



## The Canadian Coast Guard and the RCN: Roles and Responsibilities

Canada's status as a maritime nation, bounded on three sides by oceans, heavily reliant on the seas for the conduct of international maritime trade, and home to the world's longest coastline, has led to its development and maintenance of two separate sea-going services. Both tasked, broadly speaking, with the protection of Canada's national interests, the Canadian Coast Guard (CCG) and Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) share several key roles and occasionally overlapping responsibilities. However, the CCG and RCN are independent organizations, operating distinct fleets with varying capabilities for the fulfilment of operational mandates and responsibilities that are, at their core, distinct.

Formed in 1962, as a component of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), the Canadian Coast Guard is a civilian service. Its operational mandate is extensive, encompassing fisheries patrols, environmental protection, navigational aid, support to law enforcement, maritime search and rescue, and icebreaking. It has a key function in the maintenance of Canada's maritime domain awareness, by monitoring maritime activity, managing vessel traffic, conducting vessel screening, and tracking vessel movements to identify potential security threats. It subsequently supplies this information and intelligence to Canada's Marine Security Operations Centres (MSOCs), thus providing valuable details to enable those Centres to develop a comprehensive image of vessel activity and movements in Canadian waters to inform the nation's security and maritime services. The CCG's role, as a steward of Canada's waters, also makes it the lead agency in any response to a pollution incident within those waters. Indeed, in addition to operating environmental response teams, the CCG also provides on-the-scene commanders to coordinate a pollution response or, in the event that the party responsible for the pollution is capable of responding itself, a monitoring officer.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to monitoring activity in Canada's maritime approaches and assuming leadership in pollution responses in those waters, the CCG also bears responsibility for ensuring safe navigation throughout the nation's navigable waterways. As such, it is entrusted with setting and maintaining aids to navigation, such as lighthouses and buoys, that promote and expedite safe operations in Canada's internal waters and along its coasts. It furthermore endeavours, alongside the Canadian Hydrographic Service (also a DFO agency), to expand the mapping of the nation's shipping lanes. This objective is especially crucial in the Arctic, where the CCG continues to chart waterways and expand safe shipping routines in the region. In the Canadian Arctic more broadly, the CCG serves as the most conspicuous representation of the Canadian state on the water, with its five medium and two heavy icebreakers showing the flag across the Northwest Passage during the navigable summer season.

Apart from these specific responsibilities, the CCG also operates in support of other federal departments and other DFO agencies in the fulfilment of their respective mandates. While it does

not have the mandate to enforce Canadian law, given that it is not a law enforcement or military service (unlike many other international coast guards), the CCG offers critical support to agencies that do enforce Canada's laws. Its taskings regularly entail the CCG working alongside Canadian fisheries officers and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), serving as platforms for representatives of those agencies in their efforts to protect the nation's fisheries, enforce regulations and laws in Canadian waters, and prevent and address trespassing. It also assists in the prevention of illegal fishing and support of fisheries research, alongside other DFO agencies, in the nation's fishing grounds.

As such, the CCG serves a very different purpose from the RCN. While the CCG's primary concern is safety, the *raison d'être* and paramount responsibility for the RCN is security and defence – namely, the defence and security of Canada's maritime approaches and, in collaboration with the United States, the defence and security of the maritime approaches to North America more broadly.<sup>2</sup> The RCN thus possesses a military character and nature that enables it to offer a degree of deterrence and defence that the CCG cannot. This core mandate also means that the RCN is focuses its attention on hostile actors from other states, rather than trespassers or criminals (although it has recently embarked on counter-terrorism and counter-piracy operations). This mandate moreover brings with it an international role that the CCG does not possess. Indeed, because Canada's security hinges on an international alliance system, many of the RCN's taskings take it overseas.

The two maritime services are comprised of differing assets specifically attuned to their individual duties and obligations. While the CCG boasts a diverse fleet of science vessels, survey ships, icebreakers, buoy tenders, and multi-purpose vessels, suitable for and reflecting the diverse responsibilities of the civilian service, the combat vessels (like submarines and frigates) and patrol craft (for domestic operations) of the RCN testify to its military function. These distinctions will continue to enable Canada's two maritime services to collaborate and coordinate on their shared national security objectives.

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## References

<sup>1</sup> See also DFO, "Canadian Coast Guard Environmental Response: Marine Spills Contingency Plan," April 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Royal Canadian Navy, *Leadmark 2050: Canada in a New Maritime World* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2016), iv.