ISSUE BRIEF

Updating NATO's Maritime Strategy

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Introduction—The Case for an Updated Alliance Maritime Strategy

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization faces a new security environment that combines an assertive Russia seeking to alter the international order in its favor, and state failure across North Africa and the Middle East that has unleashed violent extremism, refugee flows, and instability. The new defense reality presents NATO, its member nations, and its partners a wide spectrum of challenges, which are particularly notable when manifested in the maritime domains in and around Europe. This shifting security environment at sea is especially challenging for an Alliance that has for more than a decade focused on ground-centric expeditionary and crisis management operations.

In an effort to focus the Alliance's maritime efforts and priorities, NATO released its Alliance Maritime Strategy (AMS) in 2011. This was a welcome development at the time, as it clearly delineated the contribution of maritime forces to Alliance security in the age of expeditionary operations and aligned NATO's maritime efforts with the 2010 Strategic Concept. However, the AMS does not reflect the dramatically changed security environment since 2011, from Russia's military actions in Ukraine, to crises in the Middle East and North Africa, to the rising geopolitical importance of the European Arctic (referred to as the "High North" by European allies) and the challenges of climate change with its prospective impact on the Arctic.

For these reasons, the 2011 AMS is outdated. Reflecting the consensus then prevailing in the Alliance concerning the political and strategic environment and the nature of security challenges, it focused on maritime inclusion and cooperation. Whatever the validity of its assumptions when it was approved, the 2011 AMS fails to adequately address challenges and missions that have clearly emerged in the intervening years: collective defense, deterrence, power projection, and managing instability on NATO's periphery. NATO needs an AMS that identifies the policies, capabilities, and operations that will protect NATO interests

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in the maritime domain within the context of current strategic realities, most fundamentally, the undeniable re-emergence of a potential confrontation with Russia.

This issue brief provides an outline for a new, relevant Alliance Maritime Strategy that takes into account the changing security environment in and around Europe and globally. It outlines the elements of this maritime strategy in a resource-constrained environment. This is a crucial time for the Alliance as it prepares for the July 2016 Warsaw Summit. That meeting of the leadership would be an excellent opportunity to begin shaping NATO's naval future through a new Alliance Maritime Strategy.

The Strategic Environment

The critical change in the strategic environment driving the need to update NATO's Maritime Strategy is Russia's revanchist aggression and increased, demonstrated willingness to confront the West. In Russia's periphery and beyond, this competition is playing out in the maritime domain, with Russia developing anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities in waters NATO must be able to access and operate in, including the North Atlantic, the Baltic Sea, the Mediterranean, and the Black Sea.[1] The maritime challenge from Russia is not simply a matter of a revived modernization effort for the Russian military

after a generation of shrinkage and neglect. Russia is displaying a willingness and an increasing capability to operate maritime forces in global waters where it has not done so before and where these activities challenge NATO's capacity to deal with local crises without significant Russian military involvement. In particular, in July 2015 Russia revised its Maritime Doctrine and placed specific emphasis both on the High North and assuring access for its forces into the Atlantic.

Russia has also used the maritime domain to test NATO's preparedness and display provocative behavior, including by dangerously close passes with fighter aircraft near warships of NATO navies in the Baltic and Black Seas, interfering with legitimate commercial maritime activities in the Baltic Sea, and conducting snap exercises in the High North. In addition, the United Kingdom, as well as NATO partners Sweden and Finland, have pursued suspected Russian submarines operating in their territorial waters. Indeed, NATO nations should expect that Russian probing and testing below, on, and above the sea will continue, as increasing capabilities and willingness to use them in the maritime domain enable provocative behavior in such a manner that is simply not possible ashore.

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Russia's increased activity in the maritime domain and the buildup of A2/AD networks from the High North to the Mediterranean is coupled with a marked increase in the size, quality, capabilities, and operational activities of Russian maritime forces. In 2010, Russia initiated the State Armaments Program 2020, embarking on an ambitious fleet modernization program that includes, among other things, new nuclear-powered attack submarines and conventional submarines with air-independent propulsion. These capabilities are beginning to be fielded, as Russia demonstrated by its ability to conduct long-range strikes into Syria from the sea, both with surface and sub-surface platforms, and to carry out a more ambitious operational effort, ranging from enhanced surveillance to resumed operational submarine patrols outside its remote "bastion" in the Barents Sea.

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1   A2/AD is a concept used to describe a potential adversary's deployment of weapons systems, most often with long-range capabilities, in order to deny US and allied forces freedom of maneuver in the battlespace. Land-based surface-to-air missiles (SAM), anti-ship missiles (ASM), and surface-to-surface ballistic/cruise missiles are frequently cited capabilities. Additional elements of emerging A2/AD systems include aircraft, surface ships, and submarines and their air superiority/sea control capabilities, as well as enhanced air defense, communications and surveillance systems, and cyberwar systems contribute to comprehensive A2/AD networks. A2/AD networks will also attempt to impact US and allied use of the electro-magnetic spectrum, cyber, and space. For example, in the Baltic region, land-based missiles in Kaliningrad are augmented by air, surface, and submarine operations; in the Black Sea region, the militarization of Crimea since annexation in 2014 expands SAM and ASM coverage from the eastern half of the Black Sea almost to its entirety, but the introduction of modernized submarines and surface combatants to the Black Sea Fleet adds to allied concerns. To be sure, the United States and other nations' militaries are working on doctrine, equipment, and operations to counter A2/AD, but the challenge is significant.

A Russian Su-24 "Fencer" attack aircraft makes a low altitude pass by USS Donald Cook in the Baltic Sea, April 12, 2016. *Photo credit:* US Navy.

The maritime environment strongly impacts both economic and geopolitical factors globally. Along with an assertive Russia seeking to alter the European security order through the use of force and armed intimidation, NATO also must consider other long-term developments beyond its immediate neighborhood. Geopolitical competition is on the rise. While economics may be seen as the ultimate arena of global power and influence, military capabilities and geopolitics remain central to continued security, stability, and peace. The inherent reach and flexibility of maritime forces makes their role in distant crises particularly significant.

Rising powers such as China are increasingly active in the global maritime domain, not only through commercial activities but also through the increasing reach of their maritime forces. The Chinese Navy has conducted counter-piracy operations off the Horn of Africa and a challenging noncombatant evacuation of its citizens from Libya in 2011. More recently, Chinese naval units conducted a joint exercise in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean with the Russian navy. China

also seems committed to altering the international order in its favor, which is expressed in the maritime domain through Beijing's actions to extend its reach and national authority into international waters. In the South China Sea, China is building artificial islands and extending the land mass of reefs, then installing air and maritime facilities as well as A2/AD components on them. China also has demonstrated an emerging interest in the High North, both as a source of energy and future conduit of trade between Europe and Asia.

Additionally, NATO cannot ignore nonstate maritime threats and challenges, even as the Alliance continues its orientation back to its fundamental *raison d'être*— collective defense and deterrence against potential state adversaries. Terrorism at sea could become a major threat, from ISIS and other violent and extremist groups in the Middle East and North Africa. Indeed, over the last ten years warships and merchants have been the victims of attacks by terrorist groups in maritime domains around Europe. NATO must also consider its role in managing seaborne migration and refugee flows,

as well as transnational crime and piracy. NATO will not always play a leading role in meeting these challenges, but it can fill important enabling and supporting roles to national and multilateral efforts and authorities.

Finally, NATO and its members also must contend with a number of trends shaping the maritime domain and NATO's ability to operate within and through it. For example, technological change in the military arena has allowed potential adversaries to close the gap on the significant qualitative edge of NATO nations, leading to a much more competitive military landscape, to include that for maritime forces. The rapid evolution and dissemination of technology promises to continue, and will bring new capabilities into the maritime domain, including unmanned systems (on, above, and below the surface), new weapon systems such as rail guns, and the automation of functions, complex systems, and platforms. NATO will need to invest heavily in both material and doctrinal terms to preserve its technological lead.

The collective NATO defense effort continues to be substantially greater than any possible combination of challengers, but economic pressures and a tendency to discount the possibility of military challenges to NATO have meant years of substantial reductions in NATO defense resources, even as Russia, China, and other potentially hostile powers have pursued robust modernization efforts. The relative scarcity of defense resources for Alliance members promises to continue, with a few exceptions, even with the marginal progress towards boosting defense spending commitments after NATO's Wales Summit in 2014.

Similarly, potential adversaries are using new methods, including cyber and space operations, to avoid or deny NATO's areas of comparative advantage. These new-model security challenges are not all matters of high technology; they include sophisticated means of using the full range of assets—military, economic, information, social, and political—to challenge NATO interests. These have maritime dimensions as well.

This changing operational environment in the maritime domain, which includes state competition at sea, capable nonstate actors, continued relative defense

austerity in the West, and rapid technological change is not transitory. It is the maritime component of the twenty-first century global security environment for which the transatlantic community must prepare itself now in order to safeguard NATO's interests at sea.

What the Alliance Maritime Strategy Must Deliver

An updated Alliance Maritime Strategy must address the emerging strategic environment: A competing power with significant capabilities is adopting strategy and doctrine to challenge NATO in the maritime domain and increasingly displaying aggressive behavior.

The 2014 NATO Summit in Wales re-emphasized the importance of NATO's foundational purpose: collective defense and deterrence. The 2015 Political Guidance confirmed this emphasis: "We have issued new Political Guidance to our defence planners to maintain our ability to fulfil all three core tasks of the Alliance, with a renewed emphasis on deterrence and collective defence capabilities, and to maintain our ability to effectively deal with any future challenges."[2] In light of this guidance and the maritime reflections of great power competition, the AMS must also emphasize the warfighting capabilities that naval forces—submarine, air, and surface—contribute to collective defense both in terms of conventional and nuclear deterrence. Specifically, reinforcement of allies on the European continent will require the establishment and maintenance of control over sea lines of communication; doing so in A2/AD environments requires increased capabilities for access and entry. An updated Alliance Maritime Strategy must deliver a prescriptive roadmap for establishing a ready posture for top-end warfighting capabilities.

At the same time, NATO has an overarching interest in freedom of the seas, international access to the global commons, and the international rule-based order that supports it. Maritime Security Operations (MSO) and

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2   NATO, "Statement by NATO Defence Ministers," June 25, 2015, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_121133.htm?selectedLocale=en.

naval diplomacy and engagement remain important, despite the primacy of naval warfighting. In accounting for security cooperation and MSO, the AMS can identify how NATO will leverage other partnerships to help balance these resource requirements.

The Alliance can leverage existing capacities for allied cooperation in intelligence, training, and exercises, but any strategy must also highlight additional capability and capacity requirements, correlating the potential capability and prioritizing the resource commitments and strategic choices for the alliance and member nations.

Maintaining NATO's newly challenged edge at sea will require a broad and long-term approach with a range of components. There are, however, critical elements of capabilities, resources, operations, and policy that a new AMS must urgently address.

The Critical Elements of an Updated Alliance Maritime Strategy

Capability Recommendation

Maritime strategy should focus on generating interoperable NATO naval forces capable of establishing and maintaining all-domain access. Proficiency must be maintained, through training and exercises,[3] in integrated air and missile defense, anti-submarine warfare, and anti-surface warfare; additional capacity and capability may be required in maritime Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance and Maritime Patrol, as well as space, cyber, and electronic warfare.

Optimize the Standing NATO Maritime Groups (SNMGs)—The ongoing broader NATO adaptation pursuant to the Wales decisions is aimed at a more responsive NATO force structure. The maritime expression of that lies in optimizing NATO's maritime Immediate Reaction Force. While this obviously includes the Standing NATO Mine Counter Measure

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Groups (SNMCMGs), which provide a critical capability, the updated AMS should center on the SNMGs as the lynchpin of NATO's naval capabilities against a near-peer competitor with A2/AD capabilities.

An updated AMS should also encourage NATO Maritime Command (MARCOM), as a robust headquarters, to execute independent command and control of maritime forces in steady state operations, in crisis management, and as a leading edge of NATO capabilities in collective defense. In addition to serving as a force provider and coordinating entity for the Joint Force Commands, which will command and control NATO's decisive operations, MARCOM can and should play a critical role commanding and controlling the SNMGs and SNMCMGs.

The SNMGs reflect the flexibility and agility of Naval operations—responding quickly to tasking as for Aegean operations, exercising across the Alliance, executing theater security cooperation missions with other partners, and showing the NATO flag in non-alliance waters. This comes at a cost, however, with a significant commitment of training and opportunity cost for member nations as they undergo Transfer of Authority (TOA) for long periods. The updated AMS should emphasize the importance of fully resourcing the SNMGs by member nations. At the same time, the SNMG/SNMCMGs can be made even more flexible with increased ability to aggregate and disaggregate. With more complete resource commitments, NATO could add flexibility to the SNMG / SNMCMG structure.

Resource Recommendation

Force Generation—As has always been the case, most of NATO's military capability, including in the maritime context, will continue to derive from national forces that will need to be committed to major collective defense tasks, not with forces operating under NATO command in peacetime. In keeping with NATO's strategic focus on forces more responsive to high end threats and collective defense missions, the updated Alliance Maritime Strategy must address NATO nations' contributions to NATO's maritime forces. Generating ships for Standing NATO Maritime Groups

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3   See Matt Brand, "Train, Hone, Deter," Atlantic Council, March 2016, http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/issue-briefs/train-hone-deter. Although this issue brief is not maritime in focus, the level and nature of exercises and the recommended actions and outcomes pertain.

Ships from the USS George H.W. Bush Carrier Strike Group conduct pre-deployment training in the Atlantic Ocean, December 10, 2013. *Photo credit:* US Navy/Wikimedia.

and Standing NATO Mine Counter Measures Groups includes a significant investment in training, and the medium- to long-term commitment to TOA imposes opportunity cost and restrictions on the flexibility of individual member states. In addition to the SNMG/SNMCMG force generation, the Alliance Maritime Strategy should identify additional, variable ways for nations to contribute naval forces. On any given day, dozens of NATO ships that are already underway could "timeshare" their multi-mission capabilities, which would be a critical force multiplier for NATO. At the very least, for ships operating or exercising but not under NATO's flag, a concerted strategic communications effort for them could contribute to and enhance NATO collective defense and deterrence.

To be credible, an updated Alliance maritime strategy must include adequate resources. The NATO guidelines for nations to expend 2 percent of GDP on defense budget remains valid, as does the guideline for major equipment, research, and development expenditures to be 20 percent of defense expenditures. These guidelines do not speak directly to investments in maritime capabilities and force development, but rather highlight the continuing need to commit resources to capability development; reiterating the resource requirements should be included in updated Alliance Maritime Strategy.

Operations Recommendations

NATO naval operations, at their core, provide ready forces for presence, deterrence, and security cooperation. For most added value, updating the Alliance Maritime Strategy should focus not only on the nature of operations, but also the primary geographic areas. There are several potential friction zones, where NATO and Russia have increasingly antagonistic interactions in international air space and water space. The AMS should call for increased operations and exercises in these areas to blunt further aggression and deter wider actions.

Operate in the North Atlantic, Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom-Norway (GIUK-N) gap, and the

Norwegian Sea: As confrontation between Russia and the West has returned, Russia's doctrine and strategic documents specifically emphasize the importance to Russia of operating not just in the Arctic and the North Atlantic, but also in the Mediterranean and potentially in still more distant maritime theaters. This has been reflected in a significant increase in Russian air and naval operations. At the same time, Allied operations in the region have decreased. It is imperative that NATO maritime operations return to the North Atlantic, the GIUK-N Gap, and further north. Submarine and airborne platforms would prove especially effective in this region, as they did previously. Norway will host Exercise Trident Juncture 2018, an excellent intermediate objective to demonstrate joint and maritime operations in the North Atlantic and the GIUK-N gap.

Review Baltic Sea maritime requirements: The Baltic Sea is an especially challenging operating environment for naval forces, given natural conditions (the extreme littorals, confined maneuver space, and relatively shallow waters), and the rapid emergence of a multi-layered A2/AD bubble emanating from Kaliningrad. NATO's maritime strategy must account for this difficult operating environment, and should pay special attention to the requirements for sub-surface, mine warfare, and amphibious operations in the region.

Increase Black Sea presence: The Black Sea is another potential friction zone for NATO, with frequent and increasingly challenging interactions between Russian and NATO ships and aircraft on and above the Black Sea. Increasing Black Sea presence offers unique challenges as non-Black-Sea states' naval presence in Black Sea waters is limited by the Montreux Convention. Here NATO should consider the contributions that can be made by manned and unmanned airborne systems (such as maritime patrol aircraft), as airborne platform numbers and duration of presence are not similarly curtailed. Increasing NATO's Black Sea operations, however, will require a commitment to leadership by one of the three allies on the Black Sea and to an aggressive rotation of forces by non-Black-Sea allies.

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Policy Recommendation

Clarify the Comprehensive Approach—As NATO naval forces will continue everyday maritime security efforts, despite the increasingly threatening environment, properly defining the burden-sharing and de-confliction with the European Union (EU) and other entities will help NATO to optimize high-end warfighting and collective defense. Clarity in the implementation of a comprehensive approach with European Union efforts, other international and intergovernmental organizations, and non-Naval maritime actors can strengthen NATO's strategic focus on deterrence and collective defense.

Years of coordination and deconfliction between EUNAVFOR Operation ATALANTA and NATO Operation Ocean Shield in counter-piracy efforts off East Africa provide lessons learned, including experience with institutionalizing structures and processes that have proven successful and will benefit NATO, EU, and others.[4] Another template for clarifying the comprehensive approach at sea may arise from ongoing Standing NATO Maritime Group-2 (SNMG-2) operations in the Aegean: from the outset, NATO identified intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), as well as information sharing to national and inter-governmental (i.e., EU FRONTEX) entities as its primary task.[5]

One quick way to clarify the comprehensive approach draws on October 2015 remarks at the Atlantic Council by Admiral Mark Ferguson, US Navy, Commander NATO Joint Forces Command Naples. Admiral Ferguson recommended "a voluntary SHADE-like organization." This invoked the Coalition Maritime Forces (CMF)-led

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4   EUNAVFOR or The European Union Naval Force (Op Atalanta) Somalia - Operation Atalanta was launched on 8 December 2008 and to protect humanitarian relief supplies, deter piracy, and support other EU initiatives off the coast of Somalia. For more details, see http://eunavfor.eu/mission.

5   EU FRONTEX: Frontex promotes, coordinates and develops European border management in line with the EU fundamental rights charter applying the concept of Integrated Border Management. Please see http://frontex.europa.eu/about-frontex/mission-and-tasks/.

Shared Awareness and De-confliction (SHADE) forum utilized in Gulf of Aden/Somali Basin counter-piracy operations. In this example, CMF, EUNAVFOR, and NATO operations can be de-conflicted with formalized and recurring coordination. Operators outside those organizations—variously including naval forces from the Russian Federation, China, and India—can also share awareness at the tactical level or in the more public forums at quarterly sessions.[6] The EU has now mirrored this in the Central Mediterranean, where EUNAVFOR MED has initiated a SHADE meeting for various entities concerned with migration issues and search and rescue, focused on Libya.

Conclusion

The task to address NATO's role in the maritime domain given the new security environment is urgent. While perhaps not as visible as the defense and deterrence and crisis management challenges found ashore, the contest and turbulence at sea is very real, and arguably even more decisive for Alliance security than at any point during the Cold War due, in part, to the shift in zones of friction.

A first step toward addressing the Alliance's interests and correcting shortfalls in the maritime domain would

be to formulate a new strategy for doctrine, planning, and training as outlined in this report. A new AMS would also help inform the larger NATO adaptation as the Alliance moves ahead on the recommendations from Wales. Updates to the Alliance Maritime Strategy must also feed the NATO Defense Planning Process to translate into concrete capabilities. Updated maritime concerns need to be expressed in NATO's Political Guidance as well.

An updated Alliance Maritime Strategy is not only a matter for NATO's coastal and maritime members. The sea touches all of NATO's members, even those with no salt-water coast line, either via global flows facilitated by the capability to operate successfully in the maritime domain, or through NATO's role in the full-spectrum defense and deterrence for all of its members. The global maritime domain will not only help shape the future of the transatlantic security environment, but also the global order moving forward. It is time for NATO to establish a road map for itself in this new maritime reality.

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6   "This unique gathering held quarterly allowed over 120 representatives from the commercial shipping industry sector, Military forces engaged in counter-piracy, Civilian and International representatives with a vested interest in the activities to prevent piracy activities to come together to discuss the latest developments in the fight against Somali based piracy." For further explanation of the quarterly sessions, see: Combined Maritime Forces, April 26, 2015, https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/2015/04/26/combined-maritime-forces-chairs-the-35th-shade-counter-piracy-conference/.

Atlantic Council