

SECURING THE COMMONS: Towards NATO's New Maritime Strategy

by Brooke SMITH-WINDSOR*

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A navy is a state's main instrument of maritime force. What it should do, what doctrine it holds, what ships it deploys, and how it fights are determined by practical political and military choices in relation to national needs.

George W. Baer,
*One Hundred Years of Sea Power*¹

Reminiscent of the late Cold War period, in recent years debate in official circles surrounding the purpose of Allied naval forces in transatlantic security policy has increasingly come to the fore. While in the mid-1980s preparations for the land campaign on the European Central Front dominated NATO military planning, the Soviet Union's emergent interest in becoming a powerful ocean-going nation with global reach cast new attention on the importance of securing the Alliance's maritime flanks in the event of conflict—notably the North Atlantic and Mediterranean.² In similar fashion, Afghanistan might be considered the contemporary "Central Front" preoccupying NATO strategists today. However, growing concern over piracy and the spectre of terrorism through the proliferation by sea of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), for example, has resulted in new missions for Allied naval forces.³ It has also meant greater interest in their future role. The



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¹ George W. Baer, *One Hundred Years of Sea Power: The US Navy, 1890-1990* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p.1.

² H.F. Zeiner-Gundersen et al., *NATO's Maritime Flanks: Problems and Prospects* (Washington DC: Pergamon Brassey's International Defense Publishers, 1987), esp. pp. v-x.

³ Launched pursuant to Article 5 of the Washington Treaty following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks against the United States, since 2003 *Operation ACTIVE ENDEAVOUR* has been an ongoing counter-proliferation surveillance and interdiction mission in the Mediterranean. (See: www.nato.int/shape) Beginning in 2008, pursuant to *United Nations Security Council Resolutions* (UNSCR) 1814, 1816 and 1838, NATO has been periodically engaged in counter-piracy missions in the Gulf of Aden and off the Horn of Africa. (For a history of recent international engagement in counter-piracy off the coast of Africa see: *The Role of the European Union in combating piracy*, Report submitted to the Assembly of the Western European Union, 04 June 2009, Document A/2037.)

remarks of the Head of Planning in NATO's Operations Division are indicative:

Globalization, the easing of movement across borders and the information revolution, means the world's oceans and seas have become an increasingly accessible environment for criminal activities. These range from illegal immigration, human trafficking, weapons smuggling, narcotics trafficking and piracy to terrorism and the proliferation of WMD and their means of delivery ... With this background, it is hardly a surprise that maritime security is steadily moving up on NATO's agenda.⁴

The result of such mounting NATO interest and activity in the maritime domain, not unexpectedly, has been calls to update the Alliance's 1984 *Maritime Strategy* and related doctrine. The Supreme Allied Commander Transformation has been at the forefront of these efforts as part of the recent *Multiple Futures Project* on NATO's future.⁵ Events culminated this spring when the North Atlantic Council (NAC) endorsed the development of a new *Maritime Security Operations Concept* (pending release at the time of writing) and a new *Alliance Maritime Strategy* (AMS) by early 2010.⁶

This paper aims to identify the underlying purpose behind recent NATO involvement in maritime security affairs; to offer a greater appreciation of what objective genuinely is at stake and why it is in the national interest of all Allies—whether in possession of coastline or not—to pursue it and to articulate it in the new AMS. In sum, it sets out to explain the enduring requirement for an Allied maritime strategy that underpins United States (US) *command of the commons*⁷—command of the sea, air and space above it—in order that they may continue to uphold the shared interests and val-

ues of the transatlantic democracies.

The first part of the paper is devoted to an assessment of current US naval strategy, particularly its adoption of a “comprehensive approach” to maritime security. This is followed by an examination of the related implications for the new AMS, and by extension European Union (EU) engagement in maritime security operations. The second part offers some perspectives on the process of developing the AMS. This includes its relationship to the enunciation of the Alliance's new *Strategic Concept*,⁸ as well as its communication to key constituencies.

US Command of the Commons

The seapower of a colossus

The US Navy (USN) is the largest in the world with a battle fleet tonnage greater than the next 13 biggest navies combined. Not to mention the two other sea services, the US Marine Corps and US Coast Guard, the USN operates close to 300 ships, more than 3,700 aircraft, the world's largest carrier fleet, and extensive international bases giving it unrivalled reach across the world's oceans that cover 70 percent of the globe.⁹ Such is the seapower of a 21st century colossus that accounts for nearly half of the world's military spending, greater than the next 46 highest spending nations combined.¹⁰ What this means in practice, even if perhaps seldom explicitly acknowledged, is that the US enjoys command of the global maritime commons.¹¹ Barry Posen argues that such command—the power to wield unmatched military might both at sea and ashore—is the foundation of US political pre-eminence and the key enabler of its

⁴ Diego A. Ruiz, “New operational horizons: NATO and maritime security”, *NATO Review*, (Winter 2007), available at: www.nato.int.

⁵ Supreme Allied Commander Transformation. *Multiple Futures – The Maritime Dimension*. Unclassified PowerPoint Presentation, Spring 2007, provided to the author. The *Multiple Futures Project* final report was published in April 2009 and explicitly calls for a new AMS. See: *Multiple Futures Project – Navigating Towards 2030*, (NATO, April 2009), p. 62.

⁶ The *Maritime Security Operations Concept* is intended to address some immediate doctrinal needs regarding maritime security operations pending the subsequent release of a new comprehensive maritime strategy.

⁷ For the purposes of this paper, the commons is understood to encompass the high seas as well as the “EEZ [Exclusive Economic Zone] where although a coastal state would possess the right to protect economic activities, it would lack the jurisdiction to regulate most other actors and activities from whence a threat may come.” (See: Stuart Kaye, “Threats from the global commons: problems of jurisdiction and enforcement” in *Melbourne Journal of International Law*, 8 (2007), available at: www.austlii.law.uts.edu.au). Barry P. Posen is the originator of the concept of US command of the commons. (See: Barry P. Posen, “Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of US Hegemony”, *International Security*, 28.1 (Summer 2003), pp. 5-46).

⁸ *Declaration on Alliance Security*, Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Strasbourg / Kehl on 04 April 2009, NATO Press Release (2009) 043. The new *Strategic Concept* is intended to be endorsed at the 2010 NATO summit expected next October.

⁹ See: www.navy.mil

¹⁰ Anup Shah, “World Military Spending”, *Global Issues*, (March 2009) available at: www.globalissues.org. Despite the current global economic downturn, the Obama administration recently sent Congress a \$663.8 billion defense spending request for 2010, including a 4 percent increase to the baseline budget. See: John T. Bennett, “Update: Pentagon Seeks \$533.8B for 2010 Baseline budget”, *Defense News*, (07 May 2009).

¹¹ Quoting Paul W. Kennedy, Barry Posen equates such command to “naval mastery,” “a situation in which a country has so developed its maritime strength that it is superior to any rival power, and that its predominance is or could be exerted far outside its home waters ...” See: Posen, op. cit., p.8.

post-Cold War foreign policy.¹² This includes the free market global economic system on which US and Western prosperity relies by providing the security to allow more than 80 percent of the world's trade to move, largely unhindered, by sea.

Adoption of a comprehensive approach

To understand how US command of the commons is maintained, it is insightful to turn to Geoffrey Till's discussion of contemporary maritime strategy, particularly "modern" and "post-modern" naval development.¹³ Modern navies, according to Till, reflect the Westphalian state system preoccupied with peer competition. In other words, "navies view each other as the benchmark for naval development" with the goal to always remain at least one technological step ahead of potential rivals (even allies), thus providing the option for unchallengeable unilateral action.¹⁴ Post-modern navies, on the other hand, are developed on the basis of an "internationalist, collaborative and almost collective world outlook" to ensure freedom of the seas and to cooperatively address threats ashore. In this context, the national navy is seen as one element of "a contributory strategy—the acceptance, in other words, that resource limitations mean no single nation can solve its security problems on its own, and that a collective maritime effort is required with all the loss of sovereignty that that implies."¹⁵ In current NATO parlance, the latter may be best understood as taking a comprehensive approach to maritime security where threats are mitigated or neutralized through the combined efforts of many nations and agencies marshalling both military and civilian resources in common cause.

An analysis of current US naval strategy¹⁶ reveals the presence of both developmental models with increased emphasis on a post-modern comprehensive approach—this arguably being reflective of the stated US belief that "preventing wars is as important as winning wars," thus calling for "continued peacetime engagement as much as preparations for "fighting and winning in combat."

Turning first to the modern USN, it is most evident in the discussion of the spectre of major conflict with any emergent challenger: "Maintenance and extension of this Nation's *comparative seapower advantage* is a key component of *detering major power war* [emphasis added]." It is also evident in the premium placed on ensuring such deterrence by protecting and extending the US advantage in *space* (i.e. satellites), and on:

- **Power Projection** – Our ability to overcome challenges to access and to project and sustain power ashore is the basis of our combat credibility. *Our advantages will be sustained* [emphasis added]; and
- **Sea Control** – We must be able to impose local sea control where necessary, ideally in concert with friends and allies, but *by ourselves if we must* [emphasis added].

As regards the post-modern USN, the very title of the 2007 strategy, *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*, is indicative of its ascendance. The fact that the strategy was for the first time in US history a collaborative initiative among the three sea services (Navy, Marines, Coast Guard) is equally so. The need for wider partnerships with military and non-military actors to safeguard US national security and prosperity in a "multi-polar world" receives much attention. This is particularly the case in addressing challenges such as regional conflict, terrorism, lawlessness and natural disasters—many of which are often transnational in nature.

*No one nation has the resources required to provide safety and security throughout the entire maritime domain. Increasingly, governments, non-governmental organizations, international organizations, and the private sector will form partnerships of common interest to counter these emerging threats.*¹⁷

As is acknowledged, such threats often emanate close to shore in the so-called littorals¹⁸ or in areas

¹² Posen, op. cit., p. 21.

¹³ Geoffrey Till, "Maritime Strategy in a Globalizing World", *Orbis*, 51.4 (Fall 2007), pp. 569-575.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 569-570.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 571-572.

¹⁶ *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*, (US Marine Corps, US Navy, US Coast Guard, October 2007).

¹⁷ Prior to 2007, such partnerships were regularly described in the context of building the "1000 [military and civilian] Ship Navy" or "Global Maritime Network". (See: John G. Morgan and Charles W. Martoglio, "The 1,000-Ship Navy Global Maritime Network", *Proceedings*, (November 2005), pp. 14-17.) Their growing importance was likewise officially acknowledged in the 2005 *International Outreach and Coordination Strategy for the National Strategy for Maritime Security*, (Washington DC: US Department of State, November 2005).

¹⁸ Defined as "the coastal sea areas and that portion of the land which is susceptible to influence or support from the sea, generally recognized as the region which horizontally encompasses the land-watermass interface from 100 kilometres ashore to 200 nautical miles at sea, and extending vertically into space from the bottom of the ocean and from the land surface." See: *Leadmark: The Navy's Strategy for 2020* (Ottawa: National Defence, June 2001), p. GL12.

others have chosen to describe as the world's "contested zones."¹⁹ While maritime terrorism and piracy, for instance, are of growing concern in some regions although still of marginal significance worldwide,²⁰ they can present even a Great Power like the US with some dependencies in countering them. For example, a degree of reliance on regional, local or commercial actors for intelligence. They also have the capacity to divert precious time and resources from other enduring missions such as deterring major power war and securing the US homeland closer to North American shores. The latter point becomes particularly salient in a time of global economic downturn.²¹ It should come as no surprise, therefore, that international cooperative initiatives which either enable US seapower, or lessen the burden placed upon it, have proliferated in recent years.

In terms of regional priorities, the US makes particular reference to Africa and the Western Hemisphere. With respect to means, a mix of alliance structures and more informal partnerships are to be leveraged, whether bilateral or multilateral. It is not the purpose of this paper to catalogue the plethora of initiatives underway. However, mentioning a few does indicate the scope of post-modern USN operations.

- **Combined Task Force 151** – Multinational counter-piracy naval task force operating in the Gulf of Aden and off the eastern coast of Somalia in cooperation with commercial shipping;²²
- **Africa Partnership Station** – US Sixth Fleet-led capacity building mission in maritime security and safety in West and Central Africa working with regional navies, coast guards and civil agencies;²³

- **Southern Partnership Station** – US Fourth Fleet-led capacity building mission in maritime security and safety in the Caribbean and Latin America working with regional navies, coast guards and civil agencies;²⁴
- **Proliferation Security Initiative** – US bilateral WMD interdiction ship boarding agreements with Liberia, Panama, the Marshall Islands, Croatia, Cyprus, Belize and Malta which account for some of the largest commercial shipping registries worldwide.²⁵

While US global maritime partnerships of the kind described above have grown in significance, it is important to acknowledge that they work only insofar as the other parties see it in their interest to pursue them as well—to secure regional peace and stability, for instance, or their stake in globalization by contributing to the freedom of the seas for state or private sector trade. They equally rely on at least a tacit level of comfort with helping to sustain the pre-eminence of US seapower. This reality has meant that not all cooperative initiatives have been as comprehensive as perhaps hoped, particularly with respect to parties that may not be integrated into the global economic system ("rogue states" as they are often labelled), or those that wish to check US power. Two examples are illustrative. First, both Iran and China oppose the previously mentioned *Proliferation Security Initiative*, questioning its legality. Second, consider *United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540* on the non-proliferation of WMD. China opposed the inclusion in the operative paragraph 3(c) of any reference to "interdiction", which had been included in the Group of 8 so-called *Kananaskis Principles* on which it was modelled.²⁶ It is arguable that in appreciating the inherent limitations

¹⁹ Posen, op. cit., esp. pp. 22-23, 36-42.

²⁰ Bjørn Møller argues that except for a few "pirate hotspots" "the risk of experiencing a pirate attack is actually minuscule, and most attacks are distinctly minor ... The average annual number of piracy attacks worldwide from 2003 to 2007 was 310." Maritime terrorism is similarly described as "so far ... a very minor problem" based on the available statistical data. See Bjørn Møller, "Piracy, maritime terrorism and naval strategy", *Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS) Report*, 2 (2009), esp. pp. 8-11, 23-25.

²¹ Even with recent increases to the US defence budget, the armed services face significant pressures. Indicative is the prescription for the USN of "tough choices and appetite suppression" as voiced by Admiral Gary Roughead, Chief of US Naval Operations. (See: Philip Ewing, "US Navy Operations Chief: Cutting Costs is Key", *Defense News*, (14 January 2009)). Furthermore, Derek Braddon argues that the full effects of the current global economic downturn on US and Western defense budgets will not be known until after 2010 with the potential for two grave scenarios: inflation crisis or global depression. In either case, defense spending would likely be an early casualty. (See: Derek Braddon, "What lies ahead? defence, budgets and the financial crisis", *NATO Review*, 4 (2009), available at: www.nato.int.)

²² See: www.cusnc.navy.mil/command/ctf151.

²³ See: www.africom.mil.

²⁴ See: www.southcom.mil. Both the *Southern and Africa Partnership Stations* are elements of the US *Global Fleet Station* initiative. See: Kathi A. Sohn, "The Global Fleet Station: A Powerful Tool for Preventing Conflict", *Naval War College Review*, 62.1 (Winter 2009), pp. 46-58.

²⁵ Douglas Guilfoyle, "Maritime Interdiction of Weapons of Mass Destruction", *Journal of Conflict and Security Law*, 12.1 (2007), pp. 1-36. The bilateral agreements were made pursuant to Article 4.c of the Interdiction Principles for the Proliferation Security Initiative, (Washington DC: Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation, September 2003).

²⁶ Guilfoyle, op. cit., pp. 10-15.

of, and risks in over reliance on maritime partnerships, the US seapower strategy situates alliances ahead of them. Indeed, in perhaps the boldest recognition that “allied blood is thicker than partner water,” NATO, uniquely, is singled out for special mention. The following section offers some reflections on what this arguably should mean for the 28 transatlantic democracies as they develop their new maritime strategy for the 21st century.

Implications for the Atlantic Alliance

In view of the sustained vital importance to the US of the transatlantic relationship in the maritime domain, the reciprocity that characterized it during the Cold War should again be underscored in any future AMS. In other words, it should acknowledge the US commitment to continue to underwrite (with Canada’s support)²⁷ the defence and security of Europe at and from the sea. By the same token, it should reinforce the commitment of the European Allies to in turn provide adequate naval resources (i.e. basing, capabilities) in that common cause and as a central plank in underpinning US command of the commons. For the Allies, such a supported and supporting relationship should be unreservedly embraced as being fundamental to securing the prosperity of some of the richest economies in the world, not to mention other collective goods such as largely unhindered world travel and global telecommunications. Where shared interests are not at stake, shared values should equally be emphasized as a key driver behind the relationship. Indeed, the US seapower strategy positions the mitigation of human suffering through humanitarian assistance and disaster response at the “vanguard” of its multinational maritime security efforts. The new AMS, articulated by the world’s leading democracies, should be no different.

Furthermore, in underscoring the importance of the transatlantic relationship in the maritime domain, it would only make sense that the AMS guide future Allied naval development on the basis of the US paradigm. In other words, it should espouse an appropriate mix of modern and post-modern approaches to address the panoply of contemporary threats to

Alliance security. The modern approach should prevail in supporting the US in deterring major power war through a combination of conventional and nuclear sea-based forces in the context of the Alliance’s core mission of collective defence. As in the Cold War, here the focus is surely likely to remain the defence of “NATO-Europe” with Canada and the US largely dealing with the defence of North America on a bilateral basis.²⁸ In this regard, the recent extension of the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD) agreement to encompass bilateral integrated surveillance of North America’s maritime approaches and internal waterways is informative.²⁹ So too is the fact that the aforementioned *Multiple Futures Project* final report makes just one passing reference to “NATO-Pacific” geography with no specific recommendations for the Allied defence thereof.³⁰

Adopting the newer post-modern comprehensive approach to underpin US command of the commons should also profile significantly in the new AMS. Here the emphasis should be on working with partner militaries and civilian agencies in:

- **Crisis Response Operations** (e.g. disaster response);
- **Consultation and Cooperation** (e.g. capacity building, naval diplomacy); and
- **Maritime Security Operations** (e.g. counter-piracy, WMD interdiction).

In each area, there are already sufficient precedents from which to chart the way ahead. For instance, regarding crisis response, consider the 2005 NATO support operation in which more than 20 Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) countries coordinated the delivery of relief supplies by sea and air to the US in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.³¹ With respect to consultation and cooperation, it is widely recognized that, combat capability notwithstanding, warships have symbolic value in that they are legal extensions of their parent states. The presence of a warship is a clear signal of the interest or

²⁷ Although not widely known, Canada is one of the few nations to operate a medium global force projection navy; “one that may not possess the full range of capabilities, but which has a credible capacity in certain of them and consistently demonstrates a determination to exercise them at some distance from home waters.” See: *Leadmark*, op. cit., pp. 43-45.

²⁸ For the historical context behind this approach see: Samantha Arnold and Stéphane Roussel, “Expanding the Canada-US Security Regime to the North?” in *Security Prospects in the High North, geostrategic thaw or freeze?* (Rome: NATO Defense College, May 2009), pp. 58-80.

²⁹ Daniel Hamilton et al., *Alliance Reborn: An Atlantic Compact for the 21st Century*, (Washington DC: Atlantic Council of the United States et al., February 2009), p. 29.

³⁰ *Multiple Futures Project*, op. cit., p. 53.

³¹ See: www.nato.int/shape

concern of a state—or group of states in the case of a multinational force—about a situation.³² Combined exercises with other navies and coast guards can also serve to strengthen relationships and build capacity with partner countries. A recent example is NATO's Standing Naval Maritime Group 1's (SNMG 1) 2007 circumnavigation of Africa, which included exercises with the South African Navy.³³ Lastly, concerning maritime security activities, perhaps best known are NATO's ongoing counter-piracy operations off the Horn of Africa (*Operation ALLIED SHIELD*, formerly *ALLIED PROTECTOR*)³⁴ and counter-proliferation surveillance and interdiction operations in the Mediterranean (*Operation ACTIVE ENDEAVOUR*).³⁵ As regards establishing future regional priorities for such missions, these will undoubtedly be driven by NATO's overarching policy concerns as well as naval capabilities. With a view to policy, the geographic scope of NATO's *Partnership for Peace* (PfP), *Mediterranean Dialogue* (MD) and *Istanbul Cooperation Initiative* (ICI) programs should aid in setting some parameters. In terms of capabilities, the wide variance across Allied navies will be delimiting (nothing to say of the ever present challenge to agree common rules of engagement concerning their use). For example, the US aside, among the Allies only Britain and France may be said to possess a partial major global force projection navy.³⁶ In this regard, France's return in 2009 to NATO's military command structure warrants particular mention. Given the French navy's long and notable history of global engagement and capacity building in regions such as Africa,³⁷ reintegration should only serve to bolster NATO's international efforts in maritime security. As the new French Commander of Joint Command (JC) Lisbon, Lieutenant-General Philippe Stoltz, recently remarked:

I am humbled for having been given the privilege to serve as part of this transatlantic team... I pledge

*my best efforts to pursue even further the goals of the Alliance. We have much to do at an interesting and challenging time for the Alliance. In our special role looking South, leading the NATO counter piracy mission, in support of the African Union Mission in Somalia, and other troubled areas ... [sic.]*³⁸

Implications for the European Union

Considering that the majority of NATO Allies are member states of the EU as well, it is worthwhile to also reflect on the Union's unprecedented counter-piracy and escort operations in the Gulf of Aden (*Operation ATALANTA*).³⁹ For the purposes of this paper, two points in particular deserve mention. First, just as with other multinational maritime security operations of like-minded nations, they serve an important role in lessening the burden on US naval forces. This can be particularly significant when especially proficient non-NATO European navies wish to contribute to securing the commons (such as is the case with Sweden and *Operation ATALANTA*), or when EU-flagged warships might be more politically acceptable to regional or local actors. The fact that (at the time of writing) the EU and NATO are conducting concurrent maritime security operations off the coast of Somalia is not indicative of a competitive "beauty contest" between the two organizations, contrary to what one European commentator recently suggested.⁴⁰ Whether publicly acknowledged or not, it is reflective of a practical choice of Western states to employ their naval assets in a variety of ways based on the enduring individual national need to support the US in safeguarding the global commons.⁴¹ Second, for the foreseeable future, EU naval operations providing such support can be expected to fall within the realm of post-modern maritime security missions, and not modern preparations for collective defence. With regard to the latter, the (still unratified) *Lisbon*

³² Leadmark, op. cit., p. 32.

³³ See: www.manw.nato.int/page~news_archive_2007.aspx

³⁴ See: www.manw.nato.int

³⁵ See: www.nato.int/shape

³⁶ Leadmark, op.cit., pp. 43-45. Irrespective of current capabilities, it is also important to acknowledge that in future increased budgetary pressures may lead to calls for greater role specialization on the part of some Allied navies to enable a more efficient division of labour in the conduct of prioritized missions. See: Braddon, op. cit.

³⁷ Since 1999, for example, the French Navy has had a permanent presence in the Gulf of Guinea as part of the so-called *Missions Corymbes*. For an overview of recent French naval activities see: *French Navy Information File 2008* (Paris: Ministère de la Défense, Marine Française, 2008).

³⁸ Remarks by Lieutenant-General Philippe Stoltz at the JC Lisbon change of command ceremony, 20 July 2009, available at: www.jhnb.nato.int. JC Lisbon currently holds responsibility for the aforementioned counter-piracy operation *ALLIED SHIELD*.

³⁹ See: www.consilium.europa.eu

⁴⁰ Comments at the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) conference on *The Resurgence of Sea Piracy: Legal, Political & Security Aspects*, Rome, 16 June 2009.

⁴¹ The EU is one of six international organizations, including NATO, participating in the *Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia*. The Group was formed as an international cooperation mechanism against piracy, as called for in UNSCR 1851, which was sponsored by the US. Additional background to the initiative is available at: www.america.gov

Treaty suggests that NATO will remain the forum of choice in readying European naval forces for any major war.⁴² Furthermore, “the creation of a ‘European [Union] navy’ integrating all the member states’ navies is definitely not on the agenda.”⁴³

Accomplishing NATO’s New Maritime Strategy

Alliance Maritime Strategy and the new Strategic Concept

Having discussed the fundamental premise of the new AMS, this paper now offers some perspectives on how its development might proceed. As previously referenced, the Alliance has initiated the articulation of a new *Strategic Concept* to be released at the next NATO summit expected in autumn 2010. If the current 1999 iteration is any indication, the new one will endeavour to “guide the Alliance as it pursues its agenda” including:

- expressing NATO’s enduring purpose and nature and its fundamental security tasks;
- identifying the central features of the new security environment;
- specifying the elements of the Alliance’s broad approach to security; and
- providing guidelines for the further adaptation of its military forces.⁴⁴

Recent remarks by the NATO Secretary General would indeed suggest that this will be the case.⁴⁵ If so, the new *Strategic Concept* is perhaps best understood as a forthcoming version of what

sometimes is referred to as “major” or “grand strategy,” melding policy with overarching guidance for the coordination of military means to achieve it.⁴⁶ Its contents, therefore, will undoubtedly carry significant implications for the employment of Allied naval forces, just as it will for the future use of NATO land and air forces. It is somewhat puzzling, then, why the new AMS is targeted for release just months ahead of the new *Strategic Concept*. In the interest of strategic consistency, it would appear more sensible to wait until after autumn 2010. As this paper has made abundantly clear, while the core elements of the future AMS are well known and should allow its development to begin, there remain some unanswered questions that only the *Strategic Concept* deliberations can serve to definitively clarify (e.g. regional priorities such as the High North).⁴⁷ In this context, consider the aforementioned US seapower strategy. It specifically notes that it takes guidance from the higher umbrella US strategies, including the *National Security Strategy* and the *National Defense Strategy*. A similar methodology on the part of the Alliance would be advisable.⁴⁸

An additional remark concerning terminology is also warranted. Irrespective of release dates, if the two documents are published as currently envisioned, the Alliance risks being placed in a precarious situation—one suggesting that the 28 Allies have only a vague notion (concept) about strategic priorities, yet a clear plan (strategy) for the future employment of their naval assets. For the most powerful political-military alliance in history, the optics arguably would not bode well. Surely the time has come for the transatlantic Heads of State and Government to have the fortitude and clarity of purpose to name the outcome of their deliberations on NATO’s future, a strategy as well.⁴⁹

⁴² The related provisions read: “Commitments and cooperation in this area shall be consistent with commitments under the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which, for those States which are members of it, remains the foundation of their collective defence and the forum for its implementation” in *Treaty of Lisbon amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community*, signed at Lisbon, 13 December 2007 (*Official Journal of the European Union*, 2007/C 306/01), p. 35.

⁴³ Basil Germond, “The Naval and Maritime Dimension of the European Union”, *Paper delivered at the conference “The EC/EU: a world security actor? An assessment after 50 years of the external actions of the EC/EU”*, (European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), Paris, 14-15 September 2006).

⁴⁴ *The Alliance’s Strategic Concept*, 24 April 1999, para. 5, available at: www.nato.int

⁴⁵ Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, *Launching NATO’s New Strategic Concept - Introductory remarks by NATO Secretary General at the opening of the Strategic Concept conference*, 7 July 2009; and Anders Fogh Rasmussen, *First NATO Press Conference by Secretary General*, 3 August 2009, both available at: www.nato.int

⁴⁶ For a discussion of the origins of grand strategy see: Hew Strachan, “The Lost Meaning of Strategy”, *Survival*, 47.3 (Autumn 2005), pp. 33-54.

⁴⁷ For a discussion of potential security challenges in the Arctic region see: Sven G. Holtmark, “Towards cooperation or confrontation? Security in the High North”, *NATO Defense College Research Paper*, 45 (February 2009).

⁴⁸ Quoting Samuel Huntington, Roger Barnett similarly underscores the importance of such an approach to the successful development of naval strategy. See: Roger Barnett, “Strategic Culture and its Relationship to Naval Strategy”, *Naval War College Review*, 60.1 (Winter 2007), pp. 24-34.

⁴⁹ Strategy may be defined as “the bridge between military operations and policy—the conscious consideration of effectively utilizing military forces (in war and peace) to achieve national objectives.” See: Timothy D. Hoyt, “The United States and Maritime Strategy: A Parochial View from the US Naval War College”, *Orbis*, 51.4 (Fall 2007), pp. 577-584.

Winning the battle of the narrative

The previously cited *Multiple Futures Project* final report places considerable emphasis on NATO “winning the battle of the narrative.” In other words:

The Alliance will need to develop coherent messages and an engagement strategy that both reflect its strategic goals and support its core values, ideas, missions and operations. This... will help foster broad public and governmental understanding of NATO’s roles and why it needs to develop, manage and deploy robust civil and military capabilities.

The importance of communicating NATO’s purpose and operational commitments, not only domestically, but internationally as well, is likewise underscored.⁵⁰ Such observations are particularly applicable to the development of the new AMS. Indeed, however creative the strategy may prove to be, it will only be effective if it has the support of those charged to execute it, and pay for it. In this regard, it is possible to identify four key constituencies that must be taken into careful consideration when developing and subsequently communicating the new AMS.⁵¹

- **Sailors** - Any new maritime strategy must be written and conveyed in a fashion that resonates with the sailors, marines, airmen and airwomen who will be principally charged with its implementation. It should provide them with clear purpose and inspiration in the fulfillment of their duties. And it should be consonant with what Roger Barnett aptly refers to as “navy strategic culture;”⁵²
- **Other Services** - The remaining armed services—namely Allied land and air forces—must equally be taken into account. They too must be convinced of the value of the AMS understanding how it reinforces their strategies and the joint execution of Alliance missions. Any semblance of privileged status for maritime forces—conveyed either in the AMS text or timing of its publication—should be guarded against to avoid any risk of destructive inter-service rivalry;
- **Allied Publics** - The purpose of the AMS must be

clearly imparted to Allied publics—why their way of life depends on it, how their values will be upheld by it, in short, why it is worth their investment. Allied governments should be bold in explaining the distinctive supported and supporting relationship they enjoy with the world’s Great Power in safeguarding the commons;

- **International Community** - The wider international community must be addressed. Friends and partners, both civilian and military, should be encouraged to see their place in the AMS in order that they may share in the collective goods to be secured by it. And foes and would-be aggressors also need to be made keenly aware of it—to understand that the community of transatlantic democracies will hold firm in neutralizing any threat to the peace and security of the commons on which their interests and values rest.

Concluding Remarks

In the darkest days of the Second World War, the Allies set forth their vision for the peace that would follow—a peace that “should enable all men to traverse the high seas and oceans without hindrance.”⁵³ For the better part of 60 years since the inception of the Atlantic Alliance that vision has been realized, but not without challengers, and not without sacrifice. As this paper makes clear, the peace and security of the global maritime commons is not self sustaining. This was true throughout the Cold War, and it will be the case in the next 60 years and thereafter. In the future, to be sustained, the security of the commons will continue to rely in the first order on the pre-eminence of US seapower. It will also call for a mix of traditional and post-modern comprehensive approaches to address, at and from the sea, an array of threats on and beyond the horizon. And it will most certainly require the enduring support of the Allies working together in a variety of forums—alongside old and new partners, military and civilian alike—but most significantly within NATO. This is the shared purpose that the new *Alliance Maritime Strategy*, properly timed, must guide and communicate.

⁵⁰ *Multiple Futures Project*, op. cit., pp. 63-64.

⁵¹ This section is based in part on observations by James Kurth regarding constituencies central to the development of US maritime strategy. See: James Kurth, “The New Maritime Strategy: Confronting Peer Competitors, Rogue States, and Transnational Insurgents”, *Orbis*, 51.4 (Fall 2007), pp. 585-600.

⁵² Five characteristics are identified. Barnett, op. cit., p. 25.

⁵³ *Atlantic Charter - Declaration of Principles issued by the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom*, 14 August 1941, available at: www.nato.int