modern navies like the RCN. It is also one of its most important roles. As Christian Le Mière argues, “Maritime diplomacy, whether in its coercive, persuasive or co-operative form, or using military or civilian actors, is perhaps the most significant role for maritime agencies in peacetime.”³

Why do navies tend to engage in diplomatic roles above and beyond their army and air force colleagues? Naval forces offer a relatively inexpensive yet historically and culturally symbolic method of delivering diplomatic effect without going to war. It is the inherent multipurpose attributes of naval forces that provide this advantage: lawful access to most of the world’s surface; mobility; self-sufficiency and ability to remain in area for extended periods; resilience; and versatility. Uniquely, naval diplomacy can “deter conflict, it can prevent conflict, and it can preempt conflict, filling the space between civilian diplomacy and military warfighting with a form of military diplomacy.”⁴

There is no intrinsic divide between the military and diplomatic role of a naval warship. The inherent tactical versatility of navies allows a single forward-deployed vessel to move quickly along the spectrum of diplomacy and conflict, from soft to hard power. In this way, naval diplomacy can take place any place, any time, wherever navies are active. This flexibility allows policy-makers to use these activities according to the specific features of the situation or international context. If the international system continues a trend toward more gray zone-style contestation rather than outright conflict, policy-makers would do well to appreciate that warships can still be a powerful tool in this realm, as opposed to armour or fighter aircraft for example.

We must remember that navies do not consist only of warships. They are sophisticated organisations the activities of which can have a wide spectrum of diplomatic effect. Naval diplomacy does not only happen during deployed operations or port visits. Of course, these are important, and certainly the most visible, manifestations of a navy as being on the sharp end of foreign policy. However, this does not tell the whole story.

This represents a conceptual leap from the traditional concept of ‘gunboat diplomacy’ in which naval influence upon diplomacy was bound by space (i.e., close to an adversary’s coastline), and a narrow definition of operations (active coercion). The concept of gunboat diplomacy simply does not reflect the reality of today’s world or today’s navies.

Naval Diplomacy Literature

What can the academic world teach us about this issue? While it has historically been recognised that navies convey power and purpose, even in classical times (see Thucydides’ writings on the Peloponnesian War), in general the naval realm is barely mentioned in the most influential literature on warfare. Thus well-known military theorists Carl von Clausewitz and Sun Tzu, for example, focus on land warfare.

The classic thinkers of maritime strategy are Alfred Thayer Mahan and Sir Julian Corbett, in their seminal works *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* (1890) and *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* (1911) respectively.⁵ However even they rarely mention any diplomatic role for navies beyond direct coercion and operational effect in war. Quite reasonably at the time, both assumed the importance of navies as part of wider statecraft, rather than explicitly explaining why this is the case.

Corbett did place naval action in a greater context when referring to what he called ‘major strategy,’ calling for navies to be in sync with policy and “in constant touch with the political and

diplomatic position of the country (on which depends the effective action to the instrument), and the commercial and financial position (by which the energy for working the instrument is maintained).”⁶ Corbett also sought to demonstrate the broader geopolitical context of naval activities, through “the power that navies exerted by their intelligent disposition.”⁷

There have been huge changes in naval warfare since the time of Mahan and Corbett, and in the role of naval diplomacy. Naval diplomacy as a discrete concept began to be recognised in the Cold War context of the 1970s. Probably the most influential work on the subject to date, which has even found some mainstream appeal outside of the rarified interests of naval professionals and academics, is Sir James Cable’s 1971 book *Gunboat Diplomacy: Political Applications of Limited Naval Force*.⁸ Cable undertook an historical analysis of the diplomatic use of navies, defining ‘gunboat diplomacy’ as “the use or threat of limited naval force, otherwise than as an act of war, in order to secure advantage or to avert loss, either in the furtherance of an international dispute or else against foreign nationals within the territory or the jurisdiction of their own state.”⁹ He further classified the examples of gunboat diplomacy into definitive, purposeful, catalytic and expressive.

While important in attempting to characterize the role of navies short of war, Cable’s analysis is based upon a very different time, and of course was written during the bipolarity of the Cold War. He saw naval diplomacy as “something that governments do to foreigners.”¹⁰ This difference in context, in only seeing diplomacy in terms of relative power (im)balances, as well as the subsequent legal and policy developments – especially the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) – and advances in technology, makes his work less practically useful for any modern navy seeking realistic guidance on diplomatic matters.

Of further influence upon the field of study was Edward Luttwak’s 1974 book *The Political Uses of Sea Power* and Ken Booth’s 1977 book *Navies and Foreign Policy*.¹¹ Luttwak’s analysis introduced the concept of ‘suasion’ in describing the various diplomatic effects that naval activities can achieve, and attempted to define a spectrum of such activities. His analysis reminds us of a fundamental truth; as he phrases it, “the familiar attributes of an oceanic navy – inherent mobility, tactical flexibility, and a wide geographic reach – render it peculiarly useful as an instrument of policy.”¹²

Booth’s work is most famous for introducing the ‘trinity’ of naval roles in which diplomacy is one pillar alongside military and constabulary roles. He identified seven key characteristics of warships as diplomatic instruments: versatility; controllability; mobility; projection ability; access potential; symbolism; and endurance.¹³ He also argued that there were five basic tenets of naval diplomacy, which he divided into two groups. He referred to the first group as ‘naval power politics’ which encompassed standing demonstrations of naval power and specific operational deployments. The second group, ‘naval influence politics,’ consisted of naval aid, operational visits and specific goodwill visits. Booth’s work was particularly influential on subsequent RCN and Royal Australian Navy (RAN) doctrine and still resonates today.

These works, and Hedley Bull’s short but useful 1976 “Sea Power and Political Influence” – an interesting indication of the English School’s links to the issue – came closest to constructing a conceptual framework incorporating the role of navies as instruments of national diplomatic power.¹⁴

It should be noted that the literature discussed here is Western. There was also significant literature written in the Soviet Union about the use of naval diplomacy. Notably there is the 1979 book by Admiral Sergei Gorshkov *The Sea Power of the State*, in which he writes “the navy has always been an instrument of state policy, and an important support for diplomacy in peacetime.”¹⁵ In addition, there has been a significant growth in Chinese literature, and literature about China,

in the last decade.¹⁶

Since the end of the Cold War in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the RCN and other Western navies have struggled to adapt to a new paradigm and a changed international system in which to do business. This was reflected in academia, with the earlier works on naval diplomacy now being seen as anachronistic and bound in Cold War thinking. It was clear that the models described in these works were simply not able to explain the contemporary world of naval activities in the diplomatic realm.

However, recent works by Christian Le Mière, *Maritime Diplomacy in the 21st Century: Drivers and Challenges*, Geoffrey Till, *Seapower Theory and Practice*, and Royal Navy Commander Kevin Rowlands, *Naval Diplomacy in the 21st Century: A Model for the Post-Cold War Global Order* have made excellent contributions by updating the theoretical and practical understanding of the modern diplomatic role of navies.¹⁷ Le Mière uses game theory in his analysis whereas Rowlands uses a wide range of historical examples and then draws upon communications and stakeholder theories.

Le Mière comes closest to conceptualising contemporary practice when he says “[m]aritime diplomacy is not just the gunboat diplomacy of old, or the naval suasion and presence mission of the Cold War. It is a spectrum of activities that runs from the co-operative through the persuasive to the coercive.”¹⁸ His work does a good job of recognising some of the less obvious naval diplomatic activities. The book provides a useful lens to see the link between these activities and the contemporary reality of how navies actually work and the connections to wider foreign policy issues.

As this brief literature review illustrates, the idea of naval diplomacy has received relatively little attention by academia. Much of the ‘classical’ literature may appear not to be of relevance to the RCN and other navies operating today, but the literature serves as a conceptually crucial building block. However, in a world of where great power competition has re-emerged and there is increasing multipolarity, a new model of thinking to guide our action is required.

A Proposed Typology of Naval Diplomacy Activities

RCN doctrine in *Leadmark 2050* defines the RCN’s diplomatic role as “the use of maritime forces in support of national policy objectives short of conflict.”¹⁹ This article suggests building upon this definition and argues that naval diplomacy is *the political use of navies; the constellation of naval operations and activities that seeks or has purposeful diplomatic effect*.

At present, the RCN undertakes a broad range of such activities, perhaps more than may be recognised both within the RCN or across the government. Indeed, in the manner and activities to be defined below, it can be seen that the RCN spends much of its time on diplomatic duties. Despite this level of effort, some of these activities may receive little recognition outside RCN audiences and therefore are not as fully utilized as they might be.

In attempting to capture the range of possible diplomatic activities of naval forces this article proposes to divide them into four overarching conceptual areas, each with two separate sub-categories. While not an exhaustive list, the following typology can aid our thinking on naval diplomacy and how such undertakings might be best carried out with certain capabilities, platforms and personnel. I label the four areas of naval diplomatic activity Dynamic, Evocative, Instructive and Organisational.

Dynamic activities are those undertaken by navies that directly show both their operational

capabilities and objective interest in a place, issue, or organisation. Often action-oriented, such activities will have a physical manifestation usually seeking operational effect and demonstrating national commitment. A defined measurement of success is possible, and the actions or non-actions of other parties also can be noted (e.g., a state joins an international sanctions effort, the state sends its navy to undertake patrols, prevalence of smuggling or other activity is visibly reduced). The two sub-categories are as follows.

ACTIVE OPERATIONS	PRESENCE OPERATIONS
Operational deployments e.g., UN sanctions enforcement counter-piracy, counter-smuggling narcotics/humans, active protection of shipping	Maintenance of rules-based order, sea lines of communication; routine deployments as a declaration of interest and intent in a particular area
Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR)	Group sails with allies and partners, joint patrols
Search and rescue overseas (SAR)	Fisheries patrols in Canada's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), monitoring, reporting and countering illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing outside Canada's EEZ
Exercises: attend, host, observe; bilateral, multilateral, institutional (e.g., NATO)	Environmental protection
Training, including test-firing weapons	Reassurance to allies and partners

Evocative activities display physical capabilities and tangible assets in a different, more passive manner than above. They demonstrate interest in a country or institution and are designed to build cultural and institutional memory and strategic influence. They tend toward action but not in such an obvious operational manner. Specific measurement of effect is more challenging due to the difficulty of assessing the perceptions of others, although calculating inputs is perfectly possible. The two sub-categories are as follows.

VISITS	INFRASTRUCTURE
Planned port visits (i.e., invited and expected visits) to conduct diplomatic and naval interactions	Use of infrastructure, basing, equipment by visiting navy
Chief of navy visits	Naval facilities/platforms used for Ministerial or Chief of Defence meetings or visits
Ceremonial activities overseas	Replenishment-at-sea
Fleet reviews (attending, hosting)	

Both Dynamic and Evocative undertakings may coerce, deter, influence or support external actors for operational and strategic advantage. Additionally, they can also seek to support international norms and legal regimes (e.g., UNCLOS, freedom of the sea). They both have clear cascading diplomatic effects beyond strictly naval lines of effort.

Instructive activities are undertaken by navies across a range of subjective interactions (i.e., the interactions are actively chosen, based on prioritization) in order to build capacity, generate knowledge and underpin readiness with understanding of the various contexts and cultures in which navies interact. They tend to be process-oriented with ongoing and iterative effects, with more subtle or indirect outcomes. Inputs can be measured and monitored quite simply; outputs can be reasonably inferred. The two sub-categories are as follows.

INFORMATION	TECHNOLOGY
Attendance at international conferences, regular discussion of maritime issues with other navies, government officials, academics	Defence industry support e.g., can be during port visits, demonstrating a home-country technology overseas
Working level meetings between navies, and with government officials, facilitating flow of experience and information, building connections	Selling, loaning, giving equipment
Sharing intelligence, information, strategic analysis	Technical working groups, technology research, transfer
Sharing naval calendars, deployment plans	Shared procurement projects e.g., Type 26
Publishing articles, sharing research	Sharing of best practice, testing data

Organisational activities are undertaken by navies seeking to build direct institutional linkages with other navies and multilateral naval fora. Such activities signal consistency, willingness to share and learn best practices, and bureaucratic competence. These activities are the bread and butter of navy-to-navy diplomacy but are often imperceptible to those outside navy lines. As such, they may be easy to ignore, but they are critical in building concrete relations between navy establishments and personal linkages among sailors, senior leaders and chiefs of navies. Organisational activities are straightforward to measure and monitor. The two sub-categories are as follows.

NAVY RELATIONS	PEOPLE
Planned, regularized senior leadership navy-to-navy talks, with goal of deepening ties along a broad front of activities	Exchanges of active duty naval personnel between navies in order to share knowledge, build institutional and personal rapport
Capacity-building	Naval education/training
Assistance	Naval attachés posted in diplomatic missions overseas
Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreements (ACSA); Statement of Forces Agreements (SOFA)	Leadership positions in multinational commands or institutions
Membership of multilateral international organisations e.g., Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS)	

Both Instructive and Organisational activities can be designed to support, influence and construct relationships with external actors. They offer less obviously tangible, yet still potent, diplomatic effects when embedded in a wider pan-navy or strategic cross-government framework. Together they form a depth of association between countries that few other departmental government-to-government interactions can match, and could be used by policy-makers to cement relations or influence priorities.

It should be noted that effective Instructive and Organisational activities support the success of Dynamic and Evocative activities through their contribution to knowledge and interoperability.

It is important to recognise that not all of the above activities reside solely within navy lines, depending on the organisation of the armed forces in a country. For example, taking the Canadian example, some of the activities in the Technology section may be led by the Assistant Deputy Minister Materiel group (ADM Mat), likely with embedded RCN personnel involved. Similarly, items under Infrastructure may involve coordination between a navy and the public or private owners of land, bases, or assets, which again will differ from country to country.

Towards New Thinking on Naval Diplomacy: How Can We Do It Better?

With the above typology offering a skeleton of understanding for the array of possible naval diplomatic activities, an obvious area of further enquiry is to provide practical examples and, more importantly, identify ways in which navies can improve both their effectiveness performing these tasks and the outcome achieved. While a detailed answer to this is beyond the scope of this particular article, a few challenges can be acknowledged, and specific lines of effort proposed.

Recording and Measuring Success

A key difficulty with naval diplomacy, indeed diplomatic efforts in general, is measuring and demonstrating its effectiveness. In a military culture that prizes clearly defined targeting and effects, this presents a core challenge. It could also be argued that the strategic effects of naval diplomacy are outside the bailiwick of a navy to measure. This can only be done in reference to a stated foreign policy with a clear hierarchy of interests, a robust set of principles of action, and coherent strategic direction. However, such direction may differ in quality and quantity according to the political and bureaucratic circumstances for particular navies.

That said, there are steps that any navy can take to track and assess its diplomatic activities without reference to specific policy direction. The first would be to define, record and *measure everything* as clearly as possible that has any diplomatic link. In order for any organisation to be effective in transformation, it must be able measure degrees of change in order to affect change. Navies must identify activities and measure relevant metrics. This could be as simple as recording the number of port visits a warship makes while on a deployment, or how many articles are published in local media or social media about a port visit, or how many personnel are exchanged to and from various countries.

Navies must build legacy documents and ‘lessons learned’ procedures surrounding such activities. Chronicles of past successes and failures, reports on interactions, port visits, meetings etc., must be generated as a matter of course. Solid reporting chains must be established.

Furthermore, such data must be understandable, organised and accessible by those who need it (including outside of navies). All organisations have felt the pain of poor information management when searching for a document only to be told that it was probably in “folder x, and so-and-so would know but they retired last year.”

Only through collecting this information can a navy expect to measure progress as well as demonstrate its value to the government. Navies must find quantitative and qualitative macro ways of measuring their inputs and outputs in the diplomatic sphere. Then at least an attempt can be made to determine and analyze their aggregated effects. Defence and Naval Attachés have a key role here. The question is how can a navy measure its sometimes subtle and intangible diplomatic actions in a way that makes it possible to discern their repercussions? It would seem that the power of data analytics may find a willing subject here.

Additionally, naval diplomatic activities, even operational aspects, have their main influence on *perceptions* rather than directly on an adversary. Therefore, the value or effectiveness of naval diplomacy is actually best judged by the actor on the ‘other side’ of the action, not the actors themselves. As such, naval diplomacy as ‘strategic communication’ is an area worthy of further study with obvious relevance to Public Affairs practitioners.

When considering the vexed question of measurement, it would be beneficial for navies to consider diplomacy not in a transactional manner but rather see it as a constant flow of activities that deliver short- and long-term benefits, some of which may be intangible or indeed unknown. Again, this may be a worrying thought for military planners who are trained in balancing inputs and outputs in order to achieve demonstrable effect in a particular space and time.

Naval Diplomacy is a Team Sport

Diplomacy is an enduring dialogue, a continual conversation that requires constructive engagement across a range of areas rather than a set of discrete events. It is not an activity to be turned on or off; it is a continuum of activities. Similarly, naval diplomacy must be seen as a positive, proactive *act*. It is a *choice*. It should not be considered as a potential benefit while on the way to do other things. If it is to be viewed as an act within navies, it must be given the proper level of coherence of action.

Maximising the value of naval diplomacy requires high levels of coordination. An appropriate linkage or gearing mechanism is needed that connects naval activities with wider strategic defence diplomacy and foreign policy. To marshal the capabilities and skills of a navy to this end requires the development of a mechanism that fully encompasses these strategic policy goals while also understanding the interests, capabilities and processes of the navy and any joint operational command structures.

In the RCN context, this requires thorough consultation with all relevant Canadian Armed Forces, Department of National Defence (DND) and government of Canada stakeholders. Naval activities can then be effectively leveraged for policy, economic, or other diplomatic objectives. Similarly, other government departments such as those with responsibility for industry, trade, environment, culture, as well as the Privy Council Office, should be fully aware of the RCN’s international influence. In essence, it requires a coordinated national security and foreign policy approach.

In the Canadian context, it should be recognised that the RCN is a force generator; it is the Canadian Joint Operations Command (CJOC) that employs these forces for operations – i.e., the

RCN generates the agreed type, level and capability of naval power, which is then engaged by CJOC. Therefore, many RCN diplomatic activities will actually technically take place under the auspices of CJOC. This produces challenges and opportunities for the effective strategic direction and use of naval assets for diplomatic effect.

Similarly, there must be a significant role for the Assistant Deputy Minister Policy group (ADM Pol), as well as the Strategic Joint Staff (SJS), who hold overall DND-CAF responsibility for managing Canada's defence relations with other countries. Through ADM Pol, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) must also be involved in setting the objectives, purpose and intent of naval diplomatic activities. Given the importance of tempo in diplomacy, ADM Pol and GAC are in the best position to set the agenda and direct what is in the national interest. The CAF/CJOC can then operationalise this.

Linkages can be both institutional and personal but are often not expressly formalized through specific structures such as, for example, regular meetings that plan port visits and the attendant activities well in advance. RCN planners cannot be expected to alter schemes of manoeuvre with little notice, so if there is a particular reason for a certain operational deployment or port visit (due to a wider foreign policy purpose e.g., an anniversary of diplomatic relations, a trade or defence industry interest), then this should be clearly signalled well in advance.

It is worth noting that this challenge of coherence is not new. Indeed, Rear-Admiral Bob Davidson flagged the same point more than a decade ago saying that "Canada's Navy represents more than military power or gunboat diplomacy. It is a deployable microcosm of Canadian society and technology. Much greater use of this capability could be made through improved coordination across government departments."²⁰

However, success in naval diplomacy is not only predicated upon having the right capabilities – it relies upon people. It requires personnel with soft skills such as intelligence and adaptability. In practical terms, every sailor is a diplomat. These are crucial skills for senior leadership positions and their development is accelerated by exposure to international environments. Therefore it is critical that the RCN continues to attract the best and brightest, and makes progress leveraging Canada's diverse population as a force multiplier.

The further development of a concept of naval diplomacy could be linked to this heightened sense of it being a capability in its own right. As an increased component of naval training and professional development, it would provide an opportunity to advance an institutional RCN intellectual edge.²¹

Conclusion: The Future RCN as a Critical Component of Canada's Foreign Policy

The RCN stands at a significant point in its history, poised to reap the rewards of hard-won arguments for its value and relevance over the past decade. Recapitalization of the fleet in the coming years will bring increased capabilities requiring not only practical changes but also cultural shifts within the organisation in order to take full advantage.

This renewed fleet is critical for the RCN. Fundamentally, a navy requires an adequate fleet size – and mix of capabilities within that fleet – to perform its assigned range of activities successfully. Although often unsaid, combat power underpins much of the legitimacy that is required for navies to have diplomatic effect. It is also critical to remember that navies must be maintained, not raised. Thus, while a conscript army can be created in days, a navy takes years since its capabilities cannot be conjured-up from the ether.

When considering the future fleet and how new platforms such as the Canadian Surface Combatant will affect the operations of the RCN, we must also consider developing an effective doctrine on how to utilize new platforms for naval diplomacy tasks. Crucially, the RCN can utilize this doctrine to communicate its foreign policy value to Canadians and across government, especially on the importance of fleet size in enabling the navy to perform its wide array of tasks.

In today's fractured international system, Canada must effectively leverage all aspects of national power in order to face the challenges ahead. As a middle power, Canada lacks the resources to make large contributions in every area; it can influence, but not dictate. This requires not only robust whole-of-government coordination but also increased awareness across government departments of the instruments available to influence outcomes in Canada's favour. A coherent overarching concept of naval diplomacy could clearly demonstrate the value the RCN brings to enhancing Canada's credibility and influence on the world stage.

As Canada faces the challenges of today and tomorrow, policy-makers will rightly demand that the RCN maintain its 'ready to fight' stance. By the same token, the RCN should also stand 'ready aye ready' to continue to make its significant impact upon Canada's strategic interests through its activities in the critical field of naval diplomacy.

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Notes

1. The word 'contest' is used as a verb here. It is used in this way by Canada's allies and partners, especially the UK. Actively putting to sea is an act, we have agency as a state to do so, and when we do, we are making a statement of what we believe in.
2. Vice-Admiral Ray Griggs quoted in Andrew Forbes (ed.), *Naval Diplomacy and Maritime Power Projection: Proceedings of the Royal Australian Navy Sea Power Conference 2013*, Sea Power Centre: Australia, 2014, p. 3.
3. Christian Le Mière, *Maritime Diplomacy in the 21st Century: Drivers and Challenges* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), p. 66.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

5. Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783* (Boston: Little, Brown, originally published 1890, (1949)); Julian S. Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* (First published London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1911).
6. Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, p. 327.
7. Corbett as quoted (without citation) in J.J. Widén, *Theorist of Maritime Strategy: Sir Julian Corbett and His Contribution to Military and Naval Thought* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 22.
8. James Cable, *Gunboat Diplomacy 1919-1991* (3rd ed.; Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994).
9. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
11. Edward Luttwak, *The Political Uses of Sea Power* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974; Ken Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy* (London: Croom Helm, 1977).
12. Luttwak, *The Political Uses of Sea Power*.
13. Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy*.
14. Hedley Bull, "Sea Power and Political Influence," *The Adelphi Papers*, 16:122 (1976), pp. 1-9.
15. Admiral Sergei Gorshkov, *The Sea Power of the State* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1979).
16. See, for example, Timothy R. Heath, "Winning Friends and Influencing People: Naval Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics," *China Maritime Report* No. 8, September 2020. China Maritime Studies Institute, US Naval War College.
17. Le Mière, *Maritime Diplomacy in the 21st Century*; Kevin Rowlands, *Naval Diplomacy in the 21st Century: A Model for the Post-Cold War Global Order* (London: Routledge, 2018); and Geoffrey Till, *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century* (3rd ed.; Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).
18. Le Mière, *Maritime Diplomacy in the 21st Century*, p. 123.
19. Royal Canadian Navy, *Leadmark 2050: Canada in a New Maritime World*, 2017 p. G-2.
20. Rear-Admiral Bob Davidson, "Modern Naval Diplomacy: A Practitioner's View," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1-2 (Fall and Winter 2008/2009).
21. Having a military that thinks, is educated at a high level, that rewards intellectual debate and thinking, and that having that intellectual edge is not only a good thing in its own right, but could actually make a difference on operations and in combat.