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Allies through Thick and Thin

U.S. Navy Strategic Communication, 1986–1994, in Transatlantic Context

Jon-Wyatt Matlack

Abstract: From 1986 to 1994, U.S. Navy declassified strategy documents necessarily shifted in both form and function as the Cold War ended. However, this transition also evidenced a diminished inclusion of allied navies in the Navy's strategic conceptions. Departing from the global deterrence in the maritime strategy and pivoting toward the power projection in “. . . From the Sea,” an aloofness to alliances emerged. Reflecting on this period through the example of Germany, U.S. naval strategy will be shown to be made more “whole” when it more overtly accounts for allied naval partnership.

Keywords: allied navies, U.S. Navy, naval strategy, German Navy, maritime strategy, white papers, NATO, transatlantic alliance, deterrence

How do you allocate the cost of the Navy in terms of the global presence, the capacity to operate on all the world's oceans?,” Secretary of Defense Richard B. “Dick” Cheney posed on 31 July 1991 while testifying to the House Budget Committee. He added, “Obviously they defend all of it, the entire world, in a sense.”¹ While the U.S. Navy has played a crucial role in the security of the United States throughout its history, the Cold War thrust on the naval Service the responsibility of operating on a global scale while maintaining a near wartime level of readiness. These conditions necessitated prodigious cooperation with the fleets of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) partners akin to the two World Wars. From the first announcement of the Truman Doctrine in 1947 to the middle Cold War in the 1970s, the U.S. Navy and its allies in the

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Atlantic and Pacific enjoyed numerical and qualitative superiority compared to their Soviet adversary. Though such events as the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1963 are traditionally viewed as the main flashpoints of the Cold War, the United States Navy and its allies received their most onerous challenge in the 1980s, as the Soviet Union's efforts to massively expand their naval forces culminated.

Within this historic context, the U.S. Navy published the maritime strategy in 1986.² In substantive detail, the Navy publicly prescribed a strategy that illustrated how national naval power, aided by allied fleets, would project power into all Soviet coastal regions in the event of war. Initially produced as a classified draft in 1982, the maritime strategy proved to be a resounding success in demonstrating the utility of the Navy in deterring foreign threats to the United States and its allies. However, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, the catalysts for the Navy's more robust strategic posture, left the Service as the last one standing as the Cold War abruptly ended. Lacking a peer opponent and facing mounting calls for budget cuts, the Navy entered the 1990s in the undeniably unenviable position of continuing to effectively advocate to Congress and the public for a capable naval service budget. Out of this context, the Navy published the article "The War Ahead" (1991), followed by the white papers "... From the Sea" (1992) and "... Forward from the Sea" (1994).³

The shift from the maritime strategy to the immediate post-Cold War white papers has received extensive study in recent years. However, more narrowly, this article contends that this series of Navy strategy documents evidence a devolved standard of political communicative clarity regarding the Navy as an intrinsically allied armed Service. To borrow William Cockell's characterization, naval strategy should be "simple, not simplistic."⁴ These documents' shift in audience, from that of a broadly international to a national one, similarly evidence a commensurate pivot away from a codified role for allied navies to U.S. security. The maritime strategy pointedly targeted the Soviet audience, outlined critical roles for allied observers, and illustrated the Navy's unique capability to combine these aspects to advance national goals. After the Cold War, though, and in response to pressing budget crises of the early 1990s, the Navy's capstone publications were understandably intended to justify its force structure to Congress. As such, strategy certainly needed to be easily digestible for the congressional and taxpayer audience. However, the post-Cold War strategic documents omit any conception of allied partnership with the Navy, thereby unnecessarily forgoing the Navy's particular strength to operate with friendly nations more easily, for both the domestic U.S. and international audience alike. Where the maritime strategy outlined the Navy combating enemy fleets, "... From the Sea" foresaw the Navy fighting for supremacy on both land and littorals. The post-Cold War deemphasis of the Navy fighting *alongside* allied navies was an error that need not be repeated in future strategy documents, avoiding "strategic shallowness," to borrow another phrase from Roger Barnett.⁵

To provide an illustrative example, this analysis features the allied perspective of the Federal Republic of Germany and its maritime service, the German Navy.⁶ This comparison is intended to exemplify how consequential Navy strategy can be in one specific national context of an American ally. While far from the largest or most powerful allied navy to the United States, Germany does provide a unique lens to frame this discussion. By the 1980s, the German Navy was growing and expanding its mission within the NATO Northern Flank due to its status as a military logistics hub for NATO forces.⁷ Owing to the experience of the two World Wars, the German Navy was also specifically established to perform exclusively “in close cooperation with the great maritime powers,” the United States being chief among them.⁸ With its *raison d’être* as an allied-centric fleet, the German Navy implemented the NATO defensive mission within its force structure, forsaking any broader claim toward seapower beyond its immediate borders. Moreover, the Germans, politically speaking, were astute observers of wider U.S. military strategy. As host of 96 percent of U.S. Army assets in Europe, German military strategists were on the forefront of advocates for the NATO strategy of flexible response in the 1960s.⁹ This enthusiasm for ground combat doctrine would be shared by German naval officers regarding U.S. Navy strategy. While other allied nations provide their own impact imprint for U.S. maritime security, few nations of the economic size of Germany were so wholly proactive in aligning their security structures in partnership with the United States.

Table 1. U.S. Navy active ship force levels, 1986 and 1998

	30 September 1986	20 September 1998
Battleships	3	-
Carriers	14	12
Cruisers	32	29
Destroyers	69	50
Frigates	113	38
Submarines	101	65
Ballistic missile nuclear submarines (SSBN)	39	18
Command ships	4	4
Mine warfare	21	18
Patrol	6	13
Amphibious	58	40
Auxiliary	123	57
Surface warships	217	109
Total active	583	344

Source: courtesy of author, based on “U.S. Navy Active Ship Force Levels, 1986–1999,” Naval History and Heritage Command, last updated 17 November 2017.

Table 2. German Navy active ship force levels, 1986 and 1998

	1986	1998
Frigates, destroyers	16	15
Submarines	24	16
Fast patrol boats	40	34
Mine countermeasure units	59	41
Maritime patrol aircraft/antisubmarine warfare aircraft	14	14
Naval fighter-bombers	112	53
Helicopters	41	39
Support ships	36	18
Transport/oil pollution control aircraft	0	4
Amphibious vessels	19	0

Source: Jürgen Ehle, “The German Navy after the Cold War and Reunification,” *Naval War College Review* 51, no. 4 (1998): 80.

Strategic Discourse: The Maritime Strategy

The Soviet Union’s aberrant buildup of their naval forces prompted a response from the United States Navy. Already in 1981, Under Secretary of the Navy Robert J. Murray tasked then Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Thomas B. Hayward with establishing a Strategic Studies Group for the express purpose of “ ‘reinforc[ing] in the Soviet mind the perception that it could not win a war with the United States’.”¹⁰ Directly naming “the need for a sound strategy” in the face of “a formidable blue-water Navy able to challenge U.S. interests,” the public version of the maritime strategy in 1986 exhibited to an international audience the Navy’s operational capability to prosecute counteroffensive thrusts toward the vulnerable Soviet maritime flanks.¹¹ Concretely, this entailed a comprehensive plan to exert pressure on the relatively hemmed in Soviet fleets in the Baltic, Black, Mediterranean, and North Seas, as well as the Pacific Ocean. By advertising the destruction of Soviet naval assets in these seas on a global scale, the maritime strategy boasts “alliance solidarity” while also demonstrating resolve to a Soviet audience.¹²

As in previous iterations, the American strategies of massive retaliation under President Dwight D. Eisenhower and flexible response spearheaded by President John F. Kennedy, the premise that “the probable centerpiece of Soviet strategy in global war would be a combined-arms assault against Europe” remained the basis for the Navy strategy.¹³ Much in line with the logic purported by Lieutenant Commander Stanley B. Weeks—“to deter is to threaten”—the maritime strategy was meant to demonstrate to the Soviet Union that the full capability of the Navy would bear down on the Soviet homeland should war break out.¹⁴ The strategy in effect recommended that naval forces carry out

aggressive seek and destroy operations “to complete the destruction of all Soviet fleets,” thereby allowing “us to threaten the bases and support structure of the Soviet Navy in all theaters.”¹⁵

The effectiveness of this strategy was immediate. “Soviet awareness of the challenge was heightened in the 1980s by the U.S. Navy’s . . . assertive application of naval power posited by the publicly announced U.S. ‘Maritime Strategy,’” prompting the Soviets to question whether the expenditure dedicated to their naval forces was justified in the wake of the American counter.¹⁶ John Lehman argues that already in the beginning of 1986, a “remarkable shift” was tangible, as Soviet naval operations adopted an overtly defensive character and retreated closer to home.¹⁷ The Institute for US and Canadian Studies, a Soviet and now Russian Federation-based think tank in Moscow, reported to the Soviet government in a public report that they had fallen into a trap laid by the United States. By massively investing into maritime power as a means to challenge perceived U.S. and NATO dominance of the seas, the Soviets have entered into “a race which would play to U.S. strengths in ‘existing shipbuilding capabilities,’” resulting, in the opinion of General Makhmut Gareev of the Soviet Army, that the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was diverting “resources from important tasks to goals that are unachievable.”¹⁸ These inner-Soviet insights coincide with Lehman’s stipulation that Soviet propaganda began portraying the Navy as a dangerous offensive threat, demonstrating the systematic impact of the maritime strategy.¹⁹

Toward the end of the decade in 1989, an opportunity arose for predominantly retired Soviet and American officers to gather in Washington, DC, for a roundtable discussion in hopes of openly discussing traditionally taboo topics. Among the agitation expressed by Soviet mariners, retired rear admiral Boris Yashin of the Soviet Navy opined that “the quality of Soviet ships and their quantity” were “being exaggerated by officials of the United States.”²⁰ Yashin further accused his American colleagues, with regard to the comparative quality of U.S. and Soviet warships, that they “conceal the fact . . . that in regard to their firepower . . . the U.S. has almost twice their capacity.”²¹ While “Phase III: Carrying the Fight to the Enemy” of the maritime strategy only indirectly threatens the direct application of conventional naval weaponry onto Soviet civilian targets in the motherland, the alarm of Soviet naval officers at this meeting illustrate the strategy’s wide readership.²² Retired Soviet rear admiral Alex Astrafiev indignantly questioned: “How can we understand the fact that you have recently adopted a new naval strategy? According to which [Secretary] Lehman and the U.S. should approach the Soviet Union, occupy positions on the shores, so as to act in the depth of Soviet territory.”²³ Astrafiev was further perplexed that, as he understood the broader implications of the maritime strategy, the U.S. Navy would in effect hail Mary its forces in an all-out assault, leaving critical oil supply traffic under guarded. Despite attempts to assuage the Soviet guests by the host speaker, retired U.S. Navy rear admiral Gene La Rocque, the Soviet panel stood steadfast in their position that the maritime

strategy represented a dangerous and provocative strategic stance. Regardless of whether La Rocque was speaking sincerely, Eric Grove argues that American-led NATO antagonism in the Norwegian Sea and other global positions heavily contributed to implementing “pressure that stretched the Soviet Union to the breaking point.”²⁴

Returning to the German audience, the maritime strategy demonstrated American resolve to combat the Soviet threat to NATO access to the seas. As early in the drafting process as 1982, Chief of Naval Operations Admiral James D. Watkins insisted that the Navy’s strategy should be “focused on cooperation with allies.”²⁵ The maritime strategy rather conveniently built on a previously established effort of the Germans in their invoking alliance needs to justify broader operational capacity. Having only as of 1980 been unburdened by self-imposed German government restrictions on their force structure, this decade was the first in which the German Navy’s operational zone of activity extended into the North Sea.²⁶ Even before the onset of the maritime strategy, the German Navy sought to integrate themselves into larger NATO maritime strategies to further their own domestic aspirations. For example, during the drafting process of the NATO *Concept of Maritime Operations* (CONMAROPS) in 1984, the German Navy was, along with Canada, the most influential actor in the conceptual process, as the Germans perceived CONMAROPS as “an opportunity to enshrine their national concepts in a broader NATO policy document.”²⁷ With the imposed restrictions on ship sizes lifted in 1980, along with an expanded zone of operation, the German Navy seized the chance to use CONMAROPS as the substantiating proof of a further need for “the acquisition of modern frigates and destroyers designed to operate in rough waters at long distances” away from their home bases.²⁸

One particularly relevant role seized on by the German Navy outlined in the maritime strategy concerned antisubmarine warfare, as NATO’s Northern Flank was an area vulnerable to any Soviet naval offensive aiming to sever the sea lines of communication (SLOCs). The authors of the strategy document highlight that “Germany will bear the brunt of the campaign in the Baltic,” along with Denmark, to prevent a Soviet breakthrough into the North Sea.²⁹ In the 1989 *Maritime Component*, an addendum to the maritime strategy, Admiral Carlisle A. H. Trost articulated that “ultimate control of the transatlantic SLOCs, for instance, will be determined in the Norwegian Sea,” another area of operation for the German Navy, concluding that “if we fight the next ‘Battle of the Atlantic’ in the Atlantic . . . we will ultimately lose the land war in Europe.”³⁰ The contemporary debate on submarine warfare in these regions was persistent. In 1989, Richard Hooker maintained that the 119 attack submarines of just the Soviet Northern Fleet outnumbered the entire U.S. Navy’s submarine force, of which perhaps 30 would engage the Soviets in the Norwegian Sea.³¹ Analysts in 1985 similarly concurred that the Soviet Navy could not eliminate threats in its Northern Flank without breaking through the “bulk of the German Navy” in the Baltic.³² So as to prevent the Soviets from achieving a breakthrough into

the Atlantic with their submarine forces, John Hanley argues that the Navy's Strategic Studies Group (SSG) in 1981 identified this region and its potential for trouble, and ultimately concluded that future maritime strategy should seek to reorient the "correlation of forces" in the region.³³

Commander Viktor Toyka of the German Navy pointed to his service's focused deployment of submarines in the Baltic to tie up significant Soviet antisubmarine warfare vessels, therefore complementing the U.S. Navy's ability to operate with an unchallenged southern flank during their operations in the Norwegian Sea.³⁴ The allied use of submarines in the northern Atlantic was also deemed high priority. According to the maritime strategy, "the Soviets would particularly like to be able to destroy our ballistic missile submarines," with the document concluding that it is crucial that the Soviets "lack antisubmarine warfare capability."³⁵ This rather microsomal tactical element demonstrated the unique impact the German Navy was able to contribute to the overall U.S. Navy outlook on a potential war. With the Soviet's existing contingent of antisubmarine warfare vessels heavily and aggressively engaged by German U-boats, American vessels operating in the Norwegian Sea would have been granted a freer hand. Toyka's analysis also featured other supporters. Vice Admiral Helmut Kampe of the German Navy similarly articulated in 1986 his vision that German efforts to bottleneck the Soviet fleet in the Baltic approaches provided NATO forces a safe flank as they operated elsewhere in the Atlantic.³⁶ Both Commander Toyka and Vice Admiral Kampe published their positions while working in the Ministry of Defense and while serving as the commander, Allied Forces Baltic Approaches, respectively. As such, their publications bear the weight of institutional approval and demonstrate an engaged level of political awareness on the part of the German Navy's leadership. Furthermore, these publications, written in English, indicate a perceived necessity to explain the German contribution to NATO security directly to a U.S. Navy audience.

This linkage between German Navy and U.S. Navy officers evidences a level of improvisation to calibrating and fine-tuning the relationship between the two Services. Unlike the Soviet audience's direct response to the applied strategic stimuli of the maritime strategy, the German Navy and U.S. Navy's operational confluence is not so clearly horizontally linked. Within this cooperative and symbiotic dynamic, one of the true strengths of the maritime strategy radiates brightest. By specifying a role for allied navies, but not going as far as dictating strict and truncating functions, the Navy's strategy naturally benefited from advances made concurrently by their allied forces, thus heightening the overall success of the strategy. As Secretary of the Navy John Lehman commented in 1985, "if we could not count on our allies, we would require a U.S. fleet much larger than 600 ships to deal with the 1,700 ships and submarines that the Soviets can deploy against us."³⁷ Roald Gjetsten reiterates that after the maritime strategy was publicly released, "the U.S. Navy had regained the overall initiative" on the seas in conjunction with allied forces.³⁸

New Frictions Emerge

Before the discussion can turn to “. . . From the Sea” and the post-1990 U.S. Navy strategy documents, the overall political environment by the end of the Cold War necessitates mentioning. Coinciding with the strategic discussions surrounding the maritime strategy in the late 1980s was a parallel change in the fundamental culture surrounding the formulation of strategy. The very infrastructure within the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations that carefully nurtured the maritime strategy was fundamentally uprooted by the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, which passed in an overwhelming 95-0 vote in the Senate, and a 383-27 vote in the House of Representatives.³⁹ Steven Wills identifies that the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations (OPNAV), alongside the chief of naval operation’s Plans, Policy, and Operations Office, had a deep bench of dedicated naval strategists. Despite resistance from Secretary of the Navy John Lehman, the legislature elevated the Joint Chiefs of Staff as the principal advisors to the president and granted regional combatant commanders with broader authority over strategy “at the expense of the service chiefs.”⁴⁰ One scholar even speculates that congressional leaders drafted the legislation with the Middle East in mind as an area of geostrategic concern, believing that strengthening regional commanders would mitigate further setbacks in the region.⁴¹ Wills concludes disenfranchising the Service secretaries from overall strategy formulation “significantly weakened the Navy’s strategic enterprise shaped in the 1980s, leaving it divided and disorganized” by the end of the Cold War.⁴² Even in such instances as President Ronald W. Reagan’s statement to Congress in 1987, where language from the maritime strategy was clearly adopted and refashioned at the level of high policy, the Navy was unable to maintain strict control over its strategy formulation going into the 1990s.⁴³

Budgetary constraints even before 1990 arose concurrently with the new legislation, forcing the Navy to conceive of its place within the national security infrastructure with dwindling resources, further compounding the challenges presented by Goldwater-Nichols. Wills points Samuel Huntington’s analysis that naval officers are tasked with “telling civilian leaders how they intend to defend the nation.”⁴⁴ By this logic, the Navy’s mission is more self-guided in peacetime postures than that of the Army, which relies more heavily on civilian leadership’s guidance for its mission. This, however, places the Navy in the unduly existentially threatening conundrum of having to rejustify its allocated resources in times of political rupture. In his testimony before the House Budget Committee in 1991, Secretary of Defense Richard B. “Dick” Cheney was asked by Representative Thomas J. “Jerry” Huckaby (D-LA) whether the military needed to maintain such a strong force structure going forward. Huckaby pressed, “we were hearing comments from the Defense Department about this ‘window of vulnerability’ we were going to encounter in the mid to late 1980s . . . I think we can look back and say that this arms race truly left us with a significantly bigger deficit.”⁴⁵ The congressman was not wholly unjustified in his

vantage point, since the U.S. defense budget had drastically risen from \$155.2 billion in 1980 to \$319.8 billion in 1988—a marked increase of 50 percent.⁴⁶ Along the lines of the development of the so-called Base Force, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Colin L. Powell responded in 1989 to President George H. W. Bush's ordered national security review, concluding that in concert with broad budget cuts, the Navy would be reduced to a maximum of 400 ships from the 1989 level of 592 vessels.⁴⁷

A sudden wave of budgetary consciousness within Congress is highly unlikely as the sole reason that the Navy's budget was dramatically cut after 1990. U.S. Navy spending remained high despite fraught economic circumstances throughout Reagan's administration, in part due to the gifted lobbying skills of Secretary of the Navy John Lehman throughout the halls of Congress.⁴⁸ This congressional support, despite Lehman's departure in 1987, remained durable even in the face of economic downturns in both 1982 and 1987 in the American economy.⁴⁹ Even the criticism that the maritime strategy was "no more than a cynical rationalization for larger navy budgets" does not prove valid, considering President Reagan incrementally increased the military budget in 1985 before the strategy's publication.⁵⁰ Only with the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in 1991 and the apparent end of the Soviet Union in 1991 were budget concerns placed beyond security concerns. Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney rebuked congressional accusations that the military budget was the primary catalyst for the budgetary woes of the U.S. government. While displaying a chart of defense spending proportional to the congressionally approved budgets from 1962 to 1992, Cheney purported that defense spending only increased cumulatively by 12 percent in the past 30 years, whereas mandatory spending increased 448 percent and domestic discretionary spending increased 187 percent, adding, "I don't believe that the Department of Defense is responsible for our nation's deficit problem."⁵¹

Congressional leaders such as Senator Sam Nunn (D-GA) reached across both the aisle and the Atlantic in fervent attempts to reduce the military budget. Already in 1984, Senator Nunn had fired the first salvo by attempting to pass an amendment to the budget wherein NATO allies would be penalized by a systematic withdrawal of U.S. forces in Europe unless the Europeans increased their own defense spending.⁵² Chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee John Tower (R-TX)—still serving in the U.S. Navy—retorted that "when the President of the United States says 'we must not do this,' when the Sec. of Def. says 'we must not do this,'" then the amendment should not be tabled.⁵³ In opposition, the Reagan administration lobbied vehemently and ultimately successfully to declaw the so-called Nunn Amendment, though the German defense minister Manfred Wörner commented that he resented being handled with "the stick"; "neither the Reagan administration or the European Allies had anticipated that the Senate would involve itself in a major debate on NATO."⁵⁴ Years later, in 1990, while awaiting testimony on the Navy's budget from Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Trost, Senator Nunn taunted that it was high time

to “come up with a different story this year, it’s time to reduce.”⁵⁵ Primed for austerity, Senator Nunn independently advanced his own budgetary conception of the U.S. military in the same year. Reductions to U.S. forces above all in Europe were deemed sensible, as allied forces would assume larger responsibilities for their own regions, he reasoned. Nunn’s move prompted John T. Correll to posit the counterpoint: “What if our allies refuse the roles assigned them in the strategy?,” adding that “we defend allied interests because doing so is in our own interest. Our global presence may shrink, but our global interests will not.”⁵⁶ Simultaneously, Senator Nunn forcefully advocated that the defense budget be reduced to reinvest in environmentally focused programs, an initiative supported by multiple senators, notably including Al Gore (D-TN).⁵⁷ This rather lengthy sketch of one senator’s dedicated crusade to shrink the defense budget does demonstrate the new political waters that the Navy’s strategy would be forced to operate in going forward. Arduous budgetary drawbacks were unavoidable. In his testimony before Congress, Secretary of Defense Cheney reiterated “that historically if you look at precedents you can’t find a time when we ever got it right. Every single time when we’ve been through one of these cycles of significantly downsizing the force, we’ve blown it.”⁵⁸ Representative Huckaby countered that while the United States is “spending our lowest level in 50 years on defense . . . the world is probably safer by far than it has been in the last 50 years.”⁵⁹ Very often, senators such as Sam Nunn maintained a long record of unwavering political support for NATO in his rhetoric, while later launching razor sharp legislative cuts to American NATO forces in Europe.

Concernations about the flow from the congressional purse in the United States diverged with threat assessments from multiple NATO naval officers. Indeed, the triangulation between discrepancies of rhetoric and capabilities was a common theme. Even two years after the collapse of the USSR, Commander Kurt Jensen of the Royal Danish Navy pointed out that though the Soviets/Russians were demonstrating a change in “will,” there was nonetheless no such change in “capability” in terms of their ability to wage a war against the West on the sea.⁶⁰ Alongside similar lines, Captain Torstein Siem of the Royal Norwegian Navy, also publishing in the *Naval War College Review*, presented the case that the United States’ budget discussions gave the impression that the U.S. Navy may no longer be able to provide security in the North Sea. While meekly proposing that the German Navy, with support from the French, could perhaps provide the security relationship the Norwegians deemed necessary, he ultimately insisted that Norway continue to lobby the United States for a renewal in their commitments to the NATO Northern Flank.⁶¹ American naval officers shared in this consensus. In “The Maritime Strategy for the 1990s” (published in May 1990), Admiral Trost declared in this article in *Proceedings* that however welcoming “the possibilities presented by Gen. Sec. Mikhail Gorbachev’s restructuring and openness might be,” they nevertheless advocated that the United States “continue to gauge our strategy and war fighting capabilities against this least likely, but ultimately most potent threat.”⁶² Writing in 1990

before this hearing took place, Admiral Charles R. Larson skeptically judged the Soviet policy of *perestroika* to be disingenuous, as its success would mean an enhanced Soviet economy, which would in turn strengthen their underfunded military forces.⁶³

Former Secretary of the Navy James H. Webb engaged in a dialogue with West German journalist Ulrich Schiller concerning NATO's future in early 1989. Webb acknowledged that with regard to the Soviet threat, "we are in a sense in a period where we are reading tea leaves. You're hearing one thing, and yet in terms of military capabilities there has not been an adjustment."⁶⁴ Despite his judgment of the potential for future hostilities with the Soviet Union, Webb flatly reported that "unfortunately, in our system the budget drives the strategy instead of the other way around."⁶⁵ Webb was not alone in assessing congressional efforts to lessen military spending as being more of a sterile accounting project than a result of a prolonged meditation of U.S. military strategic needs. During the aforementioned roundtable discussion between U.S. and Soviet military officers, an exchange between Major General Evgeny Nozhin of the Soviet Army and Air Force General John B. "Jack" Kidd provides a key understanding. Nozhin submitted the suggestion of a military-led effort to reduce troops and force sizes on a quid pro quo basis, to which General Kidd responded: "I think it may not be necessary to look for a rationale for action. . . . The force deployments overseas are going to be dictated by the U.S. economy," concluding ultimately that "strategists will be relieved of the responsibilities of coming up with a strategy or name for the process. It will simply happen."⁶⁶

No matter the litany of nuanced articulations by naval officers, the potential savings of the peace dividend were far too enticing for congressional representatives to passively forego. The rapid disappearance of a compelling peer adversary released Washington policy makers from the decades-long vice grip of the Soviet threat. Within the swirling constellation of this debate, the international audience of the maritime strategy is all the more striking. From opponents to staunch military funding, like Senator Nunn, to allied naval officers, the global scope of the Navy's mission is consistently paid its due attention. As it will be evidenced later, U.S. Navy white papers in the early 1990s withdraw from this position by overly committing to a political, domestic audience.

One final point of friction to address is how Operation Desert Storm might have influenced Navy strategy in early 1990s, especially regarding Germany. Skepticism on NATO's efficacy in confronting American security needs is certainly detectable in the 1991 article "The Way Ahead" by the secretary of the Navy, postulating how "the Gulf War's allied coalition may be a harbinger of future security arrangements."⁶⁷ This prescient point would be confirmed a scant two years later in 1993, when Operation Restore Hope in Somalia again instigated the creation of a coalition force.⁶⁸ Moreover, the 1992 Navy white paper ". . . From the Sea" clearly was heavily influenced by Desert Storm, as expeditionary-style wars were "seen as a template for future operations" in the document.⁶⁹ German naval historians frequently point to the participation of

five units of German mine countermeasure vessels in the Persian Gulf during Desert Storm.⁷⁰ Jürgen Ehle does provide a key insight. Because of unification, the German Navy in 1990 was charged with simultaneously drawing back its 47,4000 personnel to 27,200 by 1994, while also absorbing the 8,300 personnel of the *Volksmarine*, the former enemy navy of East Germany.⁷¹ Despite Germany's understandable preoccupation, German minor participation certainly fell short of American expectations that the Germans would transition more steadfastly into an international actor in line with their economic prowess.

Naval Strategy Post-Cold War

The seismic geopolitical collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the USSR resulted not only in the erosion of the United States' most obvious adversary, but in the U.S. Navy's character as a coalition-augmented Service oriented toward conflict with peer adversaries. After 1991, when the collapse of the Soviet Union had become a matter of fact rather than contemplation, the Navy pivoted toward a more domestic, political audience with its 1992 strategic documents "... From the Sea" and the 1994 "Forward ... From the Sea." As the audience narrowed to a more domestic audience, the Navy's hard-won credibility as a coalition-oriented Service in conjunction with allied navies was unnecessarily put at risk. Whereas declarations such as the maritime strategy outlined specific strategic goals, while also outlining the approximate operational means of fulfilling their objectives, post-1991 strategic documents advanced truncated argumentations that prompted more questions than they provided answers. Furthermore, the previously vaunted centrality of alliance partners was crucially deemphasized in the early 1990s. One unique feature of maritime strategy was the awareness of an audience well-versed in military affairs built into the framework of the documents, as evidenced by its overt conceptions that were dually inclusionary to alliance partners and resolutely targeted toward the Soviet Union. The 1980s featured one overarching strategy document, albeit in various, edited forms, while the 1990s bore witness to nine total attempts by the Navy to formulate its strategy in either a white paper or an article.⁷²

First disseminated in April 1991, Secretary of the Navy H. Lawrence Garrett III published "The Way Ahead" in *Proceedings* as a burgeoning step toward replacing the previous strategy of the 1980s.⁷³ The paper pinpoints what will become an enduring focal point through the early 1990s: emerging threats from less developed countries to U.S. sea dominance and sea access, effectively boiling down to a shift "from global commitment against a single threat to global commitment against a number of regional threats."⁷⁴ In this document, the trend toward unilateral military action sans foreseeable allied naval inclusion is already observable. "The Way Ahead" refers to allied "reluctance" to "subordinate national interests to a broader common purpose."⁷⁵ "... From the Sea" will in more explicit terms contend that this purpose takes the form of expeditionary-style forces, capable of global interventions in littoral spaces. This concession that allied observers may find the Navy's "common purpose"

dubiously convincing does cast some measure of doubt in the Navy's own confidence in this approach.

The language employed in “. . . From the Sea” further confines itself to a layman audience. Naval operational capabilities are framed as a “potential force from the sea” that is “a critical tool for diplomacy and influence.”⁷⁶ In lieu of more exacting articulations of the Navy's place in a global security infrastructure, this document's descriptive energy focused more on broader characteristics of naval forces. Vitality and the irreplaceable nature of the Navy is stressed throughout the document: “our Navy and Marine Corps will provide unique capabilities of indispensable value in meeting our future security challenges.”⁷⁷ Regarding spatiality, the document is imprecise. The *battlespace* is defined as “the sea, air, and land environment where we will conduct our operations.”⁷⁸ Later, the “shift in the strategic landscape” required the Navy to “concentrate on littoral warfare and maneuver from the Sea.”⁷⁹ But then, the document calls for the Navy's supremacy in “space-based assets” to “achieve dominance in space as well.”⁸⁰ While naval forces indisputably have generous war-waging versatility, the lack of specified war scenarios or potential adversaries leaves a muddled impression. What sort of enemy located in the less developed regions could contest the Navy on so many fronts simultaneously?

This article describes what both documents refrain from addressing. “. . . From the Sea” and its successor “Forward . . . From the Sea” are by no means devoid of meaningful information concerning the strategic and operational goals of the U.S. Navy. However, a confluence of factors lends these documents to scrutiny from a transatlantic perspective. In both publications, neither NATO, nor any codified alliance structure receives a single mention. In “. . . From the Sea,” the nebulous term “allies” appears only in conjunction with so-called “force packages.”⁸¹ Such rhetoric of an expeditionary force package effectively constrained integration of allied fleets by consigning them to last on the list of assets for possible deployment.⁸² In “Forward . . . From the Sea,” allies as actors are addressed in a cursory manner, referring on a few occasions to the need to “extend our protective shield” over allies, for example.⁸³ The term *potential coalition partner* is similarly paired with one mention of allies.⁸⁴ Both instances grant the impression that ad hoc coalitions akin to the Gulf War were anticipated, as NATO members already benefit from the U.S. nuclear shield beyond just the nuclear assets of the Navy, perhaps denoting a hesitancy to not overly commit the Navy conceptually to alliances like NATO. It is notable, as well, that “. . . From the Sea” contains strong assertions of interoperability with the Army and Air Force, illustrating the influence of Joint-Services capabilities that emerged after Goldwater-Nichols.

A specific enemy, or even an invocation of a spectrum of opponents, reminiscent of President George W. Bush's “Axis of Evil” is similarly absent. Swartz contended that the “Maritime Strategy, 1984” was a “self-consciously allied” document, given that Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Watkins consulted NATO allies throughout the drawn-out drafting process of the strategy.⁸⁵

“ . . . From the Sea” and its 1994 successor do not themselves advocate Europe as a focal point and thus leave NATO allies in the position of determining for themselves exactly what their role within U.S. Navy strategy might be. “ . . . From the Sea” indeed invoked the Navy’s role in “helping to preserve the strategic position we won with the end of the Cold War.”⁸⁶ Despite the promise in “The Way Ahead” that the maritime strategy’s “enduring principles” would be integrated in future strategy, by refraining from articulating a role within the “won” strategic spaces surrounding the European continent, the Navy tacitly conceded a significant measure of utility as the armed Service best positioned for Joint operations with American allies.⁸⁷

Critiquing these two somewhat clumsily entitled documents, Captain Edward Smith contended that the Navy swiftly attempted to reposition itself within a political context of acute budgetary stress. Smith claimed that Secretary of the Navy Sean O’Keefe’s “instructions were to go beyond simply reacting to the immediate effects of the Soviet collapse” so as “to create a ‘new zero-based plan for naval forces spanning the next fifteen to twenty years’.”⁸⁸ The result of O’Keefe’s endeavors were strategic documents that espoused an overarching operating ethos by advertising a statement of skills. As such, “ . . . From the Sea” “has shifted from a focus on a global threat to a focus on regional challenges,” ultimately placing emphasis on the flexibility of naval forces to operate in littoral regions where the United States was conceived as fighting wars similar to Desert Storm.⁸⁹ Therefore, the language of “ . . . From the Sea” was at once quite broad to leave room for imagination from policy makers, but also seemingly reduced the spectrum of potential naval capabilities to littoral-located warfare, without much conception of allied cooperation. The focus on the littoral battlespace can be interpreted as a euphemism as warfare beyond the European continent, given the strategy’s overall focus on threats in undeveloped nations. This readjustment beyond European territory for imagined conflicts of the future is not so much the error of focus, but rather the Navy’s abstention of considering roles for allied forces to integrate within task forces, thereby providing a common green for U.S. alliance partners to revitalize and retool for the next century.

Captain Smith explains that “it was clear that the final white paper [‘ . . . From the Sea’] needed to be simple, direct, and concise if it were to have any value.”⁹⁰ This newer form of lowest common denominator expression lent itself well to a congressional and civilian audience that were laymen regarding naval warfare. According to Vice Admiral Leighton W. Smith and then deputy chief of naval operations for Plans, Policy and Operations, “ . . . From the Sea” was written in such a way “to make sure that people on the Hill understood it.”⁹¹ Ironically enough, while the maritime strategy was being drafted by the chief of naval operations, the emerging paper was often criticized by several fleet flag officers for the document’s apparent “brochuremanship” character, claiming that it was at best a “PR job—not a strategy.”⁹² Wills also remarks that many naval officers demonstrated dissatisfaction with “ . . . From the Sea” and its direct

publication as an unclassified document, as opposed to the years of internal vetting that occurring with the maritime strategy.⁹³ This disunity among the officer corps, regardless of knowledge production method, showcases the challenges of crafting strategy for any armed Service.

Perhaps due to the lack of operationally specific language, “. . . From the Sea” prompted perplexed responses by German observers. In 1992, immediately after “. . . From the Sea” was published for the first time, Senator John McCain (R-AZ) contextualized the beleaguered strategic concept at a maritime symposium in Annapolis, Maryland. Erhard Rosenkranz, editor-in-chief of the German journal *Marine Forum*, praised McCain’s interpretation as especially enlightening. In Rosenkranz’s view, Senator McCain was able to “present the new maritime strategy with clarity like no admiral could have,” believing that this skill was the unique result of working in politics.⁹⁴ The finer implications of “. . . From the Sea” for an international military audience were therefore left overly vague, as Sebastian Bruns concluded: “admittedly, the document displayed a much broader focus on political viability in Washington than on operational salience.”⁹⁵ The shift in Navy documents toward a domestic, political audience is consistently accompanied by a diminished, if at all existing, compelling inclusion for allied navies in American maritime strategy. Even as Senator McCain’s previously mentioned speech presented a more nuanced understanding of “. . . From the Sea” and its principles, Erhard Rosenkranz commented that during the senator’s speech, not a single mention of the United Nations or other global organizations was given, despite the fact that the event was well attended by a variety of foreign officers and was officially observed by a United Nations delegation.⁹⁶ The clear danger in such instances is instilling the impression that the United States would in the future seek to rely on unilateral operations to advance its security.

Strategy Adherence

An analytical glance of the respective force structures (see tables 1 and 2) of the U.S. Navy and Germany Navy during the Cold War and post-Cold War period provides illumination. Despite the littoral strategy advocated by “. . . From the Sea” and “Forward . . . From the Sea,” the general trend of the U.S. Navy force structure clearly demonstrated a measured drawback of all types of vessels. Proportionally speaking, blue-water assets such as destroyers even gained in relative significance by 1999 compared with their contribution to the fleet in 1986, with amphibious and auxiliary vessels actually receiving some of the most considerable cuts. From this force structure, the U.S. Navy appears to have equally valued all its assets, notably maintaining its carrier force in strong numbers. The ostensible reasoning for maintaining a primarily blue-water fleet structure is often bolstered by the commitment to forward presence that was advocated in “. . . From the Sea.” By contrast, Tim Rexrode posits that “debates over forward presence were reduced to surrogates for debates over force structure rather than strategy,” as the warfare approach advanced in “. . . From the Sea” and “Forward

. . . From the Sea” failed to consequentially imprint on the force structure.⁹⁷ In the 1980s, the maritime strategy presented a convincing justification for an overarching naval strategic vision, allowing for Lehman’s 600-ship navy to become a natural conclusion. The “fatal flaw” of “. . . From the Sea” was the failure to establish a link between the Navy’s budget requests from Congress vis-à-vis the fleet structure and Navy strategy.⁹⁸ The budget crisis of the late 1980s and early 1990s certainly did not offer naval planners luxurious time horizons to align more cohesive adherence to their strategy. The missed opportunity for the U.S. Navy in this regard lies in viewing the implications of the political environment on the German Navy in the 1990s.

For the German Navy, the force structure is more flexible. *Flugkörperschnellboote* (fast missile Boats), a non-blue-water asset, were dramatically reduced by the 2000s, while, despite an overall drawback of naval units, blue-water assets such as frigates were produced in greater numbers and thus represented the most significant portion of the fleet. In the 1994 whitebook of the German Department of Defense, the German Navy is assigned with the task of contributing to “the freedom of the seas” by working together with U.S. Navy power.⁹⁹ Along with the designated role of the Navy, the German force structure was meant to “instead have the characteristics and capabilities of blue water units” for the purpose of joining NATO Standing Forces during crisis management situations.¹⁰⁰ Christian Jentzsch considers the Cold War German Navy as not merely having been an escort fleet, but rather an offensively equipped naval force specialized in littoral warfare.¹⁰¹ Accepting this premise, the German Navy’s subsequent post-Cold War pursuit of retention and even increase in the relative importance of blue-water assets demonstrates their determination to integrate into future international task forces.¹⁰² Jürgen Ehle argued in 1998 that the German Navy’s force structure may have limited capacity to carry out independent littoral operations into the depth of enemy territory, but its forces were adjusted to “significantly augment” existing alliance and USN force structures.¹⁰³ These insights are further supported by William Collins in 1996, who argued that although the German Navy’s size prevents it from independently implementing the principles of Navy strategy, it is “able to fulfill its commitments not only to the defense of Germany but also to combined or coalition operations anywhere a crisis develops.”¹⁰⁴ Beyond expressions of political will or statements of strategy, German Navy Captain Lutz-Uwe Gloeckner, while reflecting on “Forward . . . From the Sea,” advanced the notion that his country’s procurement policies in their force structure should continue to complement that of the U.S. Navy.¹⁰⁵ Despite the narrative deficit of post-1991 Navy strategy concerning allied navies, the example of Germany showcases the continued will of one U.S. ally to couple the security infrastructures of both countries, even as a clear enemy was lacking.

Table 1’s illustration of the Navy’s force structure makes a particular trend clear: as judged by comparing the allocation of vessels in 1986 and 1998, the U.S. Navy maintained a “less of the same” of the Cold War structure, despite

the call of “. . . From the Sea” for a “fundamentally different force’.”¹⁰⁶ Therefore the littoral strategy presented to the domestic, political audience lacked a certain measure of follow through, as the forward presence in littoral regions was nevertheless executed with the blue-water assets of the Cold War.¹⁰⁷ Owing the Navy’s prestige as the sole superpower fleet of the Western world, allied navies, through the example of Germany, demonstrate how keenly they observed the finer details of U.S. fleet structure, strategy, and budget. Instances such as German Navy commander Peter Gladziejewski’s praise of Admiral Jeremy M. Boorda to the position of chief of naval officer, believing that his experience in previous posts in NATO and his “personal strengths fit well with the new political atmosphere in Washington” supplements this reasoning.¹⁰⁸ Author Stefan Terzibaschitsch evidenced this trend as well through a yearly update in the German Navy’s *Marine Forum* informing readers on the latest changes in the U.S. Navy budget from 1993 to 1994.¹⁰⁹ This deep-rooted devotion to future cooperation and operational compatibility with the Navy further illustrates the error in the Service’s strategic documents in undervaluing the contribution of allied navies in future deployments.

Reinforcing the Links

Not unlike the sharp reductions of the Navy after the Second World War, an exacting peace dividend was inevitable after nearly 50 years of military strain on the U.S. economy.¹¹⁰ The enormous threats of the 1980s buttressed the excellence of the maritime strategy. Any strategy’s pertinence is commensurate with how extraordinary the times allow for it to be. The Navy’s commitment to battlespace dominance, power projection, or forward presence codified in post-1991 strategic documents is not this author’s subject of criticism. As controllers of the purse, orienting such documents’ message toward Congress was similarly no error, at least in principle. Military forces are extensions of the national will. More than any other armed Service, the Navy as a political tool is unique in its operability in peacetime and capability in formulating credible deterrence of future threats. For this reason, the inclusion of allied navies in strategic documents is an opportunity to promote alliance solidarity through naval partnership. In practice, its exclusion is a critical oversight. Placing emphasis on alliances also serves to remind a domestic, political audience of the Navy’s particular utility to reinvigorate previous partnerships and engage in ad hoc coalitions. The alliance aloofness of post-1991 Navy strategy documents therefore juxtaposes poorly with the ironclad commitment to foreign partners in the maritime strategy.

The political upheaval accompanying the end of the Cold War as a watershed moment in U.S. history now holds special significance today with the Russian Federation’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. No U.S. Navy strategy can be formulated in anticipation of all eventualities. That the maritime strategy did not fully account for operations akin to Desert Storm did not invalidate the document’s relevance, nor do today’s events retroactively cast the strategic assumptions outlined post-1991 in a negative light. Rather, the current need

to revitalize the political basis of cooperation with allies such as Germany does provide an impetus for the United States' interest in alliance cooperation.

In an era of hyperglobalization, George W. Baer counsels that coordination with allied navies is an intrinsic element to making U.S. maritime strategy "whole."¹¹¹ Navy strategies such as the 2008 *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* have even gone further in attempts to court allied navies to expand their capabilities than the strategic documents of the early 1990s.¹¹² As it concerns the European context, and is certainly the case for Germany, alliance structures allow smaller naval services to tailor their forces and strategic outlooks toward supporting NATO and U.S. forces by extension. NATO structures have a time-tested political durability that permit the United States, with its military forces, to continue to exercise influence in Europe.¹¹³ The legitimacy of NATO as a security guarantor has proven to temper the classic post-1945 German skepticism of unilateral military action, as the German public tends to more easily support military missions that are legitimized by NATO or the UN.¹¹⁴ As was the case in the Cold War and in the maritime strategy, Germany's Navy can be again engaged as an ally to bolster a global U.S. Navy strategic approach. The 2018 reactivation of the U.S. Second Fleet in the Atlantic occurred despite a broader pivot to the Pacific. Where German naval forces once were instrumental in tying down the Soviet Baltic fleet, calls are now being made for the German Navy to strengthen its forces in the High North to free up U.S. Navy forces to deter China.¹¹⁵ The basis for this manner of cooperation already exists through U.S. Navy-German Navy Joint efforts in previous years. German frigates are today well-trained to integrate into U.S. carrier strike groups for air-defense purposes.¹¹⁶ Prompted by German chancellor Olaf Scholz's decision to dispense a one-time investiture of 100 billion euros in the armed forces for modernization efforts, the Inspector of the German Navy vice admiral Jan Christian Kaack specifically identifies his service's vital role in protecting NATO carrier strike groups as a critical interest.¹¹⁷

At this decisive junction, the U.S. Navy should seek to replicate their successes in the 1980s, with the force multiplicative potential of allied fleets being similarly maintained in responding to the threats of the twenty-first century. As Thomas-Durell Young reflected on the experience of Western naval forces in the Persian Gulf in the late 80s, "it is not the operational doctrine but the *political* basis for cooperation that requires reform."¹¹⁸ This political basis should include a broader scope to include international partners of the United States and similarly embed this notion within Navy strategic conceptions.

Endnotes

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4. John B. Hattendorf, "The Evolution of the Maritime Strategy: 1977 to 1987," *Naval War College Review* 41, no. 3 (1988): 13.
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13. Hattendorf and Swartz, eds., "The Maritime Strategy, 1986," 211.
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