

Asia-Pacific Diplomacy

Navies exist first and foremost to fight wars, and in a previous issue of *FrontLine* (2004:3), I chronicled the recent efforts of the Canadian Navy in the Global War against Terrorism in the Arabian Sea.

But navies have many other purposes, primary among them being diplomacy. Having spent the better part of the last three years heavily engaged in active operations, our Navy has begun the return to “peacetime” diplomatic activities.

Canada’s West Coast fleet, known as “Maritime Forces Pacific” (MARFAC) has been noted for its efforts at the forefront of Canadian diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region during the past half-century. The most recent deployment was made by *HMCS Regina*, a patrol frigate based in Esquimalt, British Columbia, over the summer of 2004.

The northeast Asia-Pacific region represents one of the most volatile security environments in the world, with a range of disputes involving China, Taiwan, the Koreans, and Japan. Because all of these in some way also involve our major ally, the United States, not to mention the significant bilateral trading relationships we have developed with these nations, Canada is deeply interested in their peaceful resolution. But military regimes have been (and in many cases remain) important elements of Asian societies, and therefore enjoy a status unfamiliar to Canadians. And because Asia-Pacific is a quintessentially maritime region, the focus is very much on maritime security. Accordingly, navies have a special regional prominence, and this presents unique opportunities for Canadian naval diplomacy.

In recognition of these simple facts, MARFAC took the initiative over a decade ago to develop an “Asia-Pacific Engagement Plan” to guide its deployment priorities in conjunction with its normal naval training and operations cycles. While the primary objective remains to foster better “navy-to-navy” relationships, port destinations and activities are finalized in consultation with the Departments of Foreign Affairs and International Trade to ensure maximum support for broader diplomatic efforts.

And so *Regina’s* voyage began with her mid-June departure from Esquimalt in company with other ships of the Canadian Naval Task Group, to participate in Exercise RIMPAC off Hawaii, a biennial exercise organized by the United States Navy specifically to further interoperability among navies from around the Pacific Rim.

Only rarely are non-USN officers allowed a prominent exercise command role, but this year Canadian Commodore Roger Girouard reprised the “Sea Combat Commander” position that he had played last year in the Arabian Sea. On that occasion he commanded the Coalition Task Force 151 intercepting suspicious vessels in

As HMCS Regina (foreground) heads for her berth in Tokyo’s inner harbour, she makes a farewell sail-past of the JMSDF task group with which she crossed the Pacific Ocean after the RIMPAC exercise.

PHOTO: JMSDF





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As HMCS Regina prepared to depart China, Rear-Admiral Wang Deding (foreground), Commander of Shanghai Naval Base, signs the ship's log. Looking on is his interpreter, Commander Yang, and (in civilian clothes, from right) Commodore Roger Girouard and Commander Rick Gerbrecht. Admiral Wang's inscription speaks to the value of the diplomatic mission: (translation) "Bosom friends within the four seas are close neighbours though separated by great distance. Bon voyage!"

the search for Al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders escaping from Afghanistan.

Girouard commanded some 40 warships from eight nations during RIMPAC, and he put them through a complex series of exercise scenarios, ranging from basic rules of engagement play, through interdiction and boardings, to simulated combat.

The "fog of war" was clearly illustrated when *Regina* almost fell victim to a "blue-on-blue" attack by another friendly warship. Still, Rear-Admiral Jean-Yves Forcier (Commander MARPAC)'s post-exercise assessment declared that RIMPAC provided "an excellent opportunity to share the recent lessons learned in maritime security."

A Japanese Maritime Self Defense Forces (JMSDF) task group was also on hand for the RIMPAC exercise, and *Regina* joined up with them to continue west across the Pacific. The oldest and most enduring of Canada's relations in Asia-Pacific is with Japan, and "cross-pollinations" of officers and ratings (their placement on the other nation's ships) accomplished even greater understanding between the two navies. To celebrate the 75th anniversary of Canadian-Japanese relations, our embassy in Tokyo hosted a reception onboard *HMCS Regina* at Harumi Pier in Tokyo. Rear-Admiral Forcier flew to Japan to lend weight to the

celebrations and to further high-level navy-to-navy talks with his JMSDF counterparts. A quick refueling stop at the major US Navy facility at Yokosuka allowed similar talks with the Commander of US Seventh Fleet based there.

As Forcier returned to Canada, *Regina* departed for a two-day passage to China's bustling megapolis of Shanghai, where the frigate was re-joined by Commodore Girouard. Here the navy-to-navy purpose was more basic but, at the same time subtler: while it is unlikely that China will join any Western "Coalition of the Willing" (making interoperability a non-issue), it is

important that good working relations be established with the Peoples Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) to reassure their commanders that China is seen as an eventual partner and not an adversary.

At an entirely different level, Shanghai enjoys a reputation as an exciting port of call for sailors, and *Regina's* crew left wishing they could stay longer next time.

Regina's final stop was Inchon, the scene of US General MacArthur's daring amphibious landing in September 1951 that turned the tide of the initial North Korean onslaught. Now a bustling *entrepôt*, Inchon offers few signs of those landings, but since it is near the South Korean capital Seoul, it is a prime locale for diplomatic activity. With reunification of the Koreans looming, Canada's Navy is keen to foster confidence-building measures that will position this emerging regional powerhouse with its sophisticated navy closer to Western coalitions.

"WESTPLOY 2004" took *Regina* across the Pacific and back covering some 19,000 kilometres, a distance equivalent to steaming the breadth of Canada almost four times. In the course of this deployment, the ship and her crew renewed ties with existing regional partners and fostered new ones with emerging friends. As the world's centre of economic and geopolitical gravity shifts from the Atlantic to the Pacific, Canada's west coast fleet is leading our national engagement in the region. **FI**



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Contingents of sailors from Canada (right) and the Republic of Korea parade in a ceremony welcoming HMCS Regina to Inchon.