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## **Augmenting the Royal Canadian Navy Presence to Support Canada's Strategy in the Indo-Pacific**

**Lieutenant-Commander Suzanna Chen**

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Support Canada's Strategy in the Indo-Pacific**

**Lieutenant-Commander Suzanna Chen**

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# **AUGMENTING THE ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY PRESENCE TO SUPPORT CANADA'S STRATEGY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC**

## **AIM**

1. The aim of this service paper is to demonstrate that the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) needs to have more regular and consistent participation in the Indo-Pacific region both from maritime security and diplomacy perspectives.

## **INTRODUCTION**

2. Though a pacific nation, Canada's traditional focus in the Indo-Pacific has been on trade and only a very modest role in the security of the region. Its contribution is largely inconsistent deployments of military assets, typically one RCN ship and or Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) patrol aircraft assets, to maintain presence in the area and in support of the multinational coalition forces operating in the region. However, the June 2017 foreign affairs speech by then Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Honourable Chrystia Freeland, signalled an interest in Canada playing a role in the evolution of the Pacific region through helping "the people of the world's fastest-growing countries join the global middle class and the multilateral system that supports it."<sup>1</sup> Supporting a rules-based international order and ensuring the peace and stability in the region is critically important to global trade, and especially trade dependent nations such as Canada who are seeking trade diversity to some of the fastest growing economies of the world. Canada has a responsibility to ensure this center of geo-economic and geo-strategic gravity is not ruled through coercion but based on accepted laws and norms.<sup>2</sup> Since the federal election in October 2021 and the announcement of the Cabinet, one of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's top priorities is the development of an Indo-Pacific comprehensive strategy. The subsequent Mandate Letters to the Ministers of Foreign Affairs<sup>3</sup>, National Defence<sup>4</sup>, and International Trade<sup>5</sup>, implicates these ministers and their respective departments to support the development and launch of the Indo-Pacific Strategy.

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<sup>1</sup> Canada, Global Affairs Canada, "Address by Minister Freeland on Canada's Foreign Policy Priorities", 6 June 2017, [https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2017/06/address\\_by\\_ministerfreelandoncanadasforeignpolicypriorities.html](https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2017/06/address_by_ministerfreelandoncanadasforeignpolicypriorities.html).

<sup>2</sup> Miller, Jonathan B. "Canada and the Indo-Pacific: A Need for a Strategic Course." Canadian Global Affairs Institute. March 2021. [https://www.cgai.ca/canada\\_and\\_the\\_indo\\_pacific\\_a\\_need\\_for\\_a\\_strategic\\_course](https://www.cgai.ca/canada_and_the_indo_pacific_a_need_for_a_strategic_course)

<sup>3</sup> Canada, "Minister of Foreign Affairs Mandate Letter," 16 December 2021, <https://pm.gc.ca/en/mandate-letters/2021/12/16/minister-foreign-affairs-mandate-letter>.

<sup>4</sup> Canada, "Minister of National Defence Mandate Letter," 16 December 2021, <https://pm.gc.ca/en/mandate-letters/2021/12/16/minister-national-defence-mandate-letter>.

<sup>5</sup> Canada, "Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development Mandate Letter," 16 December 2021, <https://pm.gc.ca/en/mandate-letters/2021/12/16/minister-national-defence-mandate-letter>.

3. The Canadian defence policy, *Strong, Secured, Engaged* (SSE), published in 2017, has minimal references to the Indo-Pacific. It touches on the need to work closely with the Five Eyes partners, of which four are Pacific nations, on security issues and balance relationships with emerging powers in the region, and that Canada is committed to be a ‘reliable player’.<sup>6</sup> If the Indo-Pacific becomes more important to Canada’s foreign policy, then the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) needs to be prepared to support these efforts, with the RCN playing a central role.

4. While Canada is a middle power that is farther away from the epicenter of the Indo-Pacific region, the contributions that Canada can make through the RCN and the CAF will showcase Canada’s hard and soft power, contribute to the maritime security of the region, and helps to maintain the rules-based international order. This service paper will argue that as the Canadian government is finally moving toward an Indo-Pacific strategy, the RCN needs to determine how to best support Canada’s effort to make a more consistent and impactful approach that demonstrates an investment of time and capital that goes beyond the traditional trade and economic investments. More specifically, this paper will focus on how the RCN can play a key role in the maritime security and diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific that allows Canada to defend its interest in the region, while advancing government priorities, including peace, human rights, and economic prosperity.

## DISCUSSION

5. The Indo-Pacific region is an area that is particularly vast that includes many fast growing, developing countries for which Canada is seeking to build greater relationships with such as India, as well as countries on the western edge of the region (e.g., Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia), and the developing countries on the east coast of Africa (e.g. Tanzania, and Kenya). An important tool that is available to Canada in advancing interest in the Indo-Pacific region includes the RCN, which is a well-respected navy around the world. In projecting its influence in the region, Canada has an opportunity to project a form of sea power, by demonstrating a consistent physical presence in the region that support the security of Canada and its allies.

6. The current capabilities renewal and shipbuilding program will produce new support ships, Arctic Offshore and Patrol Ships, and the Canadian Surface Combatants with cutting edge technology and capabilities as replacements for the Halifax class frigates. These significant and long-term investments will position the RCN to become a Blue Water<sup>7</sup> navy that will meet Canada’s defence policy objectives and allow Canada to make

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<sup>6</sup> Canada, Department of National Defence, “Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada’s Defence Policy,” Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2017, p90-91.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p34.

significant contributions to the rules-based international order and maintain safety and security in the areas that have strategic interest to Canada. These capabilities include participation in allied fleets, executing maritime surveillance missions and in participating in military exercises with allied countries in the Indo-Pacific.

7. Presently, through Operation Neon and Operation Projection, Canada has been contributing RCN ships and RCAF patrol aircrafts to a multinational force led by the United States (U.S.) operating in the Indo-Pacific region. Operation Neon is Canada's contribution to the multinational effort in support of the implementation of United Nations Security Council sanctions imposed against North Korea. Operation Projection is a maritime deployment to anywhere in the world for counter terrorism. During these operations, the deployed ship and personnel conducts training, exercises, and engages with foreign navies and international security partners. Before 2018, Canada only periodically deployed CAF assets to the Indo-Pacific on a more ad hoc basis. Since 2018, Canada typically deploys one to two Halifax class frigate a year and a CP-140 Aurora to these operations. The Government renewed the mandate once on 23 April 2021 for a further two years, ensuring Canada's continued contribution to security in the Indo-Pacific region into 2023.<sup>8</sup> The lack of longer term and permanent commitment of military cooperation and contribution to multinational coalition forces does not show Canada to be committed to the Indo-Pacific. The overall military assets devoted to the Indo-Pacific region is small and irregular in frequency.

8. The United States, in contrast, has been increasing its forces in the Indo-Pacific region and seeking firmer support from allies.<sup>9</sup> The U.S. Navy has rebalanced its forces in a 60-40 split favouring the Pacific coast<sup>10</sup> to align itself with the U.S. strategic policy in the Indo-Pacific. Though Canada has not specifically advocated for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) like the U.S. and Japan, the principles of FOIP applies to maintain an rules-based international order and are in line with Canada's position. As such, Canada has an opportunity and in fact, responsibility, to contribute to naval patrols of key maritime trade routes to ensure they remain free and open, and this includes anti-piracy activities in certain areas. The only way for Canada to accomplish this is to project military power through the

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<sup>8</sup> Canada, Government of Canada, "Operation Neon," last accessed 1 January 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/departement-national-defence/services/operations/military-operations/current-operations/operation-neon.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Eric Lerhe, "In the Absence of a Plan, a Modest Proposal: Canada's Approach to Pacific Security," Macdonald-Laurier Institute: December 2021, [https://macdonaldlaurier.ca/files/pdf/20211118\\_Pacific\\_security\\_Lerhe\\_PAPER\\_FWeb.pdf](https://macdonaldlaurier.ca/files/pdf/20211118_Pacific_security_Lerhe_PAPER_FWeb.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Elinor Sloan, "America's Rebalance to the Asia-Pacific: The Impact on Canada's Strategic Thinking and Maritime posture," *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis*, 70, issue 2 (March 2015): p271, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/americas-rebalance-asia-pacific-impact-on-canadas/docview/1692916495/se-2?>.

RCN. Canada maybe halfway around the world from the Indo-Pacific but the activities in the Indo-Pacific impacts what is happening in Canada. The supply chain issues during the COVID-19 pandemic are prime examples illustrating Canada's reliance on the Indo-Pacific region and sea trade routes for food security and manufacturing supply chains. Further, the SSE emphasizes the importance of the Indo-Pacific to Canada and that Canada is committed to being a reliable player in the region,<sup>11</sup> yet five years since the SSE was first published in 2017, a long-term commitment to the Indo-Pacific within the CAF is still missing. Though the Indo-Pacific is not Canada's backyard, there is a need to demonstrate solidarity with likeminded allies and nations, Canada needs to have a long-term commitment to the maritime security in the region and the most effective way to achieve it is to project power through naval ship presence in the area.

9. China has been increasing its activities in the South China Sea and the Indo-Pacific region through the Belt and Road Initiative, accruing soft and hard power to use as needed.<sup>12</sup> When deployed on Operation Projection and Operation Neon, RCN ships had sailed through the South China Sea in the Chinese self-proclaimed territorial waters showing solidarity with partnered nations. These are excellent steps forward for Canada and the RCN, actions that signal Canada is taking positions and declaring its stands with likeminded allies and partners on issues such as the importance of maintaining free and open sea lines of communication. Further, since 2019, Canada has stepped up to strengthen ties with Japan and Australia during naval ship deployments. Canada and Japan have commenced bilateral naval drills dubbed Kaedex (Maple Leaf).<sup>13</sup> The RCN also participated as a trilateral participant in the U.S.-Japan Keen Sword naval exercise. During the Poseidon Cutlass deployment in 2019, HMCS Winnipeg and HMCS Ottawa, conducted exercises with regional partners and port calls across the region, including in the Philippines, Malaysia, India, Sri Lanka, China, South Korea and Japan.<sup>14</sup> These engagements, that can also be considered part of defence diplomacy, demonstrated the far reach and flexibility that only a RCN ship can accomplish in multilateral and bilateral forums.<sup>15</sup> However, the issue for Canada is that it does not have a consistent and regularly

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<sup>11</sup> Canada, Department of National Defence, "Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy," Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2017, p90-91.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Chatzky and James McBride, "China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative," *Council on Foreign Relations*, updated 28 January 2020, last accessed 25 January 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative>.

<sup>13</sup> "Canadian and Japanese Vessels Participate in Kaedex 19," *Naval Technology*, 27 November 2019, last accessed 28 January 22, <https://www.naval-technology.com/news/canada-japan-vessels-kaedex/>.

<sup>14</sup> Canada, Government of Canada, "Pacific Fleet Ships Return from the Asia-Pacific Region," last accessed 1 January 2022, [https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/news/2017/08/pacific\\_fleet\\_shipsreturnfromtheasia-pacificregion.html](https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/news/2017/08/pacific_fleet_shipsreturnfromtheasia-pacificregion.html).

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Rasiulis, "Military Training and Co-operation: Diplomatic Instrument and Combat Force Multiplier," *Canada Global Affairs Institute*, June 2018, last accessed 28 January 2022, [https://www.cgai.ca/military\\_training\\_and\\_co\\_operation\\_diplomatic\\_instrument\\_and\\_combat\\_force\\_multiplier#Military](https://www.cgai.ca/military_training_and_co_operation_diplomatic_instrument_and_combat_force_multiplier#Military).

impactful presence in the region. With the current geostrategic and regional dynamic due to the rise of the global powers in the region and the resulting tensions, Canada needs to have a comprehensive strategy and long-term commitment to the region with a key pillar being the projection of military power through the RCN.

10. The future of warfare is rapidly changing to multi domain operations to include the cyber and the space domains. State actors, non-state actors, and adversaries are adopting new tactics and strategies to stay at the forefront of the evolution of warfare.<sup>16</sup> This will be the new dimension of maritime security and warfare in the Indo-Pacific and globally. With disputes ranging from Taiwan, Senkaku Islands, as well as the missile testing of North Korea, it has yet to be seen what role Canada will play in this region beyond maritime patrol and ensuring maritime security.<sup>17</sup> Canada has consistently shown a willingness to support multilateral efforts for requests for assistance with hostilities and wars in the Far East such as Hong Kong in 1941, Korea in 1950, and East Timor in 1999. It can be expected that Canada will be requested or pressured by the international community and allies to assist should hostilities break out. It is even more important to deepen military integration and exercise in the multi domain operational space with strategic allies such as the U.S. and further strengthen interoperability with other likeminded powers such as Japan and Australia. RCN ships are stepping up this role in recent deployments, however, long term outlook and strategy is required. RCN ships can be expected to be the key component capability deployed.

11. One of Canada's priorities for the Indo-Pacific region should also be to disrupt terrorist organizations, prevent the smuggling of weapons, unlawful cargo, and drugs, as well as human smuggling. Off the coast of several countries in the Indo-Pacific region, there is prevalent piracy and drug trafficking activities that impact Canada directly. Drugs, illegal immigration and human trafficking are issues that can start offshore but result in significant issues that Canada experiences in its large and small cities.<sup>18</sup> Canada, through the RCN, has a responsibility and capability to make a more meaningful contribution to maritime security beyond Canadian coasts. Canada's contribution to Operation ARTEMIS

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<sup>16</sup> Franz-Stefan Gady and Alexander Stronell, "Cyber Capabilities and Multi-Domain Operations in Future High-Intensity Warfare in 2030," International Institute for Strategic Studies, 8 December 2020, [https://ccdcoc.org/uploads/2020/12/8-Cyber-Capabilities-and-Multi-Domain-Operations-in-Future-High-Intensity-Warfare-in-2030\\_ebook.pdf](https://ccdcoc.org/uploads/2020/12/8-Cyber-Capabilities-and-Multi-Domain-Operations-in-Future-High-Intensity-Warfare-in-2030_ebook.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> Eric Lerhe, "In the Absence of a Plan, a Modest Proposal: Canada's Approach to Pacific Security," Macdonald-Laurier Institute, December 2021, [https://macdonaldlaurier.ca/files/pdf/20211118\\_Pacific\\_security\\_Lerhe\\_PAPER\\_FWeb.pdf](https://macdonaldlaurier.ca/files/pdf/20211118_Pacific_security_Lerhe_PAPER_FWeb.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> "COVID-19 Enabling Increased Drug-Related Crimes in Asia," *Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada*, 15 June 2021, last accessed 28 January 2022, <https://www.asiapacific.ca/asia-watch/covid-19-enabling-increased-drug-related-crimes-asia>.

and Combined Task Force 150 help in the efforts in the western Indo-Pacific region,<sup>19</sup> but the RCN can contribute to efforts more broadly using both ships and space technology. For instance, the new maritime surveillance capabilities with the new RADARSAT Constellation Mission (RCM) will have a built in Automatic Identification System, which tracks ship transponder signals – ships without signals or tracking on diversionary courses could be targeted for further surveillance.<sup>20</sup> Combined with allied vessels, a RCN ship can support interdiction and anti-piracy efforts that contribute to greater maritime security. Though the Indo-Pacific is on the other side of the world, increasingly playing an critical role to things that matter to Canada – from trade, anti-terrorism to human security – in the region is a role for which the RCN is well suited.

12. Canada has been at the forefront of multilateral efforts to achieve public policy goals. Global Affairs Canada is active in both diplomatic and trade efforts in the Indo-Pacific region, but operates without the support of defence diplomacy, unlike other allies. The U.S., Japan and Australia are active in supporting diplomatic efforts with military efforts and projections of power in support of their allies. Though Canada is a long-time member of the Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Canada should look at ways to become more involved in active defence diplomacy through maintaining and increasing its engagement in multilateral regional forums such as the Shangri-La Dialogue (known as Asia’s premier defence summit)<sup>21</sup>, East Asia Summit<sup>22</sup>, and other meetings. RCN missions that have been undertaken in the past, such as RCN ships sailing through the Taiwan Strait as show of solidarity, and Canada’s participation in the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) naval exercise are examples of defence diplomacy that should be continued and strengthen. Other examples would include RCN ports visits and regional exercises. Canada could also seek to formalize bilateral or multilateral defence relationships in the Indo-Pacific with likeminded allies, such as Australia, Japan and Singapore. These types of commitments strengthen Canada’s allies and demonstrate commitment to the region.

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<sup>19</sup> Canada, “Government of Canada, “Operation ARTEMIS,” last accessed 28 January 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/military-operations/current-operations/operation-artemis.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Canada, Government of Canada, “RADARSAT Constellation Mission (RCM),” last accessed 1 January 2022, <https://www.asc-csa.gc.ca/eng/satellites/radarsat/faq.asp>, last accessed 25 January 2022.

<sup>21</sup> IISS Shangri-La Dialogue, last accessed 28 January 2022, <https://www.iiss.org/events/shangri-la-dialogue/shangri-la-dialogue-2022>.

<sup>22</sup> East Asia Summit: Promoting Peace, Stability and Prosperity, last accessed 28 January 2022, <https://eastiasummit.asean.org/about-east-asia-summit>.



## **CONCLUSION**

13. In order to protect Canada's interest in the Indo-Pacific, Canada can no longer be a casual contributor to the maritime security in the region. It needs to be a fully committed participant. Specifically, financial and military assets need to be allocated for efforts in the Indo-Pacific, to a level of commitment that demonstrates meaning impact and contribution to supporting Canada's allies and foreign policy goals. By committing to a long-term and uninterrupted deployment cycle of at least one RCN ship, it signals Canada's long-term national interest in the Indo-Pacific region and the protection of the rules-based international order.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

14. All the ships that have been deployed to the Indo-Pacific as part of Operation Projection and Operation Neon had been part of the Canadian Fleet Pacific (CANFLTPAC) located in Victoria, BC. Deploying ships from CANFLTPAC is much closer than ships of the Atlantic Fleet (Canadian Fleet Atlantic). However, the current split of frigates between the two coasts are five in the west and seven in the east, although it's possible to deploy ships located in Halifax to the Indo-Pacific, the time required to be on station is longer. The RCN may need to re-examine the distribution and strategies of the current and future fleet between the two coasts to best support Canada's commitment and future possible deployments to the Indo-Pacific. It may also need to develop operational and training schedules that allow for the RCN to maximize the experiences of Indo-Pacific missions.

15. The CAF as a whole and the RCN needs invest in technology and systems that are suitable to operate in the warmer, tropical Indo-Pacific climate to enable long term uninterrupted commitment to this region. Climate change, with the possibility of more active weather systems, further compounds this issue. For example, the risk of operating in more difficult sea conditions is greater with the onset of climate change. The current RCN fleet including the Halifax Class frigates and the Maritime Coastal Defence Vessels are both designed to operate in the colder water and weather of the Atlantic. In the past, older RCN vessels struggled to maintain optimal working conditions for machinery and crew as environmental control systems were not designed to sustained tropical operations. Now it's the time as the RCN is renewing capabilities and building new ships to ensure these assets can thrive and be effective in the Indo-Pacific climate.

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