

## Blog Post

[Home](#) / [News](#) / **Maritime Security Challenges Conference 2022 Overview**



Day two Five Eyes panel left to right; Moderator Mr. Johnathan Berkshire-Miller, Rear-Admiral Christopher Smith, Rear-Admiral Steven Waddell, Commodore Meilissa Ross, Rear-Admiral Anthony Rimington, Rear-Admiral Tom Moniger address the members of the Maritime Security Challenges conference held at the Fairmont Empress Hotel on November 15, 2022. Please credit: Corporal Tristan Walach, Canadian Armed Forces Photo

### News

## Maritime Security Challenges Conference 2022 Overview



Kathleen Baxter, February 26, 2023

🕒 6 min

👁 349



**14-16 November 2022 – Victoria, British Columbia**

The ninth iteration of the Maritime Security Challenges (MSC) conference, presented by the Navy League of Canada in conjunction with the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Centre for Security Studies and the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN), was held in Victoria, British Columbia from November 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup>. The two-day conference brought together 180 delegates from over twenty nations for discussions on the theme of 'Pacific Seapower: Strategic Competition in the Indo-Pacific'. This year's MSC panels covered a wide range of maritime security topics, such as challenges to the strategic commons, great power competition and options for middle powers, the strategic importance of islands, and shipbuilding. The conference also featured special presentations on the state of competition in the South China Sea, an assessment of the state of commercial shipping, and the RCN's new Arctic Offshore Patrol Ship. The most highly anticipated panel of the conference was undoubtedly the 'Five Eyes Perspectives on the Indo-Pacific' which closed out the conference, and saw the alliance's deputy heads of navy discuss the Five Eyes' role in the Indo-Pacific region. These discussions, which were animated and insightful, sought to answer one of the conference's primary questions: is China indeed the primary challenge facing the region's navies?



Vice-Admiral Angus  
Topshee speaks at the  
Maritime Security  
Challenges conference  
held at the Fairmont  
Empress Hotel on  
November 15, 2022. Photo  
credit: Corporal Tristan  
Walach, Canadian Armed  
Forces Photo

Amidst the rising great power competition between China and the US, the geopolitical centre of gravity has clearly shifted to the Indo-Pacific region, where Beijing's maritime behaviour is presenting a challenge to the international rules-based order that has existed since the end of the Second World War. Mr. Greg Poling (Director, Southeast Asia Program and Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, Center for Strategic and International Studies) gave a concise assessment of the current state of affairs in the South China Sea, where China has continued to build up and militarize land features to advance Beijing's regional claims, which cover almost the entirety of the South China Sea. Another speaker, Dr. Daniel Pauly (Sea Around Us, Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries & Department of Zoology, University of British Columbia) pointed to China's state-sponsored illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing programs, which have continued to spread further and further into the Pacific – reaching the Pacific coast of South America in some cases – as increasingly destabilizing; Beijing's ongoing IUU fishing programs frequently infringe on the rights of smaller states in the South China Sea, and are producing devastating ecological consequences for the entire region. In addition to its maritime ambitions, China's economy is resilient and globally distributed, as Dr. Kerry Nankivell (Director, Strategic Assessments, Canadian Department of National Defence) observed, with 90 nations enjoying twice as much trade with China as they do the US, making any effective decoupling from China much more difficult than has been done with Russia. Relatedly, Commodore Peter Leavy (Royal Australian Navy) noted that while China has unarguably benefitted from the current international order, an increasingly capable and nationalistic People's Liberation Army Navy has made it clear that China is now seeking to reshape that order to Beijing's benefit.

However, one of the conference's great strengths was the inclusion of regional perspectives from Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands, who did not always share the same assessment of the current great power competition as their fellow panelists. In a particularly well delivered segment, Ms. Elina Noor (Director, Political-Security Affairs, Asia Society Policy Institute) pointed out that in North American media there has typically been two primary narratives surrounding the competition between the US and China – that of democracy vs autocracy, and chaos vs order, with little room in between – which is not the reality on the ground for many Southeast Asian nations, where gradations of democracy and autocracy frequently exist. As Dr. Tarcisius Kabutaulaka (Associate Professor, University of Hawaii at Manoa) said, China has not necessarily always been seen as a bad actor in the region, and, especially in the Pacific Islands, does not have the same political baggage – such as a history of colonialism and nuclear testing – that some Western nations do. Dr. Kabutaulaka also noted that great powers are not used to being influenced by smaller powers, which makes the policies of great powers somewhat reactionary and not particularly sustainable; an example given of this behaviour was the first-ever US-Pacific Islands Summit hosted by President Joe Biden this year, which took place in response to China's recent political advances in the Pacific Islands – such as the signing of the China-Solomon Islands security pact – rather than the result of continuous long-term American engagement with the region. While Southeast Asian and Pacific Island nations may engage both the US and China, Dr. Aditi Malhotra (Editor-in-Chief, *Canadian Army Journal*) proposed that this was less an effort to counterbalance the two nations as it was an effort to have all major powers enmeshed in the security of the Indo-Pacific, to create a regional equilibrium that allows for smaller nations to maintain and express their autonomy.



Group photo of the members of the Maritime Security Challenges Conference on the 14th of November 2022. Photo credit: Corporal Tristan Walach, Canadian Armed Forces Photo

Finally, while the Five Eyes panel further explored the role of middle powers – defined by Commodore Leavy as a nation that can defend its vital interests from all but a great power threat – in the current strategic landscape, one of the panel's most interesting moments came from the question and answer period, where each of the panelists were asked to speak to the possibility of expanding the intelligence alliance to include additional like-minded nations, such as Japan and South Korea. While none of the deputy heads of navy would, understandably, comment on the likelihood of that possibility, all five panelists stressed the importance of other tri- and multi-lateral cooperation fora in the Indo-Pacific. Canada, for its part, is certainly seeking to expand its own cooperation with regional partners, as the recently released Indo-Pacific Strategy highlighted Ottawa's intent to secure an information-sharing agreement with Japan – and later South Korea – which would improve the interoperability between the RCN and those key North Pacific partners and bring Canada in line with other Five Eyes members, such as the US and Australia, who already have similar intelligence sharing agreements in force.

Maritime Security Challenges 2022 provided attendees with thought provoking discussions, and the informal conversations that took place over coffee breaks, lunches, and the banquet dinner enabled an even greater exchange of ideas and perspectives amongst the delegates. For those interested, recordings of the panels and some of the special presentations can be seen on the MSC's YouTube page, at [www.youtube.com/@MSCConference](https://www.youtube.com/@MSCConference).

**TAGS**

#FIVE EYES

#MARITIME SECURITY CHALLENGES

#MARITIME SECURITY CHALLENGES CONFERENCE

#MSC

#MSCC

#RCN

#ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY

Previous

**Military Cultural Changes on Our Horizon**

Next

**Shared Insights for Future Naval Training System: An Interview with Capt(N) Matthew Coates, Commander, Naval Personnel and Training Group (NPTG), Royal Canadian Navy**





Kathleen Baxter

RELATED POSTS

News

**A visionary company protects marine environments through innovative data-collection technology and earns Government of Canada backing**

Vanguard Staff, December 9, 2021

🕒 2 min 📌

News

**Forescout's Comply-to-Connect (C2C) contract renewed by DoD**

Marcello Sukhdeo, October 18, 2021

🕒 2 min 📌

News

**Third Independent Review of the National Defence Act to be conducted by Former Justice Morris J. Fish**

Marcello Sukhdeo, November 16, 2020

🕒 3 min 📌

News

**Canadian University Cybersecurity Group Appointed to Lead F...**

Vanguard Staff, January 19, 2023

🕒 8 min 📌

Log In

Username or Email Address

Password

Forgot Password

Remember Me

Lost Password?