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**THESIS**

**RUSSIAN NAVAL ACTIVITY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN:  
RESPONSIVE SHIFTS IN FRENCH, ITALIAN, AND SPANISH  
PERSPECTIVES AND POLICIES**

by

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December 2018

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SHIFTS IN FRENCH, ITALIAN, AND SPANISH PERSPECTIVES AND  
POLICIES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

NATO's southern flank has been exposed to a wide range of threats and challenges from Middle Eastern and North African instability, including terrorism, illegal trafficking, and mass migration. Against this backdrop, since 2008, Russia has increased its Mediterranean naval activity to levels not observed since the Cold War. This thesis investigates the extent to which the perceptions and policies of France, Italy, and Spain have shifted in response to Russia's expanded Mediterranean presence. Although its naval presence was once considered a low-priority threat, Russia's recent behavior has led to some significant changes in the perceptions and security policies of these Allies. Greater attention to this Mediterranean naval challenge has been consistent with the intensification of Russian military aggression, and these Allies increasingly share Alliance concerns about Russia's conventional military threat. However, immediate nontraditional security issues remain a more urgent priority, a circumstance that limits the extent to which these Allies are willing to regard Russia's naval presence as a threat. While both unilateral and multilateral initiatives have been steps toward improving security and stability in the Mediterranean, these Allies continue to seek the right set of measures needed to address this dynamic environment.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

CSDP	Common Security and Defense Policy
EU	European Union
EUNAVFOR MED	European Union Naval Force Mediterranean
Frontex	European Border and Coast Guard Agency
MD	Mediterranean Dialogue
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OSG	Operation Sea Guardian
PfP	Partnership for Peace
SNMG2	Standing NATO Maritime Group Two
UfM	Union for the Mediterranean
UN	United Nations

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The Mediterranean, NATO's "southern flank," is a rising strategic vulnerability for the Alliance due to emerging challenges from both state and non-state actors. Against this backdrop, it has become evident since the 2008 war in Georgia that a resurgent Russia seeks to reassert itself as a prominent Mediterranean power. This thesis investigates the hypothesis that the perceptions and policies of France, Italy, and Spain have shifted as Russia has increased its naval presence in the Mediterranean since 2008.

This thesis concludes that although its naval presence was once considered a low-priority threat, Russia's recent behavior has led to some significant changes in French, Italian, and Spanish perceptions and security policies. Greater attention to this Mediterranean naval challenge has been consistent with the rising visibility of Russian military aggression, and these Allies increasingly share Alliance concerns about Russia's conventional military threat. However, immediate nontraditional security issues remain the more urgent priority, a circumstance that limits the extent to which these Allies are willing to regard Russia's naval presence as a threat. While both unilateral and multilateral initiatives have been steps toward improving security and stability in the Mediterranean, these Allies continue to seek the right set of measures needed to address this dynamic environment.

### **A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION**

Given the January 2017 Russian-Syrian agreement to grant Russia a 49-year lease for access to the Tartus Naval Base and Russia's evident intention to maintain a permanent naval presence in the eastern Mediterranean, what are the perceptions and policies of France, Italy, and Spain on this increased presence? What policy conclusions have they drawn? This thesis identifies changes in officially articulated perceptions and policies in these countries since 2008 and strives to distinguish developments attributable not only to Russia, but also to other factors in the Mediterranean region, including terrorism, failed states, religious fanaticism, illegal trafficking, organized crime, and migrant and refugee flows. Additionally, this thesis analyzes the extent to which Mediterranean security

cooperation initiatives assist France, Italy, and Spain in the management of security priorities.

## **B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION**

The Mediterranean is one of the most economically and geopolitically significant regions in the world. As a central hub for international trade that links European, African, and Middle Eastern economies, the Mediterranean Sea is the transit route for approximately 20 percent of the world's maritime commerce and 30 percent of the world's oil.<sup>1</sup> In short, maintaining the safe and free flow of trade through this region is critical for the global economy. Moreover, the region is of crucial geopolitical importance because it links many nations and institutions in Europe, Africa, and the Levant.

NATO's southern flank is a rising strategic vulnerability for the Alliance due to emerging challenges, including a rise in terrorist attacks and activity across Europe, increased trafficking, substantial flows of migrants and refugees from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and regional conflicts and instability, all of which have created an unpredictable security environment and have complicated security policy choices.<sup>2</sup> Within this environment, Russia has taken steps to reassert itself as a prominent Mediterranean power and has increased its Mediterranean naval activity to levels not observed since the end of the Cold War. This noticeable increased activity began in 2008 when the Russian Navy began regular deployments to the region, eventually establishing a permanent Mediterranean presence in 2013.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alessandro Ungaro, "Un Mediterraneo a 360 Gradi e l'Italia," *Affarinternazionali*, last modified November 26, 2017, <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/2015/11/un-mediterraneo-a-360-gradi-e-litalia/>.

<sup>2</sup> Silvia Colombo "The Trajectory of the Crises in the Mediterranean," as contained in: Alessandro Marrone et al., *Italy and Security in the Mediterranean*, Istituto Affari Internazionali no.24 (Rome, Italy: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2016), 12–23, [http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iairp\\_24.pdf](http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iairp_24.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> "Formation of Russian Navy Squadron for Operations in Mediterranean Begins—Commander," *Russia & CIS General Newswire*, Mar 11, 2013, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy1.apus.edu/docview/1315940746>.



In 2011, the U.S. government announced an intention to shift its national security focus to the Asia-Pacific theater.<sup>4</sup> Although this pivot to the Asia-Pacific allowed the United States to rebalance and address rising security concerns, the shift provided Russia an opportunity to capitalize on what appeared to be a waning U.S. commitment to European security. In the years following the nominal U.S. shift away from Europe to the Asia-Pacific, Russia has taken aggressive actions in Ukraine, conducted provocative military activities near European states, and deployed its fleet to the Mediterranean in support of military objectives in Syria. In short, Russia's evident return to the Mediterranean and its recent aggressive actions suggest that the Alliance will need to consider response options to counter Russia's escalating aggression.

Currently, the three Alliance countries along the Mediterranean that retain aircraft carriers and maintain a regular naval presence in the Mediterranean are France, Italy, and Spain. Some observers have suggested that while the Eastern European Allies have continued to perceive Russia as the primary threat to the Alliance, the Mediterranean Allies have viewed this threat as exaggerated, and have held that the Alliance should pay greater attention to threats emanating from instability in the MENA.<sup>5</sup> Vice Admiral Clive Johnstone, Commander of the Allied Maritime Command, asserts that Russian naval forces are "threatening of our freedoms and of our infrastructure, whether you see them as an enemy or not."<sup>6</sup> Clarifying French, Italian, and Spanish perceptions of the prospective Russian naval threat will contribute to an informed analysis of the strategic issues in the region. Moreover, because of the complex nature and wide range of threats within NATO's southern flank, a deeper understanding of these Allies' policies, strategies, and objectives will show whether and to what extent there are attempts to address Russia's increased

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas R. Fedyszyn, "The Russian Navy 'Rebalances' to the Mediterranean," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings* 139, no. 12 (2013): 20–25, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1625806978>.

<sup>5</sup> Patrick Keller, "Divided by Geography? NATO's Internal Debate About the Eastern and Southern Flanks" as contained in: Karsten Friis, *NATO and Collective Defence in the Twenty-first Century: An Assessment of the Warsaw Summit* (London, England: Routledge, 2017), 54.

<sup>6</sup> "NATO's Maritime Moment: A Watershed Year in Alliance Sea Power," NATO Allied Maritime Command, last modified January 17, 2017, <https://mc.nato.int/media-centre/news/2017/nato-maritime-moment-a-watershed-year-in-alliance-sea-power.aspx>.

Mediterranean presence. This may in turn provide insights concerning future challenges and prospects for Euro-Atlantic security.

### C. LITERATURE REVIEW

Although many works of scholarship have noted that Russia has increased its naval presence in the Mediterranean and is pursuing its strategic interests in the region, few works have addressed Russian policy objectives in the Mediterranean. Specifically, there is little literature that has comprehensively analyzed Russia's 2015 update to its maritime doctrine, *Morskaya Doktrina*. The most prominent work is by British analyst Richard Connolly, who examined the Russian maritime doctrine and assessed "whether Russia possesses the material capabilities to meet the objectives contained within it."<sup>7</sup>

Connolly's article disputes Michael Kofman's analysis of the updated doctrine, reporting that many of the interpretations Kofman presented in his 2015 article "are not stated anywhere in the doctrine."<sup>8</sup> For instance, Kofman describes the doctrine as an "incredibly ambitious document with visions of carriers, multirole landing ships, new destroyers, and a host of platforms."<sup>9</sup> However, Connolly points out that "no reference to specific weapons systems or types of ship is made in the document."<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, Connolly's analysis provides a holistic and well-grounded analysis of Russia's key objectives outlined in the doctrine, one that is less speculative than some other works in its final assessments.

Connolly holds that the updated doctrine signals "the intentions of the Russian leadership to maintain a permanent naval presence in the eastern Mediterranean in support of wider Russian foreign and security objectives."<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the doctrine explicitly states

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<sup>7</sup> Richard Connolly, *Towards a Dual Fleet? The Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation and the Modernisation of Russian Naval Capabilities*, Research Paper no. 02/17 (Rome: NATO Defense College, June 2017), 1, <http://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=1061#>.

<sup>8</sup> Connolly, *Towards a Dual Fleet?*, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Kofman, "The Russian Navy: Strategies and Missions of a Force in Transition," Center for International Maritime Security, last modified November 23, 2015, <http://cimsec.org/russian-navy-strategies-missions-force-transition/20144>.

<sup>10</sup> Connolly, *Towards a Dual Fleet?*, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Connolly, *Towards a Dual Fleet?*, 2.

an intention to ensure “a sufficient naval presence of the Russian Federation in the region on an ongoing basis.”<sup>12</sup> Connolly suggests that Russia’s “renewed assertiveness in the Mediterranean is directly related to the annexation of Crimea”<sup>13</sup> in 2014 due to the 2015 revised doctrine’s stated objective to develop the Black Sea Fleet’s infrastructure in Crimea and Krasnodar Krai.<sup>14</sup>

However, other observers maintain that Russia’s resurgence in the Mediterranean began in 2008. Lee Willett, for example, notes that 2008 was a watershed moment for Russia’s Mediterranean ambitions and marked the “re-emergence of the use of sea power as a strategic tool.”<sup>15</sup>

Connolly also notes that financial and shipbuilding constraints indicate that the “naval force structure is unlikely to develop how planners originally hoped,” but that most objectives within the doctrine “are likely to remain well within reach of Russia’s emerging naval force, which looks set to be organized around a larger number of smaller vessels equipped with long-range armaments.”<sup>16</sup> Ultimately, Connolly concludes that this fact “should be a source of concern for NATO given that the priority areas stated in the doctrine all lie contiguous to member state borders.”<sup>17</sup>

Despite the increased occurrences of Russian aggression, notably in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria, the NATO Allies continue to hold differing perceptions regarding the Russian threat. While some Allies consider collective defense and Russia to be the top security priority, certain other Allies consider crisis management operations in the greater Middle East as more urgent for Euro-Atlantic security. Scholars have yet to adequately address the impact of Russia’s increased Mediterranean activity and aggression on the

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<sup>12</sup> Russian Federation, *Morskaya Doktrina Rossiyskoy Federatsii* [Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation], Moscow, 2015, <http://legalacts.ru/doc/morskaja-doktrina-rossiiskoi-federatsii-utv-prezidentom-rf-26072015/>.

<sup>13</sup> Connolly, *Towards a Dual Fleet?*, 4.

<sup>14</sup> Connolly, *Towards a Dual Fleet?*, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Lee Willett, “Back to Basics: NATO Navies Operate Across the Spectrum in the Mediterranean,” *IHS Jane’s Navy International*, 121, no. 5 (June, 2016), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1789937572>.

<sup>16</sup> Connolly, *Towards a Dual Fleet?*, 11.

<sup>17</sup> Connolly, *Towards a Dual Fleet?*, 11.

southern Allies' perceptions and policies. Helping to fill in this gap in the literature is one of the objectives of this thesis.

In 2010, Pal Jonson, a Swedish scholar, argued that France, Italy, and Spain are among the NATO Allies that could be called “Russia Firsters,” meaning that they “put more premiums on nurturing NATO’s relations with Russia than the rest of the Alliance and they tend to be more sensitive to how Russia perceives NATO’s deeds.”<sup>18</sup> Jonson explained that Allies in this group see no need to reinforce Article 5’s credibility by raising NATO’s profile along Russia’s borders “since NATO’s collective threat assessment does not support this view.”<sup>19</sup> Moreover, Jonson noted, the Russia Firsters claim that “an increased military presence including the pre-positioning of NATO forces in response to a non-threat would just strengthen the revisionist elements of Russia.”<sup>20</sup>

Jonson also identified a group that he labeled the “collective defenders.” This group consisted primarily of Allies that share borders with Russia; and it included, among others, the Baltic states, Norway, and Poland. He described the members of this group as advocates of strengthening Article 5 commitment and credibility.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, Jonson pointed out, despite the fact that these Allies “do not perceive Russia as an immediate threat to their security,” the Collective Defenders “tend to note several worrying tendencies in Russia’s long-term development.”<sup>22</sup> Consequently, Allies in this group assessed that these tendencies had generated the need for the Allies to be prepared for this prospective threat.

Despite Russia’s increased military activity and aggression since the writing of Jonson’s paper in 2010, scholars have maintained that the differing perceptions of the eastern and southern flanks continue to be a point of contention among the Allies, but that some compromises have been formulated. Following the 2016 Warsaw Summit, the

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<sup>18</sup> Pal Jonson, *The Debate About Article 5 and Its Credibility. What Is It All About?*, Research Paper no. 58 (Rome: NATO Defense College, May 2010), <http://www.ndc.nato.int/download/downloads.php?icode=195>, quoted in David S. Yost, *NATO’s Balancing Act* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2014), 39.

<sup>19</sup> Jonson, *The Debate About Article 5 and Its Credibility*, 9.

<sup>20</sup> Jonson, *The Debate About Article 5 and Its Credibility*, 9.

<sup>21</sup> Jonson, *The Debate About Article 5 and Its Credibility*, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Jonson, *The Debate About Article 5 and Its Credibility*, 5.

German expert Patrick Keller noted that there was a strong emphasis on bolstering NATO's eastern flank deterrent capabilities, and that this was accompanied by nods to the southern Allies "who in times of austerity do not want to assign too many resources to countering a threat that they deem imaginary anyway."<sup>23</sup> Keller's observation implies that the southern Allies would not consider Russia's increased naval presence in the Mediterranean a threat.

Keller also illustrates the differing threat assessments by pointing out the response of the southern Allies to the Enhanced Forward Presence, an initiative along the Eastern flank that is comprised of four NATO battlegroups in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland and designed to serve as a NATO tripwire. Keller argues that the East-South division is evident in that no southern Allies "proved willing (or able) to serve as Framework Nation for one of the four battalions" for NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence.<sup>24</sup> He observes that Canada stepped in to lead the framework for one of the four battalions instead of one of the southern Allies, and holds that this action "does not bode well for intra-European Alliance solidarity."<sup>25</sup>

Keller has also argued that NATO is reluctant to "make a meaningful commitment to addressing the challenges in the south."<sup>26</sup> Indeed, scholars have sought to identify the reasons why NATO has not played a larger role in the south, and there are two diverging perspectives. Judy Dempsey, an analyst with Carnegie Europe, has argued that the Alliance is "too divided over what role to play on its Southern flank" and that NATO does not wish to become more involved in any conflicts in the South.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, she maintains that the southern Allies "would like the Alliance to play a more active role" against the

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<sup>23</sup> Keller, "Divided by Geography?," 56.

<sup>24</sup> Keller, "Divided by Geography?," 56.

<sup>25</sup> Keller, "Divided by Geography?," 56.

<sup>26</sup> Keller, "Divided by Geography?," 57.

<sup>27</sup> Judy Dempsey, *NATO's Eastern Flank and Its Future Relationship With Russia*, CP 318 (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2017), <http://carnegieeurope.eu/2017/10/23/nato-s-eastern-flank-and-its-future-relationship-with-russia-pub-73499>.

Mediterranean challenges and that these Allies judge that NATO “now needs to focus exclusively on the south.”<sup>28</sup>

Conversely, some scholars suggest that the southern Allies are unenthusiastic about an expanded NATO role in the South. Agnieszka Nimark, an analyst with the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs, has written that France, Italy, and Spain are reluctant to have NATO expand operations in the south because “too much Alliance involvement would be unpopular with Muslims and North Africans.”<sup>29</sup> Nimark points out that this has resulted in an increase in EU-NATO cooperation initiatives, indicating that “NATO is expected to support EU efforts to reestablish stability in the south rather than expanding its own role.”<sup>30</sup>

Although the debate among scholars regarding NATO’s role in the south may seem like a new development, expert observers have long discussed Alliance Mediterranean initiatives. According to American scholar David Yost, in 1994 NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue “originated in the judgment of some Allies, notably Italy and Spain, that the Alliance’s eastward orientation with Partnership for Peace should be complemented with greater attention southward.”<sup>31</sup>

Lee Willett has argued that NATO’s response to Russia’s increased activity in the Mediterranean includes Alliance naval exercises, in which France, Italy, and Spain all actively participate.<sup>32</sup> However, he does not provide detailed evidence concerning to what extent these Allies perceive Russia’s Mediterranean presence as a threat. Other NATO Mediterranean initiatives include Operation Sea Guardian and Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 (SNMG2). Although the success of these efforts has been debated by scholars, a

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<sup>28</sup> Dempsey, NATO’s Eastern Flank and Its Future Relationship With Russia.

<sup>29</sup> Agnieszka Nimark, *NATO Summit 2016: From Reassurance to Deterrence. What’s Really at Stake?*, CIDOB 152 (Barcelona, Spain: Barcelona Centre For International Affairs, 2016), [https://www.cidob.org/en/publications/publication\\_series/notes\\_internacionals/n1\\_152/nato\\_summit\\_2016\\_from\\_reassurance\\_to\\_deterrence\\_what\\_s\\_really\\_at\\_stake](https://www.cidob.org/en/publications/publication_series/notes_internacionals/n1_152/nato_summit_2016_from_reassurance_to_deterrence_what_s_really_at_stake).

<sup>30</sup> Nimark, NATO Summit 2016.

<sup>31</sup> David S. Yost, *NATO’s Balancing Act* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2014), 204.

<sup>32</sup> Willett, “Back to Basics.”

unique objective of this thesis is an analysis of the impact of these Mediterranean initiatives on French, Italian, and Spanish perceptions and policies against the backdrop of Russia's Mediterranean naval activity.

Scholars have often discussed French, Italian, and Spanish perceptions and security policies alongside EU Mediterranean initiatives. In like manner, this literature review discusses these subjects concurrently. Although the literature that addresses these national security policies varies by the author's theme and focus, there is general agreement among scholars that the most urgent security priorities of France, Italy, and Spain are the challenges emanating from the MENA.

French Policy—The literature discussing French perceptions and policies typically analyzes themes and trends of French policy in relation to the geostrategic environment. Additionally, French analyst Simond de Galbert noted that “France’s foreign policy is hard to categorize in classic international relations terms of realism, liberal interventionism, or neoconservatism. It may from time to time exhibit some features of each of these approaches, but French policymakers rarely view diplomacy and foreign policy through such lenses.”<sup>33</sup> Consequently, some of the experts discussing French policy often have difficulty characterizing French security ambitions.

Daniel Keohane, an analyst with the Center for Security Studies at ETH Zurich, pointed out that the French White Paper on Defense and National Security of 2013 outlined “a considerable level of strategic and operational ambition relative to European governments, despite its announcement of cuts to national defense spending.”<sup>34</sup> Moreover, he explains that security challenges, including Russia’s aggression and the increasing instability in the MENA, “put added strain on the country’s defense resources.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Simond de Galbert, “The Hollande Doctrine: Your Guide to Today’s French Foreign and Security Policy,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, last modified September 08, 2015, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/hollande-doctrine-your-guide-today%E2%80%99s-french-foreign-and-security-policy>.

<sup>34</sup> Daniel Keohane, *Defense Choices for the Next French President*, no. 206 (Zurich, Switzerland: Center for Security Studies, 2017), 1, <http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CSSAnalyse206-EN.pdf>.

<sup>35</sup> Keohane, *Defense Choices for the Next French President*, 2.

Keohane's analysis suggests that, despite France's level of ambition, budget constraints may influence French security priorities and the extent to which France is willing to address specific security concerns.

In an analysis of the 2017 French Strategic Review on Defence and National Security, French commentator Boris Toucas assesses that France's fight against terrorism "will continue to absorb a significant portion of France's defense resources."<sup>36</sup> Additionally, he argues that French policy "needs more than a defensive posture. In its immediate neighborhood, France must be able to overcome any crisis and maintain superiority over any non-state actor to protect its citizens and economic interests."<sup>37</sup>

In recent years, scholars have argued that France needs to do more to assert its leadership role not only in Europe but also the world. Toucas' argument reflects this view, and he suggests that "the European Union is not and cannot be the only horizon of French diplomacy...Because France has limited reach, and because the European Union is mostly focused on its geographic neighborhood, France must engage in more strategic partnerships in Africa, the Middle East...and beyond."<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, Toucas suggests that EU Mediterranean initiatives provide France with assistance in the management of its security priorities, which allows France to be strategically assertive, but that France has yet to take full advantage of this opportunity.

In April 2017, the French analyst Tatiana Kastouéva-Jean discussed France's Russia policy and security challenges facing the next French president. She argued that France is facing a choice between "maintaining the current line, which combines firmness and dialogue, and rapprochement with Moscow, which would entail softening" or lifting

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<sup>36</sup> Boris Toucas, "Understanding the Implications of France's Strategic Review on Defense and National Security," Center for Strategic and International Studies, last modified October 19, 2017, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/understanding-implications-frances-strategic-review-defense-and-national-security>.

<sup>37</sup> Toucas, "Understanding the Implications of France's Strategic Review on Defense and National Security."

<sup>38</sup> Toucas, "Understanding the Implications of France's Strategic Review on Defense and National Security."



sanctions on Moscow.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, she argues that French policy is anchored to NATO and the EU and that the next President will need to decide “whether to prioritize Franco-Russian relations at the expense of existing Alliances.”<sup>40</sup> Her argument is representative of current scholarly efforts to discern how France perceives a resurgent Russia.

Italian Policy—The literature on Italian policy primarily discusses the security challenges that Italy faces as a result of the instability in the MENA. Italian scholars Alessandro Marrone and Vincenzo Camporini wrote in 2016 that Matteo Renzi, then the Italian Prime Minister, was seeking to “redirect Italy’s military engagement abroad toward the Mediterranean region” in response to the growing instability within that region.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, they argued that the Renzi government had “stepped up its efforts in favor of greater European cooperation and integration in the defense field.”<sup>42</sup>

Scholars have noted that Italy’s shift to managing regional instability has produced new challenges for the Italian government. Marrone and others have pointed out that one of the challenges resulting from the migration crisis “has been to manage the complexity of these operations and ensure efficient coordination between the various organizations and personnel being managed by state bodies and agencies.”<sup>43</sup>

There is general agreement among scholars on Italian perceptions and policies regarding Russia. This literature follows Jonson’s “Russia Firsters” argument and emphasizes an Italian government striving for better relations with Moscow through increased dialogue. Georgian analyst Nona Mikhelidze has argued that “Rome believes

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<sup>39</sup> Tatiana Kastouéva-Jean, “France’s Russia Policy: Between Bilateral Relations and Alliances,” as contained in: Thomas Gomart et al., *Foreign Policy Challenges for the Next French President* (Paris, France: Institut Français Des Relations Internationales, April 2017), 43, [https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ifri\\_foreign\\_policy\\_challenges\\_next\\_french\\_president\\_2017.pdf](https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ifri_foreign_policy_challenges_next_french_president_2017.pdf).

<sup>40</sup> Kastouéva-Jean, “France’s Russia Policy: Between Bilateral Relations and Alliances,” 44.

<sup>41</sup> Alessandro Marrone and Vincenzo Camporini, *Recent Developments in Italy’s Security and Defence Policy*, IAI 16/19 (Rome, Italy: Istituto Affari Internazionali, 2016), 5, <http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iai1619.pdf>.

<sup>42</sup> Marrone, *Recent Developments in Italy’s Security and Defence Policy*, 5.

<sup>43</sup> Alessandro Marrone, Michele Nones and Alessandro R. Ungaro, “Italian Defence Policy, Armed Forces and Operations in the Mediterranean,” as contained in: Marrone, *Italy and Security in the Mediterranean*, 118.

that including Moscow in all dialogues on international affairs is the best way to ensure long-term security on the continent” and that Italy considers Russia central to the European security order.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, she argues that a positive bilateral relationship between the two states “persists despite Russia’s intervention in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea.”<sup>45</sup>

However, this interpretation also notes that Italy is committed to upholding Western policy toward Russia. Specifically, this argument stresses that, despite Italian desires to maintain dialogue with Russia, Italy remains firmly committed to NATO deterrence and defense policies. Marrone points out that concerning NATO, “Italy has strongly supported reassurance, deterrence, and defense measures decided in 2014 in light of Russia’s aggressive posture.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, although Italy has maintained positive relations with Russia, scholars consider Italy committed to NATO’s principle of collective defense. This argument recognizes that Italy and its fellow Allies have strengthened NATO policy in response to Russian aggression.

Spanish Policy—Two perspectives stand out in the literature regarding Spanish defense policy. The first argument is that Spain is lagging in its contributions to Euro-Atlantic security. Dempsey holds that “Madrid, if it wished, could play a much stronger role in the resolution of the refugee crisis, Eurozone reform, or the security of sub-Saharan Africa,” but, as a result of Spain’s recent economic, territorial, and political crises, it “is definitely underperforming in the European and international arenas.”<sup>47</sup> Spanish analyst José Torreblanca has advanced a similar argument. He considers the Spanish government far removed from the international arena. He illustrates this argument by describing the Spanish government’s reaction to the immigration crisis as “completely disconnected from

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<sup>44</sup> Nona Mikhelidze, *Italy and Eastern Europe: A Dossier Subordinated to the Rome-Moscow Axis?*, (Tbilisi, Georgia: Georgian Institute of Politics, 2017), 2, <http://gip.ge/italy-eastern-europe-dossier-subordinated-rome-moscow-axis/>.

<sup>45</sup> Mikhelidze, *Italy and Eastern Europe*, 2.

<sup>46</sup> Alessandro Marrone, *Italy’s Defence Policy: What to Expect from the 2018 Elections?*, IAI 18/05 (Rome, Italy: IAI Istituto Affari Internazionali, 2018), 3, <http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaicom1805.pdf>.

<sup>47</sup> Judy Dempsey, “Judy Asks: Is Spain’s Foreign Policy Underperforming?” *Carnegie Europe*, last modified October 26, 2016, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=64953>.

the affair” compared to the European counterparts that remain deeply engaged such as Italy and Greece.<sup>48</sup>

The second argument regarding Spanish defense policy is that Spain is playing a key role in Euro-Atlantic security. Aurora Mejía, the Deputy Director General for Security for the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, argued in 2017 that despite Spain’s small defense budget, the country is making significant contributions to Euro-Atlantic security. Her argument notes that the government has strongly supported NATO and EU initiatives, and has increased its defense spending by 32 percent from 2016 to 2017. Moreover, Spain is “the leading contributor to Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) military operations, as it is the only EU country that has participated in all the operations to date.”<sup>49</sup>

The scholars discussing Spanish policy generally agree that Spain is maintaining a balancing act regarding Russia. Francisco de Borja Lasheras, a Spanish policy analyst, has written that Spain’s policy toward Russia “necessitates that it performs a balancing act between de-escalation and détente with Moscow, on one hand...and Allied assurance in NATO on the other.”<sup>50</sup> He notes that this approach has produced a “pendular foreign policy” that has been apparent in Spain’s participation “in common security frameworks while also trying to avoid what officials in Madrid perceive as the risk of isolating Russia and overlooking its role in key dossiers, such as Syria and Ukraine.”<sup>51</sup> At the same time, he observes, Russia’s aggression in Ukraine has “led Spain to scale down its view of Russia as a potential strategic partner.”<sup>52</sup> This analysis implies that there may be indications of

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<sup>48</sup> José I. Torreblanca, “Navel-gazing Spain,” trans. Carla Hobbs, European Council on Foreign Relations, last modified September 18, 2015, [http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_avel\\_gazing\\_spain\\_4024](http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_avel_gazing_spain_4024).

<sup>49</sup> Aurora Mejía, *Spain’s Contribution to Euro-Atlantic Security*, ARI 60/2017 (Madrid, Spain: Elcano Royal Institute, 2017), 2, <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/wcm/connect/ee60df9c-6039-47a5-aa20-93ba85e887e9/ARI60-2017-Mejia-Spain-contribution-Euro-Atlantic-security.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=ee60df9c-6039-47a5-aa20-93ba85e887e9>.

<sup>50</sup> Francisco de Borja Lasheras, “Spain’s Balancing Act with Russia,” European Council on Foreign Relations, last modified July 26, 2016, [http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_spains\\_balancing\\_act\\_with\\_russia](http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_spains_balancing_act_with_russia).

<sup>51</sup> Lasheras, “Spain’s Balancing Act with Russia.”

<sup>52</sup> Lasheras, “Spain’s Balancing Act with Russia.”

shifting Spanish perceptions regarding Russia, but that Spanish policy may also overlook Russia's increased Mediterranean activity.

Antonio Andrés, an analyst with the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs, has made a similar argument by pointing out that Spain's "position seems to swing between a desire to prompt dialogue with Moscow and a fear of appearing to be a belligerent partner."<sup>53</sup> However, Andrés also argues that the Spanish government perceived that Russia had legitimate interests regarding Ukraine and that these interests "must be considered in any attempt to resolve the Ukrainian conflict sponsored by the EU."<sup>54</sup> In short, these studies raise the possibility that Spain has not revised its perceptions or policies regarding Russia's increased Mediterranean activity, but has reluctantly taken a harder stance toward Russia when pressured to do so by fellow members of NATO or the EU.

#### **D. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES**

This thesis investigates three possible hypotheses concerning the perceptions and policies of France, Italy, and Spain as Russia has increased its naval presence in the Mediterranean since 2008.

First, it is possible that there has been no significant change in the perceptions or policies of these Allies. Accordingly, they may not perceive Russia's increased naval presence as an immediate threat and therefore other security concerns, including migration and terrorism, may remain the focus of attention in the security policies of these Allies. In other words, although these southern Allies may perceive Russia's provocative military activities in Ukraine and Syria as a potential threat for the eastern Allies and ultimately the Alliance as a whole, these southern Allies do not perceive Russia's expanded Mediterranean presence as an immediate security concern to be addressed in redefined policies.

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<sup>53</sup> Antonio Sánchez Andrés, *Spain and the European Union-Russia Conflict: the Impact of the Sanctions*, CIDOB 108, (Barcelona, Spain: Barcelona Centre For International Affairs, 2015), 1, [https://www.cidob.org/en/content/download/56942/1465599/version/7/file/NOTES%20108\\_SANCHEZ\\_DE\\_PEDROANG.pdf](https://www.cidob.org/en/content/download/56942/1465599/version/7/file/NOTES%20108_SANCHEZ_DE_PEDROANG.pdf).

<sup>54</sup> Andrés, *Spain and the European Union-Russia Conflict*, 4.

The second, and the most likely, hypothesis is that there have been minor shifts in the perceptions and policies of these Allies. Despite shifts in French, Italian, and Spanish perceptions to consider Russia's Mediterranean naval presence as an increasingly significant potential threat, these Allies may continue to exhibit reservations about regarding this presence as a threat, at least in any publicly articulated policy. These reservations may stem from various factors, including domestic politics, sensitivities to Russia's perceptions of policy shifts, desires to maintain positive relations with Russia, or an insufficient ability to rebalance security priorities. Similarly, these Allies may regard Russia's increased naval presence in the Mediterranean as a potential threat, but security issues emanating from the Middle East and North Africa continue to take a much higher precedence because these issues are perceived as more immediate security concerns. Consequently, these Allies may not consider Russia's naval presence as a threat to be met on a national basis, but instead as a threat that necessitates combined actions through multilateral frameworks.

The third hypothesis, and the least likely, is that the perceptions and policies of these Allies may have had a major shift and that they now regard Russia's naval presence as a high priority threat. This hypothesis considers that, as a result of Russia's increased aggression in Ukraine and Syria, these Allies have had a major shift in perspective and consider Russia's Mediterranean presence as an immediate security concern. Consequently, these Allies have made major policy shifts to address the Russian Mediterranean threat on a national basis and through multilateral initiatives.

It is most likely, however, that each country regards the threat differently, and each could fall into its own category within this spectrum of hypotheses. The geostrategic circumstances of France, Italy, and Spain expose each country to similar security concerns, and this increases the likelihood that these Allies will have approximately similar perceptions regarding Russia's naval presence. Despite exposure to similar security issues, factors such as domestic political dynamics, historical episodes, or bilateral political relations with Russia may influence the degree to which these Allies are willing to regard Russia's increased naval presence as a threat.

## **E. RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research design for this thesis is primarily qualitative. Through a qualitative analysis of events, this thesis identifies historical trends of Soviet naval activities in the Mediterranean, and these are compared to Russia's Mediterranean activities from 1991 to 2016. This analysis identifies historical factors that enabled the Soviets to maintain a permanent naval presence and determines which of these factors have had continued impacts on Russia's ability to meet its current Mediterranean objectives.

Against this background, the perceptions and policies of France, Italy, and Spain are examined to provide indications of these Allies' security concerns and how they manage security priorities. A deeper understanding of these Allies' policies and perceptions determines whether and to what extent there have been attempts to address Russia's increased Mediterranean presence. Although this thesis mainly focuses on perceptions and policies regarding Russia's increased presence, it also explores perceptions and policies regarding other security factors in the Mediterranean region (including terrorism, organized crime, and migrant and refugee flows). Through this analysis it has been possible to determine if shifts in perceptions and policies are attributable to Russia's increased naval presence or to other security concerns. Moreover, by examining Mediterranean security cooperation initiatives, one can assess the extent to which these initiatives assist France, Italy, and Spain in the management of security priorities.

Government publications and transcripts of official policy statements from France, Italy, and Spain are utilized to understand the security concerns of these Allies and to discern shifts in security priorities. These documents, translated into English when no English-language primary sources are available, are the primary sources of this study. Mainstream media articles, press releases, and speeches by government leaders are relied upon to understand security perceptions and to indicate shifts in threat perceptions not evident in governmental policy documents. These sources are also used to examine French, Italian, and Spanish responses to significant events that affect national security. Additionally, scholarly publications and non-governmental organization publications are utilized to frame the security environment in the Mediterranean region and to provide additional insight into the perceptions and policies of France, Italy, and Spain. Ultimately,

all of the aforementioned sources are drawn upon to determine current and future challenges for Mediterranean security.

## **F. THESIS OVERVIEW**

This thesis is organized as follows. Chapter II provides a brief historical background of Soviet naval activity in the Mediterranean from Stalin up until the collapse of the Soviet Union and the formal dissolution of its Mediterranean fleet in 1991. Additionally, the chapter analyzes Russia's naval activities and Mediterranean policies from 1991 to 2017, and the factors contributing to Russia's ability to maintain a permanent naval presence in the region.

Chapter III analyzes the perceptions and policies of France, Italy, and Spain. This chapter analyzes these Allies' policies, strategies, and objectives in the Mediterranean in order to determine the security priorities of each country and to understand the approaches of these Allies to address security concerns. Additionally, this chapter clarifies French, Italian, and Spanish perceptions of the prospective Russian naval threat and examines whether and to what extent they have attempted to address Russia's increased Mediterranean presence. This analysis includes an examination of bilateral relations between these Allies and Russia.

Chapter IV explores French, Italian, and Spanish activities within joint Mediterranean initiatives. This chapter assesses the extent to which these initiatives assist these Allies in the management of security priorities. Additionally, this chapter identifies how these initiatives shape French, Italian, and Spanish perceptions and policies.

Chapter V describes the prospects and challenges faced by these Allies and Russia. This chapter explores the current state of Mediterranean security and analyzes Russia's future Mediterranean activity, recent developments for France, Italy, and Spain, and prospects for NATO and EU multilateral initiatives.

Chapter VI summarizes the main findings and presents conclusions.

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## **II. RUSSIA IN THE MEDITERRANEAN—THE PURSUIT OF A PERMANENT PRESENCE**

Although Russia's Mediterranean activities gained prominence around 2008 in conjunction with Moscow's violent intervention in Georgia, steps to establish a permanent post-Soviet naval presence in the region were taken well before then. In fact, the foundation of Russia's ongoing Mediterranean activity rests to a great extent on steps taken throughout its Soviet history. It was during this time that a Mediterranean presence became a policy objective that was central to Soviet power projection and countering the West. Despite several obstacles, the Soviet Union managed to develop a permanent Mediterranean naval presence that further strengthened its capacity to protect and advance its security interests.

While the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 had a severe impact on both its fleet and its Mediterranean presence, Russia has since demonstrated that the Mediterranean remains a key area of interest. Russia's initial post-1991 Mediterranean ambitions aimed at reestablishing a permanent naval presence capable of projecting power and protecting Moscow's regional interests. Establishing this presence was the first step toward meeting Russia's wider objectives in the region, and it symbolized the revival of Russian power. As Russia has advanced its strategic position in the Mediterranean, NATO forces have faced a new security landscape in the south that is highlighted by an increasingly active and aggressive Russian military. The Alliance, therefore, must recognize that the Russian threat is not limited to its eastern flank, but concerns its southern flank as well.

### **A. SOVIETS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN**

The Mediterranean Sea's link to Russian power projection can be directly observed in Stalin's post-1945 policy. Although Stalin did not place a high priority on the region, some assessments were made. Carey Joynt and Oles Smolansky have noted that military-strategic considerations were revealed by the Soviet "attempts to improve Russia's strategic position by acquiring or effectively controlling the Turkish Straits area and to strengthen that position through the acquisition of the DoDecanese Islands and

Tripolitania.”<sup>55</sup> Moreover, they point out that control of these positions would have both “established the U.S.S.R. as a Mediterranean power” and “reinforced Stalin’s demands for the control of the Straits area.”<sup>56</sup> Despite Soviet attempts to secure these locations, Stalin ultimately limited his pursuit of influence in the region in order to avoid provoking Western powers.<sup>57</sup> Consequently, even though Stalin was unable to establish any type of continuous Mediterranean naval presence, his objectives demonstrate the early emphasis placed on the Mediterranean for Soviet power projection.

Developments at the onset of the Cold War advanced Soviet desires to establish a permanent presence in the Mediterranean. By the end of the 1940s, Western powers had taken a number of steps to strengthen their security including the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1949 and, in the southern flank, the establishment of the U.S. Sixth Fleet as a permanent naval presence.<sup>58</sup> With these developments also came the power of the U.S. nuclear arsenal that further increased Soviet desires to neutralize what Moscow regarded as a growing Western threat. Despite these concerns, the Soviet Union was limited in its ability to respond, notably in the naval domain.

Throughout the early stages of the Cold War the Soviets mainly employed a coastal defense naval force, and it took several years to develop extended naval competences. It was not until 1958 that the U.S.S.R.’s naval forces could complete their first extended deployment to the Mediterranean and, even then, the Soviet Union remained limited by its logistic capabilities.<sup>59</sup> By 1964, despite the Soviet Navy’s relative inexperience and logistical shortcomings, Soviet warships managed to establish a continuous presence in the Mediterranean.<sup>60</sup> This Soviet Mediterranean operational squadron was called the 5th

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<sup>55</sup> Carey B. Joynt and Oles M. Smolansky, *Soviet Naval Policy in the Mediterranean* (Bethlehem, PA: Department of International Relations, Lehigh University, 1972), 3.

<sup>56</sup> Joynt and Smolansky, *Soviet Naval Policy in the Mediterranean*, 3.

<sup>57</sup> Joynt and Smolansky, *Soviet Naval Policy in the Mediterranean*, 3.

<sup>58</sup> Joynt and Smolansky, *Soviet Naval Policy in the Mediterranean*, 4.

<sup>59</sup> Gordon McCormick, *The Soviet Presence in the Mediterranean*, P-7388 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1987), 1, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/papers/P7388.html>.

<sup>60</sup> David Frank Winkler, “Cold War at Sea: The Maritime Confrontation on and Over the High Seas between the United States and the Soviet Union, 1945–1989” (PhD diss., American University, 1998), 30–74, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy2.apus.edu/docview/304413359>.

Eskadra, or the Fifth Mediterranean squadron, and its mission was to locate and track the U.S. Sixth Fleet naval forces. However, the Soviet force still lacked the support facilities needed to maintain extended deployments, and this continued to constrain Soviet naval operations.

It is important to note that Khrushchev had secured naval bases in Albania in the mid-1950s, which enhanced the Soviet Navy's ability to conduct Mediterranean operations. However, this agreement was short-lived. Although the bases did not represent a major boost to the Soviet Navy's presence, they did provide the fleet with more opportunities to gain experience in the region. Moreover, the Albanian experience allowed the Soviet force to demonstrate its power, and it conducted its first major exercise in September 1960, totaling around twenty Soviet vessels in the Aegean Sea.<sup>61</sup> The Albania bases proved adequate to support the growth of the limited Soviet presence in the region, but the Soviet Union was unable to maintain this strategically important relationship. The Sino-Soviet dispute led to Albania cancelling the arrangement in 1961, leading the Soviet Union to withdraw all of its forces from the Mediterranean.<sup>62</sup> As a result, Khrushchev sought alternative options to support a Soviet naval presence in the region.

Khrushchev took steps toward establishing a strategic foothold in the region by cultivating relationships with Middle Eastern and North African states along the Mediterranean. At this time, in the early 1960s, U.S. relations with Egypt and Syria were deteriorating and in response Khrushchev intended to fill this widening gap. Joynt and Smolansky explain that "in a classical application of zero-sum game theory, the decrease of Western influence was believed to be accompanied by a corresponding growth of Soviet influence."<sup>63</sup> This growing influence was strikingly apparent when Khrushchev made a visit to Egypt in May 1964. American analyst George Dragnich points out that this visit

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<sup>61</sup>George S. Dragnich, *The Soviet Union's Quest for Access to Naval Facilities in Egypt Prior to the June War of 1967*, AD786318 (Arlington, VA: Center for Naval Analysis, 1974), 17, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/786318.pdf>.

<sup>62</sup> Robert G. Weinland, "Egypt and Support for the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron: 1967-1976" as contained in: Paul J. Murphy, *Naval Power in Soviet Policy* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1978), 262.

<sup>63</sup> Joynt and Smolansky, *Soviet Naval Policy in the Mediterranean*, 5.

“reflected a major Soviet attempt to increase the USSR’s influence there and in the region as a whole.”<sup>64</sup> Moreover, Dragnich emphasizes that while in Egypt, Khrushchev “portrayed the U.S. naval presence in the Mediterranean as a threat to the region itself...By characterizing Western naval forces as a common adversary, the Soviets may have been trying to gain Arab acceptance of a permanent naval [Soviet] presence in the Mediterranean.”<sup>65</sup> Although improved relations with Egypt and other Arab states were a positive development for the expansion of Soviet influence in the region, Khrushchev failed to obtain any agreements for a Mediterranean naval facility, which was necessary for providing logistical support to a permanent Soviet naval presence.

Owing largely to Soviet support to the Arabs during the 1967 Six-Day War, it was under Brezhnev that the Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean expanded substantially. As American defense analyst Gordon McCormick points out, following that war the Soviet Navy gained access to Egyptian and Syrian naval facilities and by 1969 “Soviet naval units were operating regularly out of the Egyptian ports of Alexandria, Mersa Matruh, and Port Said, and the Syrian port of Latakia.”<sup>66</sup> Moreover, he explains that this move led to an increased Soviet naval presence because “at the center of these activities was the Soviet naval complex at Alexandria which, by late 1970, featured a command center, extensive ship repair works, storage facilities, and a permanent Soviet presence ashore.”<sup>67</sup> In short, these facilities and the logistical support units significantly enhanced the Soviet Union’s ability to sustain a permanent naval presence in the Mediterranean.

Support from these assets facilitated the expansion of Soviet naval operations, and as they expanded, so did aggression in Mediterranean waters. Above all, however, the Jordan Crisis in 1970 and the 1973 October War resulted in a surge of Soviet naval vessels in the region that was accompanied by subsequent episodes of aggression. McCormick

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<sup>64</sup> Dragnich, *The Soviet Union’s Quest for Access to Naval Facilities in Egypt Prior to the June War of 1967*, 26.

<sup>65</sup> Dragnich, *The Soviet Union’s Quest for Access to Naval Facilities in Egypt Prior to the June War of 1967*, 26–27.

<sup>66</sup> McCormick, *The Soviet Presence in the Mediterranean*, 10.

<sup>67</sup> McCormick, *The Soviet Presence in the Mediterranean*, 10.

explains that during this crisis “the Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean expanded from a low force level of less than 55 ships prior to the conflict, to a post crisis high of between 94–98 warships and auxiliaries.”<sup>68</sup> Moreover, McCormick highlights intensified Soviet aggressive activities during the October War including, among other actions, “the first unambiguous case in which Soviet forces engaged in active anti-carrier simulations against U.S. forces involved in crisis operations... directing fire-control radar at nearby ships, and carrying out a range of pre-combat maneuvers against U.S. surface units.”<sup>69</sup>

During this period, from 1971 to 1974, Brezhnev vocally opposed the U.S. naval presence in the Mediterranean. In 1971, against the backdrop of the SALT negotiations concerning nuclear delivery systems, the Soviets pushed to include limitations on forward based systems. As Calhoun and Petersen observe, “General Secretary Brezhnev stated the U.S.S.R. was willing ‘to discuss any proposals’ concerning measures to terminate the less than ‘ideal situation when navies of the great powers are cruising about for long periods far from their own shores.’”<sup>70</sup> Although the Soviets were persuaded to exclude the issue for inclusion in the SALT I agreement, Brezhnev continued his campaign by making a public call for naval limitations for forward-based nuclear delivery systems in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. In July 1974, in a speech delivered to the Polish government, Brezhnev called for the “withdrawal of ships carrying nuclear weapons” in the Mediterranean.<sup>71</sup> While Brezhnev’s calls had no impact on U.S. naval deployments to the Sixth Fleet, they demonstrated the diplomatic steps the Soviets were willing to take to reduce the nuclear role of the U.S. Navy in its proximity.

At the same time, however, relations between Moscow and Cairo began to break down, eventually leading to the restriction of Soviet access to Egyptian port facilities. The tension began in 1971 and was spurred by disagreements over arms deliveries that in 1972

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<sup>68</sup> McCormick, *The Soviet Presence in the Mediterranean*, 12.

<sup>69</sup> McCormick, *The Soviet Presence in the Mediterranean*, 12.

<sup>70</sup> Anne Kelly Calhoun and Charles Petersen, “Changes in Soviet Naval Policy: Prospects for Arms Limitations in the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean,” as contained in: Murphy, *Naval Power in Soviet Policy*, 234–235.

<sup>71</sup> Calhoun and Petersen “Changes in Soviet Naval Policy,” 235.

led to President Sadat ordering the withdrawal of the Soviet air defense elements and Soviet advisers to the Egyptian military.<sup>72</sup> Although this had no immediate impact on the Soviet activities in Egyptian ports, it signaled the potential consequences of further Soviet-Egyptian disagreements.

The U.S.S.R.'s relations with Egypt continued to deteriorate following the October War. American analyst Robert Weinland explains that "Egypt was dissatisfied with Soviet performance during the war," and a series of postwar disputes compounded that dissatisfaction.<sup>73</sup> As a result, Egypt gradually restricted Soviet access to Egyptian port facilities and by 1975 the Soviets lost access to Mersa Mertuh, Sollum, and Port Said.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, Weinland points out that by June 1975 Egypt was taking steps to court the United States. This was evident in Cairo "including the United States but not the Soviet Union in the opening ceremonies" of the reopening of the Suez Canal.<sup>75</sup> Finally, in March 1976, a further disagreement resulted in Sadat revoking the 1971 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Moscow, giving the Soviet Union one month to close down its operations and remove its units from Alexandria.<sup>76</sup>

Despite losing access to the Egyptian ports, Moscow cultivated relations with other countries along the Mediterranean. These relations provided Soviet naval forces with access to shore-based support facilities, which enabled the Soviets to maintain a permanent naval presence in the Mediterranean. Perhaps because the Soviets recognized that the curtailment of access to Egypt's facilities required substitute facilities, Moscow pursued improved relations with other Mediterranean countries. Although the Soviet Union shifted its operations to the Syrian ports Tartus and Latakia, McCormick notes that the Syrians were "reluctant to allow the Soviet Navy to establish a permanent presence ashore. While the squadron was permitted to service its needs with harbor-based auxiliaries, it was not

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<sup>72</sup> Weinland, "Egypt and Support for the Mediterranean Squadron," 268.

<sup>73</sup> Weinland, "Egypt and Support for the Mediterranean Squadron," 269.

<sup>74</sup> McCormick, *The Soviet Presence in the Mediterranean*, 13.

<sup>75</sup> Weinland, "Egypt and Support for the Mediterranean Squadron," 270.

<sup>76</sup> Weinland, "Egypt and Support for the Mediterranean Squadron," 270; and McCormick, *The Soviet Presence in the Mediterranean*, 13.

allowed to develop Soviet-controlled command, storage, or repair assets on Syrian soil.”<sup>77</sup> Additionally, the Syrian ports “proved to be a poor substitute for the loss of Egyptian facilities” as they were “small, congested, and poorly equipped.” The Syrian ports, though not ideal, became the new Soviet hub for operations as Moscow sought access to other facilities to support its Mediterranean squadron. Accordingly, the Soviets increased visits to Algeria and Libya, eventually signing agreements with Libya to use the Tobruk and Bardia naval facilities. Moscow also concluded an accord with Yugoslavia to use the Tivat facility.<sup>78</sup> Additionally, the Soviets gained their first access to facilities in the western Mediterranean by making arrangements with Morocco and Tunisia to access their facilities.<sup>79</sup>

Although the use of additional facilities allowed the Soviets to maintain their permanent naval presence in the Mediterranean, the loss of access to Egypt had a noticeable impact on Soviet operations. In 1973, the Soviet naval presence peaked with an average daily strength of 56 warships and support vessels active in the Mediterranean, but by 1977 and for many of the following years, the average daily strength fell to 45 warships and auxiliaries.<sup>80</sup> However, as McCormick points out, “while this has arguably had a serious effect on the Squadron’s future combat effectiveness, it has not obviously reduced its value as an instrument and symbol of Soviet interests and presence.”<sup>81</sup>

Although the Soviet naval squadron in the Mediterranean remained operationally constrained throughout the 1980s, it remained active in the Mediterranean. Bosnia and Herzegovinan scholar Milan Vego comments that during the 1980s “the principal activities of the 5th Eskadra’s surface combatants, other than conducting good-will visits to Mediterranean ports, included gatekeeping at choke points and the surveillance of U.S. and

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<sup>77</sup> McCormick, *The Soviet Presence in the Mediterranean*, 14.

<sup>78</sup> McCormick, *The Soviet Presence in the Mediterranean*, 14–15.

<sup>79</sup> McCormick, *The Soviet Presence in the Mediterranean*, 14–15.

<sup>80</sup> McCormick, *The Soviet Presence in the Mediterranean*, 8.

<sup>81</sup> McCormick, *The Soviet Presence in the Mediterranean*, 16.

NATO surface ships.”<sup>82</sup> McCormick highlights that Soviet naval forces indirectly supported Libya in 1985–86 against U.S. naval and air operations in the Gulf of Sidra by taking “position in the vicinity of U.S. carriers operating off Libyan waters to receive timely warning of any U.S. attack,” relaying this information to Libyan authorities.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, McCormick asserts that the Soviets were “willing to become involved in these efforts where their assistance can be plausibly denied and carried out with a minimal degree of exposure.”<sup>84</sup> In short, the Soviet Union remained committed to the position of undermining the United States in the region, through a variety of means.

Under Gorbachev, who took office as General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985, the Soviet Navy continued operations in the Mediterranean, but gradually relaxed its stance toward the United States until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Vego notes that overall, during the final years of the Soviet Union, “Moscow’s policies toward the Middle East and the Mediterranean sought to promote Soviet objectives without alienating the United States.”<sup>85</sup> This was evident in both the reduced Soviet support for Libya and Syria and the increased cooperation with the United States in 1990–1991 in opposing Iraqi aggression.<sup>86</sup> In 1990, the daily naval strength averaged 30 ships, and by May 1991 the 5th Eskadra had been formally disbanded.<sup>87</sup> Thus, ended Soviet naval activity in the Mediterranean.

## **B. RUSSIA’S MEDITERRANEAN RISE**

Although the Mediterranean remained key to Russian power projection in the 1990s, the Russian Navy was in a severe state of decline, and President Boris Yeltsin took few steps toward a return to the region. American scholar Mikhail Tsypkin, an expert on

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<sup>82</sup> Milan Vego, “Soviet and Russian Strategy in the Mediterranean since 1945,” as contained in: John B. Hattendorf, *Naval Policy and Strategy in the Mediterranean: Past, Present, and Future* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2000), 180.

<sup>83</sup> McCormick, *The Soviet Presence in the Mediterranean*, 19.

<sup>84</sup> McCormick, *The Soviet Presence in the Mediterranean*, 20.

<sup>85</sup> Vego, “Soviet and Russian Strategy in the Mediterranean since 1945,” 181.

<sup>86</sup> Vego, “Soviet and Russian Strategy in the Mediterranean since 1945,” 181.

<sup>87</sup> Vego, “Soviet and Russian Strategy in the Mediterranean since 1945,” 184.



Russia, highlights that the navy “was cut rapidly and brutally in the 1990s...there [was] not enough money for operations, maintenance and training,” and the entire future of the navy was in question.<sup>88</sup> While this state of the navy was a major limitation to a Russian deployment to the Mediterranean, another contributing factor was the fact that Yeltsin showed little inclination to utilize the naval forces in any type of foreign policy role. Tsytkin points out that “Yeltsin failed to provide the navy with firm guidance regarding Russia’s place in the world” and that he “did not push energetically for the reform of the armed forces.”<sup>89</sup> This detachment from the navy suggests that Yeltsin had little ambition to employ the navy beyond the Russian periphery.

However, the funding cuts and Yeltsin’s lack of direction did not entirely eliminate the navy’s role in Russian foreign policy. Fiona Hill, an American analyst, notes that in the early 1990s there was a “consensus in the Russian political elite about the importance of restoring Russia’s international position.”<sup>90</sup> Against the backdrop of the 1995 conflict in Bosnia, Andrei Kokoshin, then the First Deputy Minister of Defense, offered a path forward: “Do not forget that the navy also is a special state instrument by which not only purely military, but also political missions are accomplished. I have in mind the showing of the Russian flag.”<sup>91</sup> Accordingly, in December 1995, the Russian aircraft carrier *Admiral Kuznetsov* and its battle group deployed to the Mediterranean with several intentions, including showing the Russian flag, and expressing solidarity with the Bosnian Serbs, and celebrating the 300th anniversary of the Russian Navy.<sup>92</sup>

Another motivating factor behind this deployment was to demonstrate that Russia was still a major European player on an equal footing with the West. In January 1996, the

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<sup>88</sup> Mikhail Tsytkin, *Rudderless in a Storm: The Russian Navy 1992–2002*, B58 (Shrivenham, England: Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, 2002) 1, <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/40272>.

<sup>89</sup> Tsytkin, *Rudderless in a Storm*, 5.

<sup>90</sup> Fiona Hill, “Russian Policy in the Caspian Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean,” *The Cyprus Review* 9, no. 1 (1997): 24, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1437932012/>.

<sup>91</sup> Brian T. Mutty, *The Russian Navy and the Future of Russian Power in the Western Pacific*, Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, December 2001, 44, <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/1056>.

<sup>92</sup> Vego, “Soviet and Russian Strategy in the Mediterranean since 1945,” 184; Donald L. Pilling and Doug Connell, “Waltzing with the Russian Bear,” *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, 123, no. 3 (1997): pp.61-63.

Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Yevgeny Primakov, stated that “Russia was and remains a Great Power...[and] her foreign policy should correspond to that status.”<sup>93</sup> To prove this status, during the December 1995 deployment the Russian flotilla conducted exercises with the U.S. Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean.<sup>94</sup> In May 1996, Russian Naval Captain Vladimir Maryukha noted that the deployment “announced the Russian ships’ return to an area of their influence” and that what Americans saw was “not Russian sailors bowed by poverty, but sailors who are not only as good as, but sometimes better than those from rich America.”<sup>95</sup> While this deployment did not signal an imminent return to the region, it demonstrated that the Russian Navy was still an essential instrument for Moscow. Above all, the 1995 deployment showed the enduring perceived link between the Mediterranean and Russian power projection.

Constrained by budget issues and resources, the Russian Navy did not deploy to the Mediterranean again during the 1990s. However, some of Yeltsin’s foreign engagements continued advancing Russia’s Mediterranean prospects. In 1997, against the backdrop of pressure in the Duma to gain territorial concessions in Crimea, Yeltsin pursued an agreement with Ukraine that allowed Russia to station its Black Sea Fleet at the Sevastopol port facility for twenty years.<sup>96</sup> Although this agreement had no immediate impact on Russia’s Mediterranean activity, it was nonetheless a positive development for the fleet because it provided easy and continual access to the Mediterranean. By 1999, despite indications that Russia was preparing to deploy warships to the Mediterranean during the crisis in Yugoslavia, Moscow did not deliver the final order and limited the deployment to a single submarine, the K-141 *Kursk*.<sup>97</sup> Apart from the precarious state of the navy, this was likely because Russia understood that its naval forces were hardly a credible option to

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<sup>93</sup> Hill, “Russian Policy in the Caspian Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean,” 24–25.

<sup>94</sup> Pilling and Connell, “Waltzing with the Russian Bear,” 61–63.

<sup>95</sup> Pilling and Connell, “Waltzing with the Russian Bear,” 61–63.

<sup>96</sup> Robert H. Donaldson, “Boris Yeltsin’s Foreign Policy Legacy,” *Tulsa Journal of Comparative and International Law* 7, no. 2 (1999): 303. <https://digitalcommons.law.utulsa.edu/tjcil/vol7/iss2/2>.

<sup>97</sup> Antony Preston, “Russian Navy Reported ‘Ready to Modernize,’” *Sea Power* 42, no. 11 (November 1999): 29, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy1.apus.edu/docview/235954329>; Tsypkin, *Rudderless in a Storm*, 8.

influence NATO. As Tsyarkin points out, the NATO operation in Yugoslavia left Russia with the realization that it “had no instrument for influencing NATO...NATO was not going to take Russia’s diminished conventional forces into consideration.”<sup>98</sup> Perhaps because of this realization, Russia looked to implement measures that would reorient the future of its navy.

The Russian Navy’s reorientation came in the form of an updated maritime doctrine in 2001. The doctrine not only revealed Russia’s naval objectives and plans to develop its fleet but also Moscow’s new priorities for the Mediterranean. Specifically, the doctrine emphasized “a course focused on turning it into a zone of military-political stability and good neighborly relations” and ensuring a “sufficient naval presence of the Russian Federation in the region.”<sup>99</sup> A major contributing factor to this increased attention to the Mediterranean began two years prior to the doctrine’s publication after Vladimir Putin, then the Russian Prime Minister, pushed for a Russian presence in the Mediterranean. Indeed, analysts Derek Letterbeck and Georgij Engelbrecht note that “the initial decision to re-establish a Russian military presence in the Mediterranean was announced by Vladimir Putin during his brief stint as Prime Minister in 1999.”<sup>100</sup> Consequently, the written policy articulated Russia’s intent to reestablish itself as a significant Mediterranean power.

However, the Russian Navy was hardly in a state to achieve this aim or any of the objectives outlined in the 2001 doctrine. British analyst Richard Connolly explains that “unfavorable economic conditions of the early 2000s...along with the neglect of the fleet in the 1990s after the dramatic reduction in military spending that accompanied economic reform, left the Russian fleet in a parlous state, and ill-equipped to meet the ambitions

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<sup>98</sup> Tsyarkin, *Rudderless in a Storm*, 8.

<sup>99</sup> Russian Federation, *Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation 2020*, Moscow, 2001, <http://csef.ru/en/politica-i-geopolitica/510/morskaya-doktrina-rossijskoj-federaczii-na-period-do-2020-goda-7984>.

<sup>100</sup> Derek Letterbeck and Georgij Engelbrecht, “The West and Russia in the Mediterranean: Towards a Renewed Rivalry?” *Mediterranean Politics* 14, no. 3 (November 2009): 391, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629390903346905>.

contained in the doctrine.”<sup>101</sup> This state of the fleet, resource constraints, and other factors (including the accidental sinking of the *Kursk* submarine) contributed to the cancellation of at least two planned Mediterranean deployments in 2000 and 2002.<sup>102</sup> In short, despite its declared ambitions, Russia was unable to support a permanent Mediterranean naval force in the early 2000s, and it would need to overcome several obstacles to achieve this goal.

In the following years, President Putin began leveraging diplomatic opportunities to both repair Russia’s reputation in the eastern Mediterranean and to lay the foundation for Russia’s prospective return to the Mediterranean. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow lost key naval partnerships with nearly all of the Mediterranean states. However, Russia retained its logistical facility at Syria’s Tartus naval base; and in 2005, Russia agreed to write off 73 percent of Syria’s \$13.4 billion Soviet-era debt in exchange for continued Russian access to Syria’s Tartus and Latakia port facility.<sup>103</sup> This exchange was a significant development as it extended Moscow’s reach by securing a foothold in the region and it showed Putin’s dedication toward his previously stated goal to establish a permanent presence in the Mediterranean. At the same time, Russia sought to repair relations with Algeria, Egypt, and Libya. Between 2006 and 2008, Putin paid state visits to these countries with an agenda that included cancellations of Soviet-era debts and prospective cooperation initiatives in military and energy sectors.<sup>104</sup> The importance of these visits is that they marked the first visits of a Russian President since the collapse of

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<sup>101</sup> Connolly, *Towards a Dual Fleet?*, 2.

<sup>102</sup> “Russian Sub Accident Linked to Poor Maintenance; Mediterranean Plans in Doubt,” BBC, August 15, 2000, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy1.apus.edu/docview/454301013>; “Black Sea Fleet Commander Sore Over Mediterranean Voyage Cancellation,” BBC, August 16, 2002, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy1.apus.edu/docview/454881107>.

<sup>103</sup> Ron Synovitz, “Explainer: Why Is Access To Syria’s Port At Tartus So Important To Moscow?,” Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, last modified June 19, 2012, <https://www.rferl.org/a/explainer-why-is-access-/24619441.html>; Anna Borshchevskaya, “The Tactical Side of Russia’s Arms Sales to the Middle East,” The Jamestown Foundation, last modified December 20, 2017, 6, [https://jamestown.org/program/tactical-side-russias-arms-sales-middle-east/?mc\\_cid=bf42c88f21&mc\\_eid=5abf120691](https://jamestown.org/program/tactical-side-russias-arms-sales-middle-east/?mc_cid=bf42c88f21&mc_eid=5abf120691).

<sup>104</sup> Lutterbeck and Engelbrecht, “The West and Russia in the Mediterranean,” 396.

the Soviet Union.<sup>105</sup> Above all, however, the visits showed Russia's commitment to expanding its influence and becoming a major Mediterranean power.

As Putin repaired Russia's relations with countries along the eastern and southern Mediterranean, there were indications that the readiness of Russia's fleet had moderately improved, at least enough to resume small-scale activities in the Mediterranean. This was demonstrated by Russia's willingness and ability to send warships to the Mediterranean in support of NATO operations. In 2004, Russia offered to contribute to NATO's Operation Active Endeavour, an Article 5 counter-terrorism operation in the Mediterranean. Accordingly, Russia briefly contributed a frigate to the operation in 2006 and again in 2007.<sup>106</sup> Russia's aggression against Georgia in 2008, however, led NATO to suspend the cooperation.<sup>107</sup>

Further indications of Russian intentions to establish a permanent presence in the Mediterranean emerged in the form of the largest Russian naval deployment to the Mediterranean since the fall of the Soviet Union. Led by the aircraft carrier *Admiral Kuznetsov*, the 11 unit Russian battle group that achieved this feat returned to its home port on February 3, 2008, marking the end of the 71-day deployment.<sup>108</sup> The deployment included the execution of over 400 aircraft sorties, numerous tactical exercises, and port calls to France, Italy, Portugal, and other countries.<sup>109</sup> Mikhail Kashubsky underscored the significance of this deployment by highlighting the fact that there had been doubts as to whether the *Kuznetsov* could return to combat service. In Kashubsky's words, "the return of the *Kuznetsov* to the Mediterranean, and such a significant display of Russian power projection and long-range offensive capabilities, were met with a degree of surprise in [the]

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<sup>105</sup> Lutterbeck and Engelbrecht, "The West and Russia in the Mediterranean," 391, 401.

<sup>106</sup> Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act*, 106; Lutterbeck and Engelbrecht, "The West and Russia in the Mediterranean," 394.

<sup>107</sup> A Russian frigate participated in OAE from September 9 to 25, 2006, and from September 3 to 25, 2007. Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act*, 106, 119, note 183; Lutterbeck and Engelbrecht, "The West and Russia in the Mediterranean," 394.

<sup>108</sup> Mikhail Kashubsky, "Russian Navy Reclaims its Blue-Water Force Status," *Maritime Studies* 159 (March 2008): 33, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy1.apus.edu/docview/211302224>.

<sup>109</sup> Kashubsky, "Russian Navy Reclaims its Blue-Water Force Status," 33.

Western analytical and defense community.”<sup>110</sup> Yet, the ship not only completed the deployment but also demonstrated on the world stage the revival of Russian power and Russia’s return to the Mediterranean as a strong state.

Above all, the symbolic success of the 2008 deployment signaled a new phase in Russia’s post-Soviet Mediterranean naval activities. The Russian Navy began regular deployments to the Mediterranean, utilizing its facility at Tartus to maintain a presence in the region, and started to probe NATO naval responses.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, when the U.S. government announced its intention to shift its national security policy focus to the Asia-Pacific theater in 2011, Russia capitalized on this opportunity to expand its Mediterranean operations. From 2011 on, the *Kuznetsov* carrier battle group made several deployments to the Mediterranean and conducted a wide range of air, air defense, and anti-submarine exercises.<sup>112</sup>

With these developments since Putin’s declaration in 1999 that Russia would reestablish a permanent presence, it seemed likely that Russia would create a permanent naval task force in the eastern Mediterranean. This possibility materialized in 2013. In February of that year, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu stated that “it has been decided to set up a department of navy task force in the Mediterranean zone where naval forces will stay on a permanent basis.”<sup>113</sup> By July 2013, Russia was conducting its largest naval maneuvers in the Mediterranean since the end of the Cold War. These were followed in December 2013 by another deployment of the *Kuznetsov* battle group to the region.<sup>114</sup> Russia could now be confident that it had established a permanent instrument to project power in the region.

What further reinforced Russia’s confidence in this instrument was the fact that the fleet had substantially improved since beginning its Mediterranean activity. According to

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<sup>110</sup> Kashubsky, “Russian Navy Reclaims its Blue-Water Force Status,” 33.

<sup>111</sup> Willett, “Back to Basics.”

<sup>112</sup> “Russian Aircraft Carrier, Warships Leave Syrian Waters,” BBC, January 10, 2012, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy1.apus.edu/docview/914947313>.

<sup>113</sup> “Formation of Russian Navy Squadron for Operations in Mediterranean Begins.”

<sup>114</sup> Fedyszyn, “The Russian Navy ‘Rebalances’ to the Mediterranean.”

Dimitar Bechev, “since 2008, Russia has pursued the so-called State Armament Program (Gosudarstvennaia Programma Perevooruzheniia) whose goal is to modernize conventional forces.”<sup>115</sup> Although Russia’s Mediterranean activity was once limited by its aging Soviet-era fleet, this modernization effort had a major impact on its Black Sea Fleet, as confirmed by the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA):

Beginning in 2014 after the occupation of Crimea, new units began to enter the order of battle including modern coastal missiles and naval infantry. Then in 2015, new submarines and surface combatants began to arrive to bolster the fleet. Now armed with the KALIBR missile system, the Black Sea Fleet is a significant force in the region and over the next few years could have as many as six new attack submarines and six new surface ships, which can not only exert control on the Black Sea, but can operate in the Mediterranean to counter NATO forces and support operations in Syria.<sup>116</sup>

Additionally, Bechev points out that “the 2014 annexation of Crimea tipped the balance in the Black Sea in Russia’s favor. Moscow established full control over Sevastopol,” which provided “an enormous geographical advantage.”<sup>117</sup> Consequently, the Black Sea Fleet and, by extension, the Mediterranean fleet had developed into a strengthened and credible maritime force that could easily be used to advance Moscow’s interests in the eastern Mediterranean. More importantly, the annexation of Crimea signaled a new phase for Russia’s aggressive geopolitical posturing.

One of the more alarming developments for the EU was Russia’s deepening cooperation with Cyprus in 2015. Owing perhaps to the increasing instability in Syria, Bechev notes, “ahead of President Nikos Anastasiades’s visit to Moscow in late February 2015, there was a frenzy of speculation that Cyprus was preparing to give Russia rights to bases at the port of Limassol as well as the Andreas Papandreu airbase.”<sup>118</sup> However, Bechev adds the outcome of the meeting was instead a renewal of a 1996 defense

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<sup>115</sup> Dimitar Bechev, *Rival Power: Russia in Southeast Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 183.

<sup>116</sup> Defense Intelligence Agency, *Russia Military Power: Building a Military to Support Great Power Aspirations*, 2017, 68, <http://www.dia.mil/Portals/27/Documents/News/Military Power Publications/Russia Military Power Report 2017.pdf>.

<sup>117</sup> Bechev, *Rival Power*, 184.

<sup>118</sup> Bechev, *Rival Power*, 133.

agreement and “another document allowing Russian warship access to Limassol (which they [the Russians] had enjoyed since 2013).”<sup>119</sup> Although Putin emphasized that the port’s use was for counter-terrorism and counter-piracy efforts, the development was particularly worrisome for Great Britain as Cyprus hosts approximately 3,200 British troops.<sup>120</sup> In short, the agreement not only reaffirmed Russia’s foothold in the eastern Mediterranean but also suggested that Moscow had new objectives in the region.

When Russia updated its maritime doctrine in 2015, it provided a clear indication of these new objectives. The doctrine revealed that Russia aims to use its Mediterranean presence as an instrument to expand its influence and achieve foreign policy objectives, stating that “naval activities are among the highest state priorities,” and that “the navy is designed to ensure the defense of the national interests of the Russian Federation...by military means, to maintain military-political stability at the global and regional levels, and to repel aggression from sea and ocean directions.”<sup>121</sup> Indeed, as British analyst Richard Connolly notes, the updated “doctrine signals the intentions of the Russian leadership to maintain a permanent naval presence in the eastern Mediterranean in support of wider Russian foreign and security objectives.”<sup>122</sup> In fact, the doctrine explicitly states under its Mediterranean objectives an intention to ensure “a sufficient naval presence of the Russian Federation in the region on an ongoing basis.”<sup>123</sup> The doctrine also declares Russia’s aims to develop the infrastructure of its ports from “Crimea and the Krasnodar Territory to the countries of the Mediterranean basin.”<sup>124</sup> Connolly asserts that Russia’s updated doctrine “should be a source of concern for NATO given that the priority areas stated in the doctrine

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<sup>119</sup> Bechev, *Rival Power*, 133.

<sup>120</sup> “Cyprus Signs Deal to Allow Russian Navy to Use Ports,” BBC, Last modified February 26, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31632259>.

<sup>121</sup> Russian Federation, *Morskaya Doktrina Rossiyskoy Federatsii* [Maritime doctrine of the Russian Federation], 40–42.

<sup>122</sup> Connolly, *Towards a Dual Fleet?*, 1.

<sup>123</sup> Russian Federation, *Morskaya Doktrina Rossiyskoy Federatsii* [Maritime doctrine of the Russian Federation], 58b.

<sup>124</sup> Russian Federation, *Morskaya Doktrina Rossiyskoy Federatsii* [Maritime doctrine of the Russian Federation], 58c.



all lie contiguous to member state borders.”<sup>125</sup> Accordingly, it is important to analyze Russia’s actions following the release of this doctrine and to determine whether Russia has continued to pursue the ambitions outlined in the doctrine.

Based on this updated maritime doctrine, and against the backdrop of Moscow’s increasingly aggressive military and geopolitical posturing, most analysts were unsurprised that Russia’s military intervention in the Syrian Civil War resulted in another deployment of the *Admiral Kuznetsov* battle group to the Mediterranean in 2016.<sup>126</sup> However, this deployment stands out because it was an opportunity to conduct live combat operations. Upon its arrival in the eastern Mediterranean, the *Kuznetsov*’s “command center controlled not only its own air component, but also air-force Su-24 combat aircraft based at Khmeimim air base in Syria.”<sup>127</sup> Owing to the loss of two combat aircraft during their recovery and the fact that just 30 of the 360 naval Su-33 combat sorties were made from the carrier, some analysts have assessed the ship’s air operations as unsuccessful.<sup>128</sup> At the same time, the use of long-range cruise missiles launched by both Russian submarines and surface ships was generally considered effective and successful.<sup>129</sup> While it may be true that the performance of the air component of the operations was suboptimal, the *Kuznetsov* and the rest of the battlegroup nonetheless demonstrated their ability to conduct operations in this environment. Furthermore, Russia gained a significant amount of live combat experience and lessons learned that will help the navy to improve its capabilities. Finally, it showed the world that Russia is willing to utilize its offensive naval capabilities in pursuit of its foreign policy objectives.

Additional confirmation of Russia’s commitment to the objectives stated in its updated doctrine was apparent in January 2017 when Russia and Syria signed agreements

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<sup>125</sup> Connolly, *Towards a Dual Fleet?*, 11.

<sup>126</sup> Connolly, *Towards a Dual Fleet?*, 1.

<sup>127</sup> “Chapter Five: Russia and Eurasia,” *The Military Balance* 118, no. 1 (2018): 171, <https://doi.org/10.1080/04597222.2018.1416981>.

<sup>128</sup> “Chapter Five: Russia and Eurasia,” 171.

<sup>129</sup> “Chapter Five: Russia and Eurasia,” 171.

that gave Russia continued access to Syria's Tartus port installation.<sup>130</sup> Under the 49-year agreement, Russia is allowed to expand and modernize the Syrian facility to host 11 warships, including nuclear-powered ships. This represents a considerable expansion from its current capacity of four vessels. On December 29, 2017, Putin signed the legislation ratifying the agreement and said that both Tartus and the Russian-controlled Hmeimim air base would continue operating "on a permanent basis" despite the declared partial withdrawal of Russian troops from Syria.<sup>131</sup> This agreement indicates that Russia is actively seeking to develop its regional influence and that Moscow has long-term interests in the region, far beyond its current role in Syria and the eastern Mediterranean.

### C. CONCLUSION

Since the Soviet era, the Mediterranean has been a key objective to facilitate Russian power projection. Establishing a capable and permanent Mediterranean force has been seen as key to supporting Russian security interests and as a step toward the achievement of Russia's wider foreign policy objectives. Despite several obstacles along the path, Russia has remained committed to reestablishing a permanent Mediterranean naval presence and becoming a major player in the region in order to project power and rebuild its reputation as a strong state. While Yeltsin did little to advance toward this goal, Putin paved the way for Russia's return to the region by rebuilding key relationships and developing a long-term policy for the Mediterranean.

By developing this permanent Mediterranean naval force, Russia has created an instrument of hard power that is central to regional power projection, supporting and protecting its interests, and advancing Russia's wider foreign policy objectives. Moreover, as the 2016 *Kuznetsov* task force deployment to the eastern Mediterranean has demonstrated, Russia is both able and willing to use its Mediterranean forces in combat

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<sup>130</sup> Rod Nordland, "Russia Signs Deal for Syria Bases; Turkey Appears to Accept Assad," *New York Times*, January 20, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/20/world/middleeast/russia-turkey-syria-deal.html?mcubz=0>.

<sup>131</sup> "Putin Signs Law Allowing Expansion Of Russian Naval Facility In Syria," Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, December 29, 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/putin-signs-law-syria-tartus-naval-facility/28946167.html>.

roles to support national objectives. Russia's steps toward developing its Mediterranean force have often come at the expense of a weakening Western position. Accordingly, as Russia continues its aggressive military and geopolitical posturing, NATO must recognize that its southern flank now faces what has traditionally been perceived as an eastern flank threat.

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### **III. FRANCE, ITALY, SPAIN: PERCEPTIONS AND POLICIES**

At first glance, Russia's increased Mediterranean naval activity and its aggressive geopolitical activity since 2008 appear significant enough to encourage France, Italy, and Spain to shift their perceptions and policies to view this presence as among the greatest threats to national security. However, as NATO southern flank border states, finding the balance between national security priorities has proven challenging, and the Russian threat must also be weighed in conjunction with threats emanating from instability in the Middle East and North Africa. This chapter analyzes the perceptions and policies of France, Italy, and Spain and how these perceptions and policies have changed in response to Russia's Mediterranean activity and the complex mix of challenges in the evolving Mediterranean security environment. American scholar David Yost has said that, "continuing divergence among the strategic interests and priorities of an ever greater number of Allies could place into question NATO's ability to pursue its missions effectively."<sup>132</sup> It is in this sense that it is important to determine whether Russia's Mediterranean naval activity has led to a convergence among Southern and Eastern Allied security priorities, or whether France, Italy, and Spain hold that Russia remains a challenge limited to the Eastern flank. This chapter argues that, although the perceptions and policies of these allies have gradually shifted to perceive Russia and its increased Mediterranean naval presence as a potential threat, immediate nontraditional security issues remain a higher priority, a circumstance that limits the extent to which these Allies are willing to regard Russia's naval presence as a threat.

#### **A. FRANCE**

As the distinction between Mediterranean security and North African stability has been increasingly blurred, France's Mediterranean policy has generally been shaped by regional dynamics that are recognized as linked to French national security. In 2013, France released its White Paper on defense and national security. Replacing the 2008 French

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<sup>132</sup> Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act*, 377.

White Paper on Defense and National Security, the 2013 White Paper was developed in response to the rapidly changing global security environment that “called for new strategic guidelines.”<sup>133</sup> Above all, the paper outlined three priorities for the French “defense strategy: protection, deterrence and intervention.”<sup>134</sup> Building upon these priorities, the paper identified factors that are the most consequential to French national security including military and diplomatic objectives, alliance frameworks, risks, and threats.

Even though the 2013 White Paper made no direct reference to Russia’s Mediterranean naval activity, it did reveal some French perceptions regarding Russian geopolitical ambitions. The paper acknowledged Russia’s military growth while also underscoring the fact that Russia has demonstrated “increasing displays of strength” such as “political exploitation of its energy resources” and the 2008 aggression in Georgia.<sup>135</sup> At the same time, the paper assessed that “Russia is equipping itself with the economic and military clout that will enable it to engage in power politics.”<sup>136</sup> Beyond these acknowledgements of aggressive behavior, however, the White Paper suggested that France did not consider Russia a threat to national security at this point in time. The paper observed that “France has made close cooperation with Moscow one of its political objectives for the NATO Summit Declaration in Chicago.”<sup>137</sup>

In fact, the 2013 White Paper stated that “France no longer faces any direct, explicit conventional military threat against its territory.”<sup>138</sup> However, it is important to note French concerns regarding the Mediterranean. The Middle East, the Mediterranean, and North Africa are emphasized as priority areas of interest for French and European security. Specifically, in the 2013 White Paper France recognized North Africa as an area of high risk because of the “unstable conditions following the Arab revolutions” and concerns

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<sup>133</sup> French Republic, 2013 French White Paper: Defence and National Security, Paris, 2013, 7.

<sup>134</sup> French Republic, 2013 *French White Paper*, 7.

<sup>135</sup> French Republic, 2013 *French White Paper*, 35.

<sup>136</sup> French Republic, 2013 *French White Paper*, 36.

<sup>137</sup> French Republic, 2013 *French White Paper*, 36.

<sup>138</sup> French Republic, 2013 *French White Paper*, 36.

about terrorism and the trafficking of drugs, humans, and weapons.<sup>139</sup> While these issues stem from North Africa, they are perceived to extend themselves as a “potential challenge for the whole of the Mediterranean and Southern Europe.”<sup>140</sup>

Although the 2015 French National Strategy for the Security of Maritime Areas presented perceptions of the nontraditional security challenges similar to those that were presented in the 2013 White Paper, the 2015 National Strategy stressed the worsening geopolitical and security conditions in the Mediterranean. Accordingly, the strategy attributed “a massive increase in refugee flows or economic migrants, the development of illegal trafficking (drugs, arms, humans...) and a worsening of the terrorist threat” to the increased destabilization of North African countries.<sup>141</sup> Furthermore, the strategy stated that this destabilization contributes to the increased “threat against our interests and brings it nearer to Europe and France.”<sup>142</sup> Owing perhaps to this deteriorating security environment in North Africa and the Mediterranean, the strategy showed little concern for Russia’s increased Mediterranean naval activity. The strategy did not explicitly mention Russian naval activity, but it did point out that “we are seeing the emergence, or the return, of great maritime powers which contribute to establishing new regional balances, which are potentially more unstable.”<sup>143</sup> This statement demonstrated that despite the Russian aggression displayed during the Crimean Crisis of 2014, France had yet to fully acknowledge the increased Russian activity in the Mediterranean, at least in its 2013 and 2015 published defense strategies.

Despite multiple points of convergent interests, French-Russian relations have progressively cooled as a direct result of Russian aggression. In 2010, France agreed to build and sell two Mistral helicopter carrier vessels to Russia.<sup>144</sup> Although the delivery of

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<sup>139</sup> French Republic, *2013 French White Paper*, 13.

<sup>140</sup> French Republic, *2013 French White Paper*, 53.

<sup>141</sup> French Republic, *2015 National Strategy for the Security of Maritime Areas*, Paris, 2015, 6.

<sup>142</sup> French Republic, *2015 National Strategy for the Security of Maritime Areas*, 6.

<sup>143</sup> French Republic, *2015 National Strategy for the Security of Maritime Areas*, 4.

<sup>144</sup> Dominik Jankowski and Tomasz Kowalik, “NATO-Russian Relations in the New International Security Environment,” *International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs* 19, no. 2 (2010): 90, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy2.apus.edu/docview/734023283>.

the first ship was expected in the fall of 2014, France abandoned the agreement following Russia's annexation of Crimea and the ensuing pressure from other Allies to cancel the deal.<sup>145</sup> Moreover, in response to the annexation, France joined several Allies (including Britain, Germany, and the United States) in imposing sanctions on Russia for its intervention in Ukraine.<sup>146</sup> Despite these sanctions, however, France and Russia continued their dialogue, and in November 2015 they found common interests in fighting ISIS in Syria. Indeed, following a series of terror attacks in Paris, France accelerated the deployment of the aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle to the eastern Mediterranean to launch airstrikes against ISIS. Subsequently, there were signs of rapprochement as the French aircraft carrier coordinated operations with the Russian naval flotilla in the area.<sup>147</sup> However, this apparent reconciliation was short-lived due to disagreements over Russian actions in Syria.

Russia's indiscriminate bombing of the Syrian city of Aleppo marked a notable turning point in France's perception of the Russian maritime threat. In October 2016, François Hollande, then the French President, called for war crime charges against Russia and accused Russia of attacking civilians during its bombing campaign.<sup>148</sup> In September 2017, French Defense Minister Florence Parly condemned the Zapad military exercise, conducted by Russia and Belarus, calling the demonstration a part of Russia's strategy of intimidation.<sup>149</sup> In short, Russia's provocative military activities have pushed France to

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<sup>145</sup> Zachary Fryer-Biggs, "Former Polish President Says Failed Helicopter Deal Supposed to 'make Up' for Mistral," *IHS Jane's Defence Weekly* 53, no. 50 (October 2016), <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy2.apus.edu/docview/1830251581>.

<sup>146</sup> Stephen Castle, Julie Hirschfeld Davis, and Steven Erlanger, "NATO Prepares New Sanctions Over Russian Action in Ukraine," *New York Times*, September 4, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/05/world/as-nato-meets-ukraine-conflict-holds-center-stage.html>.

<sup>147</sup> Anne-Sylvaine Chassany and Sam Jones, "France's Francois Hollande Urged to Rethink Syria Strategy," *Financial Times*, November 16, 2015, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy2.apus.edu/docview/1749480867?accountid=8289>; Thomas R. Fedyszyn, "Putin's 'Potemkin-plus' Navy," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings* 142, no. 5 (May 2016): 42–47, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy2.apus.edu/docview/1792214847?accountid=8289>.

<sup>148</sup> "Syria conflict: France Wants Russia on War Crimes Charges," BBC, October 10, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37611151>.

<sup>149</sup> "France, Germany Denounce Russia's Strategy Of 'Intimidation,' Dispute Size Of War Games," Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, September 07, 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-zapad-drills-france-germany-denounce/28722103.html>.



address Russia's military assertiveness and to acknowledge the genuineness of the Russian threat.

Russia's increased aggression evoked an evident shift in France's perception of Russian maritime activities. At the NATO Warsaw Summit in July 2016, François Hollande, then the French President, offered sharp criticisms of Russia's destabilizing actions and policies that have, he observed, "posed further risks and challenges for the security of the Allies," such as the "provocative military activities near NATO borders, including in the Baltic and Black Sea regions and the Eastern Mediterranean."<sup>150</sup> Although he expressed an intention to maintain communications with Russia and reaffirmed that NATO has no aggressive intent, his remarks indicated that France recognizes Russia's increased naval activity in the Mediterranean and, more important, the resurgent threat Russia represents for the Alliance. Additionally, in November 2016, Jean-Yves Le Drian, then the French Defense Minister, denounced Russian submarine activity in the Bay of Biscay.<sup>151</sup> In short, France's denunciations of certain Russian maritime activities demonstrate that, despite its support for dialogue with Russia, France is openly willing to characterize Russia's naval presence as a threat.

Despite previous decisions to exclude Russia from France's published defense strategy, French policymakers have revisited Russia's posture in the Mediterranean and its implications for French security. According to an unnamed French think tank analyst, Russia understands France's "strategic saturation" and its struggle to establish priorities.<sup>152</sup> Additionally, analysts Stephanie Pezard, Andrew Radin, and others have explained that "France has also consistently advocated a diplomatic rather than military response" to the Ukraine crisis.<sup>153</sup> This suggestion supports the conjecture that while France may have

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<sup>150</sup> "NATO Stance 'Strictly Defensive'—French President," Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, July 9, 2016, <https://uk.ambafrance.org/NATO-stance-strictly-defensive-French-President>.

<sup>151</sup> Esteban Villarejo, "Spanish Daily Assesses Russian, NATO Submarine Presence," *BBC Monitoring European*, Mar 29, 2017, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy2.apus.edu/docview/1881808923?accountid=8289>.

<sup>152</sup> Villarejo, "Spanish Daily Assesses Russian, NATO Submarine Presence."

<sup>153</sup> Stephanie Pezard, Andrew Radin, Thomas S. Szayna and F. Stephen Larrabee, *European Relations with Russia: Threat Perceptions, Responses, and Strategies in the Wake of the Ukrainian Crisis*, RR1579 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2017) 45, [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1579.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1579.html).

prioritized threats resulting from North African instability, Russia's aggressive actions have compelled French policymakers to reassess the significance of Russia's behavior in the Mediterranean and its level of priority within French defense policy.

In February 2017, the French National Assembly's Committee on National Defense and the Armed Forces presented a report to the French National Assembly that explored challenges to French security and the role of the French Navy in the Mediterranean. While the report repeated many of the North African concerns described in the 2013 and 2015 strategies, the 2017 report formally recognized the return of Russian power in the Mediterranean. Specifically, the report noted the permanent presence of the Russian Navy, including the presence of Russian submarines and the deployments of the Admiral *Kuznetsov* carrier battle group, and linked the Tartus and Latakia naval bases to Russia's will to preserve its strategic capabilities in the region.<sup>154</sup> While the comments within the report regarding Russia's naval activity were limited, especially when compared to the extensive focus on the migrant crisis and instability in North Africa, the report demonstrated that the French government has identified worrying patterns in Russia's Mediterranean activities that require more attention.

In the last quarter of 2017, France published its 2017 Defense and National Security Strategic Review. It offered a striking contrast from previous policy documents on national security priorities. The review was developed in response to "upheavals observed since 2013, in particular the jihadist terrorist attacks on French soil, as well as the deteriorating security situation at Europe's borders and the need to prepare a new Military Planning Act consistent with the engagements" of the French military forces.<sup>155</sup> While it remains a policy document that shapes French security programs, the review also explains that what largely separates it from the previous white papers is that the central issue is less "the identification and anticipation of trends" and more "the increased pace and intensity of changes."<sup>156</sup> In

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<sup>154</sup> Jean-David Ciot and Alain Marleix, *Sur le Rôle de la Marine Nationale en Méditerranée* [On the role of the national navy in the Mediterranean] (Information Report, French National Assembly February 7, 2017), <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/rap-info/i4451.asp>.

<sup>155</sup> French Republic, 2017 Defense and National Security Strategic Review, Paris, 2017, 13.

<sup>156</sup> French Republic, 2017 Defense and National Security Strategic Review, 13.

other words, while previous documents generally aimed at recognizing emerging risks and concerns, the 2017 review explicitly specified pressing threats to French national security. Moreover, although the review frequently reaffirmed the importance of partners, allies, and multilateralism for achieving national security objectives, the French Defense Minister stated in the review's foreword that France "can no longer rely everywhere and forever with absolute certainty on our traditional partners."<sup>157</sup> Accordingly, this statement suggests that the threats outlined within the review were considered in an impartial manner and independently of alliance circumstances.

It is important to note that the North African region remains a high priority for French national security. The 2017 review recalled the 2015 terrorist attacks on French soil and emphasized that the Sahel-Sahara region continues to be "a high priority in France's fight against terrorism and trafficking as well as in the protection of French expatriates."<sup>158</sup> In fact, according to the review, "Jihadist terrorism is the most immediate and significant threat we face, as it is directed against our homeland and population."<sup>159</sup> Accordingly, the 2017 review explained that on one hand, "geography will remain an important driver" for determining security protection priorities and that "physical flows (such as trafficking and illegal migration) that affect our security also depend on geography."<sup>160</sup> On the other hand, however, it noted that "geographical proximity cannot be the sole criterion" and that "France intends to fulfill its responsibilities globally, not limiting them to its own neighborhood."<sup>161</sup> The document therefore emphasized that "a collective awareness of shared security issues is emerging, particularly now that Europeans are finding themselves slightly more alone than in the past."<sup>162</sup> In short, although geography remains an important consideration to French security, collective threat assessments are gradually developing as an influential factor.

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<sup>157</sup> French Republic, 2017 Defense and National Security Strategic Review, 10.

<sup>158</sup> French Republic, 2017 Defense and National Security Strategic Review, ¶ 28.

<sup>159</sup> French Republic, 2017 Defense and National Security Strategic Review, ¶ 93.

<sup>160</sup> French Republic, 2017 Defense and National Security Strategic Review, ¶ 167.

<sup>161</sup> French Republic, 2017 Defense and National Security Strategic Review, ¶ 168.

<sup>162</sup> French Republic, 2017 Defense and National Security Strategic Review, ¶ 56.

While previous strategies lacked definitive assessments of the Russian threat, the 2017 review was unambiguous regarding the French perception of Russia. The review reinforced a collective threat assessment perception by noting that “Europe’s eastern and northern flanks have experienced the reassertion of Russian power and the resurgence of war. They are also affected by Moscow’s intent to rebuild a sphere of influence.”<sup>163</sup> With reference to the Baltics the review noted that “Moscow’s aggressive posture manifests itself through recurrent military demonstration”<sup>164</sup> and highlighted NATO’s response and French contributions to forward deployed forces. Finally, while discussing the North Atlantic region, the review pointed out the “increase in Russian activities,” including “flights of strategic bombers and deployments of submarines” and recognized that with “Russian activity there is a major concern, which France shares with its main allies.”<sup>165</sup> The shift in the French perception of the Russian threat is clear. Where the 2013 White Paper generally described Russia’s military activities in broad terms, the 2017 review directly detailed Russian transgressions. The former called for closer cooperation, while the latter emphasized that Russian power “must be met with a firm response combined with dialogue.”<sup>166</sup>

Above all, the 2017 review revealed the French policy shift regarding Russia’s Mediterranean naval activity. Specifically, the review recognized that the Mediterranean is “experiencing a return of power politics, with the permanent presence of Russian air and naval forces.”<sup>167</sup> The review also highlighted Russia’s “policy of all-out assertion” within the Mediterranean Sea and confirmed that France considers this Russian approach as going “hand in hand with various forms of strategic intimidation.”<sup>168</sup> Finally, the review showed the French concern for the “increased militarization” of the Mediterranean and underscored the fact that “Russia has recovered its status as a Mediterranean power, evidenced by air

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<sup>163</sup> French Republic, 2017 Defense and National Security Strategic Review, ¶ 39.

<sup>164</sup> French Republic, 2017 Defense and National Security Strategic Review, ¶ 41.

<sup>165</sup> French Republic, 2017 Defense and National Security Strategic Review, ¶ 42.

<sup>166</sup> French Republic, 2017 Defense and National Security Strategic Review, ¶ 117.

<sup>167</sup> French Republic, 2017 Defense and National Security Strategic Review, ¶ 45.

<sup>168</sup> French Republic, 2017 Defense and National Security Strategic Review, ¶ 115.

and sea power demonstrations and by its long-term presence in the eastern Mediterranean, supported by a strengthened network of overseas bases between Crimea and Syria.”<sup>169</sup> The new emphasis placed on Russia’s Mediterranean activity departed considerably from previous strategic policy documents that scarcely showed concern for Russia’s Mediterranean naval activities.

Although France has traditionally viewed Russia as the primary threat on NATO’s eastern flank, there has been a clear shift in the French perspective. The Russian aggression is no longer viewed as only an eastward-oriented problem. France now perceives Russia as a rising challenge on the Alliance’s northern, southern, and eastern flanks. While many of France’s familiar security priorities (including terrorism and destabilization in North Africa) remain, French perceptions and policies share Alliance concerns about Russia’s aggressive behavior across all domains.

## **B. ITALY**

Italy perceives security and stability in the Mediterranean region as fundamental to national security. In 2015, the Italian government published a White Paper for International Security and Defense. Comments regarding Russia are entirely absent from the document. Instead, the paper recognized that security in the Mediterranean is “influenced by dynamics occurring in adjacent areas.”<sup>170</sup> Accordingly, the paper identified stability in the Mashreq, the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and the Persian Gulf as linked to challenges such as mass migration, illegal trafficking, and international terrorism. The paper emphasized that the “achievement of a high degree of stability and democratic development in the countries that affect the Mediterranean is therefore a priority for our country.”<sup>171</sup> The paper also placed Euro-Mediterranean security on the same level as Euro-Atlantic security by stressing that “in the Euro-Atlantic context the participation in established mechanisms of prevention, deterrence, and collective defence...ensures that the nation’s security

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<sup>169</sup> French Republic, 2017 Defense and National Security Strategic Review, ¶ 124.

<sup>170</sup> Italian Ministry of Defense, 2015 White Paper: For International Security and Defence, Rome, July 2015, ¶ 51.

<sup>171</sup> Italian Ministry of Defense, 2015 White Paper, ¶ 71.

conditions are adequate, [and that] it is only possible to create similar conditions in the Euro-Mediterranean region if an intervention in this area is given national priority.”<sup>172</sup> In other words, Italy regards engagement in the region by multilateral frameworks as paramount to creating a secure and stable Mediterranean. Because Russian naval activity is absent from the paper, this statement underscores the perceived importance of stability in North Africa and its impact on Italian security.

In order to fully understand the consequences of instability in North Africa for Italian security, the country’s migrant crisis must be analyzed. The rise of terrorism in North Africa and the instability in Libya have resulted in an unprecedented flow of migrants onto Italian shores, far exceeding arrivals in France or Spain.<sup>173</sup> According to Frontex data, the first mass wave of immigration to Italy occurred in 2011, with 64,300 migrants arriving. Although there was a decrease to 15,900 in 2012 and 40,000 in 2013, another large wave occurred in 2014 with 170,760 arriving. In 2015, there was a slight decrease to 153,946 migrants, but by 2016 the number arriving in Italy reached 181,126.<sup>174</sup> In contrast, the Western Mediterranean route to Spain was limited to 9,990 arrivals in 2016.

As a result, Italy has been preoccupied with the migration crisis and the resultant risks of criminal organizations and terrorism. The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) has assessed that “more than 90 percent of the migrants coming to the EU are facilitated, mostly by members of a criminal network,” and that “there is an increased risk that foreign terrorist fighters may use the migratory flows to enter the EU.”<sup>175</sup> Indeed, according to the Italian Ministry of Interior, between March 2016 and March 2017, authorities questioned 160,593 people, arrested about 550 suspected

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<sup>172</sup> Italian Ministry of Defense, *2015 White Paper*, ¶ 50.

<sup>173</sup> Alessandra Vernile, “Case Study: The Geopolitical Importance of Maritime Security for Italy” contained in Giacomo Morabito et al., *Maritime Security in the Mediterranean Region* (San Bernardino, CA: Mediterranean Affairs, 2017), 79.

<sup>174</sup> “Central Mediterranean Route,” European Border and Coast Guard Agency, accessed June 22, 2018, <https://frontex.europa.eu/along-eu-borders/migratory-routes/central-mediterranean-route/>.

<sup>175</sup> “Migrant Smuggling Networks,” Europol and Interpol, May 2016, accessed January 13, 2018, [https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/ep-ip\\_report\\_executive\\_summary.pdf](https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/ep-ip_report_executive_summary.pdf).

terrorists, and sentenced 38 people on terrorism charges.<sup>176</sup> Consequently, the impact of the migrant crisis and the ever-increasing terror threat represent major security concerns for Italy, which may explain Italian desires to prioritize Euro-Mediterranean stability rather than Russia's Mediterranean naval activity.

Italy has taken several steps to manage the migration crisis and improve Mediterranean security. In October 2013, the Italian government commenced Operation Mare Nostrum, a year-long naval and air operation dedicated to managing the migration crisis, countering smuggling, and conducting maritime security operations.<sup>177</sup> Additionally, following a worsening of Libyan stability, in March 2015 Italy launched Operation Mare Sicuro, which conducts information collecting, search and rescue operations, and counter-smuggling operations. Although multilateral initiatives are discussed in Chapter IV of this thesis, it is important to note that Italy also plays a leading role in the Frontex-initiated multilateral Operation Themis and contributes to EU and NATO operations in the Mediterranean. Italian analyst Alessandra Vernile noted that “the Italian government is managing the migrant crisis principally as an internal problem related exclusively to Italy” and that with this approach it “has been easier to set up dual missions, aiming to protect national borders and the Italian national interests.”<sup>178</sup> In other words, Italy conducts unilateral and multilateral operations to enhance its border security and to address national security concerns. Despite Italy's various approaches, there is still no end in sight to the crisis, and it remains a significant consideration when weighed against other threats.

Although the Italian Navy is profoundly committed to migrant crisis operations, its activities are not limited to this immediate security challenge; as a result, the navy is modernizing to meet all of Italy's strategic needs. In 2016, Admiral Giuseppe De Giorgi, then the Chief of Staff of the Italian Navy, noted that in the previous ten years the Italian

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<sup>176</sup> Stephanie Kirchgaessner and Lorenzo Tondo, “Why Has Italy Been Spared Mass Terror Attacks in Recent Years?” *The Guardian*, June 23, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/23/why-has-italy-been-spared-mass-terror-attacks-in-recent-years>.

<sup>177</sup> Alessandro Marrone, Michele Nones, and Alessandro R. Ungaro, “Italian Defence Policy, Armed Forces and Operations in the Mediterranean,” as contained in: Alessandro Marrone et al., *Italy and Security in the Mediterranean*, 114.

<sup>178</sup> Vernile, “Case Study,” 79.

Navy had engaged in a wide-range of operations, “some conventional, as in the case of the Libyan crisis in 2011; and some related to maritime security, such as the counter-piracy operations in the Horn of Africa, interweaved with humanitarian operations.”<sup>179</sup>

However, the Italian fleet is aging. While there are approximately 60 ships in the Italian Navy, on average only 20 are available at any given time.<sup>180</sup> Consequently, in 2015, the Italian Parliament approved the Legge Navale plan, which appropriated the equivalent of \$5.7 billion of funding to acquire several new offshore patrol vessels, one logistics support ship (LSS), and one landing helicopter dock (LHD) vessel.<sup>181</sup> According to the plan, the multipurpose characteristics of these ships will provide Italy with useful tools in all maritime safety activities such as search and rescue and disaster relief.<sup>182</sup> Although the plan emphasizes humanitarian aid support and safety roles for these vessels, given Italy’s active involvement in NATO maritime activities, Italy’s naval modernization may also serve as a means to counter conventional state actor threats, including Russia.

There have been some indications that Italy’s perception of Russia’s naval presence in the Mediterranean has marginally shifted in recent years. To illustrate, in 2004–2014 Italy and Russia annually conducted the IONIEX (Ionian Sea Exercise) drills, to promote cooperation between the navies, but the exercise ceased in 2014.<sup>183</sup> The termination correlated with Russia’s military intervention in Ukraine (and Moscow’s annexation of Crimea) and signaled both an apparent departure from positive Italian-Russian naval relations and a subtle shift in the Italian perspective on Russia’s naval presence in the Mediterranean.

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<sup>179</sup> Luca Peruzzi, “Challenge at Sea: Italy Seeks Naval Power to Match Strategic Need,” *IHS Jane’s Navy International* 121, no. 6 (August 2016), <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy2.apus.edu/docview/1799320871>.

<sup>180</sup> Luca Peruzzi, “Italian Navy Launches Fleet Renewal,” *European Security & Defence*, no.15 (2015), 1, [http://www.mittler-report.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/daten/produkte/esd/ESD\\_Spotlight\\_No\\_15.pdf](http://www.mittler-report.de/fileadmin/user_upload/daten/produkte/esd/ESD_Spotlight_No_15.pdf).

<sup>181</sup> Peruzzi, “Challenge at Sea: Italy Seeks Naval Power to Match Strategic Need.”

<sup>182</sup> “Programma navale 2014—Marina Militare,” Italian Ministry of Defense, accessed March 27, 2018, [http://www.marina.difesa.it/uominimezzi/nuoviprogetti/Pagine/programma\\_navale.aspx](http://www.marina.difesa.it/uominimezzi/nuoviprogetti/Pagine/programma_navale.aspx).

<sup>183</sup> “Russian Navy Commander-in-Chief Visits Italy,” *Naval Today*, September 27, 2012, accessed July 12, 2018, <https://navaltoday.com/2012/09/27/russian-navy-commander-in-chief-visits-italy/>.



A comparison of comments by Italian government officials with statements by leaders in the Italian Navy raises the possibility that Italy remains sensitive to Russian perceptions of Italian policy. In 2015, Admiral Giuseppe de Giorgi addressed the return of Russian submarines in the Mediterranean and underscored the need for preparedness for conventional forms of maritime warfare.<sup>184</sup> In contrast, in 2016 the Italian Minister of Defense, Roberta Pinotti, suggested that the Russians could be a key actor in stabilizing the Mediterranean, going so far as to state that rather than “a potential adversary, I wish them as a potential ally.”<sup>185</sup> However, in September 2017, the Italian Chief of Staff, Vice Admiral Valter Girardelli, noted Russia’s naval presence in the Mediterranean and stressed the necessity for the Italian Navy to continue its defense activities.<sup>186</sup> These comments suggest that Italian military leaders recognize the Russian naval presence as a potential threat, but due to the government’s desire for regional stability, they may be reluctant to label Russia’s presence as a threat in any written policy.

In 2017, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a document titled *Italian Strategy in the Mediterranean* that, in contrast to the 2015 White Paper, discussed Russia in the Mediterranean. In short, the strategy refrained from labeling Russia’s naval presence as a threat or a concern. To a great extent, the strategy reemphasized Italy’s perceptions shared in the 2015 White Paper, notably North African instability, terrorism, and the migration crisis. However, the strategy also noted that “amidst the resulting regional chaos, international protagonists like Russia have come back to the fore...The Mediterranean has thus become a multipolar region, where the centers of power have multiplied and political agendas...are increasingly in competition.”<sup>187</sup> The strategy frequently called for

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<sup>184</sup> “La Marina Avverte: Siamo in un Clima quasi Bellico,” Public Policy, accessed November 13, 2017, <http://www.publicpolicy.it/marina-clima-quasi-bellico-47289.html>.

<sup>185</sup> Her exact words follow: “Più Che come un Potenziale Avversario li Auspicio come un Potenziale Alleato.” Gianluca Di Feo, “Pinotti: Così Cambia la Difesa, Nasce il Pentagono Italiano. Meno Comandi, più Giovani,” *Repubblica*, March 01, 2017, [http://www.repubblica.it/politica/2017/03/01/news/pinotti\\_cosi\\_cambia\\_la\\_difesa\\_nasce\\_il\\_pentagono\\_italiano\\_meno\\_comandi\\_piu\\_giovani-159480731/](http://www.repubblica.it/politica/2017/03/01/news/pinotti_cosi_cambia_la_difesa_nasce_il_pentagono_italiano_meno_comandi_piu_giovani-159480731/).

<sup>186</sup> “Discorso del Capo di Stato Maggiore della Marina Ammiraglio di Squadra Valter Girardelli in Occasione Phase-out Atlantic, Phase-in P-72A,” Italian Ministry of Defense, September 21, 2017, [http://www.marina.difesa.it/conosciamoci/organizzazione/csm/Pagine/20170921\\_sigonella.aspx](http://www.marina.difesa.it/conosciamoci/organizzazione/csm/Pagine/20170921_sigonella.aspx).

<sup>187</sup> Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, *The Italian Strategy in the Mediterranean: Stabilising the Crises and Building a Positive Agenda for the Region*, Rome, 2017, 3.

cooperation and multilateralism in the Mediterranean or, more specifically, “a multilateralism that embraces a ‘win-win’ approach and is not the victim of a ‘zero-sum game.’”<sup>188</sup> Additionally, in discussing the Italian perspective on the Syrian crisis, the strategy stated that “a dialogue with Russia is essential, as a lasting political solution to the Syrian conflict necessarily involves also Moscow.”<sup>189</sup> Ultimately, these statements reinforce the idea that Italy recognizes Russia’s increased Mediterranean naval activity, but any inclination to label this presence a threat in written policy is eclipsed by stronger desires to maintain a positive dialogue with Russia while aiming for cooperation in managing regional instability.

There are, however, additional reasons apart from these strategic concerns as to why Italy is disinclined to perceive Russia’s Mediterranean presence as a threat. One possible factor is that Italy seeks to maintain positive relations with Russia, both politically and economically. Italy has been among the most vocal members of the European Union in calling for the easing of sanctions imposed on Russia after the Crimea crisis.<sup>190</sup> Indeed, Italy is particularly sensitive to the sanctions due to close Italian-Russian market ties. Russia is the main supplier of Italian energy resources, making up to 20 percent of Italian oil imports and 47 percent of Italian natural gas imports.<sup>191</sup> At the same time, political leaders have called for greater cooperation with Moscow to resolve global issues.<sup>192</sup> Despite these factors, however, Russian analyst Alexander Dunaev argues that “Italy supports Russia, but more in words than in actions,” pointing out that “the most Rome has

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<sup>188</sup> Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, *The Italian Strategy in the Mediterranean*, 8.

<sup>189</sup> Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, *The Italian Strategy in the Mediterranean*, 15.

<sup>190</sup> Guy Dinmore, Christian Oliver, and Roman Olearchyk, “Italy Leads Calls to Slow Sanctions against Russia,” *Financial Times*, June 27, 2014, <https://www.ft.com/content/6b191cca-fd39-11e3-bc93-00144feab7de>; Jason Horowitz, “With Italy No Longer in U.S. Focus, Russia Swoops to Fill the Void,” *New York Times*, May 30, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/29/world/europe/russia-courts-italy-in-us-absence.html>.

<sup>191</sup> “Relations Between Italy and Russia,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, accessed June 21, 2018, [https://www.esteri.it/mae/it/politica\\_estera/aree\\_geografiche/europa/i\\_nuovi\\_rapporti.html#2](https://www.esteri.it/mae/it/politica_estera/aree_geografiche/europa/i_nuovi_rapporti.html#2)

<sup>192</sup> Alexander Dunaev, “A Historical Interlocutor: How Willing Is Italy to Support Russia?” Carnegie Moscow Center, March 19, 2018, <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/75873>.

done is oppose the automatic extension of sanctions and impede efforts to ratchet up pressure on Russia.” Moreover, he concludes that “Italy values its ties with Russia, but it values mutual understanding with key EU nations and the United States more. Italy won’t sacrifice that for the Kremlin.”<sup>193</sup> Accordingly, it is necessary to analyze Italy’s actions on NATO’s eastern flank to understand the Italian approach and its perceptions.

Italian actions on the eastern flank have shown that the Italian approach to Russia has been firm, yet sensitive to Russian perceptions. To illustrate, Italy has demonstrated its commitment to the 2014 Wales Summit reassurance measures, contributing to the Baltic air policing missions in 2015; and in January 2018 Italy took over as the lead nation for the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF).<sup>194</sup> However, Italy took steps to limit the size of the Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) units, reflecting the “Italian position” that Francesca Bitondo, Alessandro Marrone, and Paola Sartori have explained as follows: Italy “stands firm to the necessity to avoid exacerbations of confrontational tones with Moscow.” Additionally, these three scholars have suggested that “Russia’s increasing political and military activism in the Mediterranean and in the Middle East ended up with connecting the dynamics of the Eastern flank with those of the Southern one.”<sup>195</sup> As a result, Italy considers it “even more crucial to set a dialogue with Moscow not only on the Ukraine scenario but also on other crises involving Russia.”<sup>196</sup> In this context, Italy may view Russia’s Mediterranean activity as only a part of the sum of Russia’s overall behavior. This perception would suggest that Italy recognizes Russia’s Mediterranean activity but finds it more important to “stand firm” on the Eastern flank, rather than on both flanks in order to avoid aggravating tensions with Moscow. In short, the degree of Italy’s firmness may represent a balance between where the Italians consider it necessary to reinforce their

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<sup>193</sup> Dunaev, “A Historical Interlocutor.”

<sup>194</sup> “NATO: Italy Takes the Lead of NRF Land Component,” Italian Ministry of Defense, January 10, 2018, [https://www.difesa.it/EN/Primo\\_Piano/Pagine/so.aspx](https://www.difesa.it/EN/Primo_Piano/Pagine/so.aspx).

<sup>195</sup> Francesca Bitondo, Alessandro Marrone, and Paola Sartori, *Challenges to NATO and Italy’s Role: Trump, Brexit, Collective Defence and Neighborhood Stability*, IAI 16/18E (Rome, Italy: Istituto Affari Internazionali, 2017), 29, <http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iai1618e.pdf>.

<sup>196</sup> Bitondo et al., *Challenges to NATO and Italy’s Role*, 29.

collective defense credibility and, on the other hand, where dialogue and cooperation are needed to resolve national security concerns.

### **C. SPAIN**

Spain's perceptions and policies regarding Russia's Mediterranean activity have shifted gradually over the years since the publication of the 2013 National Security Strategy. Similar to the strategy statements of France and Italy, the 2013 National Strategy identified the Mediterranean as a major strategic priority, aiming for "peace, stability, and prosperity on the southern shore of the Mediterranean," a priority tied to the future of Spain's security.<sup>197</sup> Accordingly, the strategy considered North Africa linked to security concerns such as migratory flows, terrorism, and various types of illegal trafficking. As a result of these concerns, the Spanish strategy stated that priority must be given to stability and development in the North African region, observing that "Africa poses significant security challenges and must continue to be given preferential attention."<sup>198</sup> Additionally, the strategy frequently emphasized collaboration, cooperation, and multilateralism with partners and allies to manage global security challenges.<sup>199</sup>

While Russia was discussed in the 2013 National Strategy, there was nothing to suggest that Spain perceived Russia as a threat or a concern. Rather, Russia was referred to as "a key strategic actor of great importance to the European energy market." The strategy also stated that "cooperating with Moscow is essential to Europe's security and stability" and therefore called on Russia to "contribute to settling longstanding conflicts in the strategic environment it shares with the [European] Union, as this will enhance the democratic stability of the countries involved and the security of everyone."<sup>200</sup> Beyond these statements, however, the strategy did not address Russia's Mediterranean activity or its international behavior.

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<sup>197</sup> Kingdom of Spain, *National Security Strategy 2013*, Madrid, 2013, 14.

<sup>198</sup> Kingdom of Spain, *National Security Strategy 2013*, 11.

<sup>199</sup> Kingdom of Spain, *National Security Strategy 2013*, 2.

<sup>200</sup> Kingdom of Spain, *National Security Strategy 2013*, 19.

When discussing Spanish national security concerns, it is important to note that Madrid's desire for stability in North Africa is also motivated by security concerns for the two Spanish enclaves on the northern shores of the Moroccan coast, Ceuta and Melilla. To illustrate, in February 2017, Spain grew particularly concerned after nearly 500 migrants and refugees broke through a fence surrounding Ceuta in an attempt to reach Europe.<sup>201</sup> Although Spain's number of migrant arrivals from Africa has been lower than Italy's in recent years, the migrant crisis remains a major security concern. Additionally, Spain was expected to see a rise in migration after an Italian crackdown in 2017 on NGOs operating rescue missions in the central Mediterranean, with migrants and various organizations (both legal and criminal) turning to the Western Mediterranean Route from Morocco to Spain.<sup>202</sup> Indeed, this crackdown may have been a major contributing factor as to why migrant arrivals in Spain jumped from 9,990 in 2016 to nearly 23,143 by the end of 2017.<sup>203</sup> Although this number is much lower than Italy's 118,962 arrivals in 2017, it nonetheless demonstrates that the migration crisis weighs heavily in Spain's national security concerns.

Despite Spain's primary focus on threats emanating from North Africa, the Spanish Navy engages in a wide range of operations, but none of these indicates shifts in the Spanish perspective on Russia's Mediterranean naval activity. Spanish defense analyst Manuel J. Ruiz Isac noted that the two main priorities of Spain's fleet are (a) contributing to NATO maritime activities in the face of the "Russian challenge in the Baltic, North, and Eastern Mediterranean Seas" and (b) participating in EU missions against human trafficking in the central Mediterranean.<sup>204</sup> However, the General Lines of the Navy 2017, a document that outlined the objectives of the Chief of Staff of the Spanish Navy, did not

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<sup>201</sup> Tony Barber, "Barcelona and Spain's Sea of Troubles," *Financial Times*, August 19, 2017, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy2.apus.edu/docview/1939987656>.

<sup>202</sup> Tony Barber, "Barcelona and Spain's Sea of Troubles."

<sup>203</sup> "Western Mediterranean Route," European Border and Coast Guard Agency, accessed June 23, 2018, <https://frontex.europa.eu/along-eu-borders/migratory-routes/western-mediterranean-route/>

<sup>204</sup> Manuel J. Ruiz Isac, *Secretaria De Despacho De Guerra Y Marina, Y Ministra De Defensa Número 431*, GESI 20/2017 (Granada, Spain: Grupo de Estudios en Seguridad Internacional, 2017), <http://www.seguridadinternacional.es/?q=en/node/1011>.

directly identify Russia as a threat.<sup>205</sup> While the document did stress multilateralism and “the emergence of new” state and non-state actors, the specifics regarding these challenges were unclear.<sup>206</sup> Additionally, although the Spanish Navy has played an active role in several multilateral missions such as NATO’s Operation Sea Guardian and Standing NATO Maritime Group 2, NATO’s maritime components conduct a broad range of security tasks that are not all strictly related to Russian naval activities. Therefore, Spain’s participation does not fully reveal the extent of Spain’s shift in perception of Russia’s increased Mediterranean naval presence.

Spain has attempted to maintain a position between Russia and the Alliance that is proving to be untenable. Francisco de Borja Lasheras, a Spanish policy analyst, has pointed out that Spain’s policy toward “Russia necessitates that it performs a balancing act between de-escalation and détente with Moscow, on the one hand...and Allied assurance in NATO on the other.”<sup>207</sup> While it has proven difficult for Spain to manage this balancing act, Spain tends to hold collective defense obligations higher than how Russia perceives its actions. To illustrate, in October 2016, despite objections from several NATO allies, Spain approved a Russian request for a naval flotilla to refuel at the Ceuta port. Russia later withdrew the refueling request.<sup>208</sup> However, that same month Pedro Morenés, then the Spanish Minister of Defense, announced Madrid’s intention to deploy Spanish soldiers to Latvia, as part of the series of NATO missions in the Baltic region.<sup>209</sup>

Although Russia itself withdrew the refueling request, Moscow appeared displeased with the end result. In response to the Spanish decision to deploy soldiers to Latvia, the Russian Defense Minister, Sergey Shoygu, declared, “we were surprised by the

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<sup>205</sup> *Lineas Generales De La Armada 2017* [General Lines of the Navy 2017], Madrid, Armada Española, 2017.

<sup>206</sup> *Lineas Generales De La Armada 2017* [General Lines of the Navy 2017], 6.

<sup>207</sup> Lasheras, “Spain’s Balancing Act with Russia.”

<sup>208</sup> Camila Domonoske, “After NATO Objections, Russian Warships Won’t Refuel At Spanish Port,” NPR, October 27, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/10/27/499563200/after-nato-objections-russian-warships-wont-refuel-at-spanish-port>.

<sup>209</sup> “*Tensión entre Moscú y Madrid por la Propuesta Española de Enviar Tropas a Letonia*,” El Confidencial Digital, September 11, 2016, [https://www.elconfidencialdigital.com/defensa/Tension-Moscu-Madrid-propuesta-Letonia\\_0\\_2816718317.html](https://www.elconfidencialdigital.com/defensa/Tension-Moscu-Madrid-propuesta-Letonia_0_2816718317.html).

position of individual countries which, under the pressure of the United States and NATO, publicly refused to allow our ships to enter their ports. It's time for western partners to decide whom they are really fighting with: terrorists or Russia."<sup>210</sup> Despite these remarks, Spain moved forward with the decision to deploy troops in Latvia. This deployment is noteworthy because it not only demonstrates Spain's commitment to collective defense, but also suggests that Spain recognizes that the conventional military threat posed by Russia should not be completely ignored.

Spain's shift in perception of Russia's naval activity in the Mediterranean became evident through the Spanish Annual National Security Report. This annually published report presents a comprehensive analysis of Spain's current national security challenges, which are assessed against the background of the 2013 National Security Strategy. As previously noted, the 2013 National Strategy emphasized that cooperation with Russia is "essential to Europe's security and stability."<sup>211</sup> In contrast, the 2014 security report recognized Russia's aggressive actions in Ukraine that signified a "change in the European security landscape" and presented "a new challenge for national defense within the framework of Spain's commitment to international safety, both within the European Union and NATO."<sup>212</sup> Additionally, the report noted that Russian's actions in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea posed "a threat to the stability and security of the entire Euro-Atlantic space, with possible long-term effects in the Black Sea area."<sup>213</sup> Assessing Russia's behavior as a threat to European security represented a substantial shift from Spain's perception the previous year.

The 2014 security report also demonstrated Spain's perception of the Russian threat on NATO's eastern flank. Indeed, the report discussed the Wales summit and explained that this "summit focused mainly on the greatest threats to Euro-Atlantic security: those from the Eastern Flank (Russia/Ukraine) and the Southern Flank (constituting regions of

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<sup>210</sup> "Tensión entre Moscú y Madrid por la Propuesta Española de Enviar Tropas a Letonia."

<sup>211</sup> Kingdom of Spain, National Security Strategy 2013, 19.

<sup>212</sup> Spanish Department of National Security, *Informe Anual de Seguridad Nacional 2014*, Madrid, 2014, 45.

<sup>213</sup> Spanish Department of National Security, *Informe Anual de Seguridad Nacional 2014*, 45.

the Middle East, and the North of Africa, and the Sahel.)”<sup>214</sup> Furthermore, the report points out that “decisions were adopted to face them jointly.”<sup>215</sup> This statement, and the inclusion of Russia as an eastern threat, represented more than just a nod to the eastern Allies. It also signified that Spain recognized the eastern flank threat and that a unity of effort was required to reinforce collective defense credibility. Although there were no statements regarding Russia’s Mediterranean naval activity, the report nonetheless showed a deviation from Spain’s previously established perception.

Although the 2015 Spanish security report did not suggest a further shift in perspective, it did show some concerns. Overall, the 2015 report made few remarks regarding Russia. The most prominent was a section discussing Russia’s modified military doctrine in December 2014. Specifically, the report highlighted “the modernization and development of nuclear forces” and the fact that “Russia added forty new intercontinental ballistic missiles to its nuclear arsenal.”<sup>216</sup> While this showed that Spain remained concerned about Russian behavior, it did not necessarily demonstrate a further shift in Spanish perceptions.

Above all, the 2016 report revealed a further shift in Spain’s perceptions of Russian behavior, particularly Russia’s Mediterranean naval activity. This report again highlighted Russia’s “modernization of nuclear and ballistic weapons” as a “factor that generates a certain degree of added stress to the existing.”<sup>217</sup> Moreover, the 2016 report noted the “expansion of Russia’s posture at the Tartus naval base” in Syria and Russia’s deployment of a “naval combat group to the Eastern Mediterranean.”<sup>218</sup> The report declared that in response to this activity NATO has strengthened its presence “through regular naval deployments, exercises, and permanent maritime groups in the region.”<sup>219</sup> The inclusion in

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<sup>214</sup> Spanish Department of National Security, *Informe Anual de Seguridad Nacional 2014*, 49.

<sup>215</sup> Spanish Department of National Security, *Informe Anual de Seguridad Nacional 2014*, 49.

<sup>216</sup> Spanish Department of National Security, *Informe Anual de Seguridad Nacional 2015*, Madrid, 2015, 94.

<sup>217</sup> Spanish Department of National Security, *Informe Anual de Seguridad Nacional 2016*, Madrid, 2016, 7.

<sup>218</sup> Spanish Department of National Security, *Informe Anual de Seguridad Nacional 2016*, 148–149.

<sup>219</sup> Spanish Department of National Security, *Informe Anual de Seguridad Nacional 2016*, 148–149.



the 2016 report of Russia's Mediterranean naval activity represented the first acknowledgement in any public strategic national security documents of Russia's behavior in the Mediterranean, demonstrating another subtle shift in Spanish perceptions. Furthermore, because the Spanish Navy commanded NATO's Mediterranean force, Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 (SNMG2), throughout 2016, the language of the 2016 report indicated that Spain viewed Russia's maritime presence as a concern for both Spain and the Allies which required a multilateral response.

In December 2017, Spain published its updated National Security Strategy, noting that the security "environment has changed significantly since the approval of the 2013 Strategy."<sup>220</sup> In the foreword, the Spanish prime minister stated that "the strategy defines a common position for all bodies with responsibilities in the area of security, in addition to enhancing synergies and aligning the State's resources."<sup>221</sup> Accordingly, the strategy offered the most up to date picture of Spain's perceptions of threats to its national security.

While the 2017 National Strategy shared many of the same perceptions of strategic issues shown in the 2013 Strategy, there were some differences regarding Russia. Recalling Russia's annexation of Crimea, the strategy stated that "its actions in eastern Ukraine have caused a deterioration in Europe's security situation."<sup>222</sup> In reference to the dynamics transforming the global security environment, the strategy noted that "powers like China and Russia have taken a more active role on the international scene, projecting their power beyond their regions. Both of these countries have stepped up their defense spending and modernized their military capabilities."<sup>223</sup> Echoing previous security reports, this statement demonstrated that Spain recognizes that Russia's ambitions are not restricted to the Russian periphery.

According to the strategy, "the Mediterranean is an area where different States and international actors are seeking to project their power...Examples of this are Russia's

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<sup>220</sup> Kingdom of Spain, *National Security Strategy 2017*, Madrid, 2017, 2.

<sup>221</sup> Kingdom of Spain, *National Security Strategy 2017*, 3.

<sup>222</sup> Kingdom of Spain, *National Security Strategy 2017*, 41.

<sup>223</sup> Kingdom of Spain, *National Security Strategy 2017*, 41.

strategic rapprochement to the western coast as a way to support its fleet in the Mediterranean.”<sup>224</sup> This statement does not necessarily imply that Spain perceives the Russian fleet as a threat; to a greater extent it suggests that the Spanish government understands the ambitions behind Russia’s diplomatic maneuvers. Perhaps as a subtle response to this observation, the strategy states in the same paragraph that “the EU and NATO sea operations...address security challenges such as combating human trafficking networks; as well as the permanent deployment of U.S. warships with ballistic missile defense capabilities.”<sup>225</sup> Seeking to maintain its balancing act, however, the strategy adds that “Spain is committed to [a] common strategic position within the framework of the EU and NATO, and to a critical but constructive dialogue with Russia.”<sup>226</sup> Thus, while the strategy in many ways demonstrates Spanish shifts in perception with regard to Russia’s behavior, it also shows that sensitivities to Russia remain. Above all, when compared to the 2013 Strategy, the 2017 Strategy shows that there has been a clear shift in the Spanish perception of Russia’s Mediterranean activity.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

The French, Italian, and Spanish perspectives on Russian naval activity in the Mediterranean have shifted as Russia has increased its naval presence in the Mediterranean since 2008. Despite previous decisions to avoid explicitly labeling Russia’s naval presence a threat, these Allies are increasingly considering this presence an emerging security challenge. However, the shift in perception does not fully correlate with Russia’s expanded Mediterranean naval activity, but instead, greater attention to this challenge has been consistent with the rising visibility of Russian military aggression. As Russia has become more aggressive, these Allies have reaffirmed collective defense commitments and they have shared Alliance concerns about Russia’s conventional military threat.

Despite this shift in perspective, these Allies are southern flank border states that are directly subjected to the instability and nontraditional threats emanating from the

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<sup>224</sup> Kingdom of Spain, National Security Strategy 2017, 43.

<sup>225</sup> Kingdom of Spain, National Security Strategy 2017, 43.

<sup>226</sup> Kingdom of Spain, National Security Strategy 2017, 42.

Middle East and North Africa. The extent that these Mediterranean Allies are willing to label Russia's naval presence a threat is therefore an issue of strategic priorities rather than complete disagreement with other Allies about the fact that Russia represents a real threat for the Alliance. To illustrate, the impact of the migrant crisis has been significantly higher in Italy than in France and Spain, and this may help to explain why Italian policymakers have been less inclined to address Russia's naval presence in any written policy. These policymakers have instead pursued an approach that addresses the most pressing areas of potential Russian aggression on the Eastern flank, while preparing for "conventional forms of maritime warfare" in the South and retaining hope that Russia will cooperate in addressing nontraditional threats in the Mediterranean. Conversely, policymakers in France and Spain have addressed Russia's naval presence in the Mediterranean in their written policies and have been more sensitive to Russia's increased aggression. Above all, it is not that these allies do not understand the challenge facing the Eastern Allies, but that the consequences of immediate security concerns remain a higher priority.

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## **IV. FRENCH, ITALIAN, AND SPANISH MULTILATERAL SECURITY COOPERATION INITIATIVES**

As previously noted in Chapter III, French, Italian, and Spanish policy emphasizes the importance of partners, allies, and cooperation for achieving national security objectives. As these Allies face emerging security challenges, the responses of France, Italy, and Spain have consisted not only of national policy shifts but also increased engagement in multilateral Mediterranean security cooperation initiatives. This chapter concentrates on EU and NATO Mediterranean security cooperation initiatives to which France, Italy, and Spain contribute. This thesis offers two conclusions about their national perceptions and the impacts of these initiatives. First, although these Allies have generally supported EU cooperation initiatives, they generally regard the EU frameworks as unable to comprehensively address their security concerns. Second, while France, Italy, and Spain perceive NATO's increased attention to the south as advantageous for their security objectives, they maintain that the Alliance should continue expanding its role in the region.

### **A. EUROPEAN UNION INITIATIVES**

In 2014, the EU launched Operation Triton as a border control and surveillance operation led by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex). In February 2018, Operation Triton was renamed Operation Themis. Although the mission's primary focus is border control, search and rescue operations have also played a prominent role, and it has recently broadened its tasks to include countering drug-smuggling, illegal fishing, and maritime pollution.<sup>227</sup> According to the European Commission, Operation Themis aims to support "Italy with border control, surveillance, and search and rescue in the Central Mediterranean" and defines its operational area as "the territorial waters of Italy" with search and rescue zones up to 138 nautical miles south of Sicily.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> "Joint Operation Triton (Italy)," European Border and Coast Guard Agency, accessed February 2, 2018, <http://frontex.europa.eu/pressroom/hot-topics/joint-operation-triton-italy--ekKaes>.

<sup>228</sup> "EU Operations in the Mediterranean Sea," European Commission, 2016, [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/securing-eu-borders/fact-sheets/docs/20161006/eu\\_operations\\_in\\_the\\_mediterranean\\_sea\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/securing-eu-borders/fact-sheets/docs/20161006/eu_operations_in_the_mediterranean_sea_en.pdf).

Although the French government appears cautious about relying on Frontex, it regards the initiative as a positive development for Euro-Med security. The 2015 French National Strategy for the Security of Maritime Areas explains that “France actively participates in maritime operations coordinated by the Frontex agency, and promotes its expertise to the Agency through the participation of its activities concerning the maritime domain.”<sup>229</sup> As a result of these contributions, the French government may consider Frontex overly reliant on France. In February 2017, the French politician Jean-Marc Germain presented a report on the migratory situation to the French National Assembly. This report noted Frontex’s “excessive dependence on the member states” and the interoperability issues, but it also acknowledged the mission’s progress, emphasizing that it has “transformed into a true European Coast Guard and Border Guard, which is positive.”<sup>230</sup>

A separate report presented by the French politician Pierre-Henri Dumont in October 2017 to the Assembly also offered positive remarks on Frontex’s operational development. However, this report stressed that France “be aware of the limits and the effectiveness of this policy” and that “the responsibility for the control of the external borders always lies with the Member States.”<sup>231</sup> In short, although France acknowledges the benefits of a European border guard, France appears unwilling to rely on Frontex operations and consequently the operation has had minimal impact on French security perceptions and policies.

Operation Themis operates under Italian command, but the government has also found the results suboptimal. In July 2017, the Italian Prime Minister, Paolo Gentiloni, criticized the EU and insisted that “Italy is reaching its limit...There needs to be burden

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<sup>229</sup> French Republic, 2015 National Strategy for the Security of Maritime Areas, 51.

<sup>230</sup> “la situation migratory en Europe [The Migratory Situation in Europe],” (Information Report, French Foreign Affairs Commission, February 22, 2017), <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/rap-info/i4551.asp>.

<sup>231</sup> Pierre-Henri Dumont, “Immigration, Asile et Intégration [Immigration, Asylum, and Integration],” French National Assembly, October 12, 2017, <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/15/budget/plf2018/a0275-tVII.asp>.

sharing; the migrants need to be brought to the ports of other countries as well.”<sup>232</sup> Additionally, Nicola Latorre, the Italian Senate Defense Committee Chairman, said, “soon enough, we won’t be able to handle it any longer...what can immediately be done, is to allow vessels that are not flying the Italian flag to carry those migrants to their respective countries.”<sup>233</sup> These comments were directed at Italy’s primary issue with Triton. Specifically, the Italian government objected to the requirement that all migrants rescued at sea be taken to an Italian port, even if another EU country was closer. However, this requirement was removed when the operation was rebranded as Themis.<sup>234</sup> Consequently, the operation may produce results that Italy finds more favorable and, therefore, Rome may be more willing to perceive the framework as beneficial to Italian national security.

Spain, on the other hand, remains optimistic about Themis but desires greater collaboration between the member states. The Spanish 2016 Annual Security Review frequently underscored Spanish support and active “contributions to the international efforts in the central Mediterranean,” including Frontex operations.<sup>235</sup> However, the security review suggested that there is room for improvement, and it conveyed Spanish desires for increased cooperation by “strengthening the channels of information exchange” between organizations.<sup>236</sup> Moreover, in January 2018, Spanish Interior Minister Juan Ignacio Zoido called on the EU states to prioritize collaboration on the migrant crisis, explaining that in Spain’s experience the “agreements with third countries, the reinforcement of border control, and collaboration with Frontex” have been “very

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<sup>232</sup> Arthur Beesley, Davide Ghiglione, and James Politi, “Italy Demands EU Nations Share Burden of Migrant Arrivals,” *Financial Times*, June 28, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/98fb484c-5c14-11e7-9bc8-8055f264aa8b>.

<sup>233</sup> Michael Birnbaum and Stefano Pitrelli, “Overwhelmed by Immigrants, Italy Threatens to Bar the Door to Rescue Ships,” *Washington Post*, June 30, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/overwhelmed-by-migrants-italy-threatens-to-bar-the-door-to-rescue-ships/2017/06/30/348794b0-5c23-11e7-aa69-3964a7d55207\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.d942addb6a7a](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/overwhelmed-by-migrants-italy-threatens-to-bar-the-door-to-rescue-ships/2017/06/30/348794b0-5c23-11e7-aa69-3964a7d55207_story.html?utm_term=.d942addb6a7a).

<sup>234</sup> Steve Scherer, “In New EU Sea Mission, Ships Not Obligated to Bring Migrants to Italy,” Reuters, February 02, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-italy/in-new-eu-sea-mission-ships-not-obliged-to-bring-migrants-to-italy-idUSKBN1FL62M>.

<sup>235</sup> Spanish Department of National Security, *Informe Anual de Seguridad Nacional 2016*, 120.

<sup>236</sup> Spanish Department of National Security, *Informe Anual de Seguridad Nacional 2016*, 121.

effective.”<sup>237</sup> Zoido’s perspective may, therefore, indicate that Spain not only considers Frontex an important instrument for national security but also holds that EU Mediterranean security support effectively assists Spain in meeting its border security objectives.

In June 2015, the EU launched, within the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) framework, European Union Naval Force Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED) to develop a wider EU response to the migrant crisis. In September 2015, it was renamed “Operation Sophia,” after a baby born aboard a German ship operating as part of the EUNAVFOR MED Task Force that rescued her mother. The operation’s mission is to “identify, capture, and dispose of vessels and enabling assets used or suspected of being used by migrant traffickers” and “to disrupt the business model of human smuggling and trafficking networks” in the Mediterranean.<sup>238</sup> Although the operation has led to the arrest of 117 suspected smugglers, destroyed 491 boats, and rescued over 40,000 migrants, analysts have yet to determine a causal link between the operation and fluctuations in migrant flow numbers.<sup>239</sup> Additionally, French analyst Thierry Tardy has pointed out that the instability in Libya and the absence of a strong government have “hindered the granting of formal consent to an EU presence in Libyan territorial waters,” which, in turn, is hampering the operation’s ability to carry out its mission.<sup>240</sup>

The French government has in many ways expressed doubts about the effectiveness of Operation Sophia. In February 2017, Jean-Yves Le Drian, then the French Minister of Defense, disclosed that he found the results of the operation to be unsatisfactory and that despite the “heavy traffic between Benghazi and Misrata...no interception is possible”

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<sup>237</sup> “Zoido Pide a la UE que Priorice el Control de Fronteras y los Retorno en la Reforma de la Política Migratoria,” Europa Press, January 25, 2018, <http://www.europapress.es/epsocial/migracion/noticia-zoido-pide-ue-priorice-control-fronteras-retorno-reforma-politica-migratoria-20180125140332.html>.

<sup>238</sup> “About EUNAVFOR MED Operation SOPHIA,” European External Action Service, 2018, [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage\\_en/36/About%20EUNAVFOR%20MED%20Operation%20SOPHIA](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/36/About%20EUNAVFOR%20MED%20Operation%20SOPHIA).

<sup>239</sup> Thierry Tardy, *Operation Sophia’s World—Changes and Challenges*, Brief 32 (Paris, France: European Union Institute for Security Studies 2017), 3, <https://doi.org/10.2815/205661>.

<sup>240</sup> Tardy, *Operation Sophia’s World*, 2.



because of the Libyan territorial water restrictions.<sup>241</sup> Moreover, in October 2017, a French National Assembly report discussing Sophia did not attribute any decrease in migrant flows to the operation, pointing out that smugglers have adapted to the operation's territorial limitations.<sup>242</sup> Consequently, the French seem to view Operation Sophia as an operation that acts more like a search and rescue endeavor than an initiative that fully addresses national security concerns.

Despite Operation Sophia's evident limitations, the Italian government has demonstrated its commitment to the operation and its future prospects. In 2017, as part of Sophia, Italy trained members of the Libyan Coast Guard to strengthen efforts dismantling the smuggling networks.<sup>243</sup> Italy perceives this training as an important step for security in the Mediterranean, as demonstrated by the 2017 Italian Strategy in the Mediterranean, which declares that "cooperation with Libyan authorities in the fight against human trafficking is increasingly effective."<sup>244</sup>

Additionally, it is noteworthy that in 2016 Italian Admiral Enrico Credendino, the Commander of Operation Sophia, provided testimony to the Italian Senate in which he drew comparisons between Sophia and the EU's Operation Atalanta, a counter-piracy mission off the Horn of Africa. Specifically, he notes that Atalanta was expected to "last a year, but today it is in its seventh year," and points out that even if Sophia could deter the smugglers, they would simply return once the operation ended, a circumstance that makes it unlikely Sophia would conclude after only one year.<sup>245</sup> This suggests that the Italian government is well aware of the long-term implications of the Sophia mission.

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<sup>241</sup> *Comptes Rendus de la Commission des Affaires Etrangères, de la Défense et des Forces Armées* [Reports of the Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Armed Forces Commission], *del Senato della Repubblica*, February 01, 2017, <http://www.senat.fr/compte-rendu-commissions/20170130/etr.html>.

<sup>242</sup> Dumont, "Immigration, Asile et Intégration."

<sup>243</sup> Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, *The Italian Strategy in the Mediterranean*, 23.

<sup>244</sup> Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, *The Italian Strategy in the Mediterranean*, 23.

<sup>245</sup> Audizione Dell'ammiraglio di Divisione Enrico Credendino, Operation Commander della Missione EUNAVFOR MED—Operazione SOPHIA, del Senato della Repubblica, 18th Session, February 4, 2016, 26, <https://www.senato.it/service/PDF/PDFServer/DF/319912.pdf>.

Consequently, despite the mission's constraints, Italy's resolve to ensure the mission's success indicates that Sophia is part of Italy's long-term security strategy in the Mediterranean because it would significantly enhance Italian national security.

Similarly, the Spanish government has expressed its commitment to Operation Sophia's success. The 2016 Spanish Annual National Security Report shows that Spain "has supported the decision of the EU to add two additional tasks to Operation Sophia: ...the implementation of the weapons embargo decreed by the United Nations Security Council, and providing training to the Libyan coast guard."<sup>246</sup> Additionally, in April 2017, the Spanish Minister of Defense, María Dolores de Cospedal, confirmed that Spain remained "very committed" to Operation Sophia and offered to relieve Italy by taking command of the EU operation.<sup>247</sup> Spain reaffirmed its dedication not only by commanding Sophia from September through December 2017 but also by joining Italy in the training of the Libyan coast guard.<sup>248</sup> Spanish policy and these actions suggest that Spain will continue fostering the development of Operation Sophia because Madrid considers it a step in the right direction toward addressing security concerns resulting from the migrant crisis.

In 2008, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) was created as a multilateral Mediterranean initiative, largely advocated by Nicolas Sarkozy, then the French President. The UfM relaunched the Barcelona Process; and it is one of two regional components within the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), the other being the Eastern Partnership (EaP) that addresses Eastern Europe. According to the UfM website, its mission is "to enhance regional cooperation, dialogue, and the implementation of concrete projects and initiatives.... to address the three strategic objectives of the region: stability, human

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<sup>246</sup> Spanish Department of National Security, *Informe Anual de Seguridad Nacional 2016*, 30.

<sup>247</sup> "España se Ofrece para Asumir el Mando de la Operación de la UE Contra las Mafias en el Mediterráneo en Septiembre," Europa Press, April 27, 2017, <http://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-espana-ofrece-asumir-mando-operacion-ue-contra-mafias-mediterraneo-septiembre-20170427202702.html>.

<sup>248</sup> Francesco Battistini, "Libia, il Comandante di Sophia 'Abbiamo Salvato 34 Mila Migranti,'" March 21, 2017, [http://www.corriere.it/esteri/17\\_marzo\\_22/cosi-siamo-riusciti-salvare34-mila-migranti-mare-e5b70dfc-0e7a-11e7-bc58-c287e833415a.shtml?refresh\\_ce-cp](http://www.corriere.it/esteri/17_marzo_22/cosi-siamo-riusciti-salvare34-mila-migranti-mare-e5b70dfc-0e7a-11e7-bc58-c287e833415a.shtml?refresh_ce-cp).

development, and integration.” Additionally, it states that these “projects address areas such as economy, environment, energy, health, migration, education, and social affairs.”<sup>249</sup>

Although leaders from the French, Italian, and Spanish governments have underscored its importance, the UfM has played an inconsequential role in their defense policies. In May 2017, the Spanish Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Ildefonso Castro López, granted that the UfM is “making progress in the integration, stability, and development” in the Euro-Mediterranean region.<sup>250</sup> However, the 2017 National Security Strategy declares that “Spain supports revitalizing the southern dimension of the ENP,” a statement that indicates that Spain may not judge that the UfM is actually making progress, and, consequently, the UfM plays an insignificant role in Spanish policy.<sup>251</sup> Leaders of the Italian and French governments have made similar statements of support, but the UfM is entirely absent from France’s 2017 Strategic Review of Defense and National Security and the 2017 Italian Strategy in the Mediterranean. Although it is possible that these Allies have left it out because the initiative fails to effectively address their major security concerns, it is more likely that they do not perceive the UfM as truly a security framework.

If the Allies do not perceive the UfM as a security framework, it may be because it is too broad in scope. In February 2018, French President Emmanuel Macron alluded to this possibility in his speech delivered to the Tunisian government. Macron addressed Mediterranean security by noting that in the past, Mediterranean strategies have had visions that were “too broad” and “beyond us.” Accordingly, he proposed a “common strategy for the Mediterranean” and offered to host a “meeting of leaders” in France.<sup>252</sup> Although some media observers have interpreted his remarks as a call to relaunch the UfM, there was no direct reference to this framework. The end result may be a new type of Mediterranean

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<sup>249</sup> “Who we are,” Union for the Mediterranean, accessed February 14, 2018, <http://ufmsecretariat.org/who-we-are/>.

<sup>250</sup> Sara Rosati, “La Unión por el Mediterráneo Planea Invertir 5.300 Millones en Empleo y Educación,” *El País*, May 12, 2017, [https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/05/12/actualidad/1494604538\\_960999.html](https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/05/12/actualidad/1494604538_960999.html).

<sup>251</sup> Kingdom of Spain, National Security Strategy 2017, 44.

<sup>252</sup> “Emmanuel Macron à Tunis, Prononçant son Discours Devant les Députés de l’ARP [Emmanuel Macron in Tunis, delivering his speech to the members of the ARP],” YouTube video, 47:19, posted by Tunsie Tribune, February 01, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YRNVi9c8C4I>.

initiative to address regional stability. However, it is not outside the realm of possibility that France will propose to narrow the scope of the UfM with a more precisely defined list of objectives.

## **B. NATO INITIATIVES**

Despite the rapidly changing security environment in the Mediterranean, the Alliance has taken several steps to address the challenges at hand. However, its maritime strategy remains largely underdeveloped. In April 2017, NATO's Allied Maritime Commander, Vice Admiral Clive Johnstone, drew attention to the Alliance's need to adapt in the Mediterranean:

So much has changed so quickly in maritime NATO that just about anything written about us more than three years ago is out of date. No one would have predicted that in 2014 that NATO warships would...help stop illegal migrant trafficking; or that we would have regular engagement with EU security actors like Frontex...Or that we would be facing Russian area denial networks in several areas, along with the return of the Russian Navy as a blue water force... Few would have predicted that Allied Maritime Command would become the coordinating hub for Alliance-wide surveillance of Russian naval activity.<sup>253</sup>

Although his statement demonstrates that the Alliance is engaging in a variety of approaches to southern European and Mediterranean challenges, it also reveals that the Allies were unprepared for this dynamic environment. This possibility is further advanced when one considers the Alliance Maritime Strategy (AMS); it was last updated in 2011.<sup>254</sup> Even though the 2014 Wales Summit Declaration stated that the Alliance would “continue to intensify and expand our implementation of the Alliance Maritime Strategy,” observers have noted that this strategy is outdated and that it does not reflect the role of the Allied

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<sup>253</sup> “Graduating Class—Ensuring Connectivity, Building Relationships and Trust,” NATO Allied Maritime Command, April 03, 2017, <https://mc.nato.int/media-centre/news/2017/remarks-of-admiral-johnstone-during-his-visit-to-the-hellenic-defence-college.aspx>.

<sup>254</sup> “Alliance Maritime Strategy,” NATO, last modified June 17, 2011, [https://www.nato.int/cps/on/natohq/official\\_texts\\_75615.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/on/natohq/official_texts_75615.htm).

maritime forces in this changed security environment.<sup>255</sup> In short, although the Alliance is pursuing responses to the challenges of this new security environment, gaps remain, and the process of addressing the Southern Flank is far from complete.

In response to Russian aggression, the Alliance has answered in the Mediterranean through exercises and other actions. At the 2014 Wales Summit, the Allies approved the Readiness Action Plan (RAP), a package of measures which, the NATO Allies asserted, are a “direct result of Russia’s aggressive actions to NATO’s east.” The plan affirms that to “provide assurance at sea NATO deploys a number of multinational maritime forces...patrolling the Baltic Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean, and an enlarged Standing NATO Maritime Group conducting maritime assurance measures.”<sup>256</sup> Additionally, a July 2016 NATO fact sheet underscores that “over 100 of the nearly 300 exercises conducted in 2015 were in support of NATO’s assurance measures.”<sup>257</sup> Although not all of these exercises were exclusively naval, many of them were or had a naval component, such as Exercise Trident Juncture 2015, which combined air, land, and maritime forces in the largest NATO exercise in over a decade.<sup>258</sup> In short, France, Italy, and Spain have held key positions or have participated in many of these assurance measures, suggesting that these Allies support NATO measures to counter Russia’s Mediterranean presence.

Another counter to Russia’s presence has been Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 (SNMG2), NATO’s standing Mediterranean naval force. Noting the need to enhance the Alliance’s naval forces, the 2014 Wales Summit Declaration stated that the Alliance would “reinvigorate NATO’s Standing Naval Forces by making their...contributions more flexible and, in principle, no longer using them for protracted operations or for operations

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<sup>255</sup> “Wales Summit Declaration,” NATO, September 05, 2014, ¶71, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_112964.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm); Steve Horrell, Magnus Nordenman, and Walter Slocombe, *Updating NATO’s Maritime Strategy* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, Brent Scowcroft Center on International Security, 2016), 1, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/issue-briefs/updates-nato-s-maritime-strategy>.

<sup>256</sup> “Readiness Action Plan,” NATO, last modified September 21, 2017, [https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/topics\\_119353.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/topics_119353.htm).

<sup>257</sup> “NATO’s Readiness Action Plan,” NATO, 2016, [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2016\\_07/20160627\\_1607-factsheet-rap-en.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2016_07/20160627_1607-factsheet-rap-en.pdf).

<sup>258</sup> “Exercise Trident Juncture,” NATO, 2015, [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2015\\_10/20151008\\_1510-factsheet-tj15\\_EN.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2015_10/20151008_1510-factsheet-tj15_EN.pdf).

with low-end tasks.”<sup>259</sup> Although its tasks have ranged from participating in exercises to the shadowing and monitoring of Russian vessels in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, in 2016 SNMG2 deployed to the Aegean Sea for several months to support efforts against trafficking and illegal migration.<sup>260</sup>

German analyst Andreas Jacobs points out that this deployment “raises the question whether NATO’s Aegean activity...might be considered by some member states” as a “low-end task.”<sup>261</sup> Moreover, he reports that some observers “argue that patrolling the Aegean could challenge NATO’s Mediterranean posture against the backdrop of Russia’s enhanced naval capabilities in the eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea.”<sup>262</sup> While this may be true, SNMG2 has since resumed operations and exercises in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea.<sup>263</sup> However, some observers maintain that SNMG2 cannot balance Russia’s naval presence. Turkish analyst Sinan Ülgen, for example, has argued that SNMG2 “is insufficiently set up to exercise sea control.”<sup>264</sup>

As far as the Spanish perceptions of SNMG2’s tasks are concerned, Spain regards the Alliance naval group as a response to Russia’s presence. As previously noted, the 2016 Annual Security Review points out that in response to Russia’s naval combat group in the Mediterranean, “NATO has reinforced its naval presence in the area through regular deployments, group exercises, and a permanent naval presence in the region.”<sup>265</sup> While this does not fully indicate whether Spain perceives SNMG2 as a sufficient response to Russia’s presence, it does demonstrate that Spain perceives the naval group and its exercises as

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<sup>259</sup> “Wales Summit Declaration,” ¶71.

<sup>260</sup> “NATO’s Deployment in the Aegean Sea,” NATO, 2016, [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2016\\_07/20160627\\_1607-factsheet-aegean-sea-eng.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2016_07/20160627_1607-factsheet-aegean-sea-eng.pdf).

<sup>261</sup> Andreas Jacobs, *In Troubled Waters: NATO’s New Maritime Activity in the Aegean*, Research Paper no. 01/2016 (Rome: NATO Defense College, March 2016), 3, <http://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=907>.

<sup>262</sup> Jacobs, *In Troubled Waters*, 6.

<sup>263</sup> “NATO Ships Complete Romanian Naval Exercise,” NATO, May 11, 2018, <https://mc.nato.int/media-centre/news/2018/nato-ships-complete-romanian-naval-exercise.aspx>.

<sup>264</sup> Sinan Ülgen, “NATO’s Southern Strategy at a Crossroads,” Carnegie Europe, December 07, 2017, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/2017/12/07/nato-s-southern-strategy-at-crossroads-pub-74932>.

<sup>265</sup> Spanish Department of National Security, *Informe Anual de Seguridad Nacional 2016*, 148–149.

counters to Russia's Mediterranean posture. Additionally, the 2017 Spanish National Security Strategy shows that Spain "supports a higher profile for NATO in the south—an initiative that has been backed by the increase of NATO capabilities in the Mediterranean."<sup>266</sup> Accordingly, this statement suggests that Spain considers NATO's Mediterranean presence as key to improving Mediterranean security and stability.

Similarly, Italy regards NATO's presence as necessary for Mediterranean security but also perceives SNMG2's operations as an important step toward solving the migration crisis. The 2017 Italian Mediterranean Strategy notes that coordination between Frontex and SNMG2 "is a model that we are interested in developing to put the Mediterranean at the center of" NATO-EU cooperation.<sup>267</sup> Additionally, the strategy asserts that NATO's "strategic shift towards the south is still unfinished" and that Italy will "continue to work to ensure that the Alliance fully adapts to the new security needs, accelerating the completion of its 'Framework for the South.'"<sup>268</sup> Although NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has explained that this "Framework for the South" includes measures designed to support "defense and deterrence against any threat," it is unclear how it will address Russia's Mediterranean presence.<sup>269</sup> Consequently, it is also uncertain whether and to what extent Italy perceives NATO's Mediterranean presence as an effective balance to Russia's Mediterranean presence.

Although France may perceive SNMG2 as a counter to Russia's naval presence, French leaders suggest that SNMG2 should play a role in the migration crisis. In July 2014, French Vice Admiral Christian Canova highlighted the recent SNMG2 deployments in the eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea and stated that "in the context of the Ukrainian

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<sup>266</sup> Kingdom of Spain, National Security Strategy 2017, 44.

<sup>267</sup> Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, *The Italian Strategy in the Mediterranean*, 20.

<sup>268</sup> Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, *The Italian Strategy in the Mediterranean*, 20.

<sup>269</sup> "Press Conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg Following the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the Level of Defence Ministers on Deterrence and Defence," NATO, last modified February 16, 2017, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_141109.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_141109.htm).

crisis, naval forces are a vehicle for affirming the determination of the collective.”<sup>270</sup> Accordingly, France perceives that SNMG2 demonstrates the Alliance’s will to uphold collective defense against Russian aggression. However, possibly as a result of increased migration pressures, in February 2016 France backed the initiative to send SNMG2 to the Aegean. In reference to this plan, Jean-Yves Le Drian stated that “we can no longer tolerate these networks that provide financial support for terrorist movements and we must strive to dismantle them...we have therefore largely supported this initiative.”<sup>271</sup> In short, France may perceive SNMG2 as a tool for addressing immediate security concerns.

NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) laid the foundation for security cooperation between NATO and specific Mediterranean countries. This multilateral initiative began with Egypt, Israel, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia in 1994, with Jordan and Algeria joining in 1995 and 2000, respectively.<sup>272</sup> As David Yost has pointed out, even though the Dialogue allows these countries to determine their program involvement with the Alliance, the members “have also convened multilateral (NATO+7) meetings on a regular basis.”<sup>273</sup> As a result, this partnership has evolved from simple dialogue to information sharing, training, and achieving interoperability through joint military exercises in the Mediterranean. Yost has pointed out that Dialogue partners contributed to NATO-led operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Libya. Moreover, he suggests that participation in MD activities, “notably those that address force interoperability, may well have facilitated these contributions to Alliance-led operations.”<sup>274</sup>

Despite these accomplishments, some observers have suggested that the Dialogue is losing relevance among other cooperation initiatives and that it has failed to “establish a

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<sup>270</sup> Vincent Groizeleau, “NATO’s Maritime Strategy: Interview with Admiral Canova,” *Mer et Marine*, July 18, 2014, <https://www.meretmarine.com/fr/content/la-strategie-maritime-de-lotan-interview-de-lamiral-canova>.

<sup>271</sup> Commission de la Défense Nationale et des Forces Armées [Commission of National Defense and Armed Forces], French National Assembly, February 16, 2016, <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/cr-cdef/15-16/c1516035.asp>.

<sup>272</sup> Yost, *NATO’s Balancing Act*, 205.

<sup>273</sup> Yost, *NATO’s Balancing Act*, 205.

<sup>274</sup> Yost, *NATO’s Balancing Act*, 206.



minimum of policy convergence needed to prevent and manage crises.”<sup>275</sup> Owing perhaps to the Dialogue’s suboptimal response to the recent crises in the Mediterranean, the initiative has had no apparent impact on French, Italian, and Spanish policies. The framework is not discussed in the 2017 Spanish National Security Strategy, the French 2017 Strategic Review of Defense, or the 2017 Italian Strategy in the Mediterranean. Consequently, the absence of this initiative indicates that the MD may not adequately address any of their immediate security concerns.

At the Warsaw Summit in July 2016, NATO introduced Operation Sea Guardian (OSG) as a joint Mediterranean security mission to replace the Article 5-based Operation Active Endeavour. While Operation Active Endeavour was an anti-terrorism support mission, OSG operates as a non-Article 5 initiative with a broader scope and three core missions: “maritime situational awareness, counter-terrorism, and maritime security capacity building.”<sup>276</sup> According to Johnstone, Sea Guardian has “more robust rules of engagement” than Operation Active Endeavour had, and it uses resources and forces separate from SNMG2 so that “the Standing Naval Forces can remain focused on high-end training and rapid response.”<sup>277</sup>

It is difficult to assess the French perspective on OSG. The 2015 French National Strategy for the Security of Maritime Areas emphasizes that France “promotes the collection and exchange of intelligence” because it “is essential to prevent attempts to carry out attacks.”<sup>278</sup> Accordingly, the strategy highlights Operation Active Endeavour as an example of such collaboration. France’s 2017 Strategic Review, however, only alludes to OSG by pointing out that “NATO strengthens security in Europe’s southern approaches, and takes part (in particular by contributing naval assets) in the fight against terrorism and

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<sup>275</sup> Rachid El Houdaigui, *NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue: What Are New Possible Approaches?*, PB-16/16 (Rabat, Morocco: OCP Policy Center, 2016), 5, <http://www.ocppc.ma/publications/natos-mediterranean-dialogue-what-are-new-possible-approaches>.

<sup>276</sup> “Operation Sea Guardian,” NATO Allied Maritime Command, accessed February 14, 2018, <https://www.mc.nato.int/missions/operation-sea-guardian.aspx>.

<sup>277</sup> “Graduating Class—Ensuring Connectivity, Building Relationships and Trust.”

<sup>278</sup> French Republic, 2015 National Strategy for the Security of Maritime Areas, 22.

other risks in the Mediterranean region.”<sup>279</sup> Although this is not a direct reference to OSG, given that anti-terrorism is one of the operation’s core missions, it appears that France acknowledges that the operation plays a role when it comes to addressing French anti-terrorism concerns.

The 2017 Italian Strategy in the Mediterranean describes Sea Guardian as “further testimony of NATO’s role in the Mediterranean.”<sup>280</sup> Additionally, it declares, “from the Italian perspective, the operation is particularly relevant as a testing ground for the cooperation between NATO and the European Union. Sea Guardian complements the European mission EU-NAVFORMED Sophia.”<sup>281</sup> This indicates that Italy perceives Sea Guardian as part of the solution to the crises in the Mediterranean. Moreover, it suggests that Italy considers NATO a force multiplier for bolstering EU missions already addressing the migrant crisis.

Similarly, Spain perceives OSG as a practical framework for enhancing Mediterranean security. In the Spanish 2016 Annual National Security Review, the document asserts that “Operation Sea Guardian contributions improve security in the Mediterranean.”<sup>282</sup> Additionally, the review praises Sea Guardian’s role in NATO-EU cooperation by highlighting the fact that “Allied ships have successfully contributed to curb the irregular migratory flows across the Aegean, providing information to the EU (Frontex), Greece and Turkey.”<sup>283</sup> Not only does this demonstrate Spain’s support for OSG, it also indicates that Spain values collaborative defense efforts and perceives them as an effective approach for Mediterranean security. Above all, it is evident that the core missions under OSG can support French, Italian, and Spanish security needs far beyond what Active Endeavour was able to offer, which is probably why these Allies maintain positive perceptions of this operation.

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<sup>279</sup> French Republic, 2017 Defense and National Security Strategic Review, 58.

<sup>280</sup> Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, *The Italian Strategy in the Mediterranean*, 20.

<sup>281</sup> Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, *The Italian Strategy in the Mediterranean*, 20.

<sup>282</sup> Spanish Department of National Security, *Informe Anual de Seguridad Nacional 2016*, 35.

<sup>283</sup> Spanish Department of National Security, *Informe Anual de Seguridad Nacional 2016*, 154.

## C. CONCLUSION

While significant steps have been taken toward improving security and stability in the Mediterranean, France, Italy, and Spain continue to seek the right approach needed to address this dynamic environment. Although these Allies have shown support for all EU Mediterranean security cooperation initiatives, these frameworks have so far only provided sub-optimal solutions. As exemplified by Operation Sophia's inability to target trafficking activities in Libya, these initiatives neither comprehensively address the underlying causes of instability nor are able to take the far-reaching actions necessary to exploit potential vulnerabilities. Consequently, although these initiatives are components of these Allies' overall response to challenges in the South, the EU frameworks ultimately fall short of holistically assisting the management of security concerns unrelated to Russian Mediterranean activity.

The southern Allies have long sought increased Alliance attention to the issues facing the southern flank. Although NATO has increased its presence and has demonstrated its willingness and capacity to respond to these challenges, the Southern allies maintain that NATO's role should continue expanding. France and Spain recognize the key role of Alliance naval forces in countering Russia's increased Mediterranean naval activity, but Italy's perception regarding this role remains unclear. Above all, the southern Allies seek increased Alliance support to EU missions as they perceive that this enhances the effectiveness of EU frameworks. Although NATO's support is a step toward a comprehensive approach to Mediterranean security, it does not significantly assist France, Italy, or Spain in the management of security priorities. Yet, these Allies embrace NATO and EU multilateral cooperation initiatives as positive developments toward their long-term objective of a secure and stable Mediterranean.

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## V. PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

Although France, Italy, and Spain have pursued policies and approaches that aim at creating a more secure and stable Mediterranean, their work is far from complete. Illegal trafficking, terrorism, and instability persist, without an end in sight. Meanwhile, Russia continues to take steps to expand its influence in the region, using both hard and soft power to achieve its objectives. This chapter analyzes three topics: Russia's future Mediterranean activity, developments for France, Italy, and Spain, and prospects for NATO and EU multilateral initiatives. Each of these topics reveals that there are several challenges for both Russia and these Allies in the pursuit of their objectives.

### A. RUSSIA'S FUTURE MEDITERRANEAN ACTIVITY

As Moscow seeks to expand Russian influence in the Mediterranean region, it will leverage all available means in order to achieve its strategic objective of great power status capable of asserting and protecting Russian interests. The growth of Russia's footprint in the region will be gradual, but it could be limited as a result of an Alliance reaction. American analyst Dave Johnson has assessed that "Russia's approach to conflict undeniably includes political, diplomatic, economic, non-linear and hybrid means below the level of armed conflict which can be employed in a gradual campaign, exploiting ambiguity to achieve strategic objectives without military violence."<sup>284</sup> Moreover, he has suggested that "the various diplomatic, economic, military, and subversive measures that have been employed by Russia in the Baltic Region and increasingly in the Balkans, Black Sea, and Mediterranean regions, could be interpreted as elements of a protracted campaign already underway."<sup>285</sup> All this indicates that Russia will play an ever-increasing role in the Mediterranean region by identifying developments of interest to Moscow and employing hard and soft power techniques to build its reputation as a significant Mediterranean player.

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<sup>284</sup> Dave Johnson, *Russia's Approach to Conflict—Implications for NATO's Deterrence and Defence*, Research Paper no. 111 (Rome: NATO Defense College, April 2015), 10. <http://www.ndc.nato.int/download/downloads.php?icode=449>.

<sup>285</sup> Johnson, *Russia's Approach to Conflict*, 11.

While an Alliance response could limit Russia's Mediterranean footprint, the prospects of a serious reaction are doubtful. As long as the southern Allies remain preoccupied with the migrant crisis, terrorism, and trafficking, Russia can advance its regional interests and achieve short and long-term gains. As previously noted, Italian leaders have expressed hope that Moscow can help bring stability to the Mediterranean. This mindset allows Russia to exploit opportunities and pursue its regional objectives under the guise of pursuing a more stable Mediterranean. The possibility of an Alliance reaction to Russian behavior in the south is, therefore, lower than it otherwise might be, even when faced with worrisome trends.

Some obstacles remain in Russia's pursuit of establishing itself as a significant Mediterranean power and it would be a mistake to disregard them. Indeed, Johnson points out that "substantial institutional, systemic, and economic obstacles persist—and will be exacerbated by Crimea-related sanctions—but Russian military capabilities can be expected to improve gradually over the current planning and acquisition period to 2020."<sup>286</sup> It is likely that Moscow's ability to project power in the region will be limited in the following years as its aircraft carrier the *Admiral Kuznetsov* begins a modernization and overhaul process. As with the two-year refit in 1996, the modernization process that began in October 2017 is expected to take two to three years, but could last much longer.<sup>287</sup> Franz-Stefan Gady, a Russian military analyst, adds that due to recent budget cuts by the Russian Ministry of Defense, "the carrier's electronic warfare, communication, intelligence, navigation, and combat control systems will likely not be undergoing modernization. Most work will be confined to the *Kuznetsov* flight deck and propulsion systems."<sup>288</sup> In short, in the next few years, the overhaul leaves Russia without the instrument that has been central to its power projection within the Mediterranean region.

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<sup>286</sup> Johnson, *Russia's Approach to Conflict*, 3.

<sup>287</sup> Franz-Stefan Gady, "Modernization of Russia's Sole Aircraft Carrier Still Facing Delays," *The Diplomat*, April 02, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/04/modernization-of-russias-sole-aircraft-carrier-still-facing-delays/>.

<sup>288</sup> Gady, "Modernization of Russia's Sole Aircraft Carrier Still Facing Delays."

Despite the temporary capability shortfall from the *Kuznetsov* overhaul, Russia is not completely without hard power in the Mediterranean. Russia can utilize its permanent naval presence in the eastern Mediterranean, particularly during times of crisis. This was most recently demonstrated in August 2018, when Russia began to build up its Mediterranean fleet in what has been called “the largest naval buildup since Russia entered the Syrian civil war in 2015.”<sup>289</sup> The buildup is possibly intended to support Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in an assault on Syrian rebels, with the pro-Kremlin *Izvestia* newspaper reporting that the force “now includes 10 vessels, most of them armed with long-range Kalibr cruise missiles,” adding that more vessels are en route, including two submarines.<sup>290</sup> Although the end result of the buildup remains to be seen, it demonstrates that even without the *Kuznetsov*, Russia is capable of boosting its hard power in situations that Moscow deems necessary.

Russia has also shown that it is not entirely reliant on its hard power tools to expand its influence in the region. Moscow is seeking cooperative engagement with Egypt and other Middle Eastern and North African states to promote Russian interests in the region. In November 2017, Russia and Egypt reached a preliminary agreement that reportedly “would allow each country’s military to use the other’s air bases for a period of five years, which could be extended if agreed.”<sup>291</sup> The fact that while visiting Cairo Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said that “we believe that it’s necessary to fight this evil [terrorism] together using all accessible means” shows that this cooperation process may not be limited to air forces.<sup>292</sup> Additionally, in March 2018, the Russian government approved an agreement with Egypt to develop a Russian Industrial Zone in Egypt’s East Port Said that

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<sup>289</sup> “Russia Builds Up Mediterranean Fleet Amid Rising Tensions Over Syria,” Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, last modified August 29, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-builds-up-mediterranean-fleet-amid-rising-tensions-over-syria-idlib-province-assad/29458959.html>.

<sup>290</sup> “Russia Builds Up Mediterranean Fleet Amid Rising Tensions Over Syria.”

<sup>291</sup> Edward Yeranian, “Russia, Egypt Finalizing Military Cooperation Agreement,” VOA, December 01, 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/a/russia-and-egypt-finalizing-military-cooperation-agreement/4145739.html>.

<sup>292</sup> Yeranian, “Russia, Egypt Finalizing Military Cooperation Agreement.”

is reportedly “expected to generate 35,000 jobs in a wide array of industries.”<sup>293</sup> These diplomatic maneuvers could result in additional arrangements, including naval facility agreements under the pretense of greater security cooperation.

Above all, the agreement with Cairo demonstrates Moscow’s cooperative engagement approach. This approach identifies security issues involving common ground between Russia and another state, and exploits that issue to foster bilateral ties. Consequently, Russia puts itself in a position to develop its regional influence, promote Russian interests, and extend its reach beyond the eastern Mediterranean. To illustrate, the agreement with Egypt extends Russia’s reach into other areas with cooperative engagement potential such as addressing the instability in Libya. By adopting this method, Russia can leverage its instruments of “soft power” such as foreign assistance or economic development investments while capitalizing on opportunities for cooperation.

The cooperative engagement approach in the Mediterranean is increasingly apparent as Russia has sought to develop ties with Algeria and Morocco. In October 2017, Russia and Morocco signed cooperation agreements in military, security, and economic areas. The Russian Prime Minister, Dmitry Medvedev, stated that the agreement includes “deliveries of Russian military products to Morocco.”<sup>294</sup> Furthermore, in February 2018, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met with Algerian officials to identify agreements that “emphasize military cooperation between the two countries in the fight against terrorism.”<sup>295</sup> Although the cooperation agreements with Algeria and Morocco do not necessarily suggest that Russia has a strong foothold in these states, nor are they as extensive as the cooperation agreements with Egypt, they nevertheless demonstrate the steps Russia is taking to deepen its relationships with these Mediterranean states.

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<sup>293</sup> Mona El Fiqi, “New Industrial Zones: Russia Invests in Egypt,” *Ahramonline*, March 16, 2018, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/292926/Business/Economy/New-industrial-zones-Russia-invests-in-Egypt.aspx>.

<sup>294</sup> Amira El Masaiti, “With 11 Agreements in One Day, Russia-Morocco Cooperation Is Blooming,” *Morocco World News*, October 11, 2017, <https://www.morocroworldnews.com/2017/10/230823/11-agreements-one-day-russia-morocco-cooperation-blooming/>.

<sup>295</sup> Seth Blaine, “Russia Gaining Influence in Mediterranean,” *Center for Security Policy*, June 29, 2018, <https://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/2018/06/29/russia-gaining-influence-in-mediterranean/>.



As some of the aforementioned agreements show, Russia's cooperative engagement is not limited to security issues, but extends to economic, diplomatic, and military matters. This type of engagement has been particularly visible in Libya. Moscow has much to gain through engagement with Libya. In 2017, the Russian oil company Rosneft signed a crude offtake agreement with Libya's National Oil Corporation.<sup>296</sup> Nikolay Kozhanov, a Russian expert, notes that "if Russian companies obtain access to the region's resources" through this agreement and other energy cooperation agreements with Syria, "the additional supply would strengthen Russia's presence in the global energy market."<sup>297</sup> In other words, Russia has vested interests in Libya's success as this would tighten Moscow's grip on the region's energy supply. Anna Borshchevskaya, an expert on Russia, observes that the Rosneft deal "serves as an indication that Moscow could use Rosneft as one of its foreign policy tools in a geopolitically shaped southern Mediterranean region."<sup>298</sup>

Libya also provides military and diplomatic opportunities for Moscow. Borshchevskaya highlights that "in 2008, Moscow discussed the possibility of setting up a naval base in Benghazi with the Qaddafi regime to counter-balance U.S. interests in Africa."<sup>299</sup> Although this development did not materialize, the possibility demonstrates one of the many ways in which Moscow can gain through cooperative engagement with Libya. However, the ongoing conflicts and instability in Libya imply that Russia would need to take diplomatic steps to make its aims possible. Indeed, these steps are increasingly evident. As Borshchevskaya has pointed out, in Libya "Russian diplomats often signal that they would like to participate in a settlement there, whether alone or officially under UN

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<sup>296</sup> Nikolay Kozhanov, *Russian Policy Across the Middle East: Motivations and Methods*, (London: Chatham House, 2018), 18, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/russian-policy-across-middle-east-motivations-and-methods>.

<sup>297</sup> Kozhanov, *Russian Policy Across the Middle East*, 18.

<sup>298</sup> Anna Borshchevskaya and Mohamed Eljarh, *Russia in the Mediterranean: Strategies and Aspirations*, Mediterranean Dialogue Series: No. 12 (Tunis, Tunisia: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Mediterranean Advisory Group, 2018), 6, [http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas\\_51249-1522-1-30.pdf?180108134446](http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_51249-1522-1-30.pdf?180108134446).

<sup>299</sup> Borshchevskaya and Eljarh, *Russia in the Mediterranean*, 6.

auspices.”<sup>300</sup> Borshchevskaya explains that “Putin might be interested in bolstering his diplomatic credentials and facilitating his role as a peace-maker in Libya as well as fixer of the West’s perceived mistakes and failures.”<sup>301</sup> In short, engagement in Libya could prospectively put Russia in a strengthened position in relation to the West.

These developments in cooperative engagement and economic investments could do two things for Russia’s strategic position in the Mediterranean. First, they could enhance Russia’s future standing by building strong relationships and, if effective in these engagements, possibly constructing a reputation as a guarantor of Mediterranean security. By finding common ground with states on security, economic, and political issues, Moscow portrays itself as a regional partner, establishing a positive reputation among the Middle Eastern and North African states. Accordingly, Russia improves its status by gaining relationships of strategic value that can be leveraged against the West. Second, these engagements could provide the opportunity for Russia to expand its influence and assert itself in the region as a great power capable of promoting its strategic interests. Behind the mask of security cooperation, Russia could ultimately advance its position to the point where it could pursue its objectives and directly challenge NATO forces in the region at any given moment. By exploiting these cooperative arrangements, Russia has expanded the scope of its Mediterranean activities beyond any previous point in the post-Cold War period. Thus, Russia is taking important steps to establish itself as a major Mediterranean player that is increasingly capable of expanding its influence and countering the West.

## **B. FRANCE, ITALY, AND SPAIN**

As demonstrated in Chapter III, French, Italian, and Spanish policies aim for a secure and stable Mediterranean. When considering long-term security implications and future trends for the region, it is necessary to analyze the approaches and steps that France, Italy and Spain are taking toward this objective. Analysis of these developments may throw

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<sup>300</sup> Anna Borshchevskaya, “The Kremlin’s Middle East Gambit,” *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, April 10, 2018, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-kremlins-middle-east-gambit>.

<sup>301</sup> Borshchevskaya and Eljarh, *Russia in the Mediterranean*, 6.

light on future prospects for Mediterranean security and clarify what effect, if any, these efforts might have on Russia's Mediterranean influence.

It is possible that through continued economic and social development in the region, France, Italy, and Spain will indirectly challenge Russia's attempts to expand its influence. Through several frameworks, these Allies have all shown commitment to regional development to improve security and stability in the Mediterranean. To illustrate, in August 2017, a summit including Heads of State and Government from France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Niger, Chad, and the Chairman of the Presidential Council of Libya met to discuss the challenges facing the Mediterranean, particularly migration, smuggling, and trafficking, and the root causes driving these challenges. These countries agreed on several actions to be taken in the economic, social, and security realms to address these challenges. These actions included: enhancing "economic cooperation with communities along migration routes in Libya, with the aim to creating alternative resources of income...making them independent of human trafficking," "providing alternative economic growth models," "strengthening the implementation of the Regional Development and Protection Plan for North Africa," "stepping up security measures and measures combating human, drug, and arms trafficking," and strengthening cooperation with Morocco, Mauritania, and Algeria in the fight against migrant smuggler networks.<sup>302</sup>

Although it remains to be seen if this multipronged approach and other attempts to foster stability in North Africa will produce the desired results, they may be enough to outstrip or at least counter some of Russia's growing influence in the region. The challenge for France, Italy, and Spain is that they must continue to match or exceed Russia's economic and security cooperation support to the region.

Bobo Lo has argued that "economic means are considerably more effective in projecting power than military might."<sup>303</sup> In his view, Russia's investments in the post-

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<sup>302</sup> "Addressing the Challenge of Migration and Asylum," Heads of State Governments of France, Germany, Italy, and Spain, Niger, Chad, and Libya, August 28, 2017, 2–5, [https://m.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/\\_Anlagen/2017/08/2017-08-28-statement-refugee-migration-english.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=1](https://m.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/_Anlagen/2017/08/2017-08-28-statement-refugee-migration-english.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=1).

<sup>303</sup> Bobo Lo, *Russia and the New World Disorder* (London: Chatham House Corporation, 2015), 58.

Soviet space have encouraged “its neighbors to diversify their external relations at the same time as maintaining parasitic ties to Moscow.”<sup>304</sup> Similar parallels can be drawn to Russia’s engagement with Mediterranean states. On the one hand, the Middle Eastern and North African countries will be receptive to economic investment and assistance from Russia, which will thereby gain a high degree of influence. As Borshchevskaya and Mohamed Eljarh observe, “many MENA countries are looking to diversify their economies and political relationships. Russia provides an important diversification opportunity, beyond simply signaling to the West that they have other options.”<sup>305</sup> At the same time, these states would likely maintain some “parasitic” ties with European states in order to improve their economic performance and their own global standing. However, this outcome hinges on Russia’s ability to maintain these ties, which may prove costly during periods of severe economic slowdown, limiting the Kremlin’s overall influence.

On the other hand, MENA countries may be more receptive to European cooperation and remain cautious about embracing Moscow’s support. This outcome would shore up European influence in the area, and these states may perceive Russia’s support as an added bonus. Russia will have then gained some influence, but not enough to outmatch the other European states. Either possibility raises the prospect of a more stable and secure Mediterranean region, which would ultimately make France, Italy, and Spain more attentive to Russia’s Mediterranean activity.

However, given Russia’s expansion at Syria’s Tartus Naval Base, increased Mediterranean submarine activity, the refitting of the *Kuznetsov* aircraft carrier, and other developments, these Allies still face the challenge of Russia’s instruments of hard power in the Mediterranean. As previously mentioned in Chapter III, the Italian Navy has taken steps to upgrade its fleet. Similarly, France has recently taken steps to improve its fleet including: receiving its fifth of eight planned FREMM multi-mission frigates, purchasing six new generation Barracuda-class nuclear attack submarines to replace its six Rubis-class submarines, and acquiring five new Belharra-class frigates to replace the La Fayette-class

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<sup>304</sup> Lo, *Russia and the New World Disorder*, 58.

<sup>305</sup> Borshchevskaya and Eljarh, *Russia in the Mediterranean*, 1.

frigates.<sup>306</sup> Spain is also upgrading its fleet with the purchase of F110-class frigates to replace its six Santa Maria-class frigates and the current construction of S-80 class submarines.<sup>307</sup> While these developments do not necessarily suggest that these Allies' navies alone can balance Russia's naval power, they do show that France, Italy, and Spain are taking measures to develop their maritime capabilities.

However, will these Allies maintain the required degree of naval readiness that can contain Russia's Mediterranean ambitions? Jeremy Stöhs, an Austrian-American defense analyst, points out that most European "navies have excelled at conducting operations at the lower end of the intensity spectrum and within largely permissive environments" but "traditional war-fighting capabilities (e.g., ASW and ASuW) against near-peer competitors have atrophied severely in the quarter century since the end of the Cold War."<sup>308</sup> Indeed, in the post-Cold War period, France, Italy, and Spain have generally focused their attention on non-conventional operations such as countering terrorism and preventing trafficking. But these Allies have also taken steps to recover their long-neglected traditional maritime war-fighting skills, particularly through Alliance exercises such as NATO's annual submarine warfare exercise DYNAMIC MANTA.<sup>309</sup> Exercises such as these not only strengthen the French, Italian, and Spanish conventional war-fighting skills but also improve interoperability between the several fleets in the Alliance, which is essential for dealing with the Russian Mediterranean threat. Ultimately, the challenge for these Allies is continually working toward a high state of readiness and continuing to develop fleets that are capable of countering Russia's Navy at any given moment.

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<sup>306</sup> "France to Build Fifth Nuclear Barracuda-class Submarine," *Naval Today*, May 08, 2018, <https://navaltoday.com/2018/05/08/france-to-build-fifth-nuclear-barracuda-class-submarine/>; Pierre Tran, "DCNS, Thales Jointly Secure \$4B French Frigate Deal," *Defense News*, April 24, 2017, <https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2017/04/24/dcns-thales-jointly-secure-4b-french-frigate-deal/>; and Pierre Tran, "France Takes Delivery of Its 5th FREMM," *Defense News*, July 25, 2018, <https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2018/07/25/france-takes-delivery-of-its-5th-fremm/>.

<sup>307</sup> Esteban Villarejo, "R&D Contract Boosts Spain's New F-110 Frigates," *Defense News*, August 17, 2015, <https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2015/08/17/r-d-contract-boosts-spain-s-new-f-110-frigates/>.

<sup>308</sup> Jeremy Stöhs, "Into the Abyss?: European Naval Power in the Post-Cold War Era," *Naval War College Review* 71 : no. 3 (2018), <http://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol71/iss3/4>.

<sup>309</sup> "NATO's Advanced Anti-Submarine Warfare Exercise Dynamic Manta Started in Italy," NATO Allied Maritime Command, March 5, 2018, <https://mc.nato.int/media-centre/news/2018/natos-advanced-antisubmarine-warfare-exercise-dynamic-manta-started-in-italy.aspx>.

### C. NATO AND THE EU

The importance of multilateral cooperation initiatives to the future of Mediterranean security and stability should not be neglected. As argued in Chapter IV, although France, Italy, and Spain have demonstrated their commitment to these initiatives, they perceive the EU frameworks as suboptimal for comprehensively addressing the migrant crisis, and they call for an expanded NATO role in the southern flank. To achieve a secure Mediterranean, challenges facing both NATO and the EU need to be addressed.

Even though NATO has responded to the southern Allies' calls by taking some steps to strengthen its southern approach, the biggest challenge for the organization is adapting, prioritizing, and comprehensively engaging in this ever-changing environment. Scholars Ian Lesser, Charlotte Brandsma, and others have argued that “adapting the Alliance to meet the diverse risks across a 4,000-mile land and sea flank is essential if NATO is to remain relevant.”<sup>310</sup> They also point out that “lacking is an overall strategy and a set of concepts to deal with the multifaceted challenges in the south. Indeed, it is unclear that a unified strategy of this kind is possible given the sheer diversity of risks.”<sup>311</sup> While these scholars offer some solutions for the Alliance to consider, the overarching necessity is that the Alliance continue to minimize the gap between the southern and eastern flanks. If there is less disconnect between the two flanks, it will increase the prospects for balanced solutions.

Increased Russian aggression combined with expanded Russian Mediterranean activity may help bridge this gap. Lesser, Brandsma and others hold that “the growth of the Russia factor in the south is an additional source of risk, including the risk of an accidental clash, but may also prove a unifying element across NATO’s geography.”<sup>312</sup> Indeed, it has become increasingly apparent to France, Italy, and Spain that Russia’s

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<sup>310</sup> Charlotte Brandsma et al., *The Future of NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue*, (Washington, DC: The German Marshall Fund of the United States, June 2018), 14, [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2018\\_07/20180720\\_180713-GMF-future-med-dialog.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2018_07/20180720_180713-GMF-future-med-dialog.pdf).

<sup>311</sup> Brandsma et al., *The Future of NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue*, 15.

<sup>312</sup> Brandsma et al., *The Future of NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue*, 16.

activity is no longer limited to the eastern flank, and these three Allies contribute to several assurance measures on the eastern flank.<sup>313</sup> Similarly, the eastern Allies should recognize that Russia has expanded its activities in the south. By showing further support to the southern Allies, the eastern Allies will not only be demonstrating assurance to the south regarding some of Europe's most immediate security challenges, but they will also be showing solidarity and thus reinforcing the credibility of the Article 5 commitment. In other words, demonstrating Alliance unity in both the east and the south would be a positive step for simultaneously addressing concerns on both flanks.

As NATO-EU cooperation in the south develops and intensifies, there may be more opportunities to collaborate and effectively respond to developing challenges. Lesser and Brandsma note that “with the EU-NATO Joint Declaration of July 2016, both institutions agreed to strengthen their operational cooperation” and that this “creates a framework for NATO and the EU to work together to build defense and security capacity, and to enhance the security of their partners in the region, through specific projects in a variety of areas for individual countries.”<sup>314</sup> In discussing the NATO-EU shared vision and cooperation in the Balkans, David Yost has pointed out that this type of cooperation has “been of significant value for the member states of both organizations.”<sup>315</sup> If these two organizations can develop a shared vision and strategy for the Mediterranean, one that leverages their strengths, it would be largely beneficial for both organizations and their member states. The southern Allies strongly favor increased EU-NATO collaboration, and this would be a positive development toward that aim. One of the greatest challenges facing this cooperation, however, is that “serious difficulties have hampered their relations: institutional and national rivalries, the participation problem, and disagreements about the proper scope and purpose of NATO-EU cooperation.”<sup>316</sup> Accordingly, NATO-EU cooperation in the Mediterranean may face an uphill battle in the coming years as these

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<sup>313</sup> Examples of assurance measures these Allies contribute to include: NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence, and involvement in annual training and exercises along the eastern border. For background on NATO's Assurance measures, see “NATO's Readiness Action Plan.”

<sup>314</sup> Charlotte Brandsma et al., *The Future of NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue*, 16.

<sup>315</sup> Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act*, 255.

<sup>316</sup> Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act*, 255.

organizations and their member states develop a comprehensive approach to bring stability and security to the south.

Despite the progress and successes of EU multilateral cooperation initiatives in the Mediterranean (including Operation Sophia, Operation Themis, and Union for the Mediterranean), these operations will also continue to face various challenges in the coming years in order to be considered effective by France, Italy, and Spain. Operation Sophia will need to improve its strategy and act less like a search and rescue mission, and more like a mission that deters and defeats traffickers and smugglers. In July 2018, Italy threatened to close its ports to intercepted migrants, demanding that the migrants be distributed evenly throughout the European Union or be brought back to Libya by the Libyan coastguard.<sup>317</sup> If this operation does not take further steps to improve security for the southern Allies, they may shift their support and resources toward alternative solutions to the growing crisis. Operation Themis and the Union for the Mediterranean may also be in danger of losing their support from the southern Allies if they continue to be perceived as inadequate for addressing Mediterranean security issues. In short, unless these EU initiatives begin to address the underlying causes of instability, they are unlikely to produce the desired results.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

As France, Italy, and Spain develop policies and approaches to create a more stable and secure Mediterranean, they will have to deal with the prospect of Russia's ever-increasing influence in the region. Russia will employ both hard and soft power instruments in order to leverage perceived opportunities to expand its regional influence. Through economic and security cooperation, Russia is enhancing its future standing and building a positive reputation among Middle Eastern and North African states. While French, Italian, and Spanish socio-economic contributions to these areas may serve to reduce Russia's influence, the challenge for these Allies will remain. Although NATO and the EU have

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<sup>317</sup> Chase Winter, "Italy Threatens to Block Ships from EU's Mediterranean Migrant Mission," Deutsche Welle, July 20, 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/italy-threatens-to-block-ships-from-eus-mediterranean-migrant-mission/a-44760721>.



deepened their cooperation in the region, without a shared vision and strategy for the Mediterranean, they may fall short of their ambitions. Above all, Russia's Mediterranean activity may help bridge the Alliance's the eastern-southern flank gap, producing opportunities to reinforce the credibility of the Article 5 commitment.

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## VI. CONCLUSION

The key objective of Soviet Mediterranean policy was to establish a permanent naval presence that was capable of countering the West. Despite the Soviet Navy's relative inexperience and considerable logistic obstacles, the Soviets took steps toward the achievement of this goal by establishing a military foothold in the region. Despite this accomplishment, however, the scope of the Soviet Union's Mediterranean activity remained limited without shore-based naval support facilities. Cultivating relationships with Middle Eastern and North African states delivered a solution to this problem, providing the Soviets with the facilities required to expand their naval operations. Among these relationships, Russia's ties with Syria became one of the most important for maintaining a permanent Mediterranean presence during and especially after the Cold War. Although the naval force did not entirely reduce Western influence in the region, it nonetheless presented a challenge to the West; and it advanced Russia's wider foreign policy objectives. In sum, the Soviet phase laid the foundations for Russia's post-Cold War Mediterranean activities.

While the post-Cold War security environment in the Mediterranean has changed, Russia's geopolitical ambitions in the region have remained the same. The development of policies aimed at expanding influence in the region has demonstrated that the Mediterranean remains key to achieving Russia's strategic objectives of great power status, with Moscow capable of asserting and protecting Russia's interests in the region. To that end, 2008 marked the beginning of a new phase in Soviet Mediterranean naval activity. In the following years, the Russian Navy carried out multiple deployments, took steps toward modernization, and ultimately demonstrated its ability to execute combat operations in Syria, gaining valuable experience in this environment. At the same time, Russia has flexed its instruments of soft power in the Mediterranean, pursuing a cooperative engagement strategy that has allowed Moscow to exploit opportunities, cultivate relationships, and promote its regional influence.

As Russia continues its aggressive military and geopolitical posturing, NATO faces a southern flank threat that cannot be ignored. However, as the perceptions and policies of

France, Italy, and Spain have demonstrated, there is a difference between recognizing a potential security threat and prioritizing it as a pressing national security concern.

While it is evident that the perceptions of France, Italy, and Spain have shifted to recognize that Russia's Mediterranean naval presence represents an emerging security challenge that deserves more attention, their policy shifts have not in every way been the same. Moreover, as previously noted, the shifts in perception do not fully correlate with Russia's expanded Mediterranean naval activity, but instead, greater attention to this challenge has been consistent with the rising visibility of Russian military aggression. In response to this increased aggression, France, Italy, and Spain have recognized that Russia is not a threat limited to the Alliance's eastern flank, and they have reaffirmed their collective defense commitments by strengthening their support to NATO assurance measures. As southern flank border states that are directly exposed to the instability and nontraditional threats emanating from the Middle East and North Africa, the greatest challenge for these Allies is finding a way to balance their strategic priorities without neglecting either immediate security threats or long-term national security concerns.

French perceptions and policies regarding Russia's Mediterranean activity appear to have changed the most. While the 2013 French White paper made no direct reference to Russia's Mediterranean activity, the 2017 Defense and National Security Strategic Review placed a new emphasis on Russia's aggressive behavior, including Russia's Mediterranean sea and air power demonstrations. However, this change did not happen overnight. Increased Russian aggression, particularly in Crimea and Syria, drew the attention of policymakers who reassessed the Russian threat. French policymakers have increasingly been open on this perspective shift and have made statements denouncing Russian aggression and Mediterranean activity. While concerns regarding threats resulting from instability in North Africa and the Middle East remain, France explicitly recognizes that the Russian threat is genuine.

In contrast, Italy has remained reluctant to label Russia's Mediterranean activity a threat in any written policy. However, this has also been paralleled by increased Italian support to NATO assurance measures on the eastern flank, calls from Italian naval leaders to prepare for conventional naval warfare, and statements directly recognizing that Russia

is now a Mediterranean power. The reluctance to label Russia a threat mostly stems from Italian desires to restore stability in the Mediterranean. This is why some Italian policymakers have called on Russia to play a greater and more constructive role in restoring Mediterranean stability. Italy is arguably the most affected of the three NATO states by the dynamics of Middle Eastern and North African instability, and therefore Rome perceives this as a much more urgent concern than the potential long-term threat posed by Russia along the southern flank.

Spain emerges between France and Italy regarding its perceptions and policies. On the one hand, Spanish policy documents show that Spain openly shares French concerns about Russia's aggression and Mediterranean activity and considers a multilateral response necessary to address this challenge. Although research was unable to discover any statements by policy makers denouncing Russian Mediterranean activity, the shift in Spanish policies is evident. On the other hand, Spain remains sensitive to Russian perceptions and recognizes that constructive dialogue with Russia is crucial. However, despite the criticism Spain received from fellow Allies for initially permitting Russian warships to dock at Ceuta, Spain has demonstrated that it holds its commitments to NATO and the EU in higher regard than its relations with Russia.

Multilateral cooperation initiatives could provide some relief to these Allies by effectively addressing areas of concern in their strategic security priorities. However, the EU initiatives fall short of French, Italian, and Spanish expectations, providing little relief to what these Allies view as their most immediate security concerns. Although the NATO initiatives in the southern flank are perceived as positive developments by France, Italy, and Spain, these three Allies also consider NATO's response underdeveloped, and they maintain that the organization should continue expanding its engagement activities within the region. Additionally, it is apparent that France and Spain recognize that Alliance naval forces are integral to countering Russia's increased Mediterranean naval activity. In contrast, as discussed in Chapter III, Italy believes that Russia could play a role in promoting Mediterranean security and stability. Despite these perceived shortcomings of the EU and NATO initiatives, they remain important elements of these Allies' overall response to the challenges in the south.

As Russia continues to expand its influence throughout the Mediterranean region, France, Italy, and Spain risk losing sight of this long-term challenge by over-committing themselves to resolving the crises resulting from Middle Eastern and North African instability. While recognizing Russia's expanding Mediterranean presence as a potential threat may make these Allies more cognizant of Russia's activities in the region, it is essential that these Allies continue to recognize the fact that Russia poses a direct challenge to the Alliance in the Mediterranean. Despite their emphasis on immediate security challenges in the Mediterranean, these Allies must develop an approach to judiciously manage their strategic priorities. By finding a balance between actively preparing for and responding to developments in Russia's Mediterranean activity, as well as developing a holistic strategy that responds to North African and Middle Eastern instability, these Allies may foster the conditions necessary for a more secure and stable Mediterranean region. Above all, demonstrating Alliance unity with the eastern flank is one of the most important steps these Allies can take in response to Russia's behavior in the south. Without this unity, NATO faces the risk of weakening its collective defense credibility.

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