

## INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the American-led campaign in Iraq, old questions about Canada's military relationship with the United States have taken on a new relevance, or to be more accurate, a new visibility. These questions never really lost their relevance; they were only temporarily masked by the hopes for a post-Cold War 'peace dividend' and the myth regarding "the end of history." Now, as security questions once again dominate foreign policy debates in North America, there is a renewed focus on the age-old dilemma of Canada-U.S. defence relations: how to satisfy American security concerns while retaining an independent voice in world affairs. From the first days of the Permanent Joint Board on Defence, Canadians have worried that military cooperation would inevitably mean sacrificing Canadian sovereignty. Recent events, particularly the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 and the ensuing reorganization of the American defence establishment, have drawn attention to a new entry in the North American security lexicon: *interoperability*. Largely because of its ambiguous meaning and ill-defined connection to larger questions of military integration and defence policy, the Canadian Force's pursuit of interoperability with the U.S. Armed Forces has come under fire as yet another threat to the touchstone of Canadian sovereignty. The combination of sovereignty, ever an emotional topic in this country, and the largely misunderstood and misrepresented concept of interoperability, has given a great deal of this criticism a distinctly ideological tone.

The purpose of this monograph is to inductively address some of the more prevalent assertions put forth by critics by attempting to explicitly define the concepts of interoperability, sovereignty, and the connection between the two in the context of Canada-U.S. defence relations to determine whether critics' claims about interoperability representing a threat to Canadian sovereignty possesses any merit. These definitions, and the hypothetical effects of interoperability upon sovereignty, will then be tested against a series of two specific case studies in Canada-U.S. (CANUS) naval cooperation. This empirical approach should serve to separate some of the ideology and nationalistic sentiments from the real questions at hand.

It should be emphasized that while public interest in interoperability is relatively new, the policy itself is not. The CF, and the Navy in particular, have made cooperation with allied forces a priority since WW II. Throughout the Cold War, standardization and compatibility of equipment and doctrine was a cornerstone of the NATO Alliance. The onset of American military hegemony and

the dramatic decline in defence budgets across the Alliance after the Cold War forced the majority of Western armed forces, including those of the United States, to accept interoperability as an almost inescapable requirement of effective collective defence. It has become readily apparent that participation in multinational coalitions, almost invariably under U.S. leadership, will be increasingly dependent on the CF's ability to integrate into American C<sup>4</sup>I (command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence) structures. Given the Canadian government's continued emphasis on 'engaged internationalism,' and the ever-increasing range of international operations the CF will be called upon to support, its ability to operate effectively with allies and coalition partners, particularly the United States, will have a significant effect on the efficacy and credibility of Canadian foreign policy.

However, the recent suggestion of closer integration between Canadian and American forces under the new organisation of Northern Command and the barrage of criticism from the academic and policy communities that followed, has given new life to the old assertion that interoperability will compromise Canadian sovereignty by constraining Ottawa's policy options and undermining the operational autonomy of in-theatre commanders. These arguments carry a great deal of weight with many Canadians, particularly in view of the widening gap between Canadian and American foreign policies. Given this political environment, there is clearly a need for a closer examination of the implications of interoperability for Canadian sovereignty.

Within the broader debate, a focus on 'naval' interoperability is appropriate for two reasons: first, the Navy has come the farthest of any Canadian element in terms of interoperability with its American counterpart; and second, it is the most likely of any command to be called upon to employ those capabilities. The Navy has arguably had the most success of any of the three environmental commands in surviving the budgetary cutbacks of the 1990s. With the exception of desperately needed replacements for the existing fleet of 1950s era maritime helicopters and supply ships, the Navy is "... uniquely equipped among the country's three armed services."<sup>1</sup> As Canada's most modern service, and the government's first choice for responding to international crises, the Navy has placed a great deal of emphasis on maintaining and developing C<sup>4</sup>I and weapons systems that are interoperable with those of the United States Navy (USN). The effects of this emphasis are clearly visible in the privileged role Canadian naval units have played in multinational coalitions under U.S. leadership.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it is precisely these privileged roles that this study will analyse.

The first chapter of the monograph will be devoted to a brief history of the development of Canada-U.S. naval interoperability, touching on the evolution of the Canadian Navy and its roles and missions through the Cold War on to the

present day. This will serve both to reinforce the earlier assertion that interoperability is not a new phenomenon and to establish a context for the case study analysis. This will be followed by a more in-depth discussion of the assertions critics of the practice have levelled against the policy of interoperability in recent years, followed by a section devoted to the operationalisation of the primary variables in this debate, interoperability and sovereignty, in addition to some of the intervening and condition variables that affect the relationship, such as the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA).

The two case studies, Canadian participation in the 1990-1991 Gulf War and 'leadership interdiction' missions conducted throughout Operation Apollo, provide an excellent opportunity to investigate the effects of interoperability on sovereignty. In both cases, the Navy enjoyed a high degree of interoperability with American and coalition forces, to the point of complete integration into American Carrier Battle Groups (CVBGs). Furthermore, both these operations were considered strategically vital by the United States, a condition that could reasonably be expected to increase pressures on autonomous decision-making. Finally, these two operations are typical of the type of missions the Navy will likely undertake in the future: multinational sea control and maritime interdiction operations in primarily littoral waters.

A brief word is warranted here on the paper's methodology. Terms such as 'variable' and 'operationalization' tend to send a shudder through many political scientists wary of the behaviourist 'physics envy' that has plagued the social sciences for decades. Their use here does not imply a blind adherence to quantitative methodology, but rather an appreciation of the value of explicit theorizing. While it is impossible to eliminate the elements of bias and subjectivity inherent in the study of human affairs, a great deal can be accomplished toward this end by explicitly defining terms and relationships between variables, thus bringing those elements to the surface where they can be challenged. This is particularly true in the heated environment of continental politics, where the subtleties of terms like 'sovereignty' and 'interoperability' have been lost in a haze of political and ideological prejudices.

This study is not intended to produce a final answer to the interoperability debate. Indeed, the paper's narrow focus deliberately precludes any far-reaching determinations, as conclusions reached in the context of naval interoperability may not be applicable to parallel discussions of land or air forces. Instead, it is meant to put to the test some of the more common assertions made by critics of interoperability and military integration in a specific context; assertions that appear to be frequently based more on emotional nationalism than on logic or empirical evidence. While any conclusion drawn from this admittedly narrow analysis would certainly not be definitive for the larger debate, the process of explicitly

defining the variables and the relationships between them should at least clarify the components of the issue.

**Endnotes:**

- 1) Canada, Department of National Defence, Directorate of Maritime Strategy, *Leadmark: The Navy's Strategy for 2020* (Ottawa: DND, 2001) p. 92.
- 2) Tom Williams and Phillip Wisecup, "Enduring Freedom: Making Coalition Naval Warfare Work," *U.S. Naval Institute: Proceedings* 128:9 (September, 2002) p. 52-55.