

Canada's Navy Performing Provocative Manoeuvres in South China Sea

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Interesting how the military “defends” this country by sending ships 7,000 kilometres from Canadian soil.

Canada’s navy is running provocative maneuvers in the South China Sea. While they claim to be upholding the “international rules based order” in these missions, their main partner refuses to recognize the Law of the Sea.

At the end of last month *HMCS Calgary* passed near the Spratly Islands claimed by both China and the Philippines. In response Chinese vessels shadowed *Calgary* through the South China Sea.

In recent years Canadian vessels [have repeatedly been](#) involved in belligerent [Freedom of Navigation](#) (FON) exercises through international waters — claimed by Beijing — in the South China Sea, Strait of Taiwan, and East China Sea. To counter China’s growing influence in Asia, Washington has stuck its oar into long-standing territorial and maritime boundary disputes between China and the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam and other nations. As part of these efforts to rally regional opposition to China, the US Navy has engaged in regular FON operations, which see warships travel through or near disputed waters.

Last year the Canadian Press obtained documents showing that FON efforts in the South China Sea were approved at the highest levels of government. When *HMCS Ottawa* traveled through the South China Sea’s Taiwan Strait the government said it “[demonstrated](#) Canadian support for our closest partners and allies, regional security and the rules-based international order.”

But Canadian FON missions are principally designed to demonstrate support for the US, which is one of only a handful of countries that has refused to sign the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The US has failed to ratify UNCLOS even after gaining broad changes to the convention in 1994. Failing to ratify UNCLOS is but one of many examples of Washington’s hostility to the “international rules based order” the Trudeau government claims to uphold.

US Naval patrols in the region regularly violate UNCLOS. In “[Do US](#) Actions in the South China Sea Violate International Law?”, scholar Mark J. Valencia points out that their

employment of sonobuoys (radar) to search for submarines is prohibited by UNCLOS. Valencia also questions whether FON exercises to pressure China violate the UN Charter. Irrespective of legal interpretations, Washington's expressed concern over China's failure to adhere to international norms in maritime disputes shouldn't be taken too seriously given its own flagrant refusal to accept the Law of the Sea.

Ottawa is under pressure to increase its military contribution in a region with a significant US presence. (*Le Monde Diplomatique* pointed out that despite China's [14,000](#) kilometers of coastline, it collides with the US military, which has bases sprinkled all around region, as soon as it goes out to sea.) Recently the *Globe and Mail* published "[Canada urged](#) to play bigger role with allies to counter China in the Indo-Pacific". The story called on Ottawa to join the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, which includes the US, India, Japan and Australia.

Incredibly, Canada may join an alliance focused on an area some 7,000 kilometers from Canada's coast. Earlier this year, the Canadian Air Force [participated](#) in an anti-submarine warfare exercise in Guam known as Sea Dragon with the Quad nations for the first time.

While increasing, the Canadian navy's presence in the region is nothing new. In 2012 it came to light the military sought a [small base](#) with a port facility in Singapore to keep an eye on China. For two decades the Canadian navy [has made](#) regular port visits to Asia and since its 1971 inception Canada has [participated](#) in every [Rim of the Pacific Exercise](#), which is a massive US-led maritime warfare training action every two years.

During the early 1950s Korean War Canadian ships bombed North Korean and Chinese troops. They hurled 130,000 rounds at Korean targets. According to a Canadian War Museum exhibit, "[during the war](#), Canadians became especially good at 'train busting.' This meant running in close to shore, usually at night, and risking damage from Chinese and North Korean artillery in order to destroy trains or tunnels on Korea's coastal railway. Of the 28 trains destroyed by United Nations warships in Korea, Canadian vessels claimed eight." *Canadian Naval Operations in Korean Waters 1950-1955* details a slew of RCN attacks that would have likely killed civilians.

Before the outbreak of the Korean War the Canadian Navy sought to exert itself in the region. In a bizarre move, Ottawa sent a naval vessel to China in 1949 as the Communists were on the verge of victory. According to [Canadian Gunboat Diplomacy](#), the boat was sent too late to stop the Kuomintang's defeat by Mao's forces and was not needed to evacuate Canadians since British boats could remove them. The objective, it seems, was to demonstrate to the US and UK "that Canada was a willing partner", particularly in light of the emerging north Atlantic alliance.

A Canadian naval presence off China's coast isn't new. But running provocative maneuvers to support a nation that refuses to recognize the Law of the Sea is a bizarre way to uphold the "international rules based order".

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