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## INTO THE ABYSS?

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### European Naval Power in the Post–Cold War Era

*Jeremy Stöhs*

Since the end of the Cold War, European sea power—particularly its naval element—has undergone drastic change.<sup>1</sup> The dissolution of the Soviet Union not only heralded a period of Western unilateralism but also put an end to previous levels of military investment. In fact, once the perceived threat that Soviet forces posed had disappeared, many Western governments believed that the era of great-power rivalry and major-power wars finally had come to an end.<sup>2</sup> Rather than necessitating preparation for war, the security environment now ostensibly allowed states to allocate their funds to other areas, such as housing, education, and health care. As a result, for more than two decades, the majority of naval forces across Europe have been subject to declining budgets and far-reaching downscaling measures.

Although the post–Cold War era proved to be anything but peaceful, all military engagements throughout the 1990s involving Western states took place either at the lower end of the intensity spectrum or against enemies that posed a relatively limited threat to the overwhelming superiority of the NATO allies. Combined-arms warfare, effects-based operations, and coercive air strikes against a series of state and nonstate actors underscored the West's ability to apply military force with near impunity.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, however, effectively put an end to this period of largely unchecked Western military interventions. The attacks not only marked the beginning of an ongoing struggle between the United States and its allies and radical Islamic terrorism; they also drew attention away from traditional concepts of the utility of naval forces, such as providing credible deterrence, buttressing collective defense, and maintaining sea control. Over the following decade, counterinsurgency and counterterrorism, as well as constabulary

operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the greater Middle East, took center stage. Concomitantly, the land and air forces involved in these theaters received the lion's share of funding, while naval power (again) was considered a mere supporting element of twenty-first-century warfare. In Europe, these developments heightened the already-existing lack of appreciation for the significance of the maritime environment and the value of naval forces for a state's security and prosperity—a political and cultural myopia often referred to as “sea blindness.”<sup>3</sup>

As defense spending continued to decline, so did the size of most Western fleets.<sup>4</sup> By the end of the first decade of the new century, Europe's naval forces were heading into the proverbial abyss. Smaller than at any time in recent history, naval forces across Europe had lost important proficiencies and capabilities. The shortfall in naval platforms had substantial bearing on the ability to deal effectively with the growing range of naval tasks. The modernization of many navies has been hampered not only by shrinking budgets but by cost overruns, lengthy procurement processes, and major technical deficiencies. These problems were compounded by the fact that many armed forces across the continent have found it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain young men and women, while the overhead costs for personnel consume large parts of defense budgets.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, significant shortfalls in training and readiness—and hence the ability to use naval forces to pursue and achieve political ends—have arisen.

This article will outline the development of Europe's naval forces since the end of the Cold War. It will address the challenges European naval forces have faced in an evolving security environment, and will argue that more than two decades of fiscal austerity measures have jeopardized Europe's ability both to ensure good order at sea and to provide credible deterrence, and have limited its ability to promote common interests and shape events abroad.

This proposition is supported by Europe's most recent efforts to strengthen its defense capabilities. Russia's military actions along Europe's flanks and mass migrations to Europe and the associated threat of terrorism, as well as the uncertainty pertaining to America's foreign policy objectives, have elicited responses from European states to shoulder greater responsibility for their own security. The extent to which these developments can lead to a lasting revitalization of European naval power will be discussed in the final section.

#### **AFTER THE FALL OF THE WALL (1989–2001)**

To many observers in the West, the quick and relatively peaceful demise of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact came as a great surprise.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, until the end, the naval forces of the European NATO partners were considered the fulcrum on which rested the West's ability to deter—and, in the case of war, to defeat—Soviet forces.

### *From Sea Control to Out-of-Area Operations*

With the confrontation between the two superpowers relegated to the pages of history, most of Europe's leaders were quick to interpret these events as nothing less than the end of great-power rivalry. No longer bound to the parochial contingency plans postulated by the United States and NATO, the majority of Europe's navies began shifting toward a peacetime posture.

*The United Kingdom: Shifting of Priorities.* For the British Royal Navy (RN), the most distinguished and most powerful among Europe's naval forces, the Cold War by and large ended on a high note—followed almost immediately by a shifting of priorities. Apart from the U.S. Navy, only the Russian navy—slowly rusting away in what used to be credible sea bastions—exceeded the fleet carrying the white ensign in size and capabilities. The Falklands War a decade earlier had provided the RN with painful yet invaluable insights, and substantial improvements had been made to existing platforms and operational procedures to address the apparent shortcomings.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, a number of large-scale naval-procurement projects were under way. These included replacement of the navy's ballistic-missile submarines (with four of the new *Vanguard* class), introduction of the capable Type 23 antisubmarine warfare (ASW) frigates, and development of a common air-defense destroyer among France, Italy, and the United Kingdom (the Horizon project, later the Type 45 for the RN).

On the other hand, the RN also faced some serious challenges. First and foremost, defense spending plummeted from nearly 4 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 1991 to 2.5 percent in 1998. In other words, the military budget was cut by more than 20 percent in real terms.<sup>8</sup> Second, the new strategic environment no longer required a fleet of nearly fifty surface combatants and twenty-two submarines (both nuclear and conventionally powered). “[Britain's] Cold War mission of hunting Soviet submarines had vanished, and along with it the chief justification for large chunks of the Fleet.”<sup>9</sup>

Throughout the 1990s, the RN had to accept incremental reductions to its force structure, as well as curtailment of acquisition programs. To save money, the number of personnel was decreased from 69,000 to 50,000 within ten years. Still, the RN fared somewhat better than its sister services. One reason was the RN's importance as a key enabler of Britain's effort to “prevent or shape crises further away [from home] and [its ability] to deploy military forces rapidly before they get out of hand,” as the *Strategic Defence Review* published in 1998 emphasized.<sup>10</sup> The procurement of two larger aircraft carriers to replace the three existing smaller ships underscored the continued relevance of the RN as an effective tool of foreign policy.

Like other European navies, the RN increasingly shifted its focus from open-ocean, sea-control operations along the sea lines of communication (SLOCs) in the North Atlantic and homeland defense (in particular, ASW near the approaches to Britain's ports) to power projection over great distances and into the littoral regions of the world. Projecting military force from the sea onto land (e.g., carrier aviation and long-range cruise missiles) had proved expedient during military operations in the Balkans and the Middle East.<sup>11</sup>

Britain's close relationship with the United States allowed the RN to acquire new systems and technologies, such as Tomahawk cruise missiles, providing the navy with an important capability to fulfill these new roles. Yet while the Anglo-American defense partnership flourished, Britain's collaboration with its European neighbors initially yielded rather mixed results.

*France, Italy, and Spain: Consolidation of Forces.* France and Britain share a rich history of both competition and cooperation. Over the centuries, the two great powers waged countless wars against each other, culminating in the battle of Trafalgar, the later defeat of Napoleon, and the provisions of the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Strategic competition and deep-seated suspicions persisted between the two countries. Neither fighting side by side in two world wars nor the looming threat of a Soviet invasion could obscure the fact that, during large parts of the twentieth century, Paris and London did not see eye to eye.

What is more, conflicting views on France's status within NATO persuaded President Charles de Gaulle to withdraw from the alliance in 1966.<sup>12</sup> As a direct consequence of that decision, the French military's *raison d'être* to this day is based on providing France with capabilities with which to respond to crises that run the gamut of the intensity spectrum. Moreover, the state's geographic location, as well as its numerous overseas territories (remnants of its former colonial empire), has shaped the French fleet to a considerable degree.

By the time the Cold War drew to a close, the French and British had fashioned navies of similar size. However, the respective fleets were based on somewhat different strategic and operational concepts. Unlike the RN, which was designed principally for sea control (ASW) and the deployment of carrier strike groups in the North Atlantic, the *Marine Nationale* (MN), as the French navy officially is called, operated a mix of some "first-rate" warships and a significant number of "second-rate" surface combatants and patrol vessels. The latter are required to conduct constabulary duties, such as fisheries protection in the French exclusive economic zone (EEZ). In fact, France possesses the world's second-largest EEZ (more than 4.2 million square miles) and has naval forces continuously deployed to the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Oceans.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, while the British submarine-based nuclear deterrent had to rely heavily on U.S. technological

assistance, all critical components of France's *force océanique stratégique* (its sea-based nuclear forces) were of domestic design.<sup>14</sup>

To this day, such diverging operational requirements represent a major stumbling block to establishing common European security frameworks and pursuing joint procurement projects. The aforementioned attempt to develop a new air-defense destroyer trilaterally for the British, French, and Italian navies failed largely over differences regarding the specific capabilities each stakeholder deemed necessary.<sup>15</sup> Fortunately, France and Italy continued to pursue the project, ultimately receiving two vessels each. Britain would go on to build six ships of similar design, the Type 45 *Daring*-class destroyers.

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Throughout the 1990s, the MN held a decisive advantage over the RN (and all other navies of the time, save the U.S. Navy), despite its somewhat less capable surface component. In contrast to the British, Italians, and Spanish,

all of whom operated relatively small short-takeoff/vertical-landing (STOVL) carriers, France had two flat-deck carriers fitted with steam catapults. This allowed the French navy to deploy a well-balanced naval air wing more effectively and over greater distances. The naval air arms of the other navies had to content themselves with Harrier jump jets and helicopters, all of which had inherent limitations with regard to range / loiter time and capability.

Not being able to rely on NATO's security guarantees, France remained somewhat more cautious in the early years of the post–Cold War era. Rather than implementing rash defense cuts or canceling construction programs outright, France put its navy's organizational structure through a comprehensive streamlining effort.<sup>16</sup> As part of the Optimar 95 program, large parts of naval command structures were disbanded and the fleet was divided between the naval bases in Toulon (carriers, expeditionary forces) and Brest (ASW, mine warfare, and strategic submarines).<sup>17</sup> In addition, major construction processes of warships were stretched to alleviate strain on the shrinking budget. Most noticeably, only a single carrier remained in service.

Meanwhile, both of France's Mediterranean neighbors, Italy and Spain, found themselves in relatively comfortable situations in the early 1990s.

With the Italian Peninsula occupying a critical geographic position along Europe's southern shores, Italy's sphere of interest largely was confined to two main lines stretching across the Mediterranean Sea: starting from Gibraltar, “one

reaching the Black Sea and the Middle East through the Balkans and the Aegean Sea; the [other] moving southward through the Red Sea down to the Indian Ocean, the Gulf, and including the Horn of Africa.”<sup>18</sup>

While the Italian navy (the Marina Militare, or MM) had remained relatively hamstrung throughout the first decades of the Cold War, owing to political and doctrinal limitations, the Soviet naval buildup during the late 1970s and early 1980s required the MM to establish a greater presence along NATO’s southern flank. Many new warships were built during this period, while existing platforms underwent modernization and refit. By the end of the Cold War, Italy was operating a well-balanced fleet of ships and submarines, most of which had been built domestically.

At the same time, the country’s military strategy transitioned from sea control and static defense against Soviet forces to power projection into regions farther from home.<sup>19</sup> Italy’s military engagements in Iraq (1991), Yugoslavia (1993–97), Mozambique (1993), Somalia (1991–95), and Eritrea (1998) and against Serbia (1999) highlight the MM’s set of capabilities, as well as the country’s willingness to take action within its designated sphere of influence. Although the percentage of military expenditure slightly decreased between 1990 and 2000, the defense budget as a whole remained relatively constant, owing to Italy’s economic growth.<sup>20</sup>

Compared with the strategic ambitions of Italy (which was a founding member of both NATO and the Group of Seven), Spain’s aims were somewhat more limited. In its official statements, the country often refers to itself as a “medium power,” with its sphere of influence stretching from the western Mediterranean to the waters of the Atlantic between the Iberian Peninsula and the Canary Islands.<sup>21</sup> Even under the regime of General Francisco Franco, Spain received U.S. military assistance (mostly in the form of second-rate ships) to provide sea control vis-à-vis the Soviet navy.

Franco’s death in 1975 sparked a period of increased naval spending that laid the foundation for today’s fleet. While Italy and France were adamant about using their respective shipbuilding capabilities and maintaining their military-industrial prowess, Spain initially relied on American ship designs and combat systems. By the early 1990s, the Armada Española had evolved into a small yet modern multipurpose fleet, designed around a small STOVL aircraft carrier (based on the U.S. vision of a sea-control ship), nineteen other large surface combatants, and a flotilla of eight submarines.<sup>22</sup>

As did most other Western states, Spain experienced considerable economic prosperity during the 1990s. At the same time, it reduced defense spending steadily, to 1.2 percent of GDP by early in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Although the booming economy could compensate for the shrinking

defense apportionment, a number of large-scale shipbuilding programs were coming on line, consuming large chunks of the navy's budget. Amphibious forces were at the top of the procurement list. As was the general trend among European defense planners, Spain's considered expeditionary capabilities essential in the post–Cold War security environment. In line with this paradigmatic shift in the country's naval strategy, two *Galicia*-class amphibious assault ships were procured, together with a pair of tank landing ships and a replenishment oiler.<sup>23</sup>

The funding for five new escort vessels—the F-100 or *Álvaro de Bazán* class—was granted in 1997. This air-defense frigate benefited from the fact that, unlike some of its foreign counterparts, it incorporated the American-designed Aegis combat system, based on the SPY-1D radar and the Standard Missile 2 (referred to as the SM-2). Combining these powerful yet off-the-shelf capabilities with a relatively attractive price tag would pay dividends nearly ten years later, when Australia chose the Spanish design over the more capable but more expensive American *Arleigh Burke*-class destroyer.<sup>24</sup>

**Germany: From the Littorals to Blue Waters.** Nominally the fifth-largest navy in Europe, the German navy has pursued a somewhat different course over the past decades. Over the centuries, Germany has remained a land power, only occasionally showing greater naval aspirations.<sup>25</sup> Given the geographic as well as historic realities (access merely to the Baltic and North Seas, and under constant suspicion of militarist tendencies from its own population), the country has found it difficult to take a leading role in European defense and security matters. With the dismantling of large parts of the former East German navy after German reunification in 1989, the nation's underlying strategic aims and needs had to be revisited.

Throughout the Cold War, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) Navy had been tasked with defending West Germany's shores from amphibious assault and (together with the Danish navy) preventing Warsaw Pact forces from exiting the Baltic Sea via the Danish straits. Hence, the FRG Navy was designed primarily to conduct ASW and antisurface warfare (ASuW) in the confined and relatively shallow waters of the Baltic Sea, with a secondary escort role along the SLOCs in the North Sea and toward the English Channel.<sup>26</sup> But by the end of the Cold War the German navy already had begun transitioning from a brown-water force that operated within its littorals to a blue-water fleet that was capable of sustained deployments on the high seas.<sup>27</sup>

Like most of its NATO partners, Germany cut defense expenditures over the following decade: the military budget shrank from U.S.\$73 billion to \$50 billion. Meanwhile, the navy decommissioned large parts of its aging fleet. Unlike its neighbors, the German navy refrained from acquiring any vessels specifically

designed for amphibious operations (for both doctrinal and political reasons). Rather, a number of new surface combatants—still largely influenced by Cold War requirements—were accepted into service (the K-130 corvette and F-123 ASW frigate).

In the aftermath of the Cold War, Germany remained reluctant to deploy military force outside NATO's primary area of interest. Notwithstanding the young German state's participation in so-called out-of-area operations in the Persian Gulf (mine clearing, 1990–91) and the Adriatic (embargo against Serbia, 1992–96), a Federal Constitutional Court ruling was necessary to decide whether such deployments were in fact in accordance with German law.<sup>28</sup> Still, irrespective of legal questions, the navy's activities throughout the following decades remained limited to peacetime deployments as part of NATO's standing naval groups and focused on relatively small operations in low-threat environments.

*The Netherlands and Denmark: The Defense Industry as a Deciding Factor.* The dramatic shift within the global security environment affected the remaining, smaller European navies to varying degrees.

The Royal Netherlands Navy, for example, tried to adapt to the new situation by promoting technological and operational defense cooperation with its European partners. Examples of this effort are the Belgian-Dutch Naval Cooperation (BENESAM); the U.K./Dutch amphibious force; the Dutch iteration of the *Galicia*-class amphibious warfare ship (HNLMS *Rotterdam*, which joined the fleet in 1997); and the class of air-defense frigates, based on a trilateral frigate project among the Netherlands, Germany, and Spain.<sup>29</sup> Similarly to the Royal Navy, large parts of the Dutch escort fleet had become superfluous in the absence of a traditional naval threat. At the same time, significant investments had become necessary to replace the increasingly obsolescent subsurface fleet.

The Dutch navy also can be commended for investing in local ship designs and combat systems rather than acquiring foreign designs. A case can be made that if all European navies at the time had opted, for political or financial reasons, for American hardware (which in some cases was more advanced technologically, more readily available, or both), many industrial capabilities and proficiencies would have been lost outright. Clearly, the Netherlands was particularly keen on remaining competitive in the international defense market, given its large investments and expertise in the field of naval defense systems. For example, the active phased-array radars fitted on German, Dutch, and Danish frigates and the radars on French, Italian, and British destroyers (designated SMART-L) all are produced by the Dutch company Thales Nederland.

Also located in the North Sea, the Søværnet (Royal Danish Navy) provides a useful example for how smaller navies have dealt with shrinking defense budgets and a widening scope of operational requirements. Faced with the difficult

question of how best to deal with these two diverging trends, Danish shipbuilders came up with an ingenious solution: the Standard Flex (StanFlex) modular mission-payload system. Warships no longer would have to be designed for one specific task, but rather could swap standardized modules in and out, depending on the mission requirement. Considerable costs could be saved simply by fitting a platform with various guns and antiship and anti-air missile-launching systems when operating in a contested environment, then swapping them for mine-warfare systems, sonars, or equipment for pollution control and hydrographic surveys once the threat had passed. Owing to the growing obsolescence of the Danish fleet, policy makers decided that the Danish navy, over time, would replace its seventeen surface combatants with six vessels based on the StanFlex system.<sup>30</sup>

Significantly larger than previous frigates, the Royal Danish Navy's *Absalon*-class command-and-support vessel (still in an early design stage during the late 1990s) reflected the navy's slow doctrinal shift toward power-projection and expeditionary capabilities. Like many of its European neighbors, Denmark increasingly focused on deploying naval power over greater distances, alongside its NATO allies.

### *Opposing the General Trend: Navies and Territorial Defense*

The majority of Europe's naval forces underwent a strategic shift toward power projection, stability operations, expeditionary capabilities, and out-of-area deployments. But a handful of navies continued to adhere to the principles of territorial defense, control of SLOCs close to home, and sea-denial capabilities within the approaches to their shores.

*The Nordic Countries.* Finland, Sweden, and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Norway are examples of smaller European navies that placed a premium on defending their territories from invasion throughout the first decade of the post–Cold War period.

Recognizing Scandinavia's inherent geographic vulnerabilities (in particular, a lack of strategic depth), political and military leaders alike stressed the fact that, despite fundamental changes in the international security order, caution was well-advised. "Europe is still resolving many areas of conflict [and] all nations do indeed value military strength. . . . Therefore we cannot, within the foreseeable future, neglect the risks of war and that Sweden could be subject to an armed aggression," Admiral Peter Nordbeck of Sweden reminded others.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, these navies' principal functions were to deny the aggressor use of SLOCs, gain sea control in territorial waters, and defend ports and naval bases.<sup>32</sup>

*Aegean Rivals.* For much of the past century, Turkish and Greek naval thinking has been based on similar principles. With their territories located on a political, cultural, and religious fault line, these two major antagonists have made

significant investments in their military forces. Many of these investments have been justified by the ostensible threat the two states pose to one another, despite the fact that they are NATO allies. Consequently, Greece and Turkey spent more than 3.5 percent of their GDPs on defense throughout the 1990s.

The bulk of both navies consisted of platforms capable of conducting sea control / sea denial and protecting SLOCs. This included a sizable element of surface combatants (either surplus U.S. ships or vessels of other foreign design), as well as numerous fast-attack craft. Furthermore, both navies commanded a powerful subsurface element, of German origin. While the Turkish fleet enjoyed a numerical advantage over the Hellenic Navy throughout the Cold War, it also faced the threat of a possible Soviet attack aimed at securing the exit to the Mediterranean via the Turkish Straits. Therefore, Turkey had to maintain a credible mine-warfare capability not only to control the straits but also to act as a counterweight to the Soviet (later the Russian) Black Sea Fleet.<sup>33</sup>

Unlike many other European states, these two did not consider the ability to project power over great distances to conduct peacekeeping missions and stability operations to be primary concerns. Although both Greece and Turkey participated in naval operations outside their principal spheres of interest alongside their NATO allies, the basic tenets promulgated in both countries' defense strategies remained unchanged.<sup>34</sup> Throughout the last years of the twentieth century, both navies were well financed and maintained a high level of readiness.

#### **AFTER THE FALL OF THE TOWERS (2001–14)**

Throughout the 1990s, many naval forces in Europe still were able to adapt readily to the evolving security environment. For the most part, a sufficient number of trained personnel (many states retained conscription) and a sufficient amount of matériel allowed the Europeans to address the various security challenges with relative ease. Moreover, the overwhelming superiority of the U.S. armed forces compensated for the shortcomings and capability gaps that slowly emerged among European militaries. What is more, throughout the 1980s many navies had undergone comprehensive modernization efforts, receiving state-of-the-art aircraft, ships, and submarines. Therefore, most navies were in a good condition to fulfill the missions of a so-called postmodern navy, which include sea control, expeditionary operations, stability operations / humanitarian assistance, good order at sea, and cooperative naval diplomacy.<sup>35</sup>

#### ***Land Wars and Economic Woes***

The twenty-first century barely had begun when the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, sent shock waves rippling across the globe. Although sea power played an important role during the opening phases of both the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and that of Iraq two years later, the subsequent

counterterrorism and counterinsurgency campaigns had long-lasting consequences for Europe's sea services. As in previous military campaigns, American carrier strike groups took station in the Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf, and Red Sea, from where they conducted air strikes against enemy forces and provided air support for allied troops on the ground. Other elements of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps provided sea- and airlift capabilities and contributed elite ground forces to the fight (Marines and USN SEALs).

Although some of the European navies (in particular the British and French) participated effectively in these campaigns, the evolving struggle against globally

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*The . . . reemergence of great-power rivalry . . . , one of the largest refugee crises since the end of the Cold War . . . , terrorist attacks by radical jihadists . . . , the U.S. rebalancing toward the Indo-Pacific region, and President Donald Trump's "America First" policy have heightened the sense of uncertainty.*

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networked radical *jihadi* terrorism seemed to vindicate the theory that traditional concepts of high-intensity conflict and maneuver warfare against peer competitors largely had lost their relevance.<sup>36</sup> Following the general trend toward peacekeeping

and stability operations in distant theaters, Europe's armed forces progressively calibrated their capabilities accordingly. However, the necessary financial resources were increasingly difficult to secure.

As the security situations in Afghanistan and Iraq deteriorated, many states involved in the conflicts felt compelled to make greater investment in protecting their troops on the ground and toward bringing the wars to a quick and satisfactory conclusion. However, simply increasing the defense budget to buttress national military commitments was in many cases politically unfeasible. The money for these contingencies had to come from either the existing defense budget or supplementary and emergency funding. With army and air force components receiving a larger share of funding, many navies had to make do with even less money.

The global financial crisis of 2007, the subsequent eurozone crisis, and the economic downturn that ensued combined into a perfect storm buffeting armed forces across Europe. After the end of the Cold War, many states had been able to consolidate their militaries, despite fiscal restrictions; but against the backdrop of tanking economies, a failing financial sector, and soaring national debt, even the previous levels of defense spending and the corresponding force structures were considered unsustainable in many cases.

#### *Doing More with Less: Austerity Measures and Growing Capability Gaps*

*The United Kingdom: Truncating a Fleet.* The repercussions for Europe's naval forces were arguably most noticeable in the case of the Royal Navy. Early in the

first decade of the twenty-first century—still a time of relative plenty—the RN introduced two *Albion*-class assault landing ships and three Bay-class dock landing ships, bringing the number of large amphibious-warfare ships up to seven. The *Invincible*-class carriers, although reduced to two ships in 2005, added a substantial power-projection capability and reinforced the concept of expeditionary warfare outside NATO's previous area of operations.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, a class of up to twelve new Type 45 air-defense destroyers was under construction and the first unit of the highly capable *Astute*-class nuclear-powered attack submarine was launched in 2007—just months before the economic crisis hit.

With that crisis taking full effect and the British government being pressed to reduce its budget deficit, the military became subject to draconian austerity measures. *The Strategic Defence and Security Review*, hastily published in 2010, called for the RN's Harrier naval air arm to be disbanded and the flagship, *Ark Royal*, to be scrapped. The other ship of this class, *Illustrious*, was retained as a temporary amphibious transport helicopter carrier until the amphibious assault ship HMS *Ocean* was refitted.

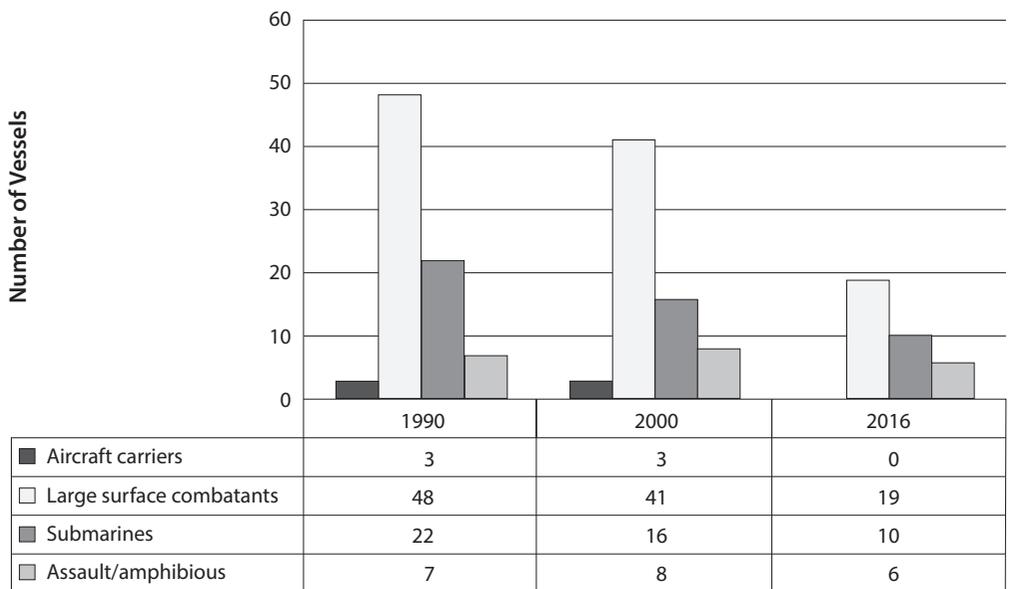
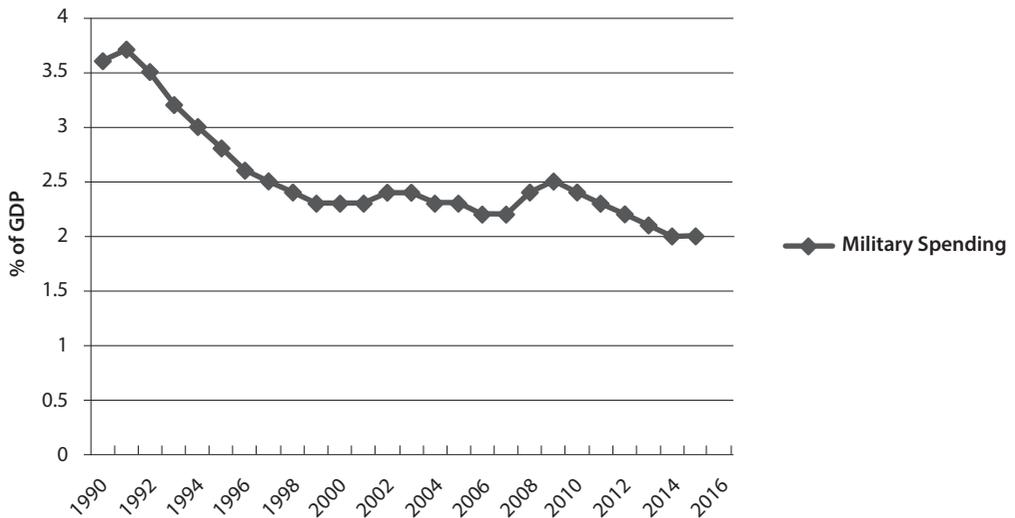
The remaining legacy frigates were decommissioned, and because production of Type 45 destroyers had been cut off after six units and numerous cost overruns, the RN's escort fleet shrank to only nineteen vessels. The replacement program for Britain's maritime patrol aircraft was terminated, leaving a significant capability gap to this day. Finally, only one of the two new *Queen Elizabeth*-class carriers was to become operational; the second would be sold or held in reserve.<sup>38</sup>

It would not take long for these measures to take their toll on Britain's ability to shape events abroad. During the air campaign against the regime of Mu'ammar Gadhafi in the summer of 2011, French, Italian, and American fixed- and rotary-wing combat aircraft were launched from carriers stationed off the coast of Libya. Britain having axed its carrier capability, its Tornados and Typhoons had to deploy from land bases in England and Italy. Smaller and less capable than at any time in recent memory, the Royal Navy arguably had reached the nadir in its history.

**France: Willing but Stretched.** Although the Marine Nationale was able to deploy highly capable carrier-based combat aircraft against targets from Afghanistan to Libya, the first decade of the twenty-first century proved to be anything but smooth sailing for the French navy.

Already in the late 1970s the idea for the replacement of France's existing flattops was floated. Consequently, the keel of the MN's first nuclear-powered carrier, *Charles de Gaulle*, was laid down in 1989. However, the program ran into major difficulties. Key components had severe design flaws, and a lack of funding meant the ship became operational only after more than a decade of construction and retrofitting. To this day, Europe's most powerful conventional naval asset has

**FIGURE 1**  
**UNITED KINGDOM DEFENSE SPENDING AND MAJOR VESSELS, 1990–2016**



Note: GDP = gross domestic product.

Sources: (above) SIPRI Military Expenditure Database; (below) appropriate volumes of *The Naval Institute Guide to Combat Fleets of the World*, *World Defence Almanac*, and *Seaforth World Naval Review*.

been plagued with technical problems. Moreover, the absence of a comparable asset among the other European navies left the ship in high demand, causing substantial wear and tear. In light of the technical hurdles and increasing financial restrictions, a second carrier never was built. Moreover, although some progress was made circa 2005–10, the joint venture between France and Britain to build a class of carriers with similar layout did not materialize.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, the MN’s strike capabilities become substantially limited during the recurring maintenance

cycles of *Charles de Gaulle*. At the time of this writing, the ship was undergoing its midlife refit and upgrade and will not return to the fleet much before 2020.<sup>40</sup>

Over the years, military-to-military relations progressively matured between France and NATO, notwithstanding the political fallout with the United States over the invasion of Iraq. More importantly, in 2009 President Nicolas Sarkozy put an end to the “French exemption” and the country officially rejoined NATO. As a RAND study noted, “France today is much more integrated in NATO planning and operation than at any time since the mid-1960s.”<sup>41</sup>

In terms of naval capabilities, France’s expeditionary-driven foreign policy during the 1990s resulted in the construction of three *Mistral*-class amphibious assault ships / helicopter carriers, which not only act as a stopgap when the single carrier is unavailable but have provided the MN with credible power-projection capabilities since being introduced in the middle of the first decade of the new century.

Meanwhile, on the basis of their experience on their joint Horizon project, France and Italy set out to build a new multipurpose frigate, known as the FREMM.<sup>42</sup> Both navies intended the class to replace their existing conglomerations of older surface combatants; the French navy hoped to procure nineteen units. Although the program can be considered a success story, France had to limit its ambitions in the light of economic woes following the economic crisis. Ultimately the MN will receive only eight FREMMs, bringing the escort fleet down to fifteen vessels, five of which (of the *La Fayette* class) already were not intended to be principal surface combatants at the time of their commissioning in the 1990s.<sup>43</sup>

***Italy: Within a Basin of Turmoil.*** The Italian navy has remained a powerful tool for Italian foreign policy throughout the twenty-first century. In fact, the country’s strategic goals have remained largely unchanged since their articulation in the late 1970s. In accordance with Italy’s strategic interests, the navy continued to enhance its expeditionary capabilities (the goal was to be able to deploy a brigade-level force); strengthen its naval airpower; acquire multirole platforms to counter all forms of threat; and promote national defense, maritime awareness, and maritime security.<sup>44</sup>

Throughout the last decade, the Marina Militare has maintained a very high operational tempo and has conducted a plethora of naval tasks. In doing so it has relied on a capable and well-balanced fleet and highly trained crews. The domestically built aircraft carrier *Cavour* was brought into service in 2008, and will be capable of deploying the Lockheed Martin F-35B STOVL fighter in the future. Its predecessor, *Giuseppe Garibaldi*, meanwhile functions as a helicopter carrier. The demand for an Italian carrier air wing results from the shrinkage of the U.S.

Navy's footprint in the Mediterranean over the last two decades. "[It] seems to be a reasonable assumption [that] the *Cavour* and the Italian fleet are effectively going to be a substitute [for the] American carrier battle group in the larger Mediterranean as the reduced US Navy carrier line-up is increasingly concentrated on the Pacific and Indian Oceans."<sup>45</sup>

The escort fleet comprises two destroyers of the Horizon, or *Andrea Doria*, class, and a growing number of new FREMM frigates. In contrast to France's curtailment policies, the Italian Ministry of Defense has decided to procure all ten frigates it initially planned. Italy's submarine fleet has profited from close cooperation with Germany's ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems and has received four

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*[W]hile most navies have excelled at conducting operations at the lower end of the intensity spectrum and within largely permissive environments, traditional war-fighting capabilities . . . against near-peer competitors have atrophied severely in the quarter-century since the end of the Cold War. The shortage of platforms, as well as the lack of mission-specific training and exercises, . . . finds its origin in strategic shortsightedness, political myopia, and the attendant fiscal austerity measures.*

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Type 212A submarines with air-independent propulsion.<sup>46</sup>

Most importantly, both Italy's navy and its coast guard have been burdened heavily with operations on the lower end of the intensity scale. Apart from everyday duties, such as making port calls, conducting search-and-rescue operations, and maintaining good order at sea, additional challenges for Italy's

sea services have resulted from political developments along Europe's southern and eastern shores over the past decade. Faced with thousands of refugees trying to escape poverty and war throughout Africa and the greater Middle East, both services have been engaged actively in countering human trafficking, as well as delivering humanitarian assistance across vast areas of the Mediterranean basin. Accordingly, the MM also has maintained a large contingent of offshore patrol vessels that are better suited for constabulary duties than their heavily armed sisters. As one observer notes, "[t]he *Marina Militare's* activities in this regard make it stand out in terms of its compliance with the duties imposed by treaty—and by humanity—in respect of the safeguarding of lives at sea."<sup>47</sup>

In combination with Italy's numerous other military commitments, these developments have left a smaller number of platforms dealing with a greater number of tasks. With dwindling resources and fewer platforms, the MM hardly can maintain its tempo of deployment across a host of areas without risking fatigue and accident. Perhaps even more importantly, since transitioning to an all-volunteer force, personnel costs have placed a substantial burden on the defense

budget, thereby limiting funding for maintenance and procurement.<sup>48</sup> Italian naval leaders remain adamant that the MM will be able to “fulfill its national and international commitments.”<sup>49</sup> But despite these protestations, the country may have to limit its ambitions: “For the navy, the longer-term consequence will likely be some re-orientation towards regional intervention capabilities at the expense of its current enthusiasm for extra-regional expeditionary deployments.”<sup>50</sup>

*Spain: Creating a Balanced Fleet.* Over the years, most European navies have streamlined their respective naval command structures while trying to modernize their fleets. As new and more-capable platforms were introduced over time, older systems were phased out. Given the complexity and cost of many of these platforms, ships and aircraft rarely were replaced on a one-for-one basis. Rather, since the turn of the century, European naval forces have experienced what is arguably the most drastic decline of platforms in recent history.<sup>51</sup> The eurozone crisis only exacerbated the strained situation in which many armed forces found themselves, which was particularly pronounced in states with relatively weak economies.

Spain’s economy, for example, was affected gravely by the crisis, and hence its armed forces were as well. Consequently, the Spanish navy has faced severe financial pressure in recent years. Fortunately, the core of its current fleet was procured prior to Spain’s financial woes. This includes the 28,000-ton *Juan Carlos*, a “strategic projection ship”; a class of five *Álvaro de Bazán* Aegis frigates; and the *Cantabria* replenishment tanker. These projects also have had a positive effect on Spain’s domestic shipbuilding industry, which is building for foreign customers both the aforementioned frigates and the assault ship. However, while Navantia has made a name for itself as one of the leading shipbuilders of surface vessels on the continent, it did not cover itself in glory in providing Spain’s future underwater flotilla. Major technical difficulties led to cost overruns and the postponement of the introduction of the new S-80 *Isaac Peral* class, resulting in bad publicity.<sup>52</sup>

While from a purely platform-centric view the navy’s situation might have seemed quite satisfactory, the lack of funding had a negative impact on training and readiness. The number of military personnel continued to decline throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century, adding to the shortage of trained officers and sailors. “[O]ne of the ways the Spanish . . . ensured continuity of capabilities in the face of spending constraints has been to reduce overall training levels,” a study points out.<sup>53</sup> “Manning problems have hurt the Spanish Navy’s ability to deploy multiple units at a short notice,” the study adds.<sup>54</sup>

Overall, Spain is likely to find it increasingly painful to support its wide range of capabilities at current spending levels. It therefore remains to be seen whether the navy will be able to retain the well-balanced fleet it currently operates.

### *Capabilities Lost—Some for Good*

Other states that also had shifted toward more-comprehensive expeditionary capabilities during the 1990s, such as the Netherlands and Denmark, largely accepted the loss of specific naval capabilities while retaining smaller, still proficiently skilled forces.<sup>55</sup>

*The Netherlands.* The Dutch, for example, went from having one of the largest and most capable Cold War fleets to what some observers believe to be a second-rate navy, arguably too small to deal effectively with tasks across a wide portion of the intensity spectrum at the same time.<sup>56</sup>

Although in 2000, Dutch defense white papers had outlined the various functions of the Royal Netherlands Navy, such as deploying a brigade-size element into high-intensity operations, one can concur with the assessment that by the end of the decade the “Dutch military [had] fallen well short of the 2000 white paper’s goals.” This comes as no surprise, given that over the course of ten years seventeen surface combatants were decommissioned, replaced by only four *De Zeven Provinciën*-class frigates. In contrast to these highly capable air-defense frigates, the four *Holland*-class large oceangoing patrol vessels that also were added to the fleet are designed with low-intensity operations in Dutch overseas territories specifically in mind. Despite their sophisticated sensor suite, they lack hitting power for force-on-force engagements. Moreover, by 2005 the remaining Dutch P-3C Orion maritime patrol planes were sold to Germany, leaving a void in the country’s maritime awareness capability.<sup>57</sup>

On a more positive note, the navy’s amphibious forces have benefited from the commissioning of two *Rotterdam*-class LPDs and the 28,000-ton joint support ship *Karel Doorman* over the last decade, and the submarines of the country’s small flotilla have demonstrated their proficiencies, both during exercises with NATO allies and while recently shadowing a Russian carrier group as it deployed to the Mediterranean.<sup>58</sup>

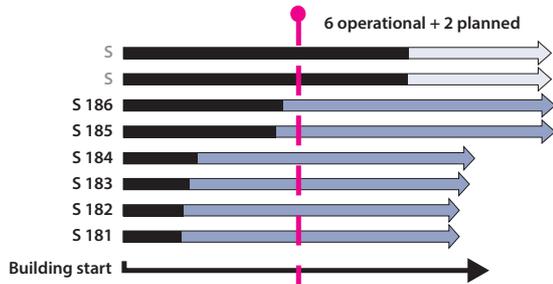
*Denmark.* Denmark was able to secure funding for two *Absalon*-class flexible support ships and three *Iver Huitfeldt*-class multipurpose frigates. Danish military activities over the last decade ranged from deployments to Afghanistan and contributions to antipiracy operations, such as the European Union’s Operation ATALANTA and NATO’s Operation OCEAN SHIELD, to providing naval elements to NATO’s standing maritime groups and participating recently in NATO’s ballistic missile–defense effort.

However, Denmark’s newly won blue-water capabilities came at the expense of more-traditional elements of sea power; most prominently, all four of the navy’s submarines were phased out by 2004, leaving it without one of the most useful

**FIGURE 2  
GERMAN SUBMARINE PROCUREMENT, 1960–2040**

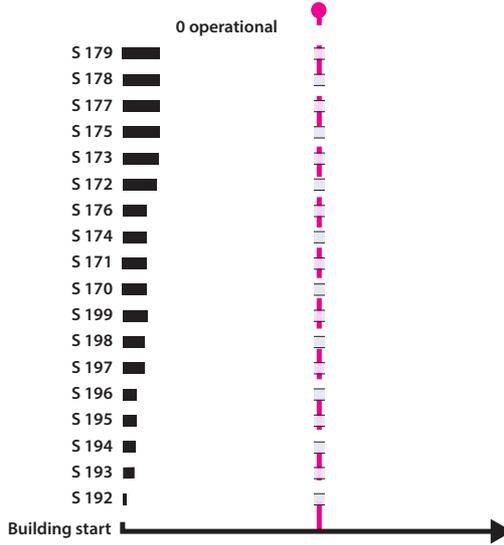
**Type 212A**

Attack submarine AIP  
 Displ.: 1,830t submerged  
 Length: 56–57.2m  
 Speed subm.: 20kts  
 Crew: ca. 27



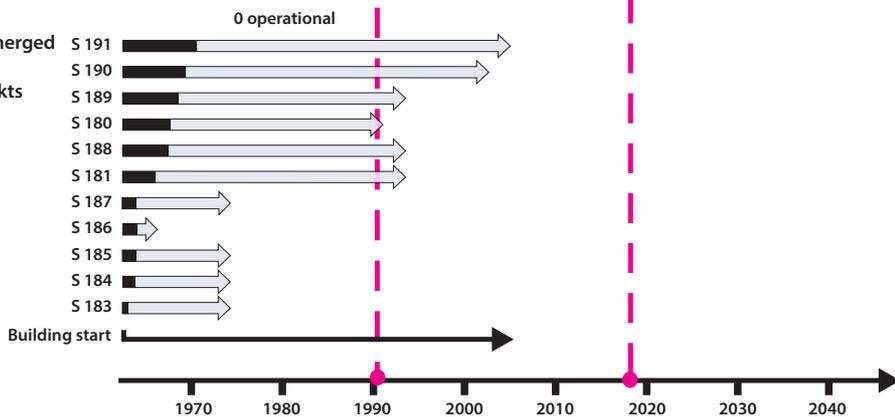
**Type 206**

Displ.: 500t submerged  
 Length: 48.49m  
 Speed subm.: 17kts  
 Crew: 22



**Type 205**

Displ.: 455t submerged  
 Length: 44.3m  
 Speed subm.: 17kts  
 Crew: 22



Note: AIP = air-independent propulsion.

Source: Stöhs/Young

naval assets.<sup>59</sup> “Today the fleet has no submarines, no fast attack craft and no dedicated minelayers.”<sup>60</sup>

*Germany.* Unsurprisingly, Germany, given its status as a world leader in conventional submarine technology, retained its submarine force throughout the post–Cold War period. Notwithstanding the addition of state-of-the-art platforms, the size of the German navy shrank in lockstep with the reductions to the defense budget. As an example, while twenty-three submarines were in service in 1990, the number had fallen to fourteen by 2000. Another fifteen years later, only six vessels were left. The surface fleet received capable F-124 *Sachsen*-class guided-missile frigates, which could provide fleet air defense for anything up to carrier strike groups; a new class of so-called stabilization frigates also was procured. Despite being larger in size, these F-125 stabilization frigates are less heavily armed than their predecessors. Therefore, a new crewing concept and modular design are intended to allow for longer periods of deployment over greater distances. These ships—as well as the next class of very large surface combatants, the MKS-180s—are the navy’s answer to the requirements postulated in the defense white paper of 2006.<sup>61</sup> The recent decommissioning of its last patrol boats (guided-missile craft) largely concluded the shift from a brown-water force to a blue-water navy. However, growing concerns over Russia’s military activities in the Baltic Sea have called this transition into question, and Germany again is looking to expand its naval capabilities in littoral waters closer to home.<sup>62</sup>

Over the last decades, Germany also has remained relatively reluctant to commit greater resources to Europe’s common defense. Except for its contribution to the security mission in Afghanistan, Germany often has been unwilling to provide any form of hard power to recent NATO- or U.S.-led military operations, such as in Libya and Syria. Rather, its involvement abroad has been focused on peacekeeping missions and stability operations (such as with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon [known as UNIFIL] from 2006 to the present) and deployments as part of NATO’s standing maritime groups, as well as providing good order at sea more generally.<sup>63</sup> With fewer vessels; the absence of large, amphibious-capable platforms; and the above-mentioned political caveats, “[Germany’s] cruising navy provides little in the way of power projection,” as one analyst has noted.<sup>64</sup> Much less can it claim to command sufficient and readily available antisurface and antisubmarine capabilities for high-threat environments. News of the entire German submarine fleet recently being out of action simultaneously is a case in point.<sup>65</sup>

### *Smart Solutions in the High North*

*Norway.* Farther north, Norway gained public attention for making some clever choices when it came to modernizing its naval forces. Although the defense budget plummeted from 3 percent of GDP in the early 1990s to 1.4 percent in 2014, the Royal Norwegian Navy has kept its force at a high level of readiness.

As its Cold War-era frigates reached the end of their service lives, a class of larger and more capable surface combatants, based on the Spanish frigate design, took shape. The first ship and namesake of the class, *Fridtjof Nansen*, was introduced into the navy in 2006. It is particularly well suited to perform a range of missions in Arctic conditions along Norway's SLOCs. Noticeably, the frigate is the smallest warship to feature the Aegis combat system, while it can deploy the new NH-90 helicopter for ASW operations. Closer to shore, Norway relies on its *Skjold* class of stealthy, high-speed corvettes to counter symmetric and asymmetric threats from the sea.

**Sweden.** Sweden showed similar technical ingenuity in commissioning five corvettes of its own, of the *Visby* class, showcasing effective signature-reduction measures. Both Norway and Sweden disbanded their network of coastal-defense capacities during the first decade of the twenty-first century as the two countries continued to forge close ties with their Western partners; however, Sweden reactivated its land-based, mobile, antiship missile systems in 2016.<sup>66</sup>

While territorial defense was not forgotten, participation within the framework of multilateral peacekeeping operations under the aegis of NATO and the UN was promoted. "Our security cannot be maintained through a one-sided focus on the conventional defense of Norwegian territory," Norway's defense white paper of 2004 stated.<sup>67</sup> The close defense cooperation among the Scandinavian states (such as Northern Defense Cooperation [known as NORDEF] and Swedish-Finnish naval cooperation), as well as with other NATO members, not only has strengthened European and transatlantic ties; it has enhanced interoperability and proficiencies among the respective navies.<sup>68</sup>

### *Divergences along the Southern Flank*

**Greece.** Arguably, the Hellenic Navy has seen the fewest doctrinal changes over the past two decades. Even during a period when the majority of Europe's armed forces sought more-comprehensive expeditionary capabilities, the Hellenic Navy remained focused on defending its adjacent waters and fulfilling its NATO obligations. The relatively constant strategic framework in which the navy operated allowed it to strengthen its traditional naval elements (e.g., ASW and ASuW).

Despite the defense budget spiking at 3.3 percent of GDP in 2010, Greece's financial collapse during the eurozone crisis had far-reaching consequences for the country's military. Coinciding with an important period of naval modernization, it caused "existing domestic construction . . . to be paralyzed whilst longstanding plans of new orders [were] stalled."<sup>69</sup> Although more recently there have been signs of improvement, the Hellenic Navy quite likely will be facing some difficult choices in the future. This is compounded by the fact that the balance of naval power in the region already has shifted, and continues to shift, toward its traditional regional competitor, Turkey.

*Turkey.* Turkey has been able to create a powerful navy that continues to expand its capabilities—an exception among European naval forces. More importantly, it has built a domestic defense industry proficient in developing and fielding everything from main battle tanks and unmanned aerial vehicles to patrol craft and frigates.<sup>70</sup>

As the country tries to establish itself as a regional power, it also seeks to deploy its military effectively beyond its borders. Its naval forces act as an important tool for gaining greater influence in the region. In the recent past, Turkish naval forces have shown an increasing level of ambition in contributing to international operations both within and beyond the Mediterranean (e.g., Turkish ships have acted as the flagship of the counterpiracy Combined Task Force 151). Yet, in light of the country's recent coup d'état attempt and the subsequent purge within Turkey's military, the navy, while a highly capable mix of foreign and domestic naval platforms, probably will not reach its full potential.

The Turkish navy provides an insightful example of how domestic turmoil can hamstring an expanding naval force. Since the turn of the century, the Turkish ministry of defense has set out on an ambitious procurement plan for the navy. This includes a number of highly sophisticated systems, ranging from domestically built *Milgem*- and *Ada*-class surface combatants to an amphibious assault ship based on the Spanish carrier *Juan Carlos*. Because of the complexity of modern warships, submarines, and aircraft, learning to operate them often involves very steep learning curves. Therefore, such systems require highly professional crews and astute commanders, as well as skilled engineers and other engineering personnel. Low morale, as well as widespread insecurities and suspicions within the armed forces, will leave some considerable doubt regarding Turkey's more assertive naval goals, such as the development of a carrier-based fixed-wing capability.<sup>71</sup>

#### AFTER THE FALL OF CRIMEA (2014 ONWARD)

In 2015, for the first time in more than two decades, Europe as a whole increased its defense spending.<sup>72</sup> This reversal of trends can be attributed directly to a range of security-related concerns with which the European states see themselves confronted.

The most worrying is the reemergence of great-power rivalry. After a “honeymoon period” of more than twenty years, Russia's military intervention in eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea have reminded Europe that it cannot take its security for granted. What is more, Russia's irredentism and its increasingly assertive behavior along Europe's northern, eastern, and southern borders coincided with one of the largest refugee crises since the end of the Cold War. Meanwhile, terrorist attacks by radical jihadists across the continent have caused a growing sense of insecurity within Europe. As if these challenges were

not daunting enough, the U.S. rebalancing toward the Indo-Pacific region and President Donald Trump's "America First" policy have heightened the sense of uncertainty.

### *Growing Pains*

Against this backdrop of intersecting security challenges, European countries' respective military strategies and defense postures (both national and NATO) are being revisited. It appears that, for the first time since the end of the Cold War, governments across Europe no longer can afford to reduce their own defense spending while readily investing large sums of money in their welfare states, all the while remaining utterly dependent on U.S. security guarantees. Consequently, all twenty-nine NATO member states have pledged to increase their financial contributions toward common security and defense.<sup>73</sup> Meanwhile, neutral Sweden and Finland also have made concerted efforts to forge closer ties with their Western partners and strengthen their armed forces, not least in the maritime domain.<sup>74</sup>

Financial considerations notwithstanding, new concepts for closer cooperation between Europe's armed forces have been developed. Establishing bi- and trilateral defense agreements has proved expedient in compensating for and bridging the capability gaps created by years of austerity measures. The 2010 defense agreement between the United Kingdom and France (the "Lancaster House treaties") "provide[s] a road-map to more effective European defence cooperation, based on deeper capability planning and mutual dependency."<sup>75</sup> For example, after more than half a decade of preparation, the Anglo-French Combined Joint Expeditionary Force (a multiservice, scalable, power-projection force capable of high-intensity warfare) became operational in April 2016, and the force arguably has "set a new 'gold standard' for defence cooperation [in Europe]."<sup>76</sup> The German-Dutch Integrated Sea Battalion and the Spanish-Italian Amphibious Battlegroup mandated by the European Union are further examples of the efforts currently under way.<sup>77</sup> It is safe to state that much of the cooperation over the past decades has enhanced operational experience among European naval forces, and many naval officers have gained proficiencies in a broader range of naval operations than their Cold War predecessors.

However, there are caveats that merit close attention. First, while most navies have excelled at conducting operations at the lower end of the intensity spectrum and within largely permissive environments, traditional war-fighting capabilities (e.g., ASW and ASuW) against near-peer competitors have atrophied severely in the quarter century since the end of the Cold War. The shortage of platforms, as well as the lack of mission-specific training and exercises, is the chief cause of this dangerous development, which finds its origin in strategic shortsightedness, political myopia, and the attendant fiscal austerity measures. In many instances,

navies find themselves unable to provide sufficient means to conduct their daily tasks, as “demonstrated by the ‘gapping’ of certain standing commitments to allow warships to be released for increasingly important NATO taskings.” Consequently, oceangoing patrol vessels and auxiliaries fulfill missions traditionally conducted by potent frigates and destroyers.<sup>78</sup>

Second, at the end of the Cold War, European powers were able to field, deploy, and sustain division-size units in operations such as DESERT STORM. In contrast, today such an effort would be largely futile.<sup>79</sup> Although they constitute the most-credible amphibious forces in Europe, French and British troops are

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*[D]efense cooperation among the European partners will need to encompass new common strategic guidelines, shared operational and doctrinal procedures, better training for military personnel, and a much-improved maintenance and readiness level of naval platforms, as well as greater industrial and technological collaboration.*

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“unlikely to be deployed in a high-threat environment without considerable U.S. force protection.”<sup>80</sup> The militaries have been “hollowed out to such an extent that the deployment of a brigade, let alone a division, at credible readiness would be a major challenge.”<sup>81</sup> Ultimately, the

European states barely manage to conduct basic peacetime (naval) duties at the desired rate, and have little to no surge capacity for emergencies.

### *Striking a Balance*

For the above-mentioned reasons, each state must strike a balance between deploying low-end military capabilities for daily tasks, on the one hand, and high-end war-fighting capabilities for worst-case scenarios, on the other. With regard to naval power, the question remains to what extent “navies [should] invest their resources in high-intensity capabilities aimed at deterring or, if necessary, prosecuting conflict with other navies, rather than in low-intensity capabilities best suited to the maintenance of good order at sea.”<sup>82</sup>

Arguably, the soundest solution to this problem is for European governments once again to provide sufficient funding for the naval branches to maintain relatively well-balanced fleets and operate them in a joint and combined fashion (i.e., with land, air, and other sea forces). These fleets need to be designed, first and foremost, to fight in contested environments, but, at the same time, must be configured to conduct many years of peacetime duties. If designed with sufficient room to grow, such naval forces would remain flexible enough to react to the ever-evolving security environment. Multipurpose surface combatants (ranging from two to seven thousand tons in displacement), amphibious-capable assets with substantial redundancies, small flotillas of modern submarines, and airborne maritime-surveillance platforms, in combination with the vital associated

replenishment and sealift capabilities, are best suited to adapt to and conduct the various missions expected in the future. At the same time, defense cooperation among the European partners will need to encompass new common strategic guidelines, shared operational and doctrinal procedures, better training for military personnel, and a much-improved maintenance and readiness level of naval platforms, as well as greater industrial and technological collaboration.

To list the multitude of measures European states are undertaking currently to strengthen their militaries is beyond the scope of this article. However, it is apparent that many have put a tentative end to the truncation of naval power and are reinvesting in capabilities at the upper end of the intensity spectrum. Norway, Poland, the Netherlands, and Germany all are modernizing or enhancing their underwater forces. Great Britain and Greece have decided to revive their intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities by reactivating and procuring maritime patrol aircraft. Italy and France will receive new, capable surface combatants over the coming years. The British government has re-committed itself to operating two carriers, the first of which should be in service by 2020—probably, initially, with a combined U.K./U.S. F-35B air group. And over the next decade, Spain, Italy, and Turkey also probably will acquire this aircraft for their flattops.

If this trend continues over the coming years and the ties within the transatlantic community remain robust, there is a good chance that Europe's naval forces will be better prepared and better equipped to perform the duties and fulfill the many functions with which they are charged. They will have arisen from the abyss.

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#### NOTES

1. In a broad sense, the term *Europe* is understood to signify a relatively unified body of like-minded states with similar domestic interests and common foreign policy goals. In theory, the concept of *European sea power* would have to be understood broadly to encompass all European states and their assets actively invested in the maritime domain. However, this article focuses on the study of naval power among selected European states that have direct access to the sea and make rather sizable investments in operating naval forces. All European states under discussion are members of NATO or the European Union; many are members of both.
2. Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs* 70, no. 1 (1990/91), pp. 22–33.
3. For discussion on sea blindness in Britain, see Nick Childs, *Britain's Future Navy*, rev. ed. (Barnsley, U.K.: Pen & Sword Maritime, 2014), pp. xv, 26. For a definition of *maritime security*, see Geoffrey Till, *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 283ff.
4. The U.S. Navy was no exception to this rule. However, it is important to note that, despite significant reductions, the emergence of near-peer competitors, the proliferation of advanced weapons, and the challenges the United States thus has faced in recent years, it nonetheless maintains the most powerful naval force in the world—by a considerable margin. On the basis of a relatively consistent understanding of naval power as part of its overarching grand strategy, essential elements

- of the U.S. naval strategy have remained unchanged. Enabling access to the global commons, maintaining credible nuclear and conventional deterrence, ensuring sea control, and projecting power globally represent basic tenets of American sea power. Sebastian Bruns, *US Naval Strategy and National Security: The Evolution of American Maritime Power* (New York: Routledge, 2017).
5. A case in point is the overhead costs for personnel of the Italian navy. As a RAND study pointed out, “The Italian defense budget is divided into three major areas: (1) investment (what the U.S. calls research and development, plus procurement), (2) personnel, and (3) training, maintenance, and operations. Since switching to an all-volunteer military in 2006, the Italian goal was to spend roughly 50 percent of their budget on personnel, 25 percent on investment, and 25 percent on training, maintenance, and operations. In reality, personnel costs have consumed roughly 70 percent of Italian military spending.” F. Stephen Larrabee et al., *NATO and the Challenges of Austerity* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2012), p. 36.
  6. Many observers in the late 1980s believed that the confrontation between East and West would continue well into the twenty-first century. See Eric Grove, *The Future of Sea Power* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1990), p. 153ff.
  7. The most obvious feature was the installation of close-in weapons systems on many surface vessels. For more information, see Anthony H. Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, vol. 3, *The Afghan and Falklands Conflicts* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1991). Also see U.S. Navy Dept., *Lessons of the Falklands: Summary Report* (Washington, DC: Office of Program Appraisal, 1983).
  8. Sixty-five billion dollars in 1991, as opposed to fifty-one billion in 1998 (in constant 2014 U.S. dollars). See SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 1988–2016, SIPRI, [www.sipri.org/](http://www.sipri.org/).
  9. Childs, *Britain’s Future Navy*, p. 9. For an interesting discussion on future British security challenges and the “maritime vs. continental” debate, see Geoffrey Till and Martin Robson, *UK Air-Sea Integration in Libya, 2001: A Successful Blueprint for the Future?*, Corbett Paper 12 (London: Corbett Centre for Maritime Policy Studies, July 2013), available at [www.kcl.ac.uk/](http://www.kcl.ac.uk/).
  10. Ministry of Defence, *Strategic Defence Review* (London: 1998), chap. 5.
  11. Iain Ballantyne, *Strike from the Sea: The Royal Navy & US Navy at War in the Middle East 1949–2003* (Barnsley, U.K.: Pen & Sword, 2004).
  12. See Norman Friedman, *The Fifty Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (London: Chatham, 2000), pp. 295–98.
  13. Ministère de la Défense, *The French White Paper on Defence and National Security* (Paris: 2008), p. 57ff.
  14. In particular, the RN’s strategic submarines have been armed with American-designed ballistic missiles. Currently the *Vanguard*-class submarine carries the Trident D5.
  15. Unlike the French and Italian destroyers, the Royal Navy incorporated the highly capable Sampson radar in its Type 45 class, despite the costs. This decision was founded in the navy’s operational requirements for the planned vessel—namely, to provide fleet air defense for its carriers against a sophisticated opponent on the high seas (ergo, without air-defense coverage from land-based assets). The RN’s planning envisioned “a much more demanding operational scenario than either the [French or Italian navy].” A comprehensive article on the ship can be found in Conrad Waters, “Significant Ships: HMS *Darling*: The Royal Navy’s Type 45 Air-Defence Destroyer,” in *Seaforth World Naval Review 2010*, ed. Conrad Waters (Barnsley, U.K.: Seaforth, 2009), p. 133.
  16. Jean-Louis Promé, “The French 1992–94 Military Programme Law: A Case of ‘Let’s Wait and See’ While Adapting,” *Military Technology* 16, no. 9 (1992), pp. 42–49.
  17. Jean-Louis Promé, “‘Optimar 95’ for the French Navy,” *Military Technology* 16, no. 9 (1992), p. 52.
  18. Angelo Mariani, “A Strategic View of the Italian Navy,” *Naval Forces* 18, special issue 1 (1997), p. 6.
  19. Giampaolo Di Paola, “L’evoluzione della Difesa italiana negli ultimi trent’anni,” *Ministero della Difesa*, September 28, 2012, [www.difesa.it/](http://www.difesa.it/).

20. Thirty-seven billion dollars in 1990, thirty-two billion in 1995, forty-two billion in 2000. SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 1988–2016.
21. Ministerio de Defensa, Secretaría General Técnica, *Defense White Paper 2000* (Madrid: Centro de Publicaciones, 2000), p. 193.
22. Bernard Prévelin, *The Naval Institute Guide to Combat Fleets of the World, 1992–93: Their Ships, Aircraft, and Systems* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1992), p. xv.
23. Ministerio de Defensa, Secretaría General Técnica, *Strategic Defence Review* (Madrid: Imprenta Ministerio de Defensa, 2003), p. 107.
24. Patrick Walters, “Spanish Armada for Warship Contract,” *The Australian*, June 20, 2007, [www.theaustralian.com.au/](http://www.theaustralian.com.au/).
25. Colin S. Gray, *The Leverage of Sea Power: The Strategic Advantage of Navies in War* (New York: Free Press, 1992), p. 289.
26. Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, *Weißbuch 1983: Zur Sicherheit der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Bonn, F.R.G.: 1983), p. 63ff. A detailed description of Germany’s naval development in the early post–Cold War period can be found in Cdr. Christian Jentzsch’s “Von der Escort-Navy zur Expeditionary-Navy?,” *Deutsches Maritimes Kompetenz Netz*, October 20, 2016, [dmkn.de/](http://dmkn.de/).
27. Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, *Weißbuch zur Sicherheit der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und zur Lage und Zukunft der Bundeswehr* (Berlin: 1994), p. 120ff.
28. The Oxford dictionary explains the term *out of area* as follows: “(A military operation) conducted away from the place of origin or expected place of action of the force concerned.” In the case of Germany it can be explained as “NATO alliance operations and non-NATO coalition operations in which the United States and other NATO allies participate and that occur outside or on the periphery of Alliance territory.” Myron Hura et al., *Interoperability: A Continuing Challenge in Coalition Air Operations* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2000), chap. 1, p. 1.
29. BENESAM is discussed in Theodore Hughes-Riley, “Fleet Review: The Royal Netherlands Navy,” in *Seaforth World Naval Review 2017*, ed. Conrad Waters (Barnsley, U.K.: Seaforth, 2016), p. 95.
30. Hans Harboe-Hansen, “The Royal Danish Navy’s Modernisation Programme,” *Naval Forces* 18, no. 6 (1997), p. 93. Germany also has been highly successful on the international market with its own interpretation of modular ship design, the Mehrzweck-Kombination (MEKO).
31. Peter Nordbeck [Adm., RSN], “Preparing the Navy for the Next Century,” interview by *Naval Forces*, in “The Royal Swedish Navy—Today and Tomorrow,” special issue 2, *Naval Forces* 17 (1996), p. 5.
32. Ibid.
33. James D. Watkins, “The Maritime Strategy, 1984,” in *U.S. Naval Strategy in the 1980s: Selected Documents*, ed. John B. Hattendorf and Peter M. Swartz, Newport Paper 33 (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 2008), p. 78.
34. See Hellenic Ministry of National Defense, *White Paper for the Armed Forces 1996–1997*. It is worth noting that, while the Turkish defense *White Paper 2000* discusses using “forward engagement” and “forward defense” to thwart threats to Turkey, the document does not address how this can be achieved by using naval forces. See Turkish Ministry of Defense, *White Paper 2000*.
35. Till, *Seapower*, p. 35ff.
36. Robert M. Cassidy, *Counterinsurgency and the Global War on Terror: Military Culture and Irregular War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2008).
37. The carrier HMS *Invincible* was decommissioned in 2005.
38. Ministry of Defence, *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review* (London: Cabinet Office, 2010), available at [www.gov.uk/](http://www.gov.uk/).
39. “France’s PA2/CVF Carrier Project: Stalled in France, Hedged on Demand from Brazil,” *Defense Industry Daily*, December 4, 2014, [www.defenseindustrydaily.com/](http://www.defenseindustrydaily.com/).
40. Fortunately, close ties with the U.S. Navy allow French pilots to train alongside their American partners, with cross-deck operations taking place since early in the first decade of the twenty-first century.
41. Larrabee et al., *NATO and the Challenges of Austerity*, p. 26.
42. FREMM stands for Frégate européenne multi-mission or Fregata europea multi-missione.

43. Alain Hinden, “La Fayette Ship Profile (I),” interview by *Naval Forces*, *Naval Forces* 19, no. 2 (1998), pp. 45–47.
44. Bruno Branciforte [Adm., IN], “The Commanders Respond: Italian Navy,” U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 138/3/1,309 (March 2012), available at [www.usni.org/](http://www.usni.org/).
45. Enrico Cernuschi and Vincent P. O’Hara, “Fleet Review—Italy: The Marina Militare; A Well-Balanced Force in Time of Crisis,” in *Seaforth World Naval Review 2013*, ed. Conrad Waters (Barnsley, U.K.: Seaforth, 2012), p. 86.
46. “Submarines with diesel-electric propulsion generally have to surface every couple of days to run the charging generator and recharge the batteries. However, with a special fuel cell system, subs can remain under water for longer. The official record [in 2015]—set by an HDW Type 212A submarine—is 14 days. If a submarine is unable to surface, the regulations require that the crew is able to survive for at least six days.” Stefan Nitschke and Stephen Elliott, “Under Water,” *Naval Forces*, [www.nafomag.com/](http://www.nafomag.com/).
47. Cernuschi and O’Hara, “Fleet Review—Italy,” p. 84.
48. Conrad Waters, “France’s Aquitaine: First French FREMM Heralds a Renaissance for Its Surface Fleet,” in *Seaforth World Naval Review 2013*, ed. Waters, p. 107.
49. Branciforte, “The Commanders Respond: Italian Navy,”
50. Conrad Waters, “Regional Review—Europe and Russia,” in *Seaforth World Naval Review 2017*, ed. Waters, p. 67.
51. Jeremy Stöhs, *The Decline of European Naval Forces: Challenges to Sea Power in an Age of Fiscal Austerity and Political Uncertainty* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2018).
52. “A major ongoing concern is the troubled S-80 submarine programme, which envisages completion of four boats to replace Spain’s existing underwater flotilla. Construction work [had] effectively been suspended until major weight and buoyancy problems identified in the first submarine, *Isaac Peral*, in May 2013 [were] resolved. General Dynamics Electric Boat of the US has been brought in to assist a major re-design, which [has involved] lengthening the submarines into a S-80 Plus configuration.” Conrad Waters, “Regional Review—Europe and Russia,” in *Seaforth World Naval Review 2015*, ed. Conrad Waters (Barnsley, U.K.: Seaforth, 2014), p. 65.
53. Larrabee et al., *NATO and the Challenges of Austerity*, p. 49.
54. *Ibid.*, pp. 49–50.
55. For an excellent overview of both navies, see the fleet reviews by Søren Nørby and Theodore Hughes-Riley in *Seaforth World Naval Review 2017*, ed. Waters.
56. “Once one of the more significant European maritime forces, the Royal Netherlands Navy has been progressively reduced in size and stature since the end of the Cold War until it barely ranks amongst Europe’s second-tier fleets.” See Conrad Waters, “Regional Review—Europe and Russia,” in *Seaforth World Naval Review 2010*, ed. Waters, p. 98.
57. Marcial Hernandez, *Dutch Hard Power: Choosing Decline*, National Security Outlook 3 (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, April 3, 2013), available at [www.aei.org/](http://www.aei.org/).
58. LPD stands for landing platform, dock. Although not an authoritative source, Wikipedia provides a sound definition of LPD: “An amphibious transport dock, also called a landing platform/dock (LPD), is an amphibious warfare ship, a warship that embarks, transports, and lands elements of a landing force for expeditionary warfare missions.” *Wikipedia*, s.v. “Amphibious transport dock,” [en.wikipedia.org/](http://en.wikipedia.org/). BBC News, “Russian Ships ‘Chase Away’ Dutch Submarine in Mediterranean,” *BBC News*, November 9, 2016, [www.bbc.com/](http://www.bbc.com/).
59. Harboe-Hansen, “The Royal Danish Navy’s Modernisation Programme,” p. 95.
60. Søren Nørby, “Fleet Review: The Royal Danish Navy,” in *Seaforth World Naval Review 2017*, ed. Waters, p. 83.
61. Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, *Weißbuch 2006 zur Sicherheitspolitik Deutschlands und zur Zukunft der Bundeswehr* (Berlin: 2006), p. 122ff.
62. Richard Tomkins, “German Navy Set for Additional Corvettes,” *UPI*, January 24, 2017, [www.upi.com/](http://www.upi.com/).
63. Bernhard Chiari, ed., *Auftrag Auslandseinsatz: Neueste Militärgeschichte an der Schnittstelle von Geschichtswissenschaft, Politik,*

- Öffentlichkeit und Streitkräften* (Freiburg, Ger.: Rombach Verlag, 2012).
64. Bryan McGrath, *NATO at Sea: Trends in Allied Naval Power*, National Security Outlook 5 (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, September 18, 2013), available at [www.aei.org/](http://www.aei.org/).
65. Sebastian Sprenger, "All of Germany's Submarines Are Currently Down," *Defense News*, October 20, 2017, [www.defensenews.com/](http://www.defensenews.com/).
66. See Robin Hughes, "Sweden Reactivates RBS15-Based Mobile Coastal Defence System," *Jane's 360*, December 30, 2016, [www.janes.com/](http://www.janes.com/).
67. Norwegian Ministry of Defense, *Strategic Defence Concept 2004* (Oslo: 2004), p. 7.
68. "The Basics about NORDEF-FCO," *NORDEF-FCO*, [www.nordefco.org/](http://www.nordefco.org/).
69. Conrad Waters, "Regional Review—Europe and Russia," in *Seaforth World Naval Review 2014*, ed. Conrad Waters (Barnsley, U.K.: Seaforth, 2013), p. 69. However, in the most recent past, things seem somewhat more positive for the Hellenic Navy. New Type 214 submarines have been introduced, the Orion patrol planes have been reactivated, and the construction of *Roussen*-class fast-attack craft has commenced.
70. Heiko Borchert and Cyril Widdershoven, *The Dawn of a New Arab Defense Industrial Network*, Arab Defense Industry Paper 1 (Lucerne, Switz.: Borchert Consulting & Research, July 2016), p. 13ff.
71. Aaron Stein, quoted in Humeyra Pamuk and Gareth Jones, "Turkish Military a Fractured Force after Attempted Coup," *Reuters*, July 26, 2016, [www.reuters.com/](http://www.reuters.com/).
72. Alessandro Marrone, Olivier de France, and Daniele Fattibene, eds., *Defense Budgets and Cooperation in Europe: Developments, Trends and Drivers* (Rome: Istituto Affari Internazionali, January 2016), available at [www.iai.it/](http://www.iai.it/).
73. All NATO members have agreed to meet the guideline of spending a minimum of 2 percent of GDP on defense.
74. Stefan Lundqvist, *Continuity and Change in Post-Cold War Maritime Security: A Study of the Strategies Pursued by the US, Sweden and Finland 1991–2016* (Åbo, Fin.: Åbo Akademi Univ. Press, 2017).
75. Ben Jones, *Franco-British Military Cooperation: A New Engine for European Defence?*, Occasional Paper 88 (Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies, February 2011), p. 5.
76. United Kingdom Ministry of Defence and Republic of France Joint Staff, *Combined Joint Expeditionary Force (CJEF) User Guide* (Swindon, U.K.: Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre; Paris: Centre interarmées de concepts, de doctrine et d'expérimentations, 2012); Jones, *Franco-British Military Cooperation*.
77. Lars Hoffmann, "German Armed Forces to Integrate Sea Battalion into Dutch Navy," *Defense News*, February 4, 2016, [www.defensenews.com/](http://www.defensenews.com/).
78. Waters, "Regional Review—Europe and Russia," in *Seaforth World Naval Review 2017*, ed. Waters, p. 73.
79. Jorge Benitez, ed., *Alliance at Risk: Strengthening European Defense in an Age of Turbulence and Competition* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, February 26, 2016), available at [www.atlanticcouncil.org/](http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/).
80. Larrabee et al., *NATO and the Challenges of Austerity*, p. 86.
81. Richard Shirreff, "United Kingdom," in *Alliance at Risk*, ed. Benitez.
82. Till, *Seapower*, p. 43.



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