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The RUSI-VI Office is located at:

Bay Street Armoury
715 Bay Street,
Victoria, BC V8T 1R1

General Inquiries- segunart@gmail.com

Web site:

<http://rusiviccda.org/>



RUSI VI

*To promote national defence and security issues
through discussion and engagement*

**Newsletter of the Royal United Services Institute
of Vancouver Island**

The Royal United Services Institute of Vancouver Island is a member of the Conference of Defence Associations. The CDA is the oldest and most influential advocacy group in Canada's defence community, consisting of associations from all parts of the country.

The CDA expresses its ideas and opinions with a view to influencing government security and defence policy. It is a non-partisan, independent, and non-profit organization.



February 2026

Table of Contents

Speakers for the Winter Session	3
President’s Message	4
SPECIAL NOTICE: Balkans 35th Commemoration.....	5
From RCAF helicopter pilot to NASA Mission Control: Erin Edwards’ path to the space program	5
Why Are All Modern Fighter Jets “Multirole” Aircraft?	10
Russia’s New Middle East Strategy	11
Manoeuvre Warfare in the Current Operating Environment	14
US Navy Turns to Proven Cutter Design for New Frigate Class.....	16
‘Threat or Use of Force’ is Superior to ‘Armed Attack’ and ‘Armed Aggression’ as the Threshold for Collective Defence	17

Hover your mouse “Control” and ”Click” to follow links to articles

Speakers for the Winter Session

11 Feb (Wed) - Gary Beels - Challenges of Submarine Technology. Gary Beels is a submarine engineering and technology expert.

11 Mar (Wed) – Noted author Ted Barris on his book on Canada’s role in the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP) of WWII

15-23 Mar RUSI AGM – conducted via email.

8 Apr (Wed) – Rob Forbes on his book on Wing Cdr Chadburn – follow up to BCATP

6 May (Wed) – Defence Policies Panel (TBC) NOTE: date change due to conflicting event – Drum and Piping Course at the Armoury

Jun - Aug – Summer recess

ANNUAL DUES RENEWAL REMINDER - If you haven't done so yet please renew your RUSI-VI membership for the 1 September 2025 - 31 August, 2026 membership year.

Annual dues are \$50.00 for Regular and \$60.00 for Family Memberships. Note: The first year of the newly established student membership category is complimentary and \$30 for following years. Please pay by: E-transfer; by cheque in the mail; by cash/cheque at our monthly lunch events. Note: please identify yourself in associated messaging when sending an e-transfer.

· E-transfer: treasurer.RUSI.VI@gmail.com

· Mail: RUSI-VI Treasurer, 1621 Barkley Place, North Saanich, B. V8L 5E6

President's Message

Welcome to the first of the 2026 RUSI VI quarterly newsletter series- as usual containing meticulously researched content on topical subject matter - thanks to the efforts of the editor/publisher Craig Cotter!

This edition contains articles that cross a wide spectrum of defence areas of interest relevant to a variety of operational spheres from space operations- as in the lead item about RCAF helicopter pilot Erin Edwards in her career road to supporting NASA operations from her start as an naval reserve bridge watchkeeper/diver- to the refinements of international legalistic terminology as applied in defining forms and categories of armed conflict. In between, we read in detail regarding multirole jet aircraft, geopolitical considerations in the Middle East, manoeuvre warfare in the context the current operational environment and changing perspectives of naval warship design. Truly a topical buffet for the diverse interests of our reading audience!

This wide scoped approach is especially relevant to our times as we are engaged in the examination of the totality of Canadian defence and security concerns in a rapidly transitioning international security environment. We daily are exposed to information on the upgrading of our air, land, sea and space capabilities to match the demands of the future in defending our sovereignty over the large portion of the planet we claim. We are concurrently also witness to the need to develop completely new capabilities - as recently highlighted by the Canadian Army modernization plans discussed at our January luncheon presentation by BGen Ursich, Deputy Commander of the Canadian 3rd Division. Our February luncheon presentation will delve into the technical complexities and challenges of the acquisition of a greatly expanded submarine capability for the RCN and the specialized naval engineering support requirements associated with the Canadian Patrol Submarine Program (CPSP) objective of seeing twelve new submarines in future operational service.

This all bodes for many more articles of contemporary interest on a wide range of defence and security subjects in our future newsletters!

Paul Seguna, CD,

President RUSI Vancouver Island

SPECIAL NOTICE: Balkans 35th Commemoration

January 2026 to November 2027

The Balkans 35th Commemoration is a volunteer Veteran led initiative. Their aim is to acknowledge Balkans Veterans from all elements of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), other Canadian Police forces, Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA) and Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) who deployed to the Balkans from 1992 to 2004.

The Balkans 35th Commemoration will provide Balkan Veterans and their families the opportunity to be acknowledged and to celebrate their achievements and sacrifices. They are looking for individuals who are willing to organize gatherings of Balkan Veterans in their Province, Territory or local community. These will help us create a National network of Balkan Veterans.

The website below includes information on Balkans 35th Commemoration events, a call for volunteers for additional events in your local area, as well as personal veteran stories from Canada's participation in the Balkans.

Website: <https://www.balkans35.ca/>

From RCAF helicopter pilot to NASA Mission Control: Erin Edwards' path to the space program

By Ben Forrest | January 28, 2026 | Vertical Magazine

Capt Erin Edwards cradled a telephone receiver at 427 Special Operations Aviation Squadron in Petawawa, Ont., and greeted the caller in a gruff-but-professional tone.

It was another hectic day in the training and standards department, and Edwards — a long-tenured CH-146 Griffon pilot — was in the middle of something.

Her demeanour changed as she listened.

“This is Jeremy Hansen calling from NASA,” she remembers the caller saying. “I’m just wondering if you still might be interested in coming to work with us.”

The room hushed. A warrant officer sitting nearby looked at Edwards and asked: “Is that an astronaut on the phone?”

It was. As the world will soon know, Col Hansen is slated to become the first Canadian to orbit the Moon in early 2026. His journey from Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) fighter pilot to the NASA space program is among the most notable career arcs in Canadian aviation history.

“Heck, yes,” Edwards remembers saying. She was elated.



Photo courtesy of Erin Edwards

Months earlier, her application to join NASA as a capsule communicator (capcom) had seemed like a long shot. Now, she was headed to Houston to work at Mission Control.

“I was definitely very surprised,” she said, in an interview with *Skies*, noting the only active military Canadian astronauts — Hansen and Col Joshua Kutryk — both trained on the CF-18.

“I assumed they were just going pick a fighter pilot and I’d never hear about my application,” she said. “I was more in shock than anything else, I think.”

In 2023, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) sent out a notice about the capcom position, asking any RCAF member with an interest in space to apply. Edwards was reluctant, but her supervisor urged her to give it a chance.

“I don’t know if I have a lot of time,” she told the supervisor. “It’d be really cool, but no one’s going to select me.”

“I think you’re going to regret not at least applying for this job,” the supervisor said. “[It’s] an area you’ve loved your whole life.”



Photo courtesy of Erin Edwards

So, it was settled. Edwards put together her military resume and cobbled together an application, which outlined her intriguing and unconventional career.

Edwards arrived in the RCAF in 2013 via the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) Reserve, where she worked as a bridge officer and diver in between her day job as a geologist. The Air Force finally selected her on her third attempt; she'd struggled with earlier tests.

In 2016, Edwards graduated from 3 Canadian Forces Flying Training School with the Portage la Prairie Award for displaying the highest degree of professionalism and officer-like qualities in her class.

After a challenging, months-long selection process, she went on to fly the Griffon with 427 Squadron, one of only a handful of women to ever qualify as an aircraft commander in the Special Operations Forces. Her career progressed steadily, into roles as a flight safety officer, operations officer, and space liaison officer. Edwards also completed a master's degree in space science while working full-time in the RCAF, including two overseas deployments.

Having a career in space still seemed like a distant dream, but it drew closer.

"The chance to work at NASA is such a limited opportunity for Canadians," Edwards said.

"To see one come through the military was a remarkable opportunity. It's one that I didn't think I would get, but [my] motivation was simply to be a part of the mission down here."

After hanging up the phone with Hansen, Edwards prepared for her move to Houston.

The job originally called for administration support, helping Hansen and Kutryk as they prepare for space flights. In reality, Edwards has filled several other key roles at NASA — "I have about three other jobs here," she said — but working as a capcom is the main appeal.

As the space crew's representative at Mission Control, the capsule communicator sits next to the flight director, offering input on the crew's preferences, mitigating conflicts in the incredibly busy crew work schedule, and helping translate procedures into comprehensible speech.

It's not much of an exaggeration to say operators and engineers speak different languages on the job — a mix of technical and professional jargon the others find difficult to de-code.

The capcom is there to make it make sense.

"We are that connection between the ground folks and what the astronauts are doing on station," said Edwards. "Sometimes we're the only person they speak to that day who's not in that crew, so you tend to set the tone."

Along with Hansen and Kutryk, Edwards works with astronauts from several other countries — including the U.S., Japan, Russia and the United Arab Emirates. They primarily use English, but capcoms also learn basic Russian.

"I'm not very good at Russian, but I know enough to ask for help from the translator if I need to," Edwards joked.

Building rapport with astronauts and cosmonauts is an important part of the job, and it comes naturally to Edwards. Capcoms and space travellers take many of the same classes, so they have similar thought processes, and Edwards also works in the astronaut office in Houston as the

Operations Officer responsible for astronaut training. (Notably, she is the first non-astronaut to hold this role.)

“I’ve come to know them really well,” she said. “When they’re not assigned to a specific mission, my staff and I manage their schedules and training ... and you’ll see them at the gym and stuff like that. You have a good idea of their personalities and how they’re going to react to things.”

The best part of the job?

“That’s a tough question, because there’s so much cool stuff here,” said Edwards. “In the military, there’s teams within teams within teams, and it’s the same thing here ... so as much as the science and the technology and the mission is super cool, I think the best thing, and the thing that I enjoy the most, is being a part of the teams here.”

Edwards is the first non-astronaut Canadian to work as a capcom with NASA, but the role is temporary by design. In August, after three years on the job, Edwards is scheduled to return to Canada, passing the opportunity on to another CAF member.

“I wish I could stay here forever,” she acknowledged. “But it’s also important that while this opportunity is available to Canada to fill, we share it — so more people get the experience being in a leadership position in an agency we don’t have a lot of face time with, as well as learn the operational side of things.”

The road here was long and winding, and success didn’t come easy. Still, Edwards is grateful for the setbacks she faced along the way; in hindsight, those failures seem like a blessing.

“What’s weird is, most of my background — geology, working as a diving officer, and my helicopter career — all three of those things have been represented in this job,” she said.



Photo courtesy of Erin Edwards

“When I came down here, they were in the process of realizing that helicopters offer a very good analog for training certain aspects of landing on the Moon. I happened to be in the right place at the right time with a combination of the right skills that NASA needed.”

There is no sense in romanticizing failure, but there is wisdom in seeing it as a gift — a teacher, an ally, a friend. Edwards persevered when others might have given up, and now she's one-of-one.

"I think it built all the pieces without me knowing it until recently," she said. "This was the path I was supposed to be on. I wouldn't constitute a failure as a bad thing. You can learn a lot about your way forward if you want to sit down, take the ego out of it, and use that information to help you in your next attempt.

"I think the next thing is just to stay curious; say yes to opportunities as they come up. There's very little in my life and all the jobs I've had that I would consider a wasted experience. Any experience is going to be beneficial to you at some point in your life, so just go try all the things!"



Photo courtesy of Erin Edwards

Why Are All Modern Fighter Jets “Multirole” Aircraft?

December 13, 2025 - The National Interest

By: Harrison Kass

As fighter jets have grown more and more expensive, pressure has mounted on modern air forces to enable those aircraft to carry out multiple distinct missions.

The term “multirole fighter” is thrown around a lot in the modern era, one of the most common levels applied to modern combat aircraft, often without much precision. Many assume the definition applies to any fighter that can also drop bombs, giving it a semblance of ground attack capability as well as its more traditional role as a dogfighter. In fact, the true definition reflects something deeper: a multirole fighter is designed from scratch to perform multiple, distinct mission sets with equal (or near-equal) competence.

This design philosophy contrasts sharply with the Cold War tendency to design aircraft that were highly specialized, as interceptors or dogfighters or ground support aircraft. Although some platforms from that era survive, multirole aircraft are far more common today, when taxpayers want versatility from their extremely expensive fighter jets.

How the US Air Force Transitioned Away from Specialized Planes

The early jet fighters were highly specialized. Aircraft designers built interceptors that could intercept extremely well, bombers that could drop bombs with pinpoint accuracy, and fast and maneuverable dogfighters. Electronics of that era were limited, and aircraft could not carry the radars and weapon suites required for different missions at the same time—so designers had to pick a mission and outfit the jet accordingly.

Multirole platforms began to appear in the 1970s. Advances in avionics, radar, and missile tech allowed aircraft like the F-4 and the F-16 to handle an increasing number of diverse roles. By the 1990s, “multirole” had become a formal doctrinal category of aircraft. Today, nearly all non-stealth fighters are inherently multirole.

So, what does a “multirole” plane actually do? As the name suggests, multirole aircraft can perform any combination of the following, depending on the platform:

- Air superiority missions, where air-to-air combat is emphasized, i.e., patrolling airspace, escorting strike aircraft, engaging enemy fighters in BVR or WVR combat.
- Ground attack and close air support (CAS), requiring precision strikes on ground-based targets, often used JDAM or laser-guided bombs or auto cannon. Ground attack is a more general term for attacking ground targets, while CAS missions directly support troops on the ground through the suppression of enemy forces and armor, which is typically in direct contact with the friendly troops on the ground.

- Suppression/Destruction of Enemy Air Defenses (SEAD/DEAD), in which aircraft deploy anti-radiation missiles, like the AGM-88 HARM, or launch electronic attack missions, to counter enemy air defenses. Historically, this task fell to specialized aircraft but has since become integrated into multirole platforms like the F-16 and F/A-18.
- Maritime strike, using anti-ship missiles, often conducted while on naval patrols. This, naturally, is an essential mission profile for nations with coastal defense needs, i.e., the United States, China, Brazil, United Kingdom.
- Reconnaissance and ISR: Multirole fighters can be outfitted with the pods necessary for mapping, infrared scanning, and battlefield monitoring. Digital sensors allow for easy swapping of mission payloads.

All the Greatest Air Force Platforms Are Still Specialized

Multirole fighters have strategic upside because of their cost efficiency, flexibility, survivability, and export appeal. The downside of course is that these aircraft are jacks of all trades, rarely the best at any one category. For example, no multirole fighter can keep pace with the F-22, which is optimized exclusively for air superiority missions, in an air-to-air engagement. Nor can any multirole fighter perform CAS as well as the A-10 Warthog, which was designed solely for CAS.

Still, the future of aircraft design will continue to rely heavily upon multirole principles. Future aircraft will be multi-domain nodes that can handle air combat, strike, EQ, command-and-control, and drone teaming with relatively equal performance between each of these roles. If anything, the roles that a single aircraft is expected to perform may only continue to expand.

About the Author: Harrison Kass

Harrison Kass is a senior defense and national security writer at The National Interest. Kass is an attorney and former political candidate who joined the US Air Force as a pilot trainee before being medically discharged. He focuses on military strategy, aerospace, and global security affairs. He holds a JD from the University of Oregon and a master's in Global Journalism and International Relations from NYU.

Russia's New Middle East Strategy

January 22, 2026 The National Interest

By: Anna Borshchevskaya, and Matt Tavares

Russia has not abandoned the game in the Middle East, and many countries in the region still have reasons to expand ties with Moscow.

Don't count Russia out in the Middle East. Conventional wisdom suggests Russia is rapidly losing influence across the region. ("Russia's standing in the Middle East has cratered," wrote Michael McFaul and Abbas Milani of Stanford University in July 2025, to take just one example). But Russia remains an active force in the Middle East, and the United States should move to thwart Moscow's ambitions in the region.

Of course, many of Russian president Vladimir Putin's partners in the region have been weakened or collapsed in recent months. Rebels ousted Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad in December 2024, and Israel has pummeled Hamas and Hezbollah, both of which are backed by the Kremlin's longtime friend Iran. Putin's war of choice in Ukraine continues to deplete Russia's resources. But these setbacks have not yet amounted to a geostrategic defeat or a regional realignment against Russia.

Russia does not just retain a presence in the Middle East; it is poised for a resurgence. Such a comeback would harm American interests, especially if Putin agrees to pause his war against Ukraine. Absent punitive postwar terms—which appear unlikely—Russia could emerge from its Ukraine invasion stronger in the Middle East than before, in at least three ways.

First, Russia remains influential across the region, particularly as Moscow's ties to American adversaries grow. Putin's partnership with Iran, for instance, continues to strengthen—despite Russia's failure to aid Iran during the 12-day war with Israel and the United States over the summer. Recently leaked Russian defense documents confirm that Moscow has started assembling the first 16 Russian Su-35 fighters for Iran under a \$6.5 billion deal that would modernize Iran's air force and boost its air defenses, including against Israel. Putin is even attempting to mediate between Israel and Iran.

Second, Russia is still very much a presence in post-Assad Syria. Moscow retains its military bases there, serves as a key economic partner, and enjoys important political influence. New Syrian president Ahmed al-Sharaa shows no signs of abandoning Russia even while looking to strengthen his ties with the West. Sharaa has said that he made a deal with Moscow in December 2024 to stay out of the fighting, letting Russia drop Assad but stay in Syria.

Russia also retains a presence in Libya, where Moscow relocated most of its military assets from Syria. All this lets Russia remain a force on the strategically vital Mediterranean—and to project power into NATO's southern flank, the Middle East, and Africa.

Third, Russia retains strong economic and diplomatic ties with American partners across the region. No American friend in the Middle East has rescinded a major agreement with Russia; nor have any of America's Middle Eastern partners sided decisively with the West to isolate Russia on the world stage for Putin's invasion of Ukraine. America's regional partners made no move, for example, to join Western sanctions against Russia.

If anything, Russia's economic ties with Turkey and the Gulf states have only strengthened after Russia invaded Ukraine in early 2022. Russia's non-oil trade with the UAE reached \$11.5 billion in 2024, a 5 percent increase from the previous year, as Emirati companies continue to invest in such critical Russian sectors as energy and transport.

In August 2025, UAE president Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed visited Russia to strengthen economic ties between the two countries, following his participation in the Putin-hosted BRICS summit in Kazan, Russia, in October 2024. Most recently, Russia and Saudi Arabia signed a rare, visa-free agreement on the sidelines of a Saudi-Russian investment forum in Riyadh last December.

Russia's clout across the region is poised to resurge, especially if the Ukraine war pauses. That would free up Russian time and resources, allowing the Kremlin to refocus on the Middle East. For centuries, Moscow has sought to control the Eastern Mediterranean—a goal that will long outlast Putin. Russian rulers have

long coveted the region's warm-water ports and its strategic location for power projection into Europe, including NATO's current southern flank.

Russia's defense industrial base remains durable, and if the Ukraine war ends or pauses, Russia would suddenly be able to sell Middle East states considerably more capabilities. Some analysts sneer at the quality of Russian military equipment, but many potential buyers have pent-up demand for Russian kit. And many Middle Eastern actors never lost interest in Russian weaponry, even if they feared Western sanctions.

Many in the Middle East accuse the United States of hypocrisy and double standards, and they have noticed that Washington has done far more to support Kyiv than to support its Arab partners. Such perceptions, right or wrong, make the region receptive to Russia. And, of course, Russia also plays a central role in the global energy market.

All these areas of interdependence create opportunities for Moscow to project its narrative across the region, including through propaganda outlets such as RT and Sputnik Arabic, which already reach millions daily. In 2015, RT Arabic ranked among the three most-watched channels in Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the UAE, and Iraq. In 2024, RT Arabic reportedly reached 46.9 million viewers, with five times as many Facebook followers as Al Jazeera or Al Arabiya.

Asking Putin to join the US-led "Board of Peace" to oversee Gaza's reconstruction is a step in the wrong direction. Instead, US policymakers should take steps now to block Russia's likely resurgence across the Middle East and North Africa. Russia's war in Ukraine has highlighted the deep ties between the Middle East and European theaters.

The United States can compete for influence in the Middle East, particularly in the Mediterranean, as part of a holistic strategy to counter Russia. It could prioritize Syria and seek ways to bolster Ukraine across the region as an alternative to Russia. Ukraine is well-positioned to counter Russia across the region, especially in the arms market.

An ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure. If the United States does not act now, it will have a harder time countering Russia in the Middle East—and Europe too, from Russia empowering adversarial actors to potentially complicating US freedom to maneuver in the Eastern Mediterranean, to give a few examples. Putin is playing the long game. President Donald Trump should, too.

About the Authors: Anna Borshchevskaya and Matt Tavares

Anna Borshchevskaya is the Harold Grinspoon senior fellow at the Washington Institute. In June 2024, she served as a consultant for the US Department of State on defense strategies in the Black Sea region. She was previously with the Atlantic Council and the Peterson Institute for International Economics.

Matt Tavares is a former official in the US Department of Defense with two decades of experience in US national security. He is now focused in the private sector on emerging technologies and the evolving nature of armed conflict.

Short Bursts – Reflections from Latvia III

Two previous articles in this series

<https://www.canada.ca/en/army/services/canadian-army-journal/articles/2024/short-bursts-jensen-latvia-reflections-1.html>

<https://www.canada.ca/en/army/services/canadian-army-journal/articles/2024/short-bursts-jensen-latvia-reflections-2.html>

Manoeuvre Warfare in the Current Operating Environment

by Rebecca Jensen, Ph.D

Editor's Note:

The Canadian-led Multinational Battle Group in Latvia, Task Force Paladin (TF Paladin), includes forces from ten sending nations, as well as 438 members of the Canadian Army. Interoperability has seldom been pushed to this level, nor at this scale. In order to align TF Paladin's approach to training and preparing to fight, the commanding officer (CO), LCol Jean-Francois Labonté, began the rotation with a weekend long meeting for leaders. After half a day of briefings on the current operating environment, small groups were tasked with developing maxims that fit under the CO's motto, "We Fight." This article is part of the Short Bursts Series: "Reflections from Latvia," which delves into some of these maxims, what they mean in practice, and why they are important.

Disperse to Survive

Early in the Russian war on Ukraine, news coverage frequently reported upon the destruction of large Russian headquarters and formations. The transformation of Ukrainian targeting techniques meant that shortly after such a high value target was identified, it could be struck with long range fires. As Ukraine has acquired increasingly long range and precise fires, they have become even more adept in this regard, forcing Russian forces to disperse. Of course, Russia as well as all the militaries studying this war have learned and adapted. Long range precision fires, such as the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS, currently in use in Ukraine) can destroy targets with great accuracy from a distance of hundreds of kilometres. This capability comes at a cost, though, with individual rockets costing about \$200,000 Canadian Dollars, and in some cases much more. The platforms that launch the missiles cost millions of dollars each, and when rocket artillery is fired, it risks becoming exposed.

A key to survival is to avoid creating the sorts of targets that are cost-effective for the use of long-range precision fires, and the easiest way to achieve this is through dispersion. Spreading a force across a large area makes elements of the force harder to detect, and also less likely to be considered high value targets when detected. This also increases deception, helping larger elements and command posts appear to be smaller or generic. This is simple but not easy. The resupply and force protection of many dispersed elements is more intensive in terms of logistics, labour, and time compared to a smaller number of larger groupings. TF Paladin is continuously refining its approach to dispersion, in order to make the force more survivable while also remaining highly effective. However, this creates the challenge of how to concentrate in order to strike and fight offensively.

Concentrate to Strike

While dispersion increases survivability and is a strong defensive measure, combined arms manoeuvre and moving to the offensive requires concentration of friendly forces. A notable feature of the Ukrainian fight against the Russian invasion has been a successful, albeit costly, breaching operation that is not fully exploited afterwards. This is often because massing the troops, equipment, and supplies needed to exploit a breach takes time, and creates a window of vulnerability in which the enemy can attack with long range precision fires.

In light of this, the challenge remains as to how to mass effects without necessarily massing forces, or alternatively, how to create a window in which a force can be safely concentrated in order to exploit an advantage. The latter is still being developed by the US military, and in particular, the Army Futures Command. This command is developing the concept of 'convergence,' or synchronizing effects across all domains in which the enemy, for a pocket of space and time, is unable either to detect massed forces, to strike them, or both. While this shows great promise, it requires capabilities and platforms largely absent in most of the NATO forces. The former approach, of massing effects without massing forces, is more feasible today. Preparatory and supporting fires, electronic warfare, and recce elements can provide some protection for NATO forces as they prepare to exploit a breach or go on the offensive. Historically, we have seen the example of the "bite and hold" approach used by the British in both world wars, in which small scale exploitations were supported by fires and then incrementally turned into defensive positions. While intensive in terms of munitions, it allowed for consistent progress in small steps that had a larger cumulative effect.

Never Stall

TF Paladin is being actively tracked by Russian forces, as are other NATO forces in the Baltics. This will only intensify if Russia actively engages NATO in theatre. Momentum and initiative are thus essential. Staying on the move supplements dispersion as an aspect of survivability, and while this increases the burden on sustainment, being hard to find and fix preserves fighting power. Given the need to move, communicate, and coordinate and at times with analog tools, this is no easy task. It requires mission command, the empowering of subordinate commanders to exercise their own judgment and take the initiative within the parameters established by the TF Paladin CO. In a multinational battle group like TF Paladin, this means establishing strong relationships built on understanding and trust, which can be a challenge even within a single army. Even before TF Paladin's rotation, the leaders of the battle group and all the sending nations have worked to create and maintain these relationships. This can look like symbolic unity, such as designing the Task Force crest together, and social functions at which soldiers of all ranks get to know their counterparts from other sending nations beyond the work setting. It also means shared training, not just for the Task Force as a whole, but also at lower levels. This includes travelling together to nearby NATO states for training in varying conditions and with different skills.

Never stalling also has a cognitive dimension. Sub-unit commanders cannot simply be effective at understanding their immediate responsibilities and mission; they must also continuously revise their understanding of the operating environment, the capabilities of TF Paladin as a whole, and the most likely threats they could face. Ongoing professional development, often informal, supports this cognitive momentum. Many leaders in the TF Paladin have found that working and training together has not only made them better at their jobs, but also provided valuable insights into how their counterparts from other nations train and fight. These insights have laid the groundwork for changes and improvements that they will take back to their own countries at the end of their rotation.

Right Place, Right Time

Counterinsurgencies and small wars of the post Cold War period featured relatively low densities of forces, engaged in what was often called 'low intensity conflict'. In these missions, commanders had significant leeway in how and where they engaged, since deconfliction (at least at a physical level) was less pressing, and the capabilities of the enemy were significantly inferior to their own. We will not have the same freedom of action in a conflict between NATO and Russia. Ensuring that every part of the task force is in the right place, at the right time, in order to carry out their task is vital, as is the awareness of when the plan invariably changes after contact. Deconflicting and coordinating forces in space and time is key to avoiding fratricide. Longstanding tools such as clearly communicated control measures are important here.

Given a very multinational Task Force where communications can be more complicated or less reliable than in a force drawn from a single country, TF Paladin's leadership has provided broad and easy to understand guidance regarding areas of responsibility. This guidance is robust and simple enough to be useful, even if communications are intermittent or unavailable. More broadly, clear intent coupled with a simple concept of operations is essential, so that even with the inevitable friction and fog of war, each component of the task force can ensure that their efforts support the mission and contribute to achieving the objective. This approach builds upon mission command and the relationships discussed earlier.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Rebecca Jensen is an Associate Fellow at the Royal United Services Institute and an Assistant Professor at the Canadian Forces College, Toronto. She is currently deployed to Latvia as advisor to the commanding officer of TF Paladin, the Multinational Battle Group, LCol Jean-Francois Labonté.

US Navy Turns to Proven Cutter Design for New Frigate Class

G Captain

<https://gcaptain.com/navy-turns-to-proven-cutter-design-fornew-frigate-class/>

Navy Turns to Proven Cutter Design for New Frigate Class <https://gcaptain.com/navy-turns-to-proven-cutter-design-fornew-frigate-class/> "The Navy plans to use a lead yard and competitive follow-on strategy for multi-yard construction to expand production capacity across the maritime industrial base. Shipyards will be evaluated on a single metric: delivering combat power to the fleet as quickly as possible."

Rhetorical questions: (*posed by RUSI NS editor*)

Does Canadian maritime defence industrial planning consider multi-yard construction, at least for when there is a major conflict? Will such mobilization-related considerations be part of the impending Defence Industrial Strategy (really, policy)? Might 'multi-yard' include yards of allies? Is Canada prepared to accept components, units, modules, etc., from foreign sources including the US. Is the USA prepared to accept components from a full range of allies including Canada? Is there a listing of what constitutes the Canadian maritime industrial base? That might be a challenge to list - when is an equipment 'maritime' and when might it be dual use? Comments from a mariner colleague: The questions are headed in the right direction.

All means must be considered and used to speed up delivery of basic hulls. War strategy and technology is changing fast. Guns and bullets are still in play while the hull must also support position jamming technology, drones and lasers. Nothing stays the same for more than a few months. Speed of construction, deployment and redeployment has to be measured in days and minutes. War is now at nanoseconds speed. Comments from a shipbuilding colleague: Interesting article and it certainly is a cost effective and expeditious way to add capacity and needed sea power. While I agree with the proven design approach and build in multiple yards, I don't agree with the lead/follow yard strategy. This typically adds friction, risk and cost since there has to be 100% transparency and trust between the yards and this is difficult to achieve and can be terribly counterproductive when issues around cost and schedule begin to appear, as they usually do. A better approach is what we well learned during the Second World War with multiple shipyards and fabricators (I believe up to twelve different yards in Canada alone) building over 100 Flower-class corvettes. The Government of Canada provided the design to the yards, acting as prime, then letting the individual yards build to their specs, with minimum oversight. There was a war on and levels of bureaucratic control were neither affordable nor practical. We repeated this, on a smaller scale, in the mid-1980s when we built 17 ice-classed vessels in nine different yards. Again, Canada provided the designs and let the yards get on with building to meet performance specification requirements, with minimal oversight. Almost all the ships built during that period are still in operation today – a testament to both the design, the Canadian yards and workers ability to produce good ships in short order. In order to achieve rapid production results in Canada we need to learn from the past and trust that our marine industry can deliver when they are given the opportunity and commercial conditions to succeed!

Rhetorical Questions posed by RUSI NS editor

'Threat or Use of Force' is Superior to 'Armed Attack' and 'Armed Aggression' as the Threshold for Collective Defence

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Author L J (Joe) Howard, PhD, LL.M., MA

Summary

'Armed attack' and 'armed aggression' against a NATO and EU Member State are, respectively, conditions precedent to NATO and EU Member States' obligations to render collective defence measures per NATO's Article 5 and TEU's Art 42(7). Diplomatic practice of states and treaty regimes includes interpreting terms and provisions in international treaty and customary law in a manner that minimizes sovereign political and military risk and optimizes benefits for home states and treaty regimes. Legal interpretation and negotiation may be insufficient to settle international disputes. Defence diplomacy along actionable vectors such as the 'threat or use of force' must often follow.

The conditions precedent of 'armed attack' and 'armed aggression' should be amended to 'threat or use of force,' given the incentive to do so stems from their lack of definition, current (2026) reordering of the international community, and problematic roles of NATO and the EU in regional collective defence. This note assesses the law (1), its faults (2), evidence, judicial and state practice (3), and makes one recommendation (4).

1. The law

1.1 Three treaties: primary rules providing for obligations if a condition precedent is first met

The Charter of the United Nations (UNC, concluded 26 June 1945, in force 24 October 1945) Art 51 provides *Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the [UN], until the Security Council [UNSC] has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defence shall be immediately reported to the [UNSC] and shall not in any way affect the authority and responsibility of the [UNSC] ... to take...such action as...necessary ... to maintain or restore international peace and security.*

The North Atlantic Treaty (NAT, concluded 04 April 1949, in force 24 August 1949) Art 5 provides

...an armed attack against one or more of [the parties] in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all ...if such an armed attack occurs, each [party] in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking...individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as ... necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security ...

Treaty on European Union (TEU, ('Maastricht Treaty') concluded 07 February 1992, in force 01 November 1993) Art 42(7) provides

If a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power, in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. This shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States. Commitments and cooperation in this area shall be consistent with commitments under the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, which, for those States which are members of it, remains the foundation of their collective defence and the forum for its implementation.

1.2 Law of treaties; secondary rules on how to interpret primary rules

The Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (VCLT, concluded 23 May 1969, in force 27 January 1980) Article 31 'General rule of interpretation' (1) provides "[a] treaty shall be interpreted in good faith in accordance with the ordinary meaning to be given to the terms of the treaty in their context and in the light of its object and purpose."

2. Inadequacies in interpreting law as a legal norm

- 2.1** 'Armed attack' appears twice in the UNC, both in Art 51, and appears nine times in the NAT. Neither treaty defines the term, making definition a matter of interpretation.
- 2.2** 'Armed aggression' appears once in the TEU, does not appear in the UNC and is undefined. However, 'aggression' appears thrice in the UNC, notably once in UNC Art 39 as an event to be determined as such by an arm's length UNSC – not by the victim state that suffered the event– which will then enable the UNSC to elect to make Art 39 'recommendations' and enforceable Art 48 'decisions.'

- 2.3** Lack of definition of ‘armed attack’ and ‘armed aggression’ is the intended outcome of treaty drafting. The opaque character of terminology recognizes the supreme right of the sovereign to apply its own modality of interpretation of terminology in determining its course of action, in armed conflict or otherwise. Excess precision in definition precludes that latitude in treaty interpretation and may also dissuade states from concluding and ratifying treaties ab initio.
- 2.4** The VCLT’s reference to ‘context, object and purpose’ are start points for clarifying a general framework of interpretation of terms in treaty law but are insufficient to provide the specificity required to define ‘armed attack’ or ‘armed aggression’ and thereby enable diplomatic action.
- 2.5** Parties apply either of three modalities of interpretation of law: ‘legal pragmatism’ grounded in rule of law, ‘instrumentalism’ by which law is a subordinate instruments of public policy, and ‘statism’ by which law is whatever interpretation of law is required to protect the motherland state. The three models will frame practitioners’ approaches to understanding a treaty’s text. However, terms in the text, such as ‘armed attack’ and ‘armed aggression,’ remain deliberately opaque, hence making expectation of immediate and conclusive outcomes of negotiations unrealistic.
- 2.6** At state v. state armed conflict, excess precision invites armed brinkmanship by aggressor states up to the nth-1 degree of an ‘armed attack’ or ‘armed aggression,’ hence precluding victim states from use of armed force in self defence as excused under UNC Art 51. On the other hand, too little precision may leave the aggressor state in doubt as to what the victim state determines to constitute an ‘armed attack’ or ‘armed aggression,’ hence tempting it to gradually escalate use of force.
- 2.7** At the collective defence level, too little precision in treaty definition enables excessive bargaining among Member States in reaching consensus as to what an ‘armed attack’ or ‘armed aggression’ comprises, leading to delay if not paralysis in decision making by the treaty regime; too much precision risks a Member State’s being obligated to join in armed conflict despite its sovereign prerogative to avoid same.

3. Interpretation of law in evidence and practice

3.1 Evidence in determining an ‘armed attack’ and ‘armed aggression’

As these two terms remain abstract concepts, denominating them in objective and descriptive terms – vice authoritative or definitive – will clarify the issue. Referring to ‘threat or use of force’ introduces objective characterization necessary to meaningful conditions precedent.

Arguably, **(i)** “gravity of the coercive act;” **(ii)** “intention of the state to resort to use of force against another state;” **(iii)** “targeted military operations.”

Stated otherwise, three elements are evidence of an armed attack;

(i) an aggressor's scale of attack and its impact on the battlefield, which may be measured in objective terms, (ii) an aggressor's deliberate intent to render lethal effect, a subjective indicator; (iii) the aggressor's degree and sophistication of operational planning, an objectively determinable factor.

A similar argument identifies "use of [lethal] force [manifest in] territorial intrusions, human casualties or considerable destruction" as one element necessary to comprise an 'armed attack.'

Further, while '*animus aggressionis*' (trans. intention to attack) may be present, it is a subjective element not determinable from objective criteria. Objective fact-based criterion of use of force remains the root source of an 'armed attack' and 'armed aggression.'

Scale and gravity distinguish a lesser from a greater unlawful threat or use of force in comparatively objective terms and may be measurable in terms of resources expended or battlefield effect in terms of casualties, territory taken or property destroyed.

What may at first be considered a series of single uses of force may be aggregated under the 'Accumulation of Events' doctrine to constitute an armed attack. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) held this position in the Nicaragua case (¶3.2), whereas the Ethiopia-Eritrea Claims Commission dismissed Ethiopia's use of the doctrine to assert Eritrea's localized border intrusions amounted to an 'armed attack.'

'Armed attack' and 'armed aggression' may be further described by reference to the underlying necessity and proportionality of use of force.

While protagonist and antagonist will have different interpretations, those of the victim state are more determinative in deciding on subsequent courses of diplomatic action given it suffers the battlefield effect.

3.2 Judicial practice

Interpretations by the ICJ hold only for the facts in the particular case being heard at the time. Previous interpretations do not form a basis for legal precedent in the ICJ, although the Court may look for similarity in fact patterns of previous cases in its current analysis.

In *Case concerning military and paramilitary activities in and against Nicaragua (Merits, Judgment 27 June 1986)*, the ICJ stated its understanding of armed attack in §195.

... [A]n armed attack... [includes] not merely action by regular armed forces across an international border, but also "the sending by or on behalf of a State of armed bands, groups, irregulars or mercenaries, which carry out acts of armed force against another State of such gravity as to amount to" (inter alia) an actual armed attack conducted by regular forces, "or its substantial involvement therein". This description, contained in Article 3, paragraph (g), of the Definition of Aggression annexed to General Assembly resolution 3314 (XXIX), may be taken to reflect customary international law.

The context of the Nicaragua case included raids against Nicaragua by armed bands of irregular forces supported by the US, hence the court's wording. Notably

- A.** the first necessary condition for an 'armed attack' – and by extension 'armed aggression' – is the unlawful use of force per UNC 2(4);
- B.** the 'accumulation of effects' doctrine appears to enable the scale and effect of one

source of use of force, i.e., that of irregulars and mercenaries, to be cumulative and transubstantiated into the scale and effect of regular forces of a state;

- C.** the cumulative scale and effect of smaller attacks amount to an ‘armed attack;’
- D.** the ‘armed attack’ is imputed to the state controlling the irregulars.

In other cases, the Court did not find that use of force had amounted to ‘armed attack,’ e.g., *Oil Platforms* (U.S. v. Iran, 2003) and *Armed Activities on the Territory of the Congo* (DRC v. Uganda, 2005).

3.3 **State practice**

Whether ‘armed aggression’ is a higher, lower or different threshold of unlawful threat or use of force vice ‘armed attack’ is a matter of interpretation. A lower threshold would broaden the range of threats that would instigate ‘aid and assistance’ from EU Member States.’

In state practice, practitioners have positively interpreted these conditions precedent twice. NAT Art 5 has been invoked once, 11 September 2001 (World Trade Centre, New York City, 2,977 deaths). TEU Art 42(7) has been invoked once, 13 November 2015 (terrorist attacks, Paris France, 132 deaths). Despite the difference in scale, each event satisfied the condition precedent.

4. **Conclusion and recommendation**

NATO treaty drafters chose UNC Art 51 ‘armed attack’ rather than UNC Art 39 ‘aggression’ or ‘breach of the peace’ as the threshold event enabling NATO to deploy threat or use of force in collective self defence. Securing evidence in proving either event is elusive, but determining ‘armed attack’ for purposes of NATO Art 5 is the sole purview of 32 like-minded Member States likely to reach consensus.

On the other hand, despite the lesser number of 15 Members (5 of whom rotate annually) on the UNSC, 9 must vote affirmatively with neither of the five Permanent Members casting its veto. The UNSC Members derive from competing regional blocs, and decisions may be focused more on political interests than mitigating ‘aggression,’ the immediate issue at hand.

Replacing the conditions precedent, ‘armed attack’ and ‘armed aggression,’ with ‘threat or use of force’ as a ‘breach of UNC Art 2(4) produces several benefits.

- A.** It offers Member States a threshold event upon which to decide to take collective measures that is clearer and simpler to determine in objective and evidentiary terms than either of the other two events.
- B.** Simplicity may shorten the time required to deliberate and arrive at a consensus as to the existence of the threshold event and enable subsequent diplomatic action to commence faster.
- C.** It does not constrain the array of collective defence measures that may be

undertaken.

D. UNC Art 2(4) provides “[a]ll members shall refrain ... from the threat or use of force ...” Interpreting what constitutes ‘threat or use’ is the prerogative of the sovereign or treaty regime.

The victim state or treaty regime adopting a minimalist interpretation of UNC 2(4) will enable it to elect to execute a greater range of ‘forceful countermeasures’ more readily, as U.S. state practice demonstrates. ‘Forceful countermeasures’ will breach UNC Art 2(4) by unlawfully deploying armed force outside the terms of Art 51 self defence. However, providing that the countermeasures are necessary and proportional to the offending action, also the case in responding to an ‘armed attack,’ ‘forceful countermeasures’ are excusable under customary international law, namely Articles on the Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts (2001) Art 22.

The threshold events currently cited in the 77-year-old NAT and 34-year-old TEU require material upgrading at the earliest opportunity. The conditions precedent of ‘armed attack’ and ‘armed aggression’ should be amended to ‘threat or use of force,’ given the incentive to do so stems from their lack of definition, current (2026) reordering of the international community, and problematic roles of NATO and the EU in regional collective defence.