RESEARCH PAPER

NATO's Maritime Strategy and the Libya Crisis as Seen from the Sea

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In case you did not know, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has an *Alliance Maritime Strategy* (AMS). The document, approved on 05 January 2011, was the first of its kind in over a quarter of a century. In spite of this post-Cold War milestone, however, the strategy was endorsed by the member states with little fanfare. Since its declassification in March of the same year, it has been quietly buried in the NATO official website, largely out of sight from the popular media and (by extension) from the European and North American populace whose security and prosperity it is ostensibly designed to safeguard.[2] The average person on the street (or, perhaps more aptly expressed in this context, on the seafront) should therefore be forgiven if he or she has never heard of, let alone read, a dedicated maritime strategy for the Atlantic Alliance in the 21st century. But exist it does.

It is possible to speculate about the reasons for the AMS' quiet passage and lack of publicity. Perhaps it was a care on the part of the 28 Allied governments not to clutter NATO's strategic messaging to their populations, given that the new capstone Strategic Concept (November 2010) was itself little more than a month old. Or, perhaps it was a concern not to stoke the coals of inter-service rivalry by presenting any semblance of privileged status for maritime forces[3] in the absence of comparable, newly-minted strategies for land and air forces. On the other hand, perhaps it was simply Allied preoccupation—in January 2011 at least—with the ongoing ground war in land-locked Afghanistan.

Whatever the reasons, the approach nevertheless represents a missed opportunity for purposeful and transparent policy discourse with the public,

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[2] The AMS does not even appear in the Alphabetical Index of the NATO official website, www.nato.int.

[3] Forces whose primary purposes are to conduct military operations at and from the sea. This is generally understood to include warships and submarines, auxiliaries, organic aircraft, fixed seabed installations, fixed shore installations (such as batteries) for the defence of seaways, shore-based maritime aircraft and other shore-based aircraft assigned to maritime tasks.

about a key component of official Alliance strategy intended to reinforce the much lauded yet scantly worded grand strategy embodied in the "chapeau" Strategic Concept. It also represents an historic irony, especially in the context of mid-March 2011. At that time the Libya crisis was in full swing. The UN Security Council had already passed Resolution 1970, imposing an arms embargo and targeted sanctions on the Gaddafi regime in the face of its wanton violence against Libya civilians. A day before the AMS' timid public release, UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1973 had also been passed, authorizing a no-fly zone, a strengthened arms embargo, and "all necessary measures" to protect civilians short of a foreign occupation. Six days later, NATO had assumed responsibility for the arms embargo under Operation Unified Protector (OUP) and, by 31 March, it had taken over control of the entire enforcement operation. At its peak, OUP would account for the deployment of no less than 21 naval assets (supply ships, frigates, destroyers, submarines, amphibious assault ships and aircraft carriers), enabling air strikes ashore, humanitarian assistance, safety of life at sea (search and rescue) and the surveillance of an area measuring approximately 61.000 nautical square miles. So the first real test for NATO's so-called crisis management "core task", as espoused in the 2010 Strategic Concept, would to a significant degree be a maritime one—though the document never once mentions the words "ocean", "sea", "maritime" or "navy". Yet, as regards the AMS that was intended to fill this void, and which OUP would by extension also put to the test for the first time in its existence, the Allies paradoxically were largely silent.

This paper intends to help redress the deficit in policy discourse about the AMS and its relationship to the Strategic Concept, as well as in assessments of how the strategy fared in its inaugural real-world encounter with modern misery and mayhem at the hands of a despot. It argues that, even if not corresponding in structure and evolutionary origin, the Strategic Concept and AMS are nevertheless compatible. Additionally, it reveals that the

central tenets of the AMS were relevant, even partly prophetic, as regards the response demanded by the Libya crisis. While OUP may be broadly described as success for the AMS, shortcomings in political will, procedures and capabilities were evident during the maritime campaign. With the benefit of hindsight, a number of conceivable remedies are therefore constructively presented to chart the way forward in time for the next crisis to confront Allied maritime forces.

AMS and the Strategic Concept

Origins

At their Lisbon Summit in November 2010, Allied Heads of State and Government endorsed NATO's new official strategy entitled *Active Engagement, Modern Defense*.[4] If the Strategic Concept may be understood as an example of grand strategy—the melding of policy with overarching guidance for the coordination of military means to achieve it[5]—it would be reasonable, indeed logical, to have expected the development of individual service (army, navy, air force) strategies thereafter in response to the top-down direction provided. In practice, however, defense strategy formulation is rarely so straightforward and the genesis of the AMS is no exception.

As early as 2007, one of NATO's two top strategic commands, Allied Command Transformation (ACT), advocated for a new maritime strategy to replace the 1984 vestige of the Cold War.[6] Such calls continued throughout 2008. By the spring of 2009, months before the formation of the so-called "Group of Experts" to consider the outlines of a new Strategic Concept,[7] an AMS initiating letter and work plan had been set in motion with ambitious timelines. These were to culminate in an envisioned North Atlantic Council (NAC)-approved maritime strategy no later than January 2010.[8] However, work on the basis of the aforementioned time-

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[4]   NATO, *Active Engagement, Modern Defense*, Strategic Concept for the Defense and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 19 November 2010, available at: http://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/index.html (accessed October 2012).

[5]   See Hew Strachan, "The Lost Meaning of Strategy", *Survival*, 47.3 (Autumn 2005), pp. 33-54.

[6]   NATO, Allied Command Transformation, *Multiple Futures – The Maritime Dimension*, Unclassified PowerPoint Presentation, Spring 2007, provided to the author. The final report of the *Multiple Futures* initiative likewise urged Allies to: "Develop a comprehensive maritime strategy to address the threats to Alliance security on the maritime commons presented by demographic shifts, energy scarcity, organised crime, technology-savvy adversaries, terrorism and the proliferation of WMD." See: NATO, Allied Command Transformation, *Multiple Futures Project – Navigating Towards 2030*, April 2009, p. 62

[7]   The Group of Experts was formed in the autumn of 2009 and led by former US Secretary of State Madeline Albright. Its final report was tabled in May 2010.

[8]   See: NATO, Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, *Alliance Maritime Strategy (AMS) development*, 19 August 2009, 5000/S-6-8/TT-4449/Ser: NU. NAC

line continued unabated even after the initiation of deliberations on a new Strategic Concept, the approval for which—it was by then well known—would not be forthcoming until late 2010 at the earliest. Whether or not it had been the intent to proactively and positively influence the outcome of the Strategic Concept in favour of Alliance maritime forces by moving forward on the AMS, in the end the grand strategy would come first. At the urging of several Allies the AMS' January 2010 approval would be postponed for one year in an effort to safeguard its broad alignment with the tenets of the new Strategic Concept.

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To determine whether or not such alignment was achieved, it is necessary to compare and contrast the broad contours of each text. The introduction to the AMS certainly asserts conformity with the Strategic Concept as regards the kinds of threats and risks the Alliance will face in the future:

> *Whether in support of Alliance joint operations, or when leading a predominately maritime mission, appropriately resourced and enabled maritime forces have critical roles to fulfil, defending and promoting the collective interests of the Alliance across a spectrum of defence and security challenges, as defined in the Strategic Concept.*[9]

Those defence and security challenges are variously described in the Strategic Concept as: proliferation; terrorism; instability and conflict that can foster trafficking in arms, narcotics and people; cyber attacks; critical infrastructure protection; energy and transit security; and environmental and natural resource constraints, including climate change. Closer reading of the AMS reveals that with the exception of cyber, which receives no mention, a maritime dimension to each of the aforementioned security challenges has been identified. Although the sequence with which they are addressed does not precisely parallel the Strategic Concept, the following is illustrative:

> *The maritime environment includes trade routes, choke points, ports, and other infrastructure such as pipelines, oil and natural gas platforms and trans-oceanic telecommunications cables […] [M]aintenance of the freedom of navigation, sea-based trade routes, critical infrastructure, energy flows, protection of marine resources and environmental safety are all in Allies' security interests. At the same time, the world's oceans and seas are an increasingly accessible environment for transnational criminal and terrorist activities, including the transport and deployment of weapons of mass destruction and associated materials [...] pirate attacks [and] illegal trafficking of humans, weapons and narcotics.*

So if the future security challenges described in the Strategic Concept and AMS are broadly consistent, what of the role of Allied forces—in particular NATO maritime forces—in addressing them?

The three core tasks distinguished for Allied forces in the 2010 Strategic Concept are by now commonly known: collective defense; crisis management; and cooperative security (partnerships). The core tasks for maritime forces as outlined in the AMS are perhaps less so, yet they are equally, if not more, significant to appreciating the aspirations for NATO navies as consensually agreed by the 28 Allies in January 2011. Once more, the AMS affirms its alignment with the grand strategy by setting out, avowedly "in full consistency with the Strategic Concept, the ways that maritime power could help resolve critical challenges facing the Alliance now and in the future". However, in perhaps the most demonstrable example of the variable speed development of the AMS and the Strategic Concept, the former articulates four rather than three core roles for Alliance maritime forces: deterrence and collective defense; crisis management; cooperative security; and maritime security.

Concerning collective defense, it is clear that maritime forces will be expected to provide an important element of NATO's nuclear deterrence, sea-based ballistic missile defense, as well as conventional strike assets, amphibious reach, effective mine countermeasures and reconnaissance and surveillance. Maritime crisis management in turn encompasses

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approval of the AMS generally was considered vital to avoid the "lame-duck" status that had accompanied the 2004 Bi-Strategic Commands' *Strategic Vision: The Military Challenge* in the absence of political top-cover. Rear Admiral Richard Leaman, ACT Deputy Chief of Staff, was a central protagonist behind the determined effort to develop a NAC-approved AMS.

[9]   NATO, *Alliance Maritime Strategy*, publically released 18 March 2011, available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-41426331-6494A785/natolive/official_texts_75615.htm (accessed October 2012).
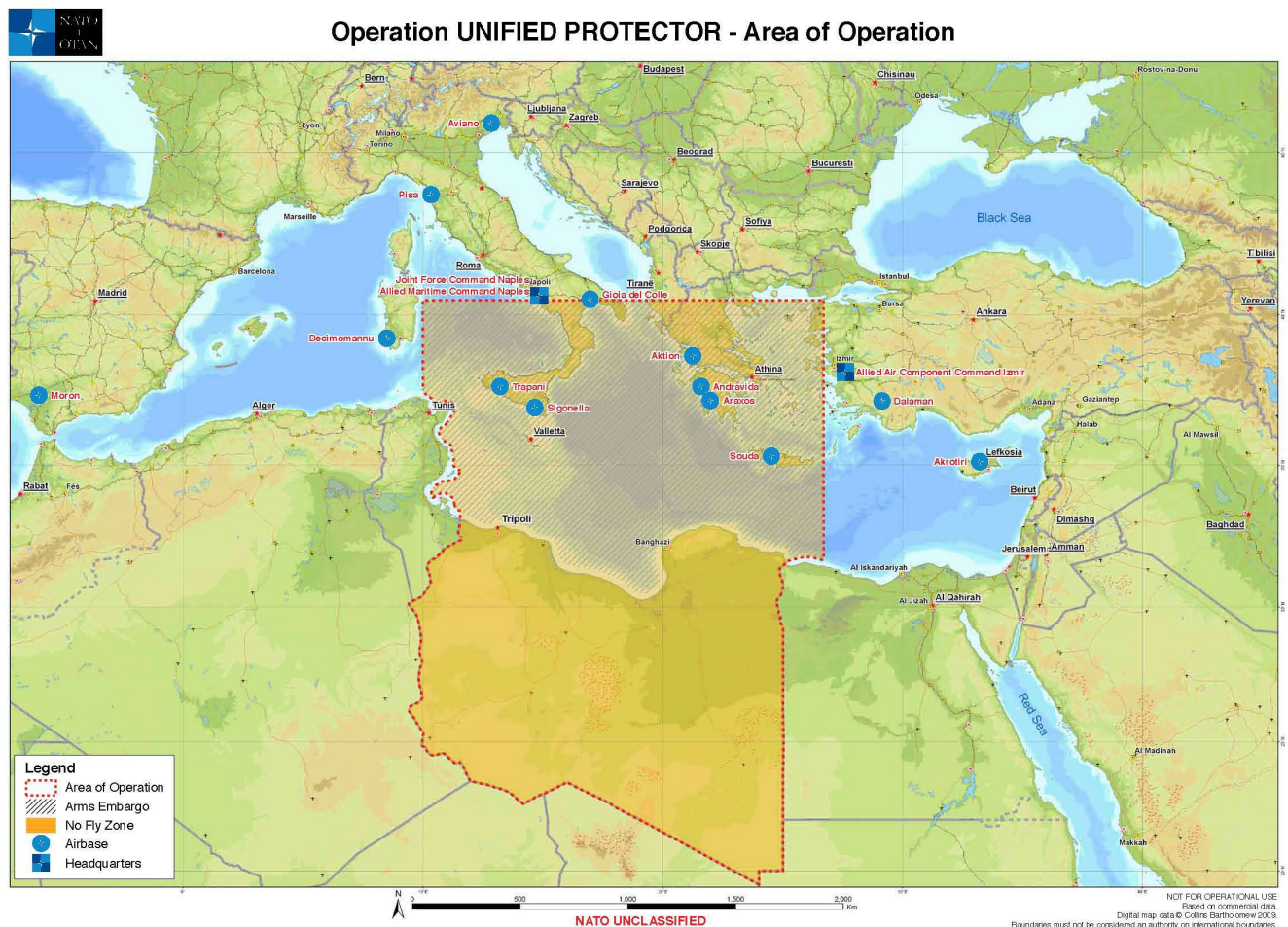
expeditionary presence operations, sea control and denial, amphibious strike, logistical support for joint force operations ashore, embargo and no-fly zone enforcement, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, counter-terrorism, non-combatant evacuation, and initial entry operations.[10] Cooperative security signifies naval diplomacy (e.g. port visits) in addition to partner capacity building, including joint training, seminars and exercises. Maritime security spans surveillance and patrolling together with the full range of maritime interdiction missions, including counter-proliferation and support to law enforcement, as well as the protection of critical energy infrastructure and sea lines of communication (SLOCs).[11] Each of these latter activities is variously addressed in the Strategic Concept and, even if the fourth maritime task does

not align with the grand strategy from a structural standpoint, the AMS may nevertheless thus be said to be conceptually compatible. On the whole, the AMS acknowledges the promise of the unique combination of reach, speed, endurance, lethality, and flexible "reversibility of posture" of maritime forces in delivering on the Atlantic Alliance's three core tasks.

AMS and Operation Unified Protector

Whether that promise was to be realized would be tested within five days of the AMS being released to the public. Reminiscent of NATO's inaugural out-of-area peace enforcement mission in 1992 (Operation Mari-

Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR - Area of Operation

Legend
- - - Area of Operation
/// Arms Embargo
■ No Fly Zone
● Airbase
■ Headquarters

NATO UNCLASSIFIED

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[10]   *Sea control* refers to the condition that exists when one has freedom of action within an area of sea for one's own purposes for a period of time in subsurface, surface and above water environments. *Sea denial* denotes preventing an adversary from controlling a maritime area without being able to control that area oneself. *Amphibious strike* concerns the projection of military power from the sea upon adjacent land areas for initiating and/or conducting operations there in the face of enemy opposition.

[11]   *Sea Lines of Communication* describes the principal maritime routes between ports, used for trade, logistics and naval forces.

time Monitor) and unprecedented collective defense action under the aegis of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty beginning in 2001 (Operation Active Endeavour), the first real-world application of the new Strategic Concept and AMS would have a significant maritime dimension. Given that OUP was a non-Article 5 operation in accordance with Chapter VII of the UN Charter, the first task of Alliance maritime forces—deterrence and collective defense—was not immediately relevant. The remaining three tasks, however, were relevant to developments in Libya in March 2011. They form the basis of this paper's assessment of the AMS' performance in its initial contact with real-world events. Crisis management, cooperative security and maritime security are addressed sequentially.

Crisis management

The AMS' references to embargo and no-fly zone enforcement as well as humanitarian assistance presaged the core elements of OUP, as demanded by UNSCRs 1970 and 1973. The references to the accompanying maritime operational requirements of sea control, amphibious strike and logistical support for joint force operations in austere environments were equally prophetic. Although non-combatant evacuation was not tested (on this occasion it was retained as a national responsibility for NATO member states and pre-dated OUP), the Alliance was confronted with aiding the rescue of migrants in jeopardy at sea.

Within hours of NATO assuming responsibility for the arms embargo against Libya, an Alliance flotilla of six ships was immediately on station to begin enforcing the naval blockade, with an additional ten more on offer. As Vice Admiral Rinaldo Veri, Commander of Allied Maritime Command Naples (MC Naples), stated at the start of maritime operations:

> *The sea is the easiest, fastest and most direct way to get arms into Libya. We are cutting off that area. I hope we can close all the windows, but one thing is sure: we are closing the main front door. The operation will assist in reducing the number of arms, related materials and mercenaries*

to and from the coastal waters of Libya.[12]

Two months later over 757 ships had been intercepted, of which 26 were boarded and 6 eventually diverted.[13] As the number of surface and sub-surface vessels gradually grew to number over 20—aided by NATO Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft—the "front door" to Libya from the sea was effectively closed. Sea control also took the form of NATO's establishment of permanent "sea corridors" between Crete and Benghazi and into the besieged port of Misurata, to ensure the unhindered flow of humanitarian medical and food supplies. As the commander of one of the vessels charged with the associated demining effort remarked:

> *This is exactly the kind of operation my crew have trained for: dealing with live mines posing a threat to legitimate shipping within sight and range of shore bombardment. […] Our actions on behalf of NATO are directly contributing to the continued welfare of the Libyan people.*[14]

Alliance amphibious strike also contributed to the suppression of Gaddafi forces. Naval gunfire was employed to prevent shelling of civilians in rebel-held areas. In spite of the decision of the United States (US) not to provide a full carrier strike group for OUP, the arrival in March of the French and Italian aircraft carriers *Charles de Gaulle* and *Giuseppe Garibaldi* also demonstrated the value to the Alliance of maritime organic air power for surgical strikes ashore. So too did the appearance in June of UK and French attack helicopters embarked on assault ships. An example of effective NATO maritime logistical support to joint forces could in turn be observed a month earlier. Then the US Military Sealift Command ship, *USNS Big Horn*, refuelled and resupplied the already underway Canadian frigate, *HMCS Charlottetown*, with its embarked helicopter for extended surveillance and compliant or non-compliant boardings. As one US officer involved in the operation observed:

> *The evolution went very well. We have conducted replenishments at sea with Canadian ships in the past, which creates*

[12] AFP, "NATO blocks 'front door' for arms smugglers into Libya", *Pakistan Today*, 24 March 2011, http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2011/03/24/news/foreign/nato-blocks-front-door-for-arms-smugglers-into-libya/ (accessed October 2012).

[13] AFP, "Libye: les navires de l'Otan créent un corridor de sécurité à Misurata", *Rianovosti*, 03 May 2011, http://fr.rian.ru/world/20110503/189358431.html (accessed October 2012).

[14] James Byron, "Brocklesby blows up mine laid by Gaddafi's forces", *Royal Navy* official website,

the esprit de corps and camaraderie that is necessary to be able to perform evolutions like this one in the middle of real-world operations.[15]

Lastly, during the course of OUP, NATO maritime assets directly aided the rescue of over 600 migrants in distress at sea.[16]

The foregoing reveals that the crisis management provisions of the AMS were both relevant and anticipatory as regards the demands placed on Alliance maritime forces during the Libya conflict. It equally accounts for their successful implementation in many respects within the littorals[17] and beyond. Further analysis nevertheless points to a number of shortcomings in execution. These were the result of apparent deficiencies in political will, procedural clarity and capabilities.

The arms embargo was initially carried out using mainly assets from Standing NATO Maritime Group (SNMG) 1 and Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Group (SNMCG) 1, already patrolling the Mediterranean Sea. These were later replaced or augmented with additional ships, submarines and maritime surveillance aircraft from NATO and coalition members. There was little choice in the matter, as NATO's standing maritime groups were not in a position to conduct a long-term sustained campaign on the scale of OUP in spite of their stated rationale of:

a multinational, integrated maritime force—made up of vessels from various allied nations, training and operating as a single team—that is permanently available to NATO to perform a wide range of tasks, from participating in exercises to crisis response and real world operational missions.[18]

Why was this so? First, in the case of each group some nations refused to assign to OUP assets already operating as part of SNMG and SNMCG in March 2011. Second, of the number of ships potentially available, the pool was in any case very small. Since the end of the Cold War, nationally dedicated maritime forces for the standing maritime groups have been decreasing sharply. This is unfortunate because, of those standing assets that did participate in OUP, the habit of cooperation and interoperability among them made for a near seamless transition to the real-world operation. The standing maritime groups can thus serve as a critical building block for a credible crisis management role for Allied navies—but only with sufficient political will to resource and use them .

The challenge of national caveats on the employment of forces for a NATO mission, thereby reducing a commander's flexibility and operational cohesion, also emerged during OUP. This ranged from some Allied governments preventing their surface ships from engaging in naval fire support[19] to declining the use of national ports for searching and clearing shipping. In the case of the US, it took the form of a decision not to engage in OUP strike missions, including through (as previously mentioned) the provision of a full carrier battle group. As former US Permanent Representative to NATO, Kurt Volker, remarked:

[T]he United States itself became a caveat country, putting limits on the roles it would play and specific capabilities it would contribute in support of the NATO mission in Libya […] [P]olitically, the United States has now made the case in practice for why caveats are acceptable—and that is a tragedy for NATO as a whole […] But to restore NATO to its position as the world's preeminent military alliance, which it was and which it should be, we need to make a realistic assessment of the problems that the Libya operation exposed and work hard to overcome them before the next

http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/News-and-Events/Latest-News/2011/May/03/110505-Brocklesby-blows-up-mine-off-Libya (accessed October 2012).

[15] Kim E. Dixon, "Military Sealift Command ship supports Operation Unified Protector", Military Sealift Command Press Release, 02 May 2011, http://www.msc.navy.mil/sealift/2011/June/operation.htm (accessed October 2012).

[16] NATO, Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR Final Mission Stats, 02 November 2011, *Fact Sheet*, www.nato.int/.../20110608_Factsheet-UP_Protection_Civilians.pdf (accessed October 2012)

[17] Commonly defined as the coastal sea areas and that portion of the land which is susceptible to influence or support from the sea, generally recognized as the region which horizontally encompasses the land-watermass interface from 100 kilometres ashore to 200 nautical miles at sea, and extending vertically into space from the bottom of the ocean and from the land surface.

[18] NATO, Allied Command Operations, "MC Northwood Becomes the Parental HQ for all NATO Standing Maritime Groups", 18 September 2012, http://aco.nato.int/mc-northwood-becomes-the-parental-hq-for-all-nato-standing-maritime-groups.aspx (accessed November 2012).

[19] Commonly defined as fire provided by naval gun, missile and electronic-warfare systems against targets ashore in support of a unit or units on land.

time NATO's capabilities are needed.[20]

Developing a firm and unambiguous Combined Joint Statement of Requirements (CJSOR) during the force generation process is arguably one way towards mitigating similar force limitation problems in future.

Procedural challenges were also apparent during the transition from the US Africa Command (AFRICOM)-led Operation Odyssey Dawn (which had initiated, from the sea, kinetic operations against the Libya regime) to NATO's OUP. The US officer with responsibility for the operation, General Carter Ham, Commander - US AFRICOM, stated at the time: "[W]e are prepared to transition to NATO quickly, effectively, and without disruption of the ongoing mission."[21] Although that was broadly achieved, it was not without difficulties which arguably cost time and needlessly spent energies. A number of factors were to blame. While the NATO Crisis Response System (NCRS) manual provides strategic guidance on a transition *from* a NATO to a non-NATO operation (Phase 6), it does not however do so for the reverse—which was precisely the situation faced by Allied maritime and other commanders in March 2011. The state of affairs was not helped by US AFRICOM, which itself suffered from underdeveloped staff processes. There, officers were often confused as to who to contact in the Alliance. To complicate matters further, the lack of a network capability to pass classified data from US AFRICOM to NATO restricted information flow.[22]

As with its US predecessor operation,[23] OUP also suffered from vaguely defined so-called "end state" conditions, including for the embargo. In an Alliance context, the end state may be understood to refer to the "NAC statement of conditions that defines an acceptable concluding situation for NATO's involvement."[24] It constitutes the essential political strategic level guidance that enables commanders to set military objectives and develop an exit strategy. During OUP, however, some commanders complained of a lack of precision from higher political authorities, which in turn complicated their planning.

Even within the military chain of command, however, shortcomings in information exchange were also present. The Alliance's commendable record in rescuing distressed migrants at sea as a result of the Libya conflict has been noted above. In one incident, however, 63 Africans adrift in the Mediterranean perished, seemingly as a result of poor communications. "This was [in] a zone under NATO's control and under close surveillance by them but still there was no reaction to the distress calls," according to the Council of Europe rapporteur, Tineke Strik, who investigated the incident. Why did this occur? One possible reason was because the Spanish frigate in the vicinity "did not receive any notification from the Maritime Rescue Coordination Center of Rome or from the NATO command in Naples."[25] Thankfully a similar incident of this magnitude was not encountered for the duration of the Libya campaign. As NATO reiterated following the April incident, "All NATO units are fully aware of their responsibilities with regard to the International Maritime Law regarding Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS). NATO ships will do everything they can to respond to distress calls and provide help when necessary."[26]

To provide a robust maritime crisis management capability as called for in the AMS, clearly the aforementioned procedural gaps and associated information system deficiencies require attention. Conceivable corrective measures include:

- revisiting the NCRS manual to use the lessons learned from OUP to provide specific guidance on the transition from a non-NATO to an Alliance operation;

[20] Kurt Volker, "Libya doesn't equal success for NATO", NATOSource, http://natosource.tumblr.com/post/10197186616/libya-doesnt-equal-success-for-nato (accessed November 2012).

[21] Joe Quartararo, Sr., Micahel Rovenolt, and Randy White, "Libya's Operation Odyssey Dawn Command and Control", *PRISM: A Journal of the Center of Complex Operations*, 3.2 (March 2012), p. 150.

[22] Ibid., pp. 144-145, 151-153.

[23] Ibid., p.150.

[24] NATO, *Allied Command Operations Planning Directive - COPD* Interim V1.0, 17 December 2010, p. 3-31.

[25] Jack Shenker and Giles Tremlett, "Migrant boat disaster: Spain challenges NATO over distress call claim", *The Guardian*, 29 March 2012, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/mar/29/migrant-boat-disaster-spain-nato (accessed November 2012).

[26] NATO Public Diplomacy Division, "Operational Unified Protector NATO–led Arms Embargo against Libya", *Fact Sheet*, June 2011.

- initiating greater exchange between NATO and US AFRICOM (e.g. staff-to-staff talks; exchange of liaison officers [LNOs]) prior to the eruption of crises, in order to clarify procedures, authorities, and information system requirements;

- actively encouraging the participation of recently appointed national Permanent Representatives to NATO and their senior staffs in the annual *Steadfast Pyramid* and *Pinnacle* exercises, run by Deputy Supreme Allied Commander (DSACEUR) for newly-minted NATO General and Flag Officers—events which specifically train and educate on NATO crisis response procedures, including the role and articulation of an end state;

- ensuring that the Alliance's new single Maritime Command (MARCOM) at Northwood, Hertfordshire, United Kingdom (UK), is fully apprised of any communications challenges vis-à-vis deployed national assets experienced by MC Naples during OUP.

OUP also exposed shortfalls in capabilities (including maritime ones), particularly among European Allies. For example, in a campaign where the US provided four fifths of all Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) used during the Libya mission, these encompassed related specialist maritime patrol aircraft. In spite of successful examples of at-sea replenishment such as the one observed earlier, oilers too were in short supply. So were maritime logistics planners generally. National shortages of precision-guided munitions (PGMs) also occurred. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the UK had elected to accept a gap in its carrier strike capability just weeks before conceivably needing it. In reflecting on the Libya campaign in June 2011, then US Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, offered the following balanced yet sober assessment of Alliance capabilities:

While the operation [OUP] has exposed some shortcomings caused by underfunding, it has also shown the potential of NATO, with an operation where Europeans are taking the lead with American support. However, while every alliance member voted for the Libya mission, less than half have participated at all, and fewer than a third have been willing to participate in the strike mission. Frankly, many of those allies sitting on the sidelines do so not because they do not want to participate, but simply because they can't […][29]

Somewhat encouragingly, NATO's "Smart Defense" initiative has since been targeting a number of the deficiencies in crisis management capabilities experienced during OUP. These include pooling maritime patrol aircraft, multinational cooperation on munitions, and Joint Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (JISR).[30] Similarly, since its inception in 2010, the European Carrier Group Interoperability Initiative (ECGII) continues to progress. It is designed to enhance the ability of nine European navies and associated air groups to interoperate in a multinational carrier strike group when required for NATO or European Union (EU) operations. In October 2012, a large Franco-Italian battle group led by the French carrier *Charles de Gaulle* practiced its interoperability for 11 days in the Mediterranean Sea through an exercise entitled *Levante*. As Rear Admiral (*le contre-amiral*) Jean-Baptiste Dupuis, Commander of the French aero-naval group CTF 473, remarked:

Well structured, progressive and varied, Levante kept its promise by offering our two navies the opportunity to achieve a high level of mutual understanding, cooperation and interoperability, particularly in implementing carrier aviation. It is a success for renewal within [the ECGII] for which it marks the first major achievement.[31]

On the whole the AMS' performance in crisis management during the Libya crisis may be best described as (to borrow from Kurt Volker)[32] "a success despite

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[27] "Lessons offered from the Libya air campaign", *A Specialist Paper by the Royal Aeronautical Society*, July 2012, p. 9.

[28] "Final farewell for decommissioned warship HMS Ark Royal", *BBC News Hampshire & Isle of White*, 11 March 2011, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-hampshire-12706441 (accessed November 2012).

[29] Robert Gates as quoted in: Claire Taylor, "Military Operations in Libya", *UK House of Commons Standard Note SN/IA/5909*, 24 October 2011, p. 21.

[30] Representing renewed emphasis on multinational cooperation among NATO Allies in order to provide cost-effective security in a period of economic austerity. See: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/78125.htm.

[31] Translated from « Manœuvres franco-italiennes en Méditerranée », *Mer et Marine*, 15 octobre 2012, http://www.meretmarine.com/fr/content/manoeuvres-franco-italiennes-en-mediterranee (accessed November 2012).

[32] Ibid., Volker.

deep-rooted problems", many of which still remain. These consequently demand concerted and sustained efforts to remedy, several of which have already happily commenced.

Cooperative security

As indicated above, alongside crisis management, cooperative security is also a core task assigned to Allied navies by the AMS. Cooperative security refers to activities such as naval diplomacy (e.g. port visits) and partner capacity building (for example, through joint exercises). The idea is to build mutual human as well as technical interoperability through cooperation in peacetime—this to ready partner forces for contributions to NATO-led operations in times of crisis, whether for reasons of political legitimacy or for operational expediency.

Through its Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) frameworks, the Atlantic Alliance had over many years already engaged in cooperative security activities with the countries of the Arab world having a vested interest in the outcome of the Libya conflict. Morocco is a case in point. Consider, for instance, the 2010 port visit to Casablanca of SNMG 2, comprising ships from the Netherlands, Germany, Greece, Italy and Turkey,[33] or the Royal Moroccan Navy's participation in NATO's maritime interdiction simulation exercise *Phoenix Express-2011*.[34] It is perhaps not surprising then that countries like Morocco, alongside Jordan, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), stood ready to be counted as partners of the Alliance in the conduct of OUP together with other non-NATO European countries such as Sweden. The trust and habit of cooperation was already in place.

Had partner naval assets like Morocco's been needed by the Alliance to execute OUP, some no doubt would have been provided. However, according to a senior NATO Flag Officer, they simply were not the kind required. Instead, the premium was placed on partner air assets and access to their airspace.[35] As Ivo Daalder, US Permanent Representative to NATO, also explained:

> *Morocco's biggest contribution was twofold. First, it opened up its airspace. And given the geography of where Morocco is, that was important in order to be able to monitor the no-fly zone and the arms embargo. And secondly, by being at the table, it was a North African country that participated and provided political support to the operation […]*[36]

So as far as cooperative security is concerned, OUP in the end proved less of a test case for the AMS compared to the crisis management core task. Nevertheless, in the event that partner navies had robustly participated, it is reasonable to speculate that some challenges would have resulted.

It is well known, for instance, that some Allied officers at the operational level in particular were at the initial stages of the campaign frustrated with the lack of authority to engage partners for planning purposes. Lack of procedural, so-called "comprehensive approach" doctrine apparently was in some measure to blame. By the same token, the process by which the offers of non-NATO nations were certified to Alliance standards for the operation appeared somewhat unclear. To avoid similar challenges in future contingencies requiring partner naval assets, these deficiencies should be taken into account by the Alliance maritime community. This, combined with a sustained program of naval diplomacy and training and education, will be the surest path to the successful real-world implementation of the AMS' cooperative security provisions. SNMG 2's recent visit to the port of La Goulette, which culminated in a *Passage Exercise (PASSEX)* with the Tunisian Navy, is indicative. As Rear Admiral Thorsten Kähler, the SNMG 2 Commander, observed: "The common training will benefit all the units involved and foster further mutual understanding within the cooperation

[33] NATO Joint Force Command Naples, "NATO Naval Force Visits Morocco", *News Release 13/10*, 14 September 2010, http://www.manp.nato.int/news_releases/mcnaples/pressreleases10/NR_13_10.html, (accessed November 2012).

[34] "Morocco Participates in NATO Exercise", *Middle East Newsline*, 07 June 2011, http://www.menewsline.com/article-23004-Morocco-Participates-In-NATO-Exer.aspx (accessed October 2012).

[35] Interview conducted by the author via video teleconference with MC Naples, 24 May 2012.

[36] Ivo Daalder, Permanent Representative to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "The Success of NATO operations in Libya and the Vital Contributions of Partners Outside NATO", 07 November 2011, http://fpc.state.gov/176760.htm (accessed November 2012).

framework of the Mediterranean Dialogue."[37]

Maritime security

As referenced earlier, in the context of the AMS the fourth task assigned Allied forces is maritime security. This comprises surveillance and patrolling and the full range of maritime interdiction operations (MIO), including counter-proliferation and support to law enforcement. The protection of critical energy infrastructure and SLOCs is also involved. While some related issues have already been addressed in the previous section on crisis management, this part focuses attention on additional relevant aspects of MIO and SLOC protection during OUP.

Under the embargo enforcement mission, the focus of interdiction was vessels carrying illegal arms and mercenaries. Inevitably, however, migrants in need of humanitarian assistance were also encountered, as cited previously. In addition, asylum seekers were also chanced upon. The Alliance should have expected this, given that since the Arab Spring began thousands of refugees had arrived by sea in the Southern Italian islands of Lampedusa, Pianosa and Sicily alone. MC Naples , however, publically asserted in the first month of the Libya campaign that "[i]ssues of migration or asylum seekers are not within the mandate of this specific operation [OUP]."[38] This was not entirely accurate. As noted earlier, SOLAS obligations demanded action in cases of humanitarian need. Where asylum seekers were found, universal principles of International Refugee Law also applied. While the ship master is not responsible to determine the status of the people on board, he generally should not disembark individuals in the country of origin or from which they have fled, particularly where their lives may be placed at risk. Governments have an important role to play in respecting these principles and establishing procedures

to be followed.[39] These generally appear to have been put in place in the case of Allied governments providing maritime assets during OUP. The following is illustrative. When the Canadian frigate *HMCS Charlottetown* interdicted vessels happening to be carrying over 500 people in March 2011, they were rendered assistance and duly handed over to Italian coast guard authorities. In July, the same warship delivered 114 individuals to safety in Tunisia, when Libya clearly was not an option.[40] Before the next crisis emerges, the recently established single MARCOM should therefore redouble efforts to ensure that all branches within its remit are aware of a mariner's standing universal obligations in the case of AMS MIO and elsewhere, irrespective of a specific Alliance mission.

In addition to the aforementioned humanitarian sea corridors, safeguarding free navigation of SLOCs for lawful commercial purposes in accordance with the AMS was also high on the agenda of Allied maritime forces during OUP. It could not have been otherwise: "Some 30 percent of all international sea-borne trade by volume comes from or is directed to ports in the Mediterranean, or passes through its waters, including 18 percent of the world's sea-transported oil."[41] In order to mitigate possible disruptions to maritime traffic, NATO was compelled to work closely with the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the commercial shipping industry. Its primary conduit in this regard was the standing NATO Shipping Centre (NSC) which, in support of MC Naples, monitored all shipping activity (i.e. speed, position, course, destination, cargo) that transited the Marine Surveillance Area covering the Libya coast. As one NSC officer, Commander Sten Olav Hagald, stated in the midst of OUP:

> *The reporting scheme we are running provides MC Naples with valuable information on movement of shipping the area. This information gives necessary maritime situational*

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[37] Allied Command Operations, "COMSNMG2 says port visit to Tunis 'Excellent'", 23 October 2012, http://www.aco.nato.int/comsnmg2-says-port-visit-to-tunis-excellent.aspx (accessed November 2012).

[38] "NATO Policy Regarding Migrant Boats Leaving Libya", 29 March 2011, *wordpress.com*, http://migrantsatsea.wordpress.com/2011/03/29/nato-policy-regarding-migrant-boats-leaving-libya/ (accessed November 2012).

[39] International Maritime Organization, International Chamber of Shipping, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Rescue at Sea – A guide to principles and practice as applied to migrants and refugees*, Production by the International Training Center of the International Labor Organization, Turin, Italy, Undated.

[40] "Update Regarding PACE Investigation into Migrant Deaths in the Mediterranean", 09 December 2011, http://migrantsatsea.wordpress.com/2011/12/09/update-regarding-pace-investigation-into-migrant-deaths-in-the-mediterranean/ (accessed November 2012).

[41] "NATO's efforts to minimize the impact of the Libyan operation on merchant shipping", *worldmaritimenews.com*, 23 June 2011, http://worldmaritimenews.com/archives/21278 (accessed November 2012).

awareness, which lays the basis for MC Naples' conduct of operations.[42]

Two mandatory reporting systems were promulgated and effectively communicated to industry, through such means as the NSC website and national chambers of shipping.[43] The NSC also issued warnings about conditions in Libya ports and waters, including the incidence of pro-Gaddafi forces placing mines near Misurata.[44] On the whole, the system functioned well. As the NSC remarked at the conclusion of OUP:

> *The cooperation between NATO and the Merchant Communities during the operation has been good. This good relationship is one of the key factors to the relatively rapid return to normality in the Libyan waters and also the well-being of the Libya civilian population in the aftermath of the campaign.*[45]

While the monitoring of commercial shipping generally functioned well, it is fair to say that it was not entirely devoid of challenges. There were issues as regards the identification of certain cargoes forbidden under UNSCR 1970, which had originally imposed the embargo against Libya. Paragraph 9 of the Resolution stated that the UN Security Council decides that all UN member states:

> *shall immediately take the necessary measures to prevent the direct or indirect supply, sale or transfer to the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, from or through their territories or by their nationals, or using their flag vessels or aircraft, of arms and related materiel of all types […][T]his measure shall not apply to: […] Other sales or supply of arms and related materiel, or provision of assistance or personnel, as approved by the [UN Sanctions] Committee […]*[46]

The difficulty arose with respect to the references to "related materiel". It was not always clear to operators charged with implementing the embargo what that constituted. Higher authorities at NATO Headquarters in Brussels could have petitioned the UN Sanctions Committee to better define for operators the types of cargoes to be interdicted in this regard, but in the case of OUP this does not appear to have happened. Thus, similar to the issue of the end state previously discussed, once again the development of mutually supporting interfaces and procedures at the strategic, operational and tactical levels still requires attention for the most effective and efficient implementation of the AMS in times of crisis.

Conclusion

This paper has endeavoured to raise the profile of a piece of contemporary maritime strategy central to safeguarding the principles and fulfilling the purposes of the Atlantic Alliance as outlined by its 28 member states in the 2010 Strategic Concept. It paints a picture of an AMS perhaps imperfectly developed in terms of sequence and organizational structure, but one whose content is wholly compatible with the overarching grand strategy from which it takes its guidance. It in turn has offered a snapshot of how the AMS' central tenets fared in reality, given that the 2011 Libya conflict and OUP proved to be very much a test of NATO's 21st century maritime wherewithal. Overall, the AMS delivered under exceptionally demanding conditions. Nevertheless, some challenges remain for which this study has presented a number of potential remedies. There are no doubt others also to be brought to the surface. In this regard, maritime analysts must continue to assess the lessons from Libya to ready Allied maritime forces for the crises of tomorrow. As one colossus of maritime strategic thought reminds us: "The study of history lies at the foundation of all sound military conclusions and practice."[47]

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[42] Ibid.

[43] See, for example: Hellenic Chamber of Commerce, "NATO: Libya Crisis – Info for Shipping", 06 April 2011, http://www.nee.gr/default.asp?t=newsDetails&id=101 (accessed December 2012).

[44] Ibid., *worldmaritimenews.com*

[45] Ibid, NATO Public Diplomacy Division.

[46] United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 1970 (2011)*, 26 February 2011, S/RES/1970 (2011).

[47] Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History: 1660-1783.*

List of Abbreviations

ACT	Allied Command Transformation
AFRICOM	Africa Command
AMS	Alliance Maritime Strategy
AWACS	Airborne Warning and Control System
CJSOR	Combined Joint Statement of Requirements
COMSNMG	Commander Standing NATO Maritime Group
DSACEUR	Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe
ECGII	European Carrier Group Interoperability Initiative
EU	European Union
HMCS	Her Majesty's Canadian Ship
HMS	Her Majesty's Ship
ICI	Istanbul Cooperation Initiative
IMO	International Maritime Organization
ISR	Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance
JISR	Joint Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance
LNOs	Liaison Officers
MARCOM	Maritime Command (Northwood)
MC Naples	Maritime Command Naples
MD	Mediterranean Dialogue
MIO	Maritime Interdiction Operations
NAC	North Atlantic Council
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCRS	NATO Crisis Response System
NSC	NATO Shipping Center
OUP	Operation Unified Protector
PASSEX	Passage Exercise
PGMs	Precision-Guided Munitions
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
US	United States
USNS	United States Navy Ship
SLOCs	Sea Lines of Communication
SNMCG	Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Group
SNMG	Standing NATO Maritime Group
SOLAS	Safety of Life at Sea
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction