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Exercise Solo Flight

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Lieutenant-Commander Emily Salzer

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THE ROLE OF NAVAL FORCES IN MULTINATIONAL OPERATIONS: RELEVANT AND EFFECTIVE?

Introduction

Water accounts for seventy percent of Earth's surface area and is essential to the life and prosperity of the global population. Currently, ninety percent of all goods travel by sea and, still, maritime commerce is expected to double within the next decade.¹ Moreover, the seabed is a vast and largely untapped source of natural resources that are likely to become more sought after as land-based natural resources are expended. So, while the seas are no longer a main mode of transportation nor a field for pitched battles, they are still a place where economic, political and military activities occur and a domain from which to build and exhibit national power. Indeed, waterways remain prominent in political considerations across the spectrum of Diplomatic, Informational, Military and Economic power (DIME). Moreover, maritime considerations seem to be growing in political significance, and it is expected that they will increase in importance throughout the century; a naval resurgence of sorts.² According to experts in the field, the maritime world will be almost unrecognizable as early as 2030 due to the rise of emerging countries, new consumer classes, and resource demands; it is expected that claims by countries to control maritime spaces contrary to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) will challenge the existing freedom of navigation and

¹ Department of National Defence, *Leadmark 2050: Canada in a New Maritime World*, Ottawa: National Defence, 2017, 2.

² Lombardi, Ben Lombardi, Defence Research and Development Canada, *The Future Maritime Operating Environment and the Role of Naval Power*, Scientific Report: DRDC-RDDC-2016-R085, Ottawa: National Defence, 2016, i.

maritime world order.³ This in turn questions the continued relevancy and efficacy of contemporary naval warfare strategy.

The terms “naval warfare” or “naval power” may still conjure images of ships firing upon ships or searching for and sinking submarines, such as what occurred during the Battle of the Atlantic or in *The Hunt for Red October*.⁴ However, it has been seventy years since the last sea battles of this kind. Nevertheless, Canada’s maritime forces have contributed to three major joint and multinational campaigns since the end of the cold war; notably, as the first military assets deployed by Canada in each instance.⁵ However, naval power is more than just combat power, it is a component of the combined power of a nation. It is a tool of statecraft and diplomacy and proof of the ability to project power beyond one’s own territory.⁶ Moreover, “there is a dexterity in the maritime domain...that is not necessarily present in the land and air environments.”⁷ Naval power has “strategic utility” in that it can play a role across all spectrums of DIME, and it provides political freedom of manoeuvre as warships can swing between roles and postures as circumstances arise or conflicts evolve.⁸

Currently, naval operations are primarily thought of in a multinational context as there is almost always a shared interest in peaceful international relations. Multinational alliances come in many sizes, cover many geographical region and are known under

³ Lloyds Register Group, *Global Marine Trends 2030*, accessed on 15 April 2022, 50, <https://www.lr.org/en/insights/global-marine-trends-2030/>.

⁴ <https://www.tribute.ca/movies/the-hunt-for-red-october/5456/>

⁵ Operation FRICTION in the Persian Gulf 1990-91, Operation APOLLO in Afghanistan 2001-3, and Operation MOBILE/UNIFIED PROTECTOR in Libya 2011.

⁶ Lombardi, DRDC, *The Future Maritime Operating Environment and the Role of Naval Power*, 69.

⁷ Martin Ewence, “Steady Strategy, Contingent Capability: NATO Tackles Emerging Maritime Challenges and Increasing Instability,” *Janes Navy International*, (August 2014), 12, <https://customer-janes-com.cfc.idm.oclc.org/Janes/Display/jni76439-jni-2014>.

⁸ *Leadmark 2050*, 20.

many names: coalition, partnership, treaty and mutual defence pact, to name a few. These alliances can be time-limited to address a single issue or enduring, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and its Collective Defence of Member States. Of note, for NATO, “naval power has historically been a defining feature of the Alliance.”⁹ It is also essential to make a distinction between the different types of multinational operations: cooperative operations are where friendly nations operate in the *same area* but pursue national objectives, coordinated operations are where forces are allocated tasks within a *coordinated plan*, and combined forces are *fully integrated* into a unified force under a single command structure.¹⁰

The aim of this paper is to examine the naval component of multinational operations through the lens of its employment during the most recent multinational joint operation with a significant naval contribution, Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR (OUP). Furthermore, with a focus on the current NATO Allied Maritime Strategy (AMS), it will argue that although the strategic options naval forces provide to alliance operations remain relevant, existing and evolving challenges may impact the efficacy of naval intervention. While not strictly Canadian in focus, this paper makes observations relevant to Canada’s employment of naval power.

Operation Unified Protector and its application of naval power

⁹ Bryan McGrath, “NATO at Sea: Trends in Allied Naval Power”, *American Enterprise Institute*, No. 3 (September 2013), 1, <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/nato-at-sea-trends-in-allied-naval-power/>.

¹⁰ Eric Grove, “Naval Operations: The Multinational Dimension,” *Janes Navy International* (January 1995), <https://customer-janes-com.cfc.idm.oclc.org/Janes/Display/jni00347-jni-1995>. *I acknowledge the age of this article but it still presented some valid information.

In the early months of 2011, the world decided to intervene in Libya, where civil war was quickly developing into a “gross and systemic violation of human rights” under the regime of Muammar Gaddafi.¹¹ NATO leadership and Defence Ministers from around the globe were meeting to discuss possible responses to the crisis, and nations were making arrangements to evacuate non-combatants; Canada did so under Operation MOBILE starting on 25 February.¹² Based on these early discussions and the deteriorating conditions in Libya, UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1973 was adopted on 17 March 2011, invoking Chapter VII of the UN Charter. To enforce the demands of the resolution, centred on the requirement for Libyan authorities to comply with international and humanitarian law, Member States were authorized to take “all necessary measures” to protect civilians.¹³ Specifically, the resolution authorized the enforcement of a no-fly zone over Libyan airspace, the enforcement of the arms embargo established in an earlier resolution (Resolution 1970), and actions to protect civilians from attack.¹⁴ NATO was anticipating leading the operation from the outset, however, differing opinions on the tactics to be used to enforce the no-fly zone delayed NATO’s development of Rules of Engagement (ROEs) and their assumption of command for the overall mission.¹⁵ Although it added complexity to the early days of the Libyan conflict, it must be noted that the delay in reaching consensus was significantly shorter than in

¹¹ United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1970 (26 February 2011), UN Doc S/RES/1970, 1, <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1970>.

¹² Government of Canada, Operation MOBILE, last updated 22 January 2014, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/military-perations/recently-completed/operation-mobile.html>.

¹³ United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1973 (17 March 2011), UN Doc S/RES/1973, 1, <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1973>.

¹⁴ UNSC Resolution 1973, 2-3.

¹⁵ Karin Wester, “Operation Unified Protector, NATO, and the UN,” Chapter 7 In *Intervention in Libya: The Responsibility to Protect in North Africa*, 213–51. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020, 216.

previous NATO responses.¹⁶

While NATO worked on gaining accord, ten nations, including Canada, commenced joint combat action on 19 March 2011 as an international coalition under the lead of US Africa Command.¹⁷ Naval forces were on station quickly due to a simple reassignment of vessels from Standing NATO Maritime Group (SNMG) 1 and Standing NATO Mine Counter-Measure Group (SNMCMG) 1 which were already employed within their standard patrol zones in the Mediterranean; additional alliance vessels joined these standing naval forces throughout the operation. Air operations commenced with kinetic action led by the US, UK and France. On 23 March, NATO Allied Maritime Command (MC Naples) took full command of the arms embargo and international naval assets. By 31 March, the sole command of *all* international operations in Libya transitioned to NATO and was conducted as Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR (OUP) under the command of Canadian Lieutenant General Charles Bouchard.¹⁸ The operation continued until 31 October 2011, when NATO deemed the operation complete following the death of Muammar Gaddafi and thus the end of the regime of concern. The combined forces quickly returned to their respective nations or standard SNMG patrol zones; any follow-on stability or reconstruction activity in Libya was left to UN-led operations and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs).¹⁹

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 217.

¹⁷ Government of Canada, Operation MOBILE.

¹⁸ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR Final Mission Stats, last updated on 02 November 2011, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2011_11/20111108_111107-factsheet_up_factsfigure.pdf

¹⁹ Florence Gaub, "The North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Libya: Reviewing Operation Unified Protector", *The Letort Papers* (June 2013), Strategic Studies Institute: US Army War College Press, 27, <https://permanent.fdlp.gov/websites/ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/download.cfm-q=1161.pdf>.

With 19 nations participating, although some in non-kinetic roles, OUP was called the “mightiest military alliance in history” by the US Secretary of Defense.²⁰ And, while considered by some as a primarily air operation, naval forces arguably provided a crucial strategic advantage to the operation. Foremost amongst the naval role, the UN arms embargo was assigned to the maritime component and warships patrolled approaches to Libyan Territorial waters from 19 March with the mission to “prevent the flow of arms, related materiel and mercenaries to Libya”.²¹ Twelve nations provided a total of 21 naval assets that included a variety of warships, aircraft carriers, supply ships, submarines, and amphibious landing platforms; Canada provided two Canadian Patrol Frigates (CPFs).²² Although a relatively small force based on the sheer size of the blockade area, with roughly 1500 kilometres of Libyan coastline and 250,000 square kilometres of sea, NATO achieved and maintained naval superiority throughout the operation.²³ As it was clearly not possible to blockade all routes to Libya, “trip wire” patrol zones were assigned to cut off the quickest, most accessible, and straightest routes.²⁴ The process for the blockade was quite simple: all merchant traffic entering the embargo zone was required to radio MC Naples and any ship hailed by a NATO vessel was required to provide satisfactory information about their cargo or activities. NATO ships were authorized to intercept and board if satisfactory responses were not received; 3100 vessels were hailed and around 300 vessels were boarded during OUP.²⁵

²⁰ Wester, “Operation Unified Protector, NATO, and the UN,” 226.

²¹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR NATO Arms Embargo against Libya, Fact Sheet 23 March 2011, https://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2011_03/unified-protector-arms-embargo-factsheet.pdf.

²² NATO OUP Arms Embargo Fact Sheet.

²³ Gaub, “The North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Libya: Reviewing Operation Unified Protector”, 14.

²⁴ NATO OUP Arms Embargo Fact Sheet.

²⁵ NATO OUP Arms Embargo Fact Sheet.

Additionally, naval assets provided intelligence, surveillance and recognizance (ISR) coverage of the coastline and warned off inbound and outbound vessels.²⁶ The information gleaned from these activities was layered with information from open sources (such as AIS Marine), radar, and electro optics to provide the most comprehensive domain awareness possible. This combination of blockade processes were employed for the entirety of OUP.

While the embargo was the primary maritime role, naval assets were utilized for other purposes throughout the operation. First, some nations used deployed vessels to evacuate entitled persons (EP) and non-combatants.²⁷ Next came kinetic action with 110 Tomahawk cruise missiles launched ashore from surface ships and submarines paired with surgical airstrikes launched from carriers.²⁸ These actions were at the forefront of the initial military effort to neutralize Libyan air defences. Later, the sonar of NATO submarines was used to monitor the movements of Libyan Special Forces to forewarn of any attacks against NATO vessels, an innovative usage of submarines first employed during OUP.²⁹ There was also an important role for Mine Counter-measures during OUP due to the mining of Misrata, a strategic location for humanitarian assistance operations, in April 2011.³⁰ Mine Counter Measures Vessels (MCMVs) from several nations operated close inshore to clear the mines and prevent further mining of approaches to

²⁶ Luca Peruzzi, "Interview: Vice Admiral Rinaldo Veri, Commander NATO HQ Allied Maritime Command, Naples", *Janes International Defence Review* (November 2011), <https://customer-janes-com.cfc.idm.oclc.org/Janes/Display/idr14438-idr-2011>.

²⁷ Dave Slogget, "A Unified Approach: How Naval Agility Helped Win in Libya", *Janes Navy International* (March 2012), <https://customer-janes-com.cfc.idm.oclc.org/Janes/Display/jni74917-jni-2012>.

²⁸North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR Final Mission Stats, last updated on 02 November 2011, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2011_11/20111108_111107-factsheet_up_factsfigure.pdf.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Wester, 220.

strategic ports.³¹ Naval assets were also employed in psychological operations (PSYOPS), broadcasting messages to vessels operating in the embargo area and by ensuring NATO ships operated close inland to be at all times visible to regime forces and Libyan civilians. And, while not an assigned task specific to OUP, during their time in the operations area, NATO vessels rescued over 600 migrants in distress at sea as part of their responsibility under the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS).³²

Another key aspect of the naval operations during OUP was the fact that NATO ships were fired upon, including HMCS Charlottetown (CHA). For Canada, this was the first time since the Korean War.³³ The warships faced threats from ashore, including artillery and anti-aircraft cannon fire and 122mm rockets launched from beaches. Tactical innovation was used during these skirmishes with naval helicopters employed as spotters for returning naval gunfire.³⁴ Additionally, some vessels, again including CHA, faced fast small boat attacks, which is the closest thing to a “naval battle” most NATO nations have faced this century.³⁵ NATO also neutralized other threats with naval gunnery including preventing Libyan naval assets from adding to the conflict and firing inland at the rebels in Misrata³⁶.

The maritime domain of OUP experienced some “wins” that make the operation worthy of study. First, there was effective coordination and collaboration between naval

³¹ Slogget, “A Unified Approach: How Naval Agility Helped Win in Libya.”

³² Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR Final Mission Stats.

³³ Government of Canada, Operation MOBILE.

³⁴ Slogget, “A Unified Approach: How Naval Agility Helped Win in Libya.”

³⁵ Eva Hoare, “Canadian Ship Fends off Attack by Libyan Boats,” *Winnipeg Free Press* (13 May 2011), <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/canada/canadian-ship-fends-off-attack-by-libyan-boats-121764844.html>.

³⁶ Slogget. “A Unified Approach: How Naval Agility Helped Win in Libya.”

and air forces, for ISR and targeting for naval gunnery.³⁷ Additionally, OUP saw NATO working closely with industry “to ensure the flow of legit commercial and private shipping to Libya continues unimpeded” resulting in up to 10,000 vessels a day being tracked through open-source programs.³⁸ NATO also exercised means to combine and analyze information from various tracking databases to improve their ability to identify threats in near-real time.³⁹ The utility of naval gunnery was reaffirmed, as was the ability of warships to swing between a variety of different roles to project soft and hard power. However, the operation was not without its challenges. In the maritime domain, there was a lack of robust intelligence and cultural knowledge on Libya, exacerbated by the short planning window, which was especially challenging at the beginning of the operation when nations were working in isolation to locate evacuees and to identify targets.⁴⁰ This lack of intelligence was mitigated as the mission lasted but the naval forces were challenged throughout with a lack of coordination and cohesive intelligence, specifically about conditions and threats ashore.⁴¹ Some of this stemmed from a shortage of Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) assigned to NATO which meant there were gaps in coverage within the larger embargo area.⁴² And perhaps the greatest source of tension for the naval forces was a lack of munitions combined with numerous national caveats that meant a

³⁷ Khalisa Huseynova, “Operation Unified Protector: Strategic Lessons Learnt”, *The Atlantic Forum* (March 2021), <https://www.atlantic-forum.com/content/operation-unified-protector-strategic-lessons-learnt>.

³⁸ Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR Final Mission Stats.

³⁹ Luca Peruzzi, “Interview: Vice Admiral Rinaldo Veri, Commander NATO HQ Allied Maritime Command, Naples.”

⁴⁰ Slogget, “A Unified Approach: How Naval Agility Helped Win in Libya.”

⁴¹ Wester, 216.

⁴² Slogget, “A Unified Approach: How Naval Agility Helped Win in Libya.”

few nations, namely the UK, France, and the US, had to shoulder the burden for kinetic naval effects.⁴³

Although the maritime domain was relatively insulated from criticism, it must be noted that OUP was a controversial operation. It was deemed by some critics to be a “war of choice” versus a “war of necessity”, specifically, that Responsibility to Protect (R2P) was utilized to enforce a regime change.⁴⁴ NATO was also accused of cultural and situational blindness in the region which led to a protracted conflict and a contentious and unconfirmed number of civilian casualties.⁴⁵ With OUP lasting more than twice as long as expected, there was tension between Member States regarding higher than anticipated costs and unequal burden sharing.⁴⁶ The perhaps most lasting black spot on the operation is the fall-out from NATO’s rapid withdrawal from the region despite requests by the Libyan National Transitional Council (NTC) for NATO to remain longer in certain roles. Although the intentions of the NTC remain in question, the lack of NATO contribution to post-conflict stabilization is deemed a direct contributor to the resulting instability and refugee crisis.⁴⁷ As a result, although deemed a military success, much of the OUP mission remains controversial.

Current naval strategy

Despite the controversies surrounding the operation itself, OUP effectively validated many aspects of contemporary naval strategy and the versatility of naval power.

⁴³ Wester, 226.

⁴⁴ Ibeh Moses Chigozie, “Libya: The Moral Permissibility of ‘Operations Unified Protector’,” accessed on 27 April 2022, <https://www.e-ir.info/2014/01/25/libya-the-moral-permissibility-of-operation-unified-protector/>.

⁴⁵ Gaub, 17, Webster 226.

⁴⁶ Wester, 226.

⁴⁷ Gaub, 27.

Additionally, OUP is likely indicative of the complexity of future multinational operations: geographically outside traditional operations area, with split or multiple mandates, and reliance on front-line and kinetic capabilities not universally available to participating Member States. This section will first summarize the basics of naval power and what it delivers in the contemporary environment. Then, focusing on NATO as the multinational organization with the most formalized doctrine and frequently employed naval forces, it will discuss the key principles of naval strategy in multinational operations and the effects of the evolving geopolitical environment.

No discussion of naval strategy is complete without looking to the preeminent naval scholars, Corbett and Mahan⁴⁸. While both had differing opinions and definitions of what constituted “sea (or naval) power,” they both agreed on several points. First, that a fleet is a tool for both political and military leadership, meaning that a navy can be used for means other than combat and needs to be looked at in a broader national security context.⁴⁹ Next, they agree that the primary goal of naval forces is always to gain command of the sea; in the words of Corbett, “the object of naval warfare must always be directly or indirectly either to secure the command of the sea or prevent the enemy from securing it.”⁵⁰ This concept has endured in contemporary naval strategy, although the term “command of the sea” is sometimes replaced with “access” or “battlespace dominance.” The fundamental difference in this century is that it is not just the sea but

⁴⁸ Alfred Thayer Mahan is best known for “The Influence of Sea Power on History” (1890) while Julian Stafford Corbett is best known for “Some Principals of Maritime Strategy” (1911). Their works are summarized in: Kevin McCrairie, *Mahan and Corbett, And the Foundations of Naval Strategic Thought*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2021).

⁴⁹ Kevin McCrairie, *Mahan and Corbett, and the Foundations of Naval Strategic Thought*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2021), 85.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 107.

also the air above the sea and the space and cyber domains that must be commanded.⁵¹ And, while the requirement for command of the sea is still valid, it is not an end in and of itself, it is used to allow actions necessary to reach the desired end.⁵² Essentially, command of the sea allows freedom of navigation and manoeuvre to achieve military objectives or political ends; it allows for power to be projected ashore, sustainment and transportation activities to occur and access to strategic locations, among other things. Determining the means to achieve command of the sea is the central task of naval strategy and key to the overall success of an operation, multinational, joint or otherwise.⁵³

Naval power brings numerous attributes that make it very appealing for employment in multinational operations. First and foremost are the practical aspects, in that naval assets are mobile, persistent, poised, versatile, flexible, self-sufficient, resilient, and can act as a sea base.⁵⁴ Strategically, they can be mission configured or used for influence activities and global engagements outside of the typical security, constabulary and combat role of naval forces. Tactically, naval power can be used across domains for tasks such as insertion and extraction of Special Forces, operational sustainment, supporting fires ashore, and ISR.⁵⁵ In this way, naval power can be used as a force multiplier; OUP had success with maritime assets working for the air component and vice versa to respond to the operational priorities at the time.⁵⁶ However, in Canadian doctrine

⁵¹ Benjamin Armstrong, "D-All of the Above: Connecting 21st Naval Doctrine to Strategy," *Infinity Journal*, Volume 4, Issue 4 (Summer 2015), 5, <https://www.militarystrategymagazine.com/article/d-all-of-the-above-connecting-21st-century-naval-doctrine-to-strategy/>.

⁵² *Ibid*, 3.

⁵³ *Leadmark 2050*, 29.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 12.

⁵⁵ Vice Admiral Paul A. Maddison, *Strategic Trust and Cooperation*, Address, Naval War College, Newport Virginia, United States, 14 August 2012.

⁵⁶ Luca Peruzzi, "Interview: Vice Admiral Rinaldo Veri, Commander NATO HQ Allied Maritime Command, Naples."

at least, naval forces are influential only if they have balanced capabilities, are multi-purpose, combat-effective, globally deployable and adaptable and agile.⁵⁷ As will be discussed in the final section of this paper, these attributes are hard to attain and retain.

Because of the above-listed attributes, naval forces are heavily employed by nations and multinational alliances for various purposes and in differing postures. Moreover, naval vessels have often served as ambassadors and “every warship deployment and port visit is laden with symbolic and diplomatic meaning.”⁵⁸ As demonstrated at the outbreak of both crises in Ukraine, naval forces can be quickly deployed to a region as a symbol of support, deliver reassurance to neighbouring nations, and be poised to react to the conflict if and how required. These crises, as with OUP, also validated the utility of maintaining standing naval forces in regions where tensions threaten to spill over into conflict. When HMCS Charlottetown was redeployed from SNMG1 in the Mediterranean to the coast of Libya in 2011, it was sent there as a “precautionary and staged measure” and was “there for all inevitabilities”; in this case, the inevitability was naval warfare.⁵⁹ Naval forces are similarly forward-deployed and poised in strategic locations to exert coercive or persuasive diplomacy, that is, to signal intent using armed forces in “situations short of war”, for enforcement of UN Resolutions or compliance with UNCLOS, or for rising nations to demonstrate newly acquired naval capabilities, to name a few common examples.⁶⁰ A contemporary example of this is the docking of a UK warship in Singapore, the first permanent British presence in the region

⁵⁷ *Leadmark 2050*, iii.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 21.

⁵⁹ Allan Woods, Canadian Warship to be Dispatched to Libya. Toronto Star, Last accessed on 27 April 2022,

https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2011/03/01/canadian_warship_to_be_dispatched_to_libya.html

⁶⁰ Lombardi, DRDC, *The Future Maritime Operating Environment and the Role of Naval Power*, xx.

in 50 years.⁶¹ Ultimately, and most relevantly for multinational operations, “naval forces have an inherent flexibility and multipurpose nature which allows them to fit together as a task force with relatively little difficulty.”⁶²

When it comes to formally conveying naval strategy, many countries have published maritime strategy documents or strategic concepts; for Canada, the unclassified version is *Leadmark 2050*. Multinational alliances also generate maritime strategy documents, with the NATO Allied Maritime Strategy (AMS) currently being the one applicable to the most nations.⁶³ The AMS was released in March 2011 and closely followed the higher NATO Strategic Concept of 2010.⁶⁴ The document was written to apply to any critical challenge faced by the Alliance. It articulates the key maritime contribution to NATO operations: deterrence and collective defence, crisis management, cooperative security, and maritime security.⁶⁵ Over and above the NATO Strategic Concept, the AMS adds “outreach through partnership, dialogue and cooperation” to cooperative security and adds the crucial role of maritime security to capture the importance of freedom navigation, sea-based trade, critical infrastructure, energy flows, protections of marine resources, and environmental safety. In line with the fundamental aspects of naval power discussed earlier in this paper, the AMS also demands that NATO forces be “agile, flexible, versatile....rapidly deployable and sustainable at strategic

⁶¹ Ng Wei Kai, “British Warship Deployed to Indo-Pacific Region Docks in Singapore,” *The Straits Times*, last updated 8 April 2022, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/politics/uk-warship-docks-in-singapore-as-part-of-first-permanent-british-presence-in-region-since-1971>.

⁶² Eric Grove, “Naval Operations: The Multinational Dimension.”

⁶³ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *Alliance Maritime Strategy*, 18 March 2011, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_75615.htm

⁶⁴ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *Active Engagement, Modern Defence: Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*. Adopted by the Heads of State and Government in Lisbon, 19 November 2010, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_68580.htm

⁶⁵ NATO Allied Maritime Strategy, para III.7.

distances” and notes that further transformation of processes and capabilities will be required to achieve these demands.⁶⁶ While NATO’s strategic documents were written to apply to most circumstance, it is important to note that a lot has happened in the world since 2010 and 2011 and both NATO strategies require renewal. Accordingly, a new NATO Strategic Concept will be adopted at a NATO Summit in Madrid in June 2022, and an updated AMS will follow.⁶⁷ It must also be noted that although the formal documents are indeed due for renewal, initiatives were launched throughout this intervening period to address any overt challenges not accounted for, such as NATO Partnerships and the Readiness Action Plan (RAP).⁶⁸ Most recently, as a response to China’s failure to condemn Russia’s actions in Ukraine, NATO agreed to increase political cooperation with nations in the Asia Pacific region, focused on cyber defence, emerging technology and countering disinformation.⁶⁹

Although the geopolitical environment is ever-evolving, contemporary naval strategy is formulated and updated to ensure relevancy to changing circumstances, as discussed above. It is the application of naval strategy and how naval forces are employed, equipped, and interact to achieve strategy (naval, joint, multi-domain and political) that needs attention and will have the most impact on the outcome of multinational operations. Several key considerations and opportunities for NATO and

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, para III.8. and V.7.

⁶⁷ North Atlantic Treaty Organization. *Topic:Strategic Concepts*, last updated 29 November 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_56626.htm.

⁶⁸ NATO Partnership: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_84336.htm, Readiness Action Plan: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2016_07/20160627_1607-factsheet-rap-en.pdf.

⁶⁹ Rhyannon Bartlett-Imagawa, “NATO, Asia-Pacific Partners Agree to Bolster Cooperation,” *Nikkei Asia*, Last updated 8 April 2022, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Ukraine-war/NATO-Asia-Pacific-partners-agree-to-bolster-cooperation#:~:text=LONDON%20%2D%2D%20NATO%20members%20agreed,condemn%20Russia%27s%20war%20in%20Ukraine>.

international naval forces arose from OUP and endure today, for example, the importance of interoperability in today's technology-reliant world, the requirement for broad domain awareness based on the increased speed and sources of information and effects in the likely littoral geography of future operations, and the advantage of maritime support to joint activities. Another very important consideration, briefly covered in NATO's Strategic Concept, is the need to provide continued support after conflicts have ended to better ensure lasting stability.⁷⁰ Additionally, opportunities for new international partnerships and strategic relationships, such as the one between NATO and Asia Pacific partners, will grow as the security of the maritime commons continues to rise as a global issue.⁷¹ And, although nations will want to maintain a breadth of capabilities because it is an aspect of national pride and "provides sovereign decision making power and freedom of action," the limitations, constraints and demands on naval assets that will be discussed in the next section will require NATO and other multinational coalitions to consider how best to manage contribution warfare in a way that ensures all eventualities are covered.⁷²

Challenges to the effectiveness of naval power

The preceding section summarized naval strategy and the efforts that nations and alliances, particularly NATO, must make to ensure that it remains relevant. However, the contemporary security environment contains a broad set of challenges and evolving factors that will impact efforts to fulfill these strategic roles, such as NATO's collective

⁷⁰ NATO Strategic Concept, 20.

⁷¹ *Leadmark 2050*, 10.

⁷² *Ibid*, 12.

defence, crisis management, cooperative security and maritime security. This section will focus on some of the most critical challenges nations and multinational alliances face today and in the near term.

The first and much discussed contemporary challenge is the changing geopolitical landscape. In recent years, the West has focused on the rise of the Asia Pacific as a region of concern. However, the February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine has required a refocus of attention to eastern European waters. The rise of China and Russia's overt show of military might have reinvigorated arguments that great power competition has returned.⁷³ Specifically, there is growing concern that China's response, or lack thereof, to Russia's actions illustrates further global polarization.⁷⁴ Add to that the continued instability in the Middle East and Northern African regions, the rising migrant crisis in Central America, and the likelihood of climate change effects triggering conflict worldwide, there is a growing demand for military presence to fulfil diplomatic purposes and or crisis management, a role often filled by naval assets. In addition to increasing the threat of conflict, climate change brings with it the increased human security challenges that will demand international responses. Naval assets are often the quickest, easiest and most cost-effective response to humanitarian crises, further increasing the demand on these strategic resources.⁷⁵

⁷³ Dr. Stephen Nagy, "The Invasion of Ukraine, the Return of Great Power Competition, and the Fragmentation of Globalization," Australian Institute of International Affairs, 17 March 2022, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/invasion-ukraine-return-great-power-competition-fragmentation-of-globalisation/>.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Leadmark 2050*, 17

Also, in terms of geopolitics, the Arctic countries will face further pressures with the opening of the Arctic. For Canada, the requirement to maintain a naval presence in the region to indicate sovereign control demands ongoing and increasing presence in the region.⁷⁶ This area will grow in strategic importance to non-Arctic nations as climate change will enable circumpolar navigation and allow access to previously inaccessible resources; it is likely that existing sovereignty claims in the region will be challenged.⁷⁷ With China showing interest in Arctic affairs and Western relations with Russia in tatters, this region may become more contentious than it currently is. Relatedly, as more states gain wealth and resources to pursue new opportunities and objectives, they may wish to project power beyond their borders which could ignite simmering regional tensions or inflate longstanding animosity and drive an increased political demand to counter with a demonstration of national power; naval presence and poise is an oft used means to achieve this end.⁷⁸

An additional important geopolitical consideration for Western nations is the fact that, in recent years, the US has been stepping away from its role as the global security provider and being more selective of where and how it becomes involved; specifically, it has pushed back on its over-share of the NATO burden.⁷⁹ This has led to reconsiderations of fleet size and composition and ultimately resulted in the shrinking of Western fleet.⁸⁰ At the same time, China's fleet and naval range is growing. Through advancing its fleet size and technological capabilities, China's strategy could simply be to raise the cost of

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 14.

⁷⁷ Lombardi, DRDC, *The Future Maritime Operating Environment and the Role of Naval Power*, 35, 56.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 39.

⁷⁹ Kori Schake, "Lost at Sea: The Dangerous Decline of American Naval Power", *Foreign Affairs Magazine* (March/April 2022), 167.

⁸⁰ Lloyds Register Group, *Global Maritime Trends 2030*.

western power projection into the Asia Pacific as a deterrent, giving them the freedom of action in the region that they desire.⁸¹ But the risk to freedom of navigation in the region and the possibility of conflict as a result means that China's posturing cannot be ignored. Moreover, China is not the only non-Western nation growing its naval power; attention will be required in other parts of the global south.⁸² All these geopolitical arisings *could* be mitigated by employing naval power in one form or another. However, it is an already strained resource that faces additional challenges, as will be discussed below.

Closely related to the evolving geopolitics is the challenge of geography. As previously stated, the maritime environment is immense. Naval resources are finite and can only be in one place at a given time. The three regions currently of most concern to Canada are the Arctic, the Asia-Pacific and Eastern Europe; these could not be any more geographically disbursed. This is not a problem unique to Canada. Geography affects individual states' and standing alliances' ability to sustain concurrent operations, especially at a strategic distance, while also keeping up on training, exercises, and domestic security challenges.⁸³ The geographical dispersion of contemporary global hot spots challenges many nations' ability to contribute forces to alliances and coalitions, especially if a nation is without a "blue water navy" capable of being self-sustaining away from home.⁸⁴ And, except for the current events unfolding in Russia, most high-risk zones are outside NATO territory. Although NATO has accounted for this in its Strategic

⁸¹ Lombardi, DRDC, *The Future Maritime Operating Environment and the Role of Naval Power*, 40.

⁸² *Ibid*, 41.

⁸³ Lloyds Register Group, *Global Maritime Trends 2030*.

⁸⁴ *Leadmark 2050*, iii.

Concept so as to have the ability to project power outside of its borders, not all Member States have the ability to do so.⁸⁵

Another key geographical challenge focusses on where future naval warfare will likely occur; in the littorals.⁸⁶ The littorals are a challenging conflict zone because they are a “complex, dynamic, cluttered and extremely dangerous environment in which friendly, adversarial and neutral forces coexist” that “obscure the friendly versus hostile picture of the situation.”⁸⁷ Furthermore, littorals, being in reach of land and necessitating shorter weapons ranges than open water, are accessible to irregular, hybrid and state-centric threats.⁸⁸ And the psychological effect of sinking an adversary flag ship visible from land is worthy of major effort and expenditure of ammo, illustrated by Ukraine in 2022.⁸⁹ This increased number of actors and the crowded environment limits freedom of movement and decision making time for naval forces and thus requires fulsome and real-time ISR; this is a challenge for even the most technologically advanced naval forces.⁹⁰ And with the technologies that will be discussed in the next paragraph, the future will likely see an increasing area of sea that can be denied or controlled from land; the options available to land based forces for area denial are vast.⁹¹ The littorals demand increased attention to planning and execution and “success ... will likely demand new approaches to joint campaigns.”⁹²

⁸⁵ NATO Strategic Concept, 8.

⁸⁶ Littorals are the waters in coastal regions.

⁸⁷ Lombardi, DRDC, *The Future Maritime Operating Environment and the Role of Naval Power* DRDC, 80.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 80

⁸⁹ Jenny Hill, Sinking of Moskva a Blow to National Pride, BBC News, 15 April 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61114843>.

⁹⁰ *Leadmark 2050*, 32.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 29.

⁹² *Ibid*, 33.

The perhaps most critical and quickly evolving challenge faced by naval forces in the effort to remain effective and relevant is advanced technology. Western navies have been spoiled by operating under circumstances where they benefit from superior technology; this superiority can no longer be assumed because advanced technologies are more affordable and widespread⁹³. Modern technology simplifies sea-denial while simultaneously enhancing the capabilities of non-traditional adversaries.⁹⁴ The proliferation of advanced weapons technology, especially Anti-Ship Ballistic Missiles (ASBM), will have a direct impact on how and from where naval operations can be conducted. Other advanced technologies, such as armed crewless vehicles and laser weapons systems, further muddy the water. The cyber and space domains can be exploited to practical effect by forces of an alliance, but “adversarial deployment of cyber could just as easily disrupt the effectiveness of naval platforms or networked fleets.”⁹⁵ Perhaps most importantly, dependency on technology creates vulnerability. It will be challenging for international naval forces to assess the security impact of emerging technologies and to plan in a way that takes all the potential threats into account. It also creates challenges for interoperability if technological capabilities are unequal amongst allies. Nations may not be able to keep up with the larger naval powers, and new technology often demands new tactics, creating challenges for multinational interoperability.⁹⁶ Accordingly, technology is likely to be a primary consideration in the upcoming renewal of the NATO Strategic Concept and AMS.

⁹³ Lombardi, DRDC, *The Future Maritime Operating Environment and the Role of Naval Power*, 72.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 74

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 83

⁹⁶ Maddison, *Strategic Trust and Cooperation*.

Another mounting challenge for naval power is that Western navies are trending smaller.⁹⁷ Although ship numbers are not necessarily directly indicative of capability, it does create a capacity deficit and affects the ability of nations and the international community to respond to emerging crises as well as fulfil other crucial naval roles such as cooperative and maritime security. In *Strong Secure Engaged*, the defence of Canada has primacy above all else, and the same is likely with other nations.⁹⁸ This is exhibited in naval procurement in recent years; the majority of warships built across the globe in recent years were “smaller patrol vessels and corvettes designed to aid coastal states in controlling their EEZ.”⁹⁹ This means that there may need to be prioritization amongst coalitions, tradeoffs amongst nations, and higher risk tolerance or lowered scope of operations. It is important to remember that if a nation diverts naval assets from one operation to support another, there is an opportunity cost that could have strategic implications and lasting repercussions. Climate change will only exacerbate this as nations may face more demand for the employment of military forces domestically, not to mention the inevitable increase in HADR. Also, as previously noted, sea power has been used as a political tool for influence and information operations. Less global presence will in and of itself be a signal. Furthermore, fewer vessels to respond to an increased global demand for naval intervention will plausibly lead to longer deployments and have a measurable and detrimental effect on crew wellbeing and development as well as prevent maintenance of the vessel itself.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Lloyds Register Group, *Global Maritime Trends 2030*.

⁹⁸ Department of National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Defence Policy*, Ottawa: DND, 2017.

⁹⁹ Lombardi, DRDC, *The Future Maritime Operating Environment and the Role of Naval Power*, 88

¹⁰⁰ Kori Schake, “Lost at Sea: The Dangerous Decline of American Naval Power”, 168.

These challenges illuminate the requirement for NATO and other alliances to focus on coordinating and balancing national naval contributions to most effectively respond to the growing range of international security threats. But the real challenge will be finding the right balance to create the necessary naval force capabilities.

Conclusion

This paper focused on illustrating that naval power and the contemporary naval strategy used in multinational operations continues to be of value. As exhibited leading up to and during OUP, strategy and priorities can change, and naval power has the flexibility to be employed in a multitude of kinetic and non-kinetic roles and within the maritime domain or as a joint and pan-domain enabler. Moreover, while the world is changing, naval power remains an essential provider of stability at sea in an increasingly unpredictable world.

Oceans remain prominent in political considerations, and there is a continued need to preserve peace and good order at sea. Naval power, therefore, will continue to play a role in international security. And whether the future maritime strategy is shaped by Chinese ambition or increased criminal activity resulting from resource challenges related to climate change, the fundamental role of naval power is unlikely to change significantly from its current employment. How and by what platforms these roles are performed in the future depends on which emerging technologies are leveraged based on the expected payoff and the need to balance capability against vulnerability.

This paper also serves to illustrate that, although the relevancy of contemporary naval strategy has been validated, multinational alliances will be increasingly challenged

to meet the demands for naval resources. To mitigate these challenges, NATO, Canada, and all nations with sea power should focus on exploiting the opportunities presented during OUP as “NATO’s air-sea campaign fought during OUP may come to be viewed as typical of future air-sea battles in the contested littorals.”¹⁰¹ Specifically of value would be a focus on interoperability and balanced capabilities between regular partners. In NATO’s own words, strategy requires a “continuous process of reform, modernization and transformation.”¹⁰²

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¹⁰¹ *Leadmark* 2050, 31.

¹⁰² NATO Strategic Concept, 9.

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