



ALLIANCES, COALITIONS, AND THE RCN

If you've read Briefing Notes 36 and 37 on interoperability and naval task groups, you'll know that the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) works with other navies. In this Briefing Note we discuss the formal defence alliances that Canada has, plus the informal arrangements, and how they relate to the RCN.

Canada is active internationally and belongs to many international organizations and agencies that focus on everything from weather to health to aviation to trade to governance of the Arctic. Surprisingly, however, Canada belongs to few formal defence alliances – indeed there is one formal defence alliance: the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). As an extension of its defence partnership with the United States, Canada also participates in a binational command dedicated to the defence of the North American continent: the North American Air (later changed to Aerospace) Defence (NORAD) Command. We will discuss both of these briefly.

NATO was formed by the North Atlantic Treaty (the Washington Treaty) in 1949 as the Cold War between 'the West' and the Soviet bloc began amidst the ashes of World War II. Canada was one of 12 original signatories, and NATO continues to be an important element of Canada's international defence policy. There are now 29 members.

Article 5 forms the heart of the alliance. It outlines the collective defence elements of the treaty. It states:

Article 5

The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.

The member states are to ensure that they maintain some ability to defend themselves and participate in the defence of others. This is outlined in Article 3 which states that "In order more effectively to achieve the objectives of this Treaty, the Parties, separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack."

As noted, the original threat was the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. With the end of the Cold War in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, NATO faced a crisis of existence – what would it do in the absence of the Soviet threat? There were some people who thought that NATO would fade away, but it has not. Indeed, first it became active in areas outside of the North Atlantic and then, as Russia became more assertive, it beefed up its forces in its traditional areas. In the years since the Cold War ended, NATO forces have, for example, participated in peacekeeping/peacemaking in the former Yugoslavia, counter-piracy patrols off

the coast of Somalia, and counter-insurgency in Afghanistan. NATO has grown into a huge organization with offices in Europe and the United States which deal with political affairs, military affairs (army, air force, navy), logistics, intelligence and training.

How does the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) fit into NATO? The headquarters of Allied Maritime Command (HQ MARCOM) is in Northwood, Britain. There are a variety of maritime elements in NATO. These include:

- Standing NATO Maritime Groups
 - Standing NATO Maritime Group 1 (SNMG1)
 - Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 (SNMG2)
 - Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Group 1 (SNMCMG1)
 - Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Group 2 (SNMCMG2)
- MARCOM Subordinate Commands
 - NATO Maritime Air Command (COMMARAIR)
 - NATO Submarine Command (COMSUBNATO)
- NATO Shipping Centre

The four NATO Standing Naval Forces (SNF) provide NATO with a continuous naval capability and presence, and form the core of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (Maritime). The idea behind the SNF is to deter attack in the North Atlantic, and promote and preserve freedom of the seas and freedom of navigation in international waters.

Until 2005, SNMG1 was called Standing Naval Force Atlantic (STANAVFORLANT). It is a multinational force designed to deter enemies in the North Atlantic. It carries out operational deployments, training exercises and interactions with member navies to build and maintain high levels of readiness, interoperability and war-fighting capabilities. It usually consists of four to six destroyers and frigates, and provides NATO with an immediate response capability.

For many years Canada has continuously deployed RCN frigates on a rotational basis. They are employed in exercises and operational tasks in the NATO Maritime Command's areas of responsibility. HMCS *Halifax* deployed in January 2021 as part of Canada's contribution to NATO regional assurance and deterrence measures (*Operation Reassurance*), replacing HMCS *Toronto* which deployed with SNMG1 from July to December 2020. A Canadian assumed command of SNMG1 in January 2021, and HMCS *Halifax* will serve as the flagship for the SNMG1 command team throughout its deployment.

In 2005 Standing Naval Force Mediterranean (STANAVFORMED) was re-designated Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 (SNMG2). As the name suggests, it is active in the Mediterranean but has also been deployed farther south. It has supported NATO's maritime contribution to prevent the movement of terrorists and/or their weapons, narcotics and weapons of mass destruction. It also deployed to defend World Food Program vessels off Somalia against pirates in 2009 (*Operation Allied Protector*), and to *Operation Ocean Shield*, an anti-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden, starting in 2009. Like SNMG1, it also usually consists of four to six frigates and destroyers.

The other two standing naval forces are, as their name suggests, immediate operational reaction bodies that focus on mine countermeasures. One operates in the Atlantic (SNMCMG1) and the other in the Mediterranean (SNMCMG2). As well, NATO also has a separate submarine command (COMSUBNATO). This is the NATO command agency for all submarines assigned in support of NATO operations and exercises, including boats from both NATO and non-NATO

partner states.

The second formal arrangement to which Canada belongs is NORAD, a binational command between Canada and the United States. It was formed in 1958, at a cold period in the Cold War, to protect the approaches of North America from Soviet bombers, and later missiles. As the name suggests, it focuses mainly on air and space; it has not traditionally included the maritime approaches to the continent. However, when changes to the NORAD Agreement were made in 2006, among other things, it gained a third mission: maritime warning. This mission includes collecting, processing, assessing and sharing information relating to maritime areas of Canada and the United States, in order to identify threats and enable response by national agencies responsible for maritime defence. In terms of the maritime arena, NORAD does not have a control mission, only a warning function. Surveillance and control continue to be executed by national commands and coordinated bilaterally only if necessary.

Other Alliance/Coalition Maritime Operations

As noted, Canada is a member of few formal defence alliances. And yet it is active internationally. The RCN has been active in security/defence operations outside formal alliances. One of the cornerstones of Canadian foreign policy has been the United Nations since it was formed in the aftermath of WW II. The UN is not a defence alliance – it is based on the notion of collective security – however on many occasions UN Security Council (SC) decisions have resulted in the commitment of Canadian Armed Forces personnel.

When we think of UN operations, we tend to think of army or air force missions, not the navy. But the UN has used maritime forces for SC-authorized missions – blue helmets on water. For example, after Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, the UN authorized a force to remove Iraqi forces. Canada participated in this. The maritime component of the Gulf War (*Operation Friction*) involved the destroyers HMCS *Terra Nova* and HMCS *Athabaskan* to assist with enforcing the UN trade blockade against Iraq, and the supply ship HMCS *Protecteur* was deployed to provide underway replenishment, command/control and at-sea medical services.

There are examples of UN-authorized missions that are carried out via NATO forces and organization. Thus, in the 1990s, in support of a UN SC resolution, the NATO Standing Naval Force Mediterranean patrolled in international waters off the coast of the former Yugoslavia to prevent weapons from being transported to the warring parties in Bosnia. (Canada provided three ships to *Operation Maritime Guard*.) In the aftermath of 9/11, the UN authorized land, air and naval operations against Afghanistan. In addition to air and ground forces, Canada responded with five ships in *Operation Apollo* in support of counter-terrorism operations in the Persian Gulf. And in 2011, in response to actions by the President of Libya the UN SC authorized an operation to support the people of Libya, mainly conducted by naval forces, to monitor and stop the transfer of weapons into the country. This was carried out using ships from NATO SNMG2 and SNMCMG2, reinforced with other naval and maritime air assets from NATO members (*Operation Unified Protector*).

UN-authorized naval missions have continued. The RCN participates in the enforcement of UN sanctions against North Korea. Although there are not always RCN ships involved, the regular deployments (*Operation Neon*) have involved a rotation of frigates, maritime patrol aircraft, a submarine and the interim supply ship MV *Asterix*.

In recent years many RCN operations have also occurred as part of what have been called

‘coalitions of the willing.’ Thus, Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), headquartered in Bahrain, is a voluntary commitment formed by the United States in the wake of 9/11 in order to undertake counter-terrorism operations at sea as part of *Operation Enduring Freedom*. CMF is made up of three task forces which have specific areas of focus and specific mandates: CTF 150 focuses on counter-terrorism/counter-smuggling; CTF 151 focuses on counter-piracy; and CTF 152 focuses on maritime security. The coalition has grown and evolved to encompass and address wider maritime security threats. They are all multinational task forces, and CTF 150 participants have included Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, Pakistan, Spain, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and the United States. The area for which CTF 150 is responsible includes busy shipping lanes and spans over two million square miles, covering the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Indian Ocean and Gulf of Oman (but not inside the Arabian Gulf, which is the responsibility of CTF 152). This area contains the approaches to three narrow waterways (‘choke points’) – the Strait of Hormuz, Bab El Mandeb and the Suez Canal – where ships are vulnerable. Since 2012, the Canadian contribution to CTF 150 is referred to as *Operation Artemis*. Canadians have regularly taken command of the task force as part of a rotating system of command.

One more arrangement is worth mentioning. It is not a defence alliance as such, but it does involve military assets and capabilities. Canada belongs to the Five Eyes partnership, which is an intelligence alliance comprised of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States. Intelligence is gathered by these five states from multiple sources, including signals intelligence (electronic signals and systems used by foreign targets, such as communications systems, radars, and weapons systems), defence intelligence (assessments of military capabilities and assets of foreign targets), human intelligence (inter-personal contacts) and geospatial intelligence (analysis of images and data associated with a specific location). This intelligence is shared across the group as a means of building mutual awareness of current threats posed by state and non-state actors.

Conclusions

If recent history provides any guide, the RCN will deploy in response to threats or crises in the maritime environment. It will do so at the request of the government of Canada, NATO, the United Nations, or as part of a multinational coalition. Since the majority of the world’s population lives in close proximity to the oceans, navies will undoubtedly play a major role in responding to crisis and conflict in the future.