My ties and admiration for the Canadian Navy go back almost three decades and have included collaboration in the areas of naval operations in NATO’s Standing Naval Force Atlantic, diplomatic and peace-making negotiations in the Middle East Peace Process multilateral maritime area (mentored by Canada, with the support of the Canadian Navy and Canadian Coast Guard and Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade), and many stimulating academic interchanges.

Throughout these experiences, I have come to appreciate more and more President John F. Kennedy’s words to the Canadian Parliament, “Geography has made us neighbors. History has made us friends. And necessity has made us allies.”

A Perspective on the Future of Canadian Sea Power

Against this geostrategic background, my goal is to provide one US friend’s perspective on the future of Canadian sea power. I do this as Canada’s navy considers its future strategy on the eve of its centennial celebration of the past. My focus will be on Canada’s future sea power strategy, and its implications for the relations between the navies of our two countries (and other maritime forces).

I have written elsewhere about the traditional and increasingly close operational relationship between Canadian and US maritime forces, and much has been written in both countries about such elements as interoperability, information sharing, homeland defence and maritime domain awareness cooperation. There has also been significant discussion of Canadian contributions to operations and command globally – from Operation Desert Storm, integration of Canadian frigates into US strike groups, Canada’s Operation Apollo contributions to countering global violent extremism, to Canada’s command of the multinational CTF 150 naval forces in the Arabian Sea, and Canadian disaster relief contributions to the United States following Hurricane Katrina. So I will not repeat here the good work done by many, especially over the past decade, regarding the relationship and tactical/operational elements of the relationship of our navies. (In any case I could not match the characteristic clarity and eloquence of some of the recent work.)

Rather I will focus on how Canada’s maritime strategy can help ensure that the future of Canadian sea power is bright – and appropriately appreciated by Canada’s allies. First, we must consider why a strategy for national sea power is necessary. Simply put, as I tell my US Naval War College students, there is no point in having a military strategy if there is no national strategy to which it can contribute. That is, our national strategy must include a naval strategy.

Considerations for a Strategy of Future Canadian Sea Power

Stanley B. Weeks

HMCS Iroquois conducting international operations.
graduate students, strategy is the link between where we are today and where we want to be in the future. Key to this is knowing where you’re going because ‘if you don’t know where you’re going, any road will get you there.’ Thus, the obvious requirements for strategy development include a good assessment of where you are and where you need and want to be in the future. I will, from a US perspective, make some observations about this subject.

**Existing Foundations of Canadian Sea Power Strategy**

As the Canadian Navy crafts a new maritime strategy for the future, it has a strong existing foundation in two documents. The first is *Leadmark: The Navy’s Strategy for 2020*. (As most of you know, a leadmark means a fixed navigational point of reference.) *Leadmark* was issued by the Canadian Navy in June 2001 with the stated aim of articulating “the principles of naval strategy essential for a medium power such as Canada.” The second document is *Securing Canada’s Ocean Frontiers* which was issued in May 2005 with the post-9/11 goal of supplementing the original 2001 *Leadmark* document and addressing “the few shortfalls in *Leadmark*.”

The real issue in crafting Canada’s new maritime strategy, then, is not what its goals are, but rather how best to contribute maritime power in the context of evolving national, joint, allied and international security environments. These environments have different characteristics and different emphases. Domestically, the environment is characterized by the enhanced importance of seaborne trade to the economic prosperity of Canadians, the enhanced emphasis of sea borders in homeland defence, and Arctic sovereignty and disaster relief capabilities. On the North American continent, the characteristics are an enhanced emphasis on cross-border maritime security cooperation. And the global environment is characterized by an increased emphasis on forward defence against global threats to peace and security – including terrorism, threats to seaborne trade, humanitarian assistance/disaster relief, etc.

While the Canadian Navy’s structure and capabilities must gradually evolve to deal with these evolving security environments, the basic 2001 *Leadmark* explanation of the various “Canadian naval roles and functions for the 21st century” remains valid for the new strategy, as do the fundamental principles and capabilities (in the document’s terminology, basic and force multiplier “competency components”).

With this baseline of the aims and context, what follows below are a few observations and recommendations about factors affecting a new Canadian maritime strategy.

**Factors to consider in a New Canadian Maritime Strategy**

The first factor to consider is *aim and audiences*. The new Canadian maritime strategy must resonate with five audiences. The first audience is, of course, the Canadian Navy. The new strategy must reflect accurately the internal consensus of what the Canadian Navy does, how it does it, and sketch the desired future force evolution plans. The second audience is the joint leadership (military and civilian) of the Canadian Forces. The new strategy must explain how the Canadian Navy provides unique capabilities and options, and also how it complements (and enables) the other services. The third audience is Canada’s political leadership. The strategy must carefully reflect key guidance in the current government’s Canada First Defence Strategy, but it would also be wise to acknowledge continuities from previous governments’ defence policies.
The fourth audience is Canada's attentive public. Any new maritime strategy should be given trial runs in discussions with the Canadian public, and then have a firm strategic communications plan for rollout. The final audience is the US Navy and US defence leadership. The keyword and storyline in this context should be 'contribution' – how the Canadian Navy has been, and will continue to be, a contributing and relevant value-added ally.

The second factor to consider is linking strategy with concepts of operations. Leadmark’s categorization of the Canadian Navy as a "Medium Power Global Force Projection Navy" is well crafted. As well, casting Canadian Navy roles and functions in terms of the Booth/Grove trinity of function (diplomatic, constabulary and military) is very helpful as a framework for a (perhaps somewhat expanded) explicit explanation of Canadian Navy general concepts of operations in all three contexts. In this regard, the new internal Canadian Navy Maritime Force Employment Strategy under development will be important, both as a baseline for implementation of concepts of operation and as a future operational planning framework.

The third factor to consider is linking strategy with resources. Perhaps the most important impact of the Canada First Defence Strategy is that it lays out a predictable funding baseline over a 20-year period and sets forth major “core equipment” including "15 ships to replace existing destroyers and frigates” and "10 to 12 maritime patrol aircraft." This force structure, plus earlier commitments to three Joint Support Ships (JSS) and six to eight Arctic Offshore Patrol Ships, establishes some clear baselines. Additionally, and of great importance to Canadian maritime strategy, the Canada First Defence Strategy requires the Canadian Forces to have the capacity to “[l]ead and/or conduct a major international operation for an extended period” – which can be easily translated by the Canadian Navy as “maintain the Canadian Task Group and other forward presence capabilities” (including command-capable combat ships with appropriate command and control capabilities, and advanced air defence, and their essential replenishment ships).

The new internal Canadian Navy Maritime Force Development Guidance (MFDG) will be key to ensuring clear linkage of Canadian Navy strategy and operational concepts, and linkage to future maritime force development. Brief basic elements of the MFDG should be reflected in a new maritime strategy to show how the Canadian Navy plans to maintain essential capabilities in the future.

Factors Complicating a Future Canadian Maritime Strategy

There are number of factors that will complicate any future maritime strategy. The first is that the overall Canadian Forces/government procurement and contracting system seems broken and must be addressed. The Joint Support
Ship fiasco and several commercial no-bids for the Canadian Patrol Frigate Modernization Program show that even agreed critical force plans all too often fail in execution. Unfortunately, the plans for procuring Arctic Offshore Patrol Ships could be the next to fail. The history of the Sea King helicopter replacement indicates that the procurement problem is not new. Addressing this problem might begin by frankly considering capabilities/resources tradeoffs. Simply put, either requirements or budgets (or both) must change. (By the way, Canada is not alone in having naval acquisition problems – in the United States, we have recently had the Zumwalt DDG-1000, Littoral Combat Ship, and Deepwater acquisition failures.) But, aside from the procurement process, ultimately, the real Canadian problem is the low level of budgets for defence.

A second complicating factor is the question of amphibious/expeditionary capability. The confusing half-mentions in the current Canadian Navy strategy documents of “expeditionary capabilities” need to be re-thought, especially in light of the failure of the Standing Contingency Task Force and a dedicated big amphibious ship, and, frankly, the unlikelihood of obtaining any additional defence resources to create a new capability area. In any overall national defence strategy which is written after the current fight in Afghanistan, it is likely that there will be little public support for prolonged irregular ground warfare ashore. The Canadian Navy should instead point out to the political leadership and the public how offshore naval power maximizes options and minimizes casualties (and still enables the other services in land interventions if they are needed), as a possible basis for a broader post-Afghanistan national security strategy.

A third complicating factor is the issue of advanced air/missile defence capability. Here, too, a decision must be made by the Canadian Navy and clearly reflected in the new Canadian maritime strategy. Is the Canadian Navy finally going to develop (as other middle power navies are doing) advanced Aegis-like air and missile defence capabilities to enable its task groups to be truly globally deployable? Or is this just too expensive for Canadian defence budgets?

The fourth complicating factor is the issue of submarines. Although the case for Canadian Navy submarines has been well made elsewhere, the justification in the current Leadmark strategy documents of why Canada needs this capability is weak. This capability must be better explained and justified, particularly since Canadian politicians and the public have mostly been exposed to the sensational problems (and, to this foreign observer at least, puzzling delays) in operationalizing these submarines.

The fifth complicating factor is the roles and missions
of the Canadian Navy in the Arctic and in homeland defence. The current Securing Canada's Ocean Frontiers strategy document rightly notes the navy lead in maritime domain awareness, and acknowledges the Arctic and other homeland defence roles, but more clarity is needed. This will not be easy since the real problem is the nature of the existing Canadian Coast Guard, the essential non-military civilian status of which should be re-considered at the national level.

The final complicating factor is what I call 'mind the gap.' Over the next decade, up to half of Canada's current naval force will not be deployable due to the frigate modernization work. Canada's naval leadership is keenly aware of this, and seems to be planning well for this situation, but it will also be important to ensure that naval and defence leaders in Washington and NATO are briefed and understand this situation.

Conclusions
In conclusion, here are some sympathetic observations, from my US perspective, as the Canadian Navy prepares for its second century of sea power and develops an updated maritime strategy to guide it into the future.

My first observation is that the US Navy has too many tasks and too few numbers. The Canadian Navy will have a sympathetic friend in the US Navy as it continues to acquire more effective maritime capabilities, particularly in the areas of North American maritime defence and global deployments. But it will be important to address with US naval leaders the upcoming gap in deployable Canadian ships, and especially to preserve in the long run the overall numbers of Canadian ships – these numbers are already at a minimum to maintain a globally deployable Canadian naval force.

My second observation is that as the Canadian Navy embarks on development of its new maritime strategy, there is understandable interest in potentially relevant lessons from the development of the US joint maritime services strategy, Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower. My personal view is that a ‘conversation with the country’ can be a useful part of the strategy development process, but unlike the US approach, it would be better to defer that conversation until the Canadian Navy has developed a draft of what the new maritime strategy should say. At that point, the public conversation can usefully focus on vetting and refining that draft.

Third, I would recommend that the new Canadian maritime strategy be a stand-alone document which integrates a clear unclassified overview of naval operating concepts and an outline of future planned force structure and the risk assessment behind that structure. There will undoubtedly be the requirement internal to the Canadian Forces and the Canadian Navy for elaborating documents (e.g., force development, naval doctrine), but the goal should be to integrate strategy, basic operational concepts and force structure, thereby avoiding problems in the recent US experience, where the new maritime strategy left as separate documents the naval operations concept and navy strategic plan, leading to Congressional and media criticism of an apparent lack of strategy-force structure linkage.

My final observation is that developers of the new Canadian maritime strategy should remember that sea power can be a compelling story for all of the audiences identified above. An active strategic communication plan by the Canadian Navy should focus on communicating the new strategy to all those audiences simply, with clear lines and minimum jargon. With this compelling story in hand, the final key to success for the new Canadian maritime strategy will be consistent and constant repetition at every opportunity.

Notes
1. This article is based on a paper presented at the conference "Preparing for the Next Century of Canadian Sea Power," held at the University of Calgary, 8-10 September 2008.