**The Russian Federation Navy**

Since the beginning of the latest wave of reforms in Russia’s armed forces in 2009, the Russian leadership has been conveying the message that the Russian Navy’s crisis period is over, that it is returning to its former glory, and that it is capable of carrying out missions befitting the navy of a superpower. Looking ahead, the Russian Navy is not expected to reach the size of the Soviet fleet at the end of the 1970s based on the current force buildup plans, however recent developments indicate that the fleet is upgrading its capabilities and will not be the weak fleet it was in the 1990s following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Russian Federation’s Navy is ranked third in the 2022 Global Naval Powers Ranking and includes the vessels listed in Table 8.

As the conflict in Ukraine continues, particularly in the Black Sea, maritime experts are raising questions regarding the future of the Russian Navy. While Russia’s naval forces have played an important role in the war, their performance was, at best, mixed. The Russian Navy successfully blockaded Ukrainian ports and launched missiles against coastal targets throughout Ukraine. However, in the process it lost its flagship in the Black Sea as well as one of its most important amphibious vessels, failed to secure control of Snake Island, and failed to execute crucial amphibious operations on the Ukrainian coast.

**Table 8:** Types and Numbers of Russian Navy Vessels

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Type of vessel | Number of vessels | Comments |
|  | Aircraft carrier | 1 | Unclear competence |
|  | Helicopter carrier | 0 |  |
|  | Destroyers and cruisers | 15 |  |
|  | Frigates | 11 |  |
|  | Corvettes | 86 |  |
|  | Submarines (SSK, SSN, SBN) | 70 |  |
|  | Reconnaissance ships | 59 |  |
|  | Minesweepers | 49 |  |

Source:: https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country\_id=russia

***The Naval Campaign between Russia and Ukraine***

On August 17, 2022, the Russian media reported that following the sinking of the Russian Black Sea Fleet’s flagship, the Moskva, by Ukraine, the withdrawal from Snake Island, and the recent attacks on bases in the Crimean Peninsula, President Putin dismissed the commander of the Black Sea Fleet, Igor Osipov, and appointed 59-year-old Vice Adm. Viktor Sokolov as his replacement. Sokolov had been the head of the Naval Military Academy in St. Petersburg since 2020. According to the Russian news agency RIA, Sokolov was introduced to the fleet’s command staff at the headquarters in Sevastopol, Crimea. Such an event is generally well-publicized, however sources who spoke with the news agency said that a public event was not held in this case due to the high terror alert status in the peninsula in general and in Sevastopol in particular. The Russians are clearly concerned about Ukrainian commando attacks across the peninsula and fear for the lives of senior commanders in the Russian Navy. Moreover, this move by President Putin demonstrates his dissatisfaction with the performance of his Black Sea Fleet, which is one of the most important components of the Russian Navy. In the past, Sokolov also headed the Russian naval force in the Syrian arena.[[1]](#footnote-1)

***The Russian Federation Navy’s New Doctrine***

Despite the Russian Navy’s disappointing performance in the Black Sea, President Putin approved the updated version of the Russian Maritime Doctrine in late July 2022 (on Russian Navy Day), updating the previous 2015 document.[[2]](#footnote-2) This is a strategic planning document of the highest-level, which details Moscow’s official approach to the maritime domain. The new edition reflects significant changes compared to the previous 2015 version.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The 2022 doctrine follows the 2015 template, identifying fourteen national interests, as opposed to seven in the 2015 doctrine. The national interests listed combine the main principles from the 2015 doctrine and the national maritime policy goals. Similarly to the 2015 doctrine, the 2022 doctrine addresses the implementation of what is referred to as the “National Maritime Policy.” It is interesting to note that while the 2015 doctrine was released after Russia invaded the Crimean Peninsula and subsequently annexed it, the 2022 doctrine was released against the backdrop of the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine. At the time of writing this report, it appears the Russian fleet does not have the upper hand. The 2022 doctrine emphasizes a more nationalist approach, seeking to position Russia as a strong maritime nation with a constant global presence. This theme is clearly reflected in the first strategic goal, which is “to develop the Russian Federation as a great maritime power and strengthen its position among the world’s leading maritime powers.” The 2022 doctrine is the third in a series since the first doctrine was published in 2001. When the dots are connected, the 2022 doctrine, like the earlier versions, appears ambitious. It tends toward global confrontation with the West, prioritizes security concerns in defining national objectives, and reorients Russia’s foreign policy toward the global South following its invasion of Ukraine. The Kremlin intends to strengthen its naval combat capabilities worldwide and announced higher readiness to employ military means to further its interests in international waters, including its intention to increase its naval presence on the high seas. In order to do so, the new doctrine calls for a complete restructuring of the shipbuilding industry while enhancing the quality of its technological and production capabilities, both in the military and civilian domains. In the strategic objectives chapter, Russia asserts that it is a “great maritime power” and has interests in all seas and oceans.

Another important change is in the classification of all maritime domains in the world according to how vital they are and Russia’s willingness to use armed force in them. The three categories are:

“Areas of existential importance,” in which Russia can use all components in the defense of its interests, including armed force. Under this category are the territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of Russia, the Russian part of the Caspian Sea, the Okhotsk Sea (near Japan), and large parts of the Arctic Ocean.

“Important areas,” in which the use of force will be available as a last resort after the other options have been exhausted. These areas include the eastern Mediterranean basin, the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, the Baltic Sea, the Turkish, Danish, and Kuril straits, and even international shipping routes off the coast of Asia and Africa.

“The other regions,” refers to the rest of the international waters, where Russia’s interests will be promoted by non-forceful methods.

Similar to the 2015 text, the new doctrine divides the world into six geographical “directions,” however their order of importance has changed. The Arctic and the Pacific directions, previously mentioned in the second and third places, have been upgraded to the first two spots, at the expense of the Atlantic direction, now numbered third. One of Russia’s main goals in each of these three directions is to “ensure strategic stability” (a euphemism for mutual nuclear deterrence), stated in more assertive and urgent language, compared to 2015. This might be linked to President Putin’s use of “nuclear signals” toward the West when he deployed strategic submarines during one of the stages of the conflict with Ukraine.

The doctrine explains that the Arctic has turned into a region of global military and economic competition and lists sustaining Russia’s leading position in this region and “wide exploitation” of its mineral reserves as major goals. Russia intends to utilize the Northern Sea Route (NSR) as its internal waters. Thus, the resource-intensive NSR, initially promoted by the Russians as an alternative to the Suez Canal, has been redirected eastward since the war began to expedite the export of Russian commodities to Asia.

As for maritime law, the new doctrine establishes the supremacy of Russian law over international law. It gives a stronger emphasis than in the past to the production and export of energy resources from offshore reservoirs and the protection of underwater gas pipelines; strengthens the ability to mobilize all maritime capabilities, including civilian ones, in emergencies; calls for strengthening the Russian military and commercial fleet and developing the necessary technological and industrial capacity, including in the field of aircraft carrier construction; and calls for the acceleration of Russian diplomatic activity in the maritime context in international organizations dealing with maritime issues, as well as the presence of Russian battleships and research ships in the global maritime domain.

Maritime analysts note that Russia seems to be seeking to avoid an image of being increasingly dependent on China following its disastrous invasion of Ukraine. Whereas the 2015 doctrine stated that the “development of friendly ties with China is a key component of national maritime policy in the Pacific direction,” China is completely absent from the current document. Instead, there are new “key components,” which include lowering the threats to Russia’s national security, assuring strategic stability in the region, and developing friendly relations with the countries in Asia-Pacific. It is clear from the document that both the Arctic and the Pacific are conceived as areas of strategic confrontation between Russia and the United States and its allies.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The reference to the Mediterranean basin (as mentioned above, a sub-region of the Atlantic region) is updated and more detailed in relation to the 2015 doctrine. It states, among other things, that Russia seeks to strengthen its partnership with Syria; will ensure its military presence in the Mediterranean on the basis of the Russian military outpost in Tartus, Syria; will seek to establish additional techno-logistical outposts in the region; will work vigorously to ensure military-political stability in the Middle East; and will seek to deepen its cooperation with Middle Eastern countries.

In the context of the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf, the doctrine notes Russia’s desire to expand its cooperation with Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq, including developing relationships that involve security and maritime cooperation with all the countries of the Indian Ocean region. In this context it should be noted that the facts on the ground indicate Russia’s lack of success in operating the Russian fleet in the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, and its attempts over the past three years to persuade the Sudanese government to implement the long-term lease agreement for part of Port Sudan that was signed with former dictator Omar al-Bashir, have failed.

In conclusion, it is difficult to miss the glaring discrepancy between the goals set by the 2022 doctrine and the reality in the maritime arena as it unfolded (and is still unfolding) in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The Black Sea Fleet’s performance is incongruent with the maritime doctrine document, which is essentially part of Russia’s national security approach. The maritime doctrine document emphasizes the conflict between Russia and the United States and NATO and puts more focus on the use of force in defending Russia’s global interests. It emphasizes Russia’s inclination to turn international waters into an arena for strategic competition and confrontation between the major powers. As the document itself was approved by President Putin and published on Russian Navy Day, it may indicate how detached President Putin and his senior admirals are in regard to the low performance level demonstrated by the Black Sea Fleet in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine in the Black Sea. The Russian fleet’s force buildup plan also reflects technological gaps and gaps in the capacity of Russian shipyards to meet the targets for building the Russian fleet as a “blue water navy” capable of operating effectively across the seven seas.

***Conclusion and Implications for Israel and Its Strategic Partners***

The 2022 maritime doctrine is the first national security document that Russia has published since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, and reflects the Kremlin’s strategic thinking at the present time. The document focuses on Russia’s overall confrontation with the United States and NATO, and emphasizes a more central place for the use of force in defending Russian global interests and seeking economic and strategic alternatives for the West in the developing world.

The doctrine’s approach to the Middle East is revolutionary compared to previous Russian strategic documents, and bridges the gap that has emerged over the past decade between the actual importance of the region for Moscow and the way the issue is expressed in the document. Russia considers the Eastern Mediterranean, and therefore the Middle East, as an “important area” and is willing to use force to defend its assets in a confrontation with the West.

In planning Israel’s long-term policy, it is necessary to take into account Russia’s aspirations to deepen its military grip and political activity in both the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. While Russia understands that Europe is expected to wean itself off Russian gas, it is in no hurry to part with its energy hold over the continent. Therefore, unlike in the past, promoting gas exports from the Eastern Mediterranean to Europe as an alternative to Russian gas, during this tense period, may provoke Russia and even lead to efforts to hinder the progress of such projects.

In light of Iran’s growing importance to Russia, as reflected in the doctrine, the question arises as to whether Russia will continue to separate its relations with Israel from its ties with Iran? Iran is relevant to Russia not only in the Indian Ocean region, where it is mentioned by name, but is also critical in the Caspian Sea and in relation to the Russian presence in Syria. Iran is defined as a “partner” as opposed to a “strategic partner” – a term Russia uses only in regard to India. Saudi Arabia is mentioned as a counterweight to Iran, and is vital to Russia for pushing oil prices higher.

The pathos in which the maritime doctrine is written provokes in many scholars a tendency to focus on how detached Putin and his admirals are from the Russian Navy’s grim state of affairs. Indeed, it is very likely that Russia will find it difficult to meet its full ambitions, especially in regard to building a “blue waters navy.” The Russian navy falls short of the US Navy in all categories, and were it not for its nuclear weapons, it would not be perceived as such a severe threat. Even if Russia greatly increases its investment in building its navy, it is unlikely to match the United States’ capabilities nor those of China, which is rapidly introducing advanced military vessels at a rate unparalleled by any other country in the world.

Nevertheless, in our region, the gap between Russian aspirations and achievements may prove to be narrower due to Russia’s bases in Syria, the geographic proximity, and the fact that the Mediterranean is considered “green water.” Israel’s maritime activity, which is more closely coordinated with the United States than it has been in the past, will need to take into account operational constraints (preventing conflict) and Russia’s advanced intelligence capabilities, which are likely to impact Israel’s freedom of operation, especially in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. These challenges may intensify if Russian-Iranian relations grow stronger, and as a result, Russia may intentionally work to restrict Israel’s actions, including in the context of the “War between the Wars” taking place in Syria.[[5]](#footnote-5)

***The Russian Navy’s Force Buildup***

Since Putin came to power, he has invested significant resources in restoring Russia’s military potential, which was severely damaged following the collapse of the Soviet Union. As part of this effort, he has focused on rebuilding the Russian Navy. At the same time, Russian commercial companies have expanded their activities in the field of offshore drilling, laying underwater gas pipelines, and developing the Arctic region.

Despite ambitious national plans and significant financial investment, many problems remain that limit Russia’s development as a maritime power, and some have even become more acute. Both the military and civilian industries in Russia suffer from a lack of technological expertise, production infrastructure, and advanced human resources in many areas. For example, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has struggled to maintain its only aircraft carrier, which is obviously outdated. After the sinking of the Moskva cruiser in the war in Ukraine, Russia has only four ships that can be classified as cruisers/combat cruisers and about ten destroyers. All of these ships were either launched or under construction during the Soviet era, and Russia lacks the ability to build new large ships.

There is speculation that the Russian Navy’s force buildup plan will be modified after President Putin approves the Navy Doctrine and Russian Navy Regulations on Navy Day, on July 31, 2022.[[6]](#footnote-6) Due to the cooling of relations between Russia and the West, several European commercial companies have refused to supply diesel engines and shipborne equipment under contracts that were signed prior to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

Russian Navy Commander Nikolay Yevmenov announced in early June 2022 that during 2022, the Russian Navy would receive 46 new warships and auxiliary vessels. Yevmenov noted at the keel-laying ceremony for two diesel-electric submarines held in St. Petersburg that the global military-political situation requires Russia to maintain a strong and balanced fleet. Yevmenov reiterated President Putin’s desire for the Russian Navy to maintain a ratio of at least 70% modern ships in its order of battle.[[7]](#footnote-7) This month, keels were laid for six new vessels for the Russian Navy, including two Lada-class conventionally-powered submarines being built at the Admiralty Shipyards, two research vessels at the Zelenodolsk Shipyard, one Alexandrit-class minesweeper at the St. Petersburg shipyard, and a Razumny-class corvette at the Amur Shipyard. Given the significant numerical superiority of NATO’s naval forces, it appears highly logical for the Baltic Fleet to equip itself with advanced missile-carrying submarines whose survivability has been proven in the conflict in the Black Sea.

In the civilian sector, Russia lacks the capability to lay underwater gas pipelines, perform deep-water drilling, or liquefy gas, and has relied on Western companies that have either stopped or are stopping their work in Russia due to the sanctions imposed on it following the outbreak of the war with Ukraine.

Nuclear-armed submarines are the mainstay of the Russian Navy’s power and allow Russia to pose a significant threat to other major powers. Russia has been successful in building new submarines of this type and advancing modernization projects for them. In the coming years, it will showcase a unique array of ultra-quiet torpedo-armed submarines equipped with powerful nuclear warheads (Poseidon). In the conventional domain, the Russians have managed to produce corvettes, frigates, and diesel submarines, arming them with advanced and accurate cruise missiles: the Kalibr, which has a range of up to 2,500 km and was used extensively against Ukraine and in Syria, and soon the Zircon - a hypersonic missile with an estimated range of 1,000–1,500 km. Russia is the global leader in the field of nuclear-powered icebreakers, which are essential for the development of the Arctic region.

However, all the Russian maritime projects suffer from a proliferation of models, which complicates maintenance; substandard quality and negligence, frequently leading to catastrophic accidents; delays in the development and production schedule; a shortage of technological personnel; and a heavy reliance on foreign components. The regime of Western sanctions imposed on Russian industries even before the current war in Ukraine is expected to present significant challenges for the development of Russia’s naval power, which is the crux of its new maritime doctrine.

As the Russian Navy is primarily composed of smaller ships and is a “green-water navy” rather than a “blue-water navy” that is designed for the open ocean, most of its activity is focused in the water basins near Russia’s borders (primarily the North Sea, the Black Sea, the Baltic Sea, the Caspian Sea, the Sea of Okhotsk, and the Sea of Japan). The eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea is a unique and exceptional area in which the Russian Navy has managed to establish a permanent presence in the post-Soviet era. The naval base in Syria, at the port of Tartus, has been leased to Moscow for decades, as has the air force base in Khmeimim, which provides it protection. The military importance of the eastern Mediterranean has become more evident in recent days: Russia has concentrated the lion’s share of its warships there and in the Black Sea, in an aim to deter NATO from deepening its involvement in the war in Ukraine.

***The Russian Navy’s Activity in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Seas and Its Operational Doctrine***

International relations researcher Basil Germond notes that “whereas President Putin’s final objectives remain unclear, control of the Northern coast of the Black Sea from the official border of the Russian Federation to the Russian-backed secessionist Republic of Transnistria might be one of his geopolitical objectives.” He adds that “Russia’s interest in dominating the Black Sea has constituted a recurring feature of its foreign policy since Peter the Great. Tsarist Russia, and then the Soviet Union, have recurrently attempted to control the Black Sea and, beyond, the Turkish Straits, in a bid to gain perennial access to ‘warm waters’.”[[8]](#footnote-8) In light of this, the maritime operations that took place in this region when Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 are worth examining.

Following the signing of the second Minsk Agreement between Russia and Ukraine in 2015, the Kremlin released a document on its maritime strategy. The Russian government stated that it sees the maritime domain as being of paramount importance, as it enables the import and export of trade. Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that Russia places central importance on two maritime zones, the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea, with the Mediterranean Sea to its south. The Mediterranean Sea, which is accessed via the Black Sea, is essentially Russia’s gateway to trade routes to and from Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. This trade route allows Russia to export wheat and gas. The Black Sea Fleet is also responsible for operations in Syria, supplying soldiers, transferring weapons, and establishing Russian naval control in the Mediterranean arena. Since 2015, Russia has built up its Baltic and Black Sea fleets – both in quality and quantity. Warships, submarines, missiles, aircraft, and other weapons in these areas have been upgraded and increased in number. About two weeks before the invasion began, Russian warships were deployed in the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas, creating a naval blockade isolating the Black Sea from the US Sixth Fleet ships and other NATO vessels. This move was effective and prevented the entry of NATO ships into the Black Sea through the Bosporus, despite Turkey announcing a week after the start of the war that it would deny access to the Black Sea for any military vessels.

Anti-access (A2/AD) is a classic strategy for the Russian Navy, the goal being to limit the maneuverability and effectivity of NATO’s military actions at sea and in the air, using long-range air defense systems and anti-ship missiles. Russian naval vessels effectively control the sea and airspace at distances of hundreds of kilometers. The second layer of the A2/AD strategy was executed by deploying three battalions of Yakont anti-ship missiles with a range of almost 400 miles.

**Figure 20:** Deployment of the Russian Navy in the Eastern Mediterranean on the eve of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine[[9]](#footnote-9)

On February 24th, 2022, President Putin launched a “special military operation” against Ukraine, during which airports and military headquarters were attacked. Tanks and forces rolled in from Russia, Crimea, and Belarus, which is under Russian control. The Russian army had three main axes of operation on land: one into the north of Ukraine (from Russia/Belarus) toward Kyiv, one into the northeast of Ukraine (from Russia) toward Kharkiv/Donbass, and one toward the southern coast of Ukraine from the Crimean peninsula. The direction of the attack from the south (Crimea) led westward towards the port of Odessa and eastward towards the port of Mariupol. The military operation launched from the south, from Crimea, also involved maritime aspects. The naval operation and activity in the Black Sea may not seem significant compared to the military operation on land, but there are significant connections between the two events. The events in the Black Sea appeared to be less tense compared to the military operation on land and in the air becuase Ukraine lost most of its navy during Russia’s invasion of Crimea in 2014.

In the conflict that erupted in February 2022 against Ukraine, Russia’s initial strategy in the Black Sea was to block Ukraine’s shipping routes. Such a move, if successful, would have given Russia an economic advantage and begun turning the Black Sea into what could be considered a Russian sea. However, Ukrainian forces fended off the Russian forces, and aside from one early amphibious attack, the Russians did not use their ships to try to land forces near the coastal cities.

In the early days of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Russian Navy controlled the northern part of the Black Sea, between Crimea and Ukraine. It quickly occupied the Ukrainian base on Snake Island, near the Romanian border in the southwestern corner of the region, and imposed a sea blockade on merchant traffic, some of which was attacked by Russian Navy ships, which sent a clear message. Later on the Russian Navy attacked Ukrainian Navy ships, as demonstrated by the destruction of the Sloviansk ship, and managed to seize ten more Ukrainian warships. In late February, the Ukrainian Navy sank its own flagship, the frigate Hetman Sahaidachny, in the port of Mykolaiv, to prevent it from falling into the hands of the Russian Navy.

Another of the Russian Navy’s missions was to carry out precise bombing of quality military and civilian targets deep inside Ukraine. The attacks were carried out using long-range high-precision Kalibr missiles (SS-N-30), which have a range of 1,500 miles and a warhead with the power of half a ton. It is estimated that in the early days of the war Russian submarines and surface ships fired more than 30 Kalibr missiles at targets within Ukraine’s territory.

The Russians created a sense of being about to conduct a planned amphibious landing near Odessa to make a land bridge to the Russian-breakaway state of Transnistria in Moldova. Although the landing did not ultimately occur, Russian Polnocny-class landing ships sailed back and forth, creating a palpable sense of threat. Russian warships, including two Admiral Grigorovich-class frigates, patrolled near Odessa, conducting occasional bombing missions and providing essential intelligence. Russian warships, even those with limited defenses, could operate uninterruptedly within range of the city’s coastline. According to various estimates, the Ukrainians laid sea mines to prevent invasion along parts of its coast, which may have prevented Russia’s access to certain areas. Russia responded by deploying minesweepers in front of its landing ships and continued to operate freely.

The situation changed dramatically less than two months after the start of the war, when on April 13th, two Ukrainian Neptune missiles (based on the Russian Kh-35) hit Russia’s Black Sea Fleet’s flagship, the Moskva (RTS Moskva), causing it to sink on April 14th, 2022.

The impact of the sinking was greater than the loss of a single ship and severely damaged the Russian fleet’s image of being invincible. Until the Moskva was hit, the Black Sea Fleet had operated with almost no disruption and a sense of complete maritime control, despite its warships seeming to have suffered some minor damage. Since the Moskva’s sinking, the Russian fleet has primarily hidden behind Crimea, which has affected Russia’s ability to control the Black Sea.

Beginning in May 2022 there were increasing reports that Denmark would supply anti-ship Harpoon missiles to Ukraine, and indeed, on June 17th, the Russian tugboat Vasily Bekh, which was on its way to re-supply Russian-occupied Snake Island, was hit by two Harpoon missiles despite having a Tor system on board capable of destroying incoming missiles. Consequently, the ship sank.

**Figure 21:** The Russian Navy’s losses in the conflict between February 24th and May 3rd, 2022[[10]](#footnote-10)

On June 20, Harpoon missiles were used once again to neutralize a Russian-controlled gas platform in the Black Sea. Such platforms were used to track Ukrainian vessels, and so in a dramatic turn of events, Russia abandoned Snake Island at the end of June. This was a victory for the Ukrainian artillery systems used to bombard the exposed island, as well as for the Harpoon missile system, which made the Russian’s supply mission so dangerous.

Another quintessential role of the Black Sea Fleet is to ensure freedom of navigation for Russian merchant ships carrying wheat, gas, and other goods, which provide “oxygen” for the Russian economy during the war. It should be noted that several times during the war, Russian merchant ships were detected sailing without an Automatic Identification System (AIS), allowing them to sail relatively covertly to avoid being targeted by NATO forces. In this context, the Russian fleet discovered and later removed floating sea mines that were thrown into the sea by the Ukrainians.

On Russian Navy Day, held at the end of July 2022, the Ukrainians attacked the Black Sea Fleet command in Sevastopol, Crimea, with drones, and repeated such an attack in August 2022, indicating the Black Sea Fleet commanders’ inability to adapt to the new situation and adjust their operational approach accordingly.[[11]](#footnote-11)

As of the writing of this report (December 2022), the Russian Navy is sailing much less and its touring areas tend to be far from the Ukrainian coast. Amphibious ships are increasingly being kept in port and offensive operations are limited to launching cruise missiles in proximity to their home port entrances.

Russian submarines are part of the launch system for cruise missiles fired against ground targets in Ukraine; their ability to launch cruise missiles while submerged allows them to come closer to Ukraine’s shores. However, reports published by British intelligence in mid-September 2022 suggest that Russia has moved its Kilo-class submarines from the naval base in Sevastopol, Crimea to the Krasnodar region in Russia, fearing that they would be targeted by long-range Ukrainian fire.[[12]](#footnote-12) Even the new Admiral Grigorovich-class frigates are operating beyond the range of the Harpoon missiles, despite being equipped with both soft and hard defense systems against anti-surface defense missiles.

Russia suddenly began to increase the defenses of the Kerch Bridge, which connects the Kerch Peninsula in Crimea to the Taman Peninsula in Krasnodar, at the entrance to the Sea of Azov, despite it being out of range of most Ukrainian weapons. This fact suggests an increased sense of risk among the Russian command in the area. The Black Sea Fleet’s air wing, located at the Saki airbase in Crimea, was also heavily damaged in aerial attacks carried out on the night of August 9th, which destroyed about half of the unit’s aircraft.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Despite this, Russia still maintains an effective blockade. It does so with missile corvettes and patrol boats operating much further south, near the coast of Romania. However, according to a large number of maritime analysts, it seems Russia has much less control over the northern Black Sea.[[14]](#footnote-14) Since the spring, the Black Sea Fleet’s problems have been increasing as a result of poor leadership, outdated equipment, and vulnerabilities that the Ukrainians have been happy to exploit. The series of failures led to the replacement of Russian Black Sea Fleet Commander Adm. Igor Osipov by Adm. Viktor Sokolov on August 17th.

***Russia’s Attack on the Nord Stream 1 and 2 Subsea Gas Pipelines***

In late September 2022, three leaks were discovered in the Nord Stream 1 and 2 subsea gas pipelines that run from Russia to Germany under the Baltic Sea. Officials identified two significant drops in pressure in the Nord Stream 2 pipeline on September 26th, followed by an additional drop in pressure in the Nord Stream 1 pipeline, and determined that there were three separate leaks. Swedish seismologists stated that subsea explosions preceded the pressure drops that caused these leaks. The Danish military released images of gas bubbling up from the pipeline to the surface of the Baltic Sea in the vicinity of the Danish island of Bornholm. A single leak in a large pipeline might be a random occurrence, but simultaneous leaks in completely separate locations are unprecedented. This is compounded by the fact that these pipelines are at the source of the geopolitical tensions resulting from the war in Ukraine, making it highly difficult to explain this as an accident or coincidence. All of this occurred while officials were inaugurating the Baltic Pipe, a new gas route from Norway to Poland. At present, while European and US officials are calling it a deliberate act, they have not directly specified the potential suspects. Official authorities in several countries, including Germany, Sweden, and Denmark, are investigating the sources of the leaks. However, many in Europe unofficially blame Russia for the sabotage, and the European Union maintains that the Kremlin has a track record of using energy as a weapon. Moscow probably has the ability and equipment to carry out such an operation as well as the incentive to continue to apply pressure on Europe while President Putin increases his military efforts.

**The North Atlantic Treaty Organizations’ (NATO’s) Naval Forces**

Changes in government in the United States have led to a strengthening of its commitment toward NATO, of which the United States was a founding member, a sentiment that was also reflected in the first meeting between US Secretary of Defense General Lloyd Austin and the NATO’s Secretary General. Austin emphasized the United States’ view of NATO as the essential forum at the core of transatlantic security, and reaffirmed strong support for NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg’s 2030 initiative, which aims to keep the alliance strong militarily, strengthen it politically, and give it a more global standing. The alliance consists of 30 countries.

In the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, two additional countries, Sweden and Finland, requested to join NATO. Both simultaneously sent their official letters of request to join NATO to Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on May 18th, 2022. NATO heads of state and government invited Finland and Sweden to join the alliance at the Madrid Summit on June 29th. The accession protocols for both countries were signed on July 5th, after the accession talks were completed. The process itself requires approval by all 30 NATO member countries. As of September 2022, 27 member countries had approved the request. The remaining two countries, Turkey and Hungary, have not yet approved the request, and it is expected that Turkey’s approval will not be granted before mid-2023, mainly due to the issue being linked to support for the Kurdish PKK organization.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Even before their final acceptance to NATO, Finland and Sweden participated in NATO’s large-scale naval exercise in the Baltic Sea in mid-June 2022, despite Turkey’s reservations about their membership. NATO’s Baltops 22 exercise, which lasted for two weeks, was hosted in Sweden this year, and the Finnish Navy and air force also participated. The exercise, which was the largest in recent years, involved 45 ships and 76 aircraft from 16 countries (14 from NATO, one from Sweden and one from Finland).[[16]](#footnote-16)

On February 24th, 2022, with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, NATO was challenged by a superpower (Russia) for the first time since the end of the Cold War. To a large extent, NATO and the European Union responded effectively in the early months of the war. The US leadership once again demonstrated its essential role in successfully mobilizing international efforts, particularly in coordinating military support for Ukraine. NATO’s response to the war sought to balance stronger and increasing support for Ukraine with a reluctance to engage in a broad military confrontation with Russia, and has so far has proven justified. Most European countries turned to NATO’s tried and tested security umbrella, which is backed by US military capabilities, while the G7 and the European Union proved to be swift in tightening sanctions.

However, as the aggression continues, with Russia focusing its efforts on gaining control of eastern and southern Ukraine through attrition warfare, the Western alliance is being put to the test. Different interpretations of sanctions affecting the transportation of banned goods to Kaliningrad illustrate this problem. The UN and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) have not been able to offer meaningful responses, mainly due to Russia’s debilitating veto power. Furthermore, solidarity with Ukraine is still not universal among all UN member states, especially from one of the rising powers – China.

The war between Russia and Ukraine has not yet tested the reliability of NATO’s collective defense guarantees as stipulated in Article 5 of the treaty. So far, the mere existence of Article 5, along with NATO’s increased forward presence (now comprising more than 40,000 soldiers under direct NATO operational command), has provided sufficient deterrence. However, President Putin’s unpredictable behavior, coupled with his declaration to consider using missiles and the most destructive weapons systems against targets in foreign territories (which had become common at the time in Syria), have created a new reality in the vicinity of NATO member states’ territories. Moscow has shown its willingness to use indiscriminate force without legitimate military reasons and to commit war crimes, with the justification being the restoration of lands once held by Tsarist Russia. Unsurprisingly, NATO member states bordering Russia are concerned about a potential – even if temporary – loss of parts of their territory, and after witnessing the erasure of Mariupol and Kharkiv, are alarmed by the threat of direct missile attacks on their cities and critical infrastructure.

NATO found itself in the heart of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine in the Black Sea without a clear strategy for this maritime area, despite several researchers warning about the problem as early as the summer of 2021.[[17]](#footnote-17) The lack of a strategy for the Black Sea region and NATO’s failure to perceive itself as an integral part of it are problematic. NATO has limited itself to narrow thinking regarding Article 5 commitments in the Black Sea region, which is bordered by the waters of Romania, Bulgaria, and the Turkish coast. This had already been demonstrated by NATO’s lack of response to the Russian-initiated incident on November 25th, 2018, in the Kerch Strait, during which the Russian Federal Security Service’s coastal guard fired upon and seized three Ukrainian vessels in international waters off the coast of the Crimean Peninsula.

Against the backdrop of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a NATO summit was held in Madrid in late June 2022, at which NATO heads of state and government approved its 2022 Strategic Concept.[[18]](#footnote-18) It should be noted that there was an early understanding among NATO members that the previous document needed updating. The new concept document presents its purpose and principles:

* “NATO is determined to preserve the freedom and security of its member states. Its central goal and greatest responsibility is to ensure our collective defense against all threats, from all directions. We are a defensive alliance.
* The transatlantic link between our nations is vital to our security. We are bound together by shared values: individual liberty, human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. We remain firmly committed to the purpose and principles of the United Nations Charter and the North Atlantic Treaty.
* NATO is the unique transatlantic forum for consultation, coordination, and action on all matters related to our individual and collective security. We will strengthen our alliance based on indivisible security and our strong solidarity, and we are committed to defend one another, as anchored in Article 5. Our ability to deter and defend is the backbone of this commitment.
* NATO will continue to fulfill three core missions: deterrence and defense; crisis prevention and management; and cooperative security. These are complementary in ensuring the collective defense and security of all member states.
* We will improve our individual and collective resilience and our technological edge. These efforts are critical to fulfilling NATO’s core missions. We will promote good governance and integrate climate change, human and gender security, peace, and security in all our tasks. We will continue to promote gender equality, as reflected in our values.”[[19]](#footnote-19)

**Figure 22:** NATO forces’ deployment following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine[[20]](#footnote-20)

It is especially worth noting NATO’s strategy regarding China, which is worded in the new document in a particularly blunt and sharp manner, likely influenced by the United States: “The stated ambitions and coercive policies of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) are aimed at challenging our interests, security, and values. China is using a wide range of political, economic, and military tools to expand its global influence. China’s actions in the field of hybrid and cyber warfare, accompanied by manipulative rhetoric and disinformation, are directed against the United States’ allies with the intention of undermining NATO’s existence. China seeks to dominate a number of technological and industrial sectors, critical infrastructure, strategic materials, and supply chains. It uses its economic leverage to create strategic dependencies and increase its influence. It seeks to undermine the rules-based international order, including in the space, cyber, and maritime domains. The tightening strategic alliance between the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation and their coordinated efforts to undermine the international rules-based order, are contrary to our values and interests.”[[21]](#footnote-21)

The possession of nuclear weapons by the organization relies on the strategic nuclear capabilities of the alliance, especially those of the United States, and the document emphasizes the supreme assurance this weapon provides to the security of the alliance. The document also emphasizes that the independent nuclear strategies of the United Kingdom and France have their own deterrent role and greatly contribute to the alliance’s overall security.[[22]](#footnote-22)

The document emphasizes the strategic importance of the Western Balkans and the Black Sea regions for NATO’s maritime domain.[[23]](#footnote-23) It should be noted that the document is general in nature and addresses each of the challenges at the thematic level rather than the geographic level, and therefore no emphasis is made in regard to the maritime domain in which NATO operates.

In the context of NATO’s maritime contribution to the crisis between Russia and Ukraine, NATO was not in a position to activate its naval power in any significant way. NATO officials justify this based on the specific geopolitics of the Black Sea, as well as the necessity to avoid escalation with a nuclear-armed state. While the United States deployed a combat group led by an aircraft carrier in the Aegean Sea, with F-18 aircraft covering part of the combat zones in southern Ukraine, these were not activated at any stage of the conflict. The US Navy, along with the rest of NATO’s fleets operating outside the Black Sea, including the United Kingdom and France, decided not to respond for fear of escalating the conflict. The situation was further complicated by Turkey’s decision to close the Black Sea to all warships, not just those covered by the Montreux Convention. It should be noted that the Turkish Straits regime (Bosporus and Dardanelles), established by the Montreux Convention in 1936, gives Turkey the authority to close the straits to warships involved in combat (based on its assessment of the situation), which it did less than a week after the start of the war.[[24]](#footnote-24) As the war continues, it seems Turkey’s actions are hurting Russia more, as they prevents it from reinforcing its naval forces in the Black Sea with naval forces from other arenas, especially in light of the losses the Russian Navy has suffered in the conflict so far (see the review of the Russian Navy).

There are those who criticize the lack of direct involvement by NATO naval forces in the crisis. The last warship from NATO fleets that patrolled the Black Sea was a French destroyer, which completed its mission in mid-January 2022, and since then no NATO military vessels have entered the Black Sea. In contrast, 16 vessels from the Russian navy, including missile ships and vessels capable of landing tanks, sailed to the Black Sea. The main reason for this is disagreements among NATO members on whether the Russian Navy should be challenged in the area when there is no coherent and significant NATO strategy for the Black Sea. This also includes the reluctance of some NATO members, primarily Turkey, to agree to naval patrols so as not to provoke Russia. Other factors are budget constraints and the existence of other priorities among some leading NATO countries.[[25]](#footnote-25)

To compensate for NATO’s lack of involvement in the war against Russia and to avoid direct military conflict between NATO countries and Russia, the organization has relied on the private maritime sector, which is undoubtedly a component of contemporary sea power, in order to harm Russia while avoiding military escalation. As a result, almost all the major shipping companies, including MSC, Maersk, and ONE, have suspended their activities to Russian ports, which has affected the Russian economy. This demonstrates the holistic nature of sea power, which is wider than that exercised by state actors through military force, and includes the corporate sector, whose interests and concerns in this case drive it to act against Russia with other tools. In addition, the United States, United Kingdom, and other European countries have banned Russian-flagged or Russian-owned ships or the operation of Russian companies from entering their ports. All of these steps are part of a comprehensive global diplomatic effort led by public and private stakeholders to put pressure on President Putin’s regime. This maritime element is not negligible, and its impact on the Russian economy is already being felt by Russian maritime stakeholders.

In terms of the maritime dimension of the conflict, it is likely to be linked to the fate of Odessa: if the port city falls and Russia manages to control the entire Ukrainian coastline (which at the time of writing this report seems relatively unlikely), it will negatively affect Ukraine’s ability to resist and exert additional pressure on global food security by prolonging Ukraine’s inability to freely access global maritime shipping routes. In practice, Russia is prioritizing ground operations and avoiding the use of naval forces to achieve this goal. In the longer term, the effects of the civilian components of sea power could ultimately contribute to Russia’s failure even without the use of naval force. These effects are already being felt and will only increase over time, as maritime countries and stakeholders continue to leverage their sea power to exert as much pressure as possible on Russia.

Naval forces from 11 NATO member states participated in the annual Sea Breeze 2022 military exercises in the Black Sea, which began in July 2022. These are the first major exercises in the Black Sea since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. All necessary precautions were taken in the exercise areas to ensure the safety of the participants due to the risk of free-floating mines in this area. The US Navy decided not to send warships to the 2022 exercise, but its crews participated in the command and control work that accompanied the exercise. The US Navy’s Task Force 68 participated in several events, including anti-mining warfare, remotely operated vessel searching techniques, and underwater ordnance reconnaissance. Task Force 67 participated in the exercise using P-8A-class Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft.

In 2022, NATO continued its Sea Guardian operation throughout the Mediterranean Sea. This flexible operation, which NATO began in 2016, is controlled by NATO’s Allied Maritime Command - MARCOM, in Northwood, United Kingdom, and is designed to cover all of NATO’s maritime security operation (MSO) missions. The operations themselves take place only in the Mediterranean Sea and include three maritime security missions: maritime security capacity building, maritime situational awareness, and counter-terrorism at sea. This operation remains one of the most important tools for projecting NATO’s stability throughout the Mediterranean and provides an opportunity to increase cooperation and mutual capabilities with additional non-NATO countries located along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. It should be noted that France withdrew from these operations in July 2020 following an incident in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, in which a Turkish frigate demonstrated aggression towards a French destroyer, which had stopped a Turkish merchant ship suspected of violating the UN embargo on Libya.[[26]](#footnote-26)

In January 2022, the first operation of the year was held in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, in which maritime patrol aircraft from Greece, Poland, and Turkey, as well as submarines from Greece and Turkey participated. The flagship of the operation was the Turkish frigate TCG Barbaros. At the time, NATO’s Standing Maritime Group 2, which included the flagship vessels ITS Margottini, ESPS Blas de Lezo, and TCG Goksu, was deployed in the eastern Mediterranean Sea and was expected to contribute to NATO’s efforts to improve awareness of its maritime status in the region. In late June 2022, a two-week operation was concluded in the western Mediterranean Sea under the command of the Spanish frigate ESPS Reina Sofia, which was joined by a submarine from Italy and maritime patrol aircraft and early warning aircraft from Canada, Portugal, and Spain. During the two weeks, the force conducted focused security patrols at sea to deter and detect possible illegal maritime activities.[[27]](#footnote-27)

The accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO will enhance NATO’s capabilities in two critical ways. One is geostrategic: the Baltic Sea will no longer be a gray security zone, and Finland’s 1,340-kilometer border with Russia will no longer be a source of concern for a land invasion that could threaten NATO from the north. The result would be a weakening of Russia’s security position in the Nordic and Arctic regions. As for the maritime domain, although the Swedish Navy is the smallest of Sweden’s three military arms, it is equipped with five submarines (three Gotland-class and two Södermanland-class), seven corvettes (five Visby-class and two Gävle-class), nine/eight minesweepers (four Koster-class and four Styrsö-class), 13 larger patrol ships (two Stockholm-class and 11 Tapper-class), and nine auxiliary ships. The Swedish Navy is considered advanced, based on its domestically-built diesel-electric submarines, which are among the most cutting-edge in the world, and having the first non-nuclear-powered submarine to include an air-independent propulsion system, extending its underwater endurance from a few days to weeks.

***NATO’s Security Budget Following Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine***

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has led NATO members to recognize that they need to increase their defense spending in light of what NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg called “the most serious security crisis of our generation.”[[28]](#footnote-28) Despite the decision made at the 2014 Wales Summit following Russia’s invasion of Crimea, to increase the defense spending of all NATO members to 2% of each country’s GDP by 2024, only nine out of the 30 NATO countries are expected to fulfill this commitment (see Figure 23).[[29]](#footnote-29) According to NATO sources, since the invasion in February 2022, most member countries have committed to investing more in defense, and at a much faster pace. As we are dealing with maritime aspects – the effects of this decision on NATO’s naval force buildup will be examined.

**Figure 23:** NATO defense expenditures in 2014–2022 and the number of countries that have met the 2% goal[[30]](#footnote-30)

**Table 9:** NATO’s order of battle as of 2022

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Vessel type | Number of vessels | Comments |
| Aircraft carriers | 17 | Including from the United States |
| Submarines | 144 |  |
| Destroyers | 112 |  |
| Frigates | 135 |  |
| Corvettes | 56 |  |
| Minesweepers | 153 |  |
| Reconnaissance ships | 298 |  |

Source: D. Clark, Number of military ships in NATO in 2022, by type, Statista, March 2, 2022

Following the invasion, Germany set plans to increase defense spending to more than 2% of its GDP through a special fund of €100 billion, earmarked for the modernization of military equipment and spread over several years. Germany has not met the 2% target, and until recent events, it was not expected to do so by the final deadline of 2024. Germany is currently the third-largest contributor to NATO, after the United States and the United Kingdom. If Germany does indeed spend this amount, it will surpass the United Kingdom’s current defense spending in absolute terms and become NATO’s second-largest security contributor.[[31]](#footnote-31) Poland was one of the few countries already spending 2% of its GDP on defense prior to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Shortly after the invasion, it committed to increasing its spending to 3% of its GDP by 2023, and passed legislation to ensure that this commitment would indeed be fulfilled. It is still unclear what portion of the additional budget will be allocated to maritime reinforcement, whether in vessels or combat systems.

***Rivalries and Cooperation within NATO***

The pact between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States (AUKSUS) led to the cancellation of the French submarine project intended for Australia and a cooling of relations between France and the three pact partners. The French security establishment was left shocked after suddenly losing a $66 billion deal for Naval Group to build diesel-electric submarines for Australia, when the Australians decided to change course and build a new fleet of nuclear-powered submarines with the help of the United States and the United Kingdom.[[32]](#footnote-32) The relationship between France and Turkey deteriorated, as mentioned, after the incident in 2020 in the eastern Mediterranean Sea in which a Turkish frigate behaved aggressively toward a French ship that had stopped a Turkish merchant ship suspected of violating the UN embargo on Libya during the Sea Guardian operation. On July 1st, 2020, France announced that it was suspending its involvement in the Sea Guardian operation due to the tensions with Turkey. In fact, France’s support for Greece was already revealed in 2020 when Greece was coping with Turkish naval operations in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, which both France and Greece viewed as highly hostile.[[33]](#footnote-33)

These events have prepared the ground for a tightening of France’s security relationship with Greece. On September 28th, 2021, the Greek Ministry of Defense committed to purchasing three FDI-class (frégate de defense et d’intervention) frigates from France’s Naval Group, along with a weapons system provided by MBDA, in a deal valued at approximately $3.5 billion. On the same day, a memorandum of understanding on strategic defense partnership was signed in Paris between French President Emmanuel Macron and Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis. According to security analysts, this agreement confirms that bilateral relations are shifting toward a new balance. Greece, which has now emerged from its financial and political crisis, has become an interesting economic and diplomatic partner for France. The French investment in Greece strengthens the “Mediterranean Option” that was developed during Macron’s tenure, and provides natural support for Athens, which is seeking security and looking to break free from its obsessive rivalry with Turkey, whose diplomacy is currently opening up to new opportunities. The French-Greek partnership, originally presented as a contribution to European strategic autonomy, fits in perfectly with the French presidency’s plan for the European Union Council. However, the French-Greek option raises questions for NATO, as the mutual assistance clause of the agreement implicitly targets Turkey. Naturally, Turkey condemned the agreement, and certain elements within the European Union, such as Germany, also expressed skepticism regarding its stabilizing influence.[[34]](#footnote-34)

In March 2022, the countries signed the agreements and the Greek Navy will receive the first two ships in 2025 and 2026. To meet these goals, the French agreed to provide the Greeks with frigates from the production line originally intended for the French Navy. The frigates are intended for both surface and air missions and are equipped with modern sensors such as the Thales Sea Fire radar. They have an innovative mast that integrates all the sensors, with a fixed coverage capability of 360 degrees. The frigates are also equipped with the Naval Group’s MU90 torpedo and anti-aircraft and anti-surface missiles made by MBDA. The ships have a landing surface that allows a helicopter weighing 10 tons and an aerial drone to take off and land and will also be equipped with CANTO anti-torpedo defenses from Naval Group. The system consists of small, launchable decoys that emit a continuous stream of signals to confuse attacking torpedoes at a great distance from the ship, until they are exhausted.

Despite NATO’s vital importance, there are rivalries and conflicting interests within it that are difficult to reconcile, and its true test will be if Russia attacks one of its members and triggers Article 5, which requires the entire organization to come to the aid of the attacked party.

**The British Royal Navy**

The Royal Navy is ranked ninth in the Global Naval Powers Ranking for 2022. As is well-known, the United Kingdom left the European Union on January 31st, 2020 (Brexit), but remained a NATO member. It was among the most determined NATO countries in opposing Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, providing a range of military, economic, humanitarian, and defensive assistance to Ukraine, as well as imposing additional sanctions on Russia and Belarus.

***The New British Maritime Strategy***

On August 15th, 2022, the United Kingdom published a new maritime strategy for the next five years, focusing on improving freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific region, officially recognizing that environmental challenges in the maritime domain are a cause for concern and have a negative impact on maritime security in its broader sense. The new strategy redefines maritime security as the preservation of rules, regulations, and norms to enable a free, fair, and open maritime domain. With this new approach, the government rightly acknowledges “any illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and environmental damage to our seas as a maritime security concern.”[[35]](#footnote-35) The strategy document is authored by the heads of five government ministries, including the Ministry of Defence, who note that Russia’s war in Ukraine and other events are bringing the world to a state of heightened global tension. They also write that leaving the European Union has given the United Kingdom the ability to develop policies and strategies that best represent the priorities and values that are most important to the British people.

The new maritime security strategy outlines how the United Kingdom will enhance its capabilities in technology, innovation, and cyber security, officially recognize environmental damage as a concern for maritime security and address modern issues such as illegal fishing and polluting practices, and improve the quantity and quality of available seabed mapping data to expand its knowledge and help identify emerging threats.

The strategy document sets the following goals for joint government, academia, and industry efforts:

1. Protecting the homeland (delivering the world’s most effective maritime security framework for Britain’s borders, ports and infrastructure).
2. Responding to threats: taking a whole system approach to bring world-leading capabilities and expertise to bear to respond to new, emerging threats.
3. Ensuring prosperity: ensuring the security of international shipping, the unimpeded transmission of goods, information and energy to support continued global development and Britain’s economic prosperity.
4. Championing values: championing global maritime security underpinned by freedom of navigation and the international order.
5. Supporting a secure, resilient ocean: tackling security threats and breaches of regulations that impact on a clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically-diverse maritime environment.

In March 2022, the United Kingdom published a national shipbuilding strategy, according to which the country plans to invest £4 billion (approximately $5.3 billion) in the shipbuilding industry. This investment will also support shipyards and suppliers across the UK and create a production line of over 150 new military and civilian vessels over the next 30 years.[[36]](#footnote-36)

A glimpse into the threats perceived by the United Kingdom can be found in the remarks made by its First Sea Lord, Adm. Sir Ben Key, in July 2022, regarding the lessons learned from the conflict in Ukraine. Adm. Key said that the conflict in Ukraine had underscored both the importance of the sea and global trade on the oceans and the value of the best equipment, operated by highly-motivated, professional armed forces. However, he warned that while “Putin has, through his actions, created a new Iron Curtain from the Baltic to the Black Sea… focusing solely on the Russian bear risks missing the tiger in the room.” According to Adm. Key, “the world has woken up to the risks that Russia’s invasion poses, and the need for nations to meet their NATO spending targets as a matter of urgency.” However, he emphasized that “today we see Russia as the clear and present danger, but China will pose the greater long-term challenge. Having overestimated some of Moscow’s military capabilities, we can’t now risk underestimating those of Beijing.” Adm. Key believes that China “is potentially on the way to building the largest navy in the world, backed up by a massive coastguard and maritime militia, making the Royal Navy’s allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific – including the USA, Australia, France and Japan – crucial in ensuring the continuance of the rules based order that has promoted peace and prosperity since the end of World War II.”[[37]](#footnote-37) These remarks underline the United Kingdom’s commitment to its traditional ally, the United States, against the threat the latter identifies as its primary concern, despite the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine and President Putin’s threats against NATO countries (and particularly the United Kingdom), which include the use of nuclear weapons in extreme situations.

***The Royal Navy’s Size and Force Buildup Plan***

As of August 2022, there were 74 vessels in active service in the Royal Navy. The Royal Navy has shrunk in the number of warships over the past three decades, primarily due to the end of the Cold War. According to the 2010 Strategic Defence Review, the total number of destroyers and frigates, which was 23 at the time, would continue to decrease to only 19 if the force buildup plan was not changed. As part of the increase in defense spending announced in November 2021, then Prime Minister Boris Johnson said he wanted the United Kingdom to be “the foremost naval power in Europe.”[[38]](#footnote-38) That ambition implicitly included the intention to reverse the fleet’s decline and increase it to at least 24 ships by the first half of the 2030s. These would include the new Type-26 and Type-31 frigates, and the announcement of a preliminary design, the Type-32. The Royal Navy is not the only navy facing challenges in trying to rebuild a larger number of naval vessels, provide new capabilities, and introduce new technologies while the industrial capacity to do so is diminishing. In light of this, there is a concern that before the number of vessels increases, the Royal Navy will be forced to retire aging vessels and reduce its overall fleet size.

The United Kingdom is nearing the end of an ambitious force buildup plan, the highlight of which is the operationalization of its two new aircraft carriers, the HMS Queen Elizabeth and HMS Prince of Wales. The HMS Prince of Wales, which was supposed to sail to the United States and participate in a joint exercise with the US Navy to operate F-35B jets and unmanned systems, returned to Portsmouth in late August 2022 for repairs after suffering significant damage to its shaft and propeller. In addition to the propeller damage, superficial damage to the rudder was also found. Royal Navy sources described the malfunction as related to the coupling which joins the final two sections of the shaft. The aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth replaced the HMS Prince of Wales in the joint exercise in the United States.[[39]](#footnote-39)

***Britain’s Activity in the Indo-Pacific and the Relationship with France***

Almost a year after the surprising announcement of the agreement between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States (AUKUS) in 2021, the full diplomatic implications are still unclear. The pact facilitates cooperation on security issues in the Indo-Pacific region in particular and concerns the sharing of critical military capabilities and technologies, such as cyber, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, and undersea areas. It reflects the increased attention the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia are dedicating to the Indo-Pacific and their commitment to limiting China’s exercise of power in this region. The pact angered France and was a prominent source of dispute between countries that see themselves as defenders of the liberal international order. At the core of the agreement is Australia’s intent to acquire nuclear-powered submarines from either the United States or the United Kingdom, abandoning its 2016 agreement to purchase diesel-powered submarines built in France, as it believes that the French-made submarines are no longer suitable for its purposes.

The appointment of Catherine Colonna, a professional diplomat and former French ambassador to London, as France’s Foreign Minister, is a sign that after a year of mutual anger, France is ready to move forward pragmatically and turn over a new leaf. After all, the Indo-Pacific remains a high priority of the French foreign policy and France needs find a way to work with AUKUS members. Thus, in May 2022, French and Australian officials committed to restoring bilateral relations, as Australia indicated it would compensate the French Naval Group for the loss of revenue from the submarine contract, and France plans to deploy an aircraft carrier to the region by 2025, which is expected to carry out operations in cooperation with the US Navy.

With the easing of tensions between France and Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, some in the West recommend considering ways in which France could join the non-nuclear aspects of the AUKUS framework. Given France’s significant presence in the Indo-Pacific region in recent years, which is more than that of any other European power, the United States could leverage both France’s experience and capabilities to counter China’s growing influence in the region, while exploring ways to harness the technological and economic capabilities of European and Asian countries. These sources highlight the benefits of including France in AUKSUS, as it is the driving force behind the European Union’s growing engagement with Asia, with the most prominent advantage being a trans-European-Pacific effort to counter China’s regional influence, with implications for Americans, Europeans, and other Asian partners.[[40]](#footnote-40)

The United Kingdom has no aspirations to be a power on the level of the United States in the Indo-Pacific region. However, it is rapidly building on its maritime presence in Singapore and its garrison in Brunei and is expected to become a power on the level of Australia, with considerable capabilities and numerous interests in the region. For example, in May 2022, the Royal Navy ship HMS Tamar successfully completed its first deployment in the Indo-Pacific as part of the United Kingdom’s permanent maritime presence in the region. The ship left its home port in the United Kingdom in September 2021 and is planned to operate for five years (alongside its sister ship, HMS Spey) with allies and partners throughout the region, including visits to countries such as Australia, Japan, Fiji, and Singapore.[[41]](#footnote-41) Such a result is vital to the interests of the United States, and therefore it supports and encourages the United Kingdom in these efforts.

**The Indian Navy**

***India’s Position in the Crisis between Russia and NATO***

Since late February 2022, when Russian forces invaded Ukraine, India has maintained a neutral position regarding the war. It abstained from UN votes condemning Russia’s invasion and refused to publicly blame Russia for the crisis, despite the fact that it traditionally values sovereignty and territorial integrity. India has maintained its strong historical ties with Russia, increased its imports of Russian oil, and welcomed Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on a diplomatic visit in April 2022.[[42]](#footnote-42)

***The Indian Fleet***

India emphasizes its navy’s mission of protecting its natural wealth, keeping its trade routes open for economic development, and maintaining its international status in the world. India’s coastline is 7516.6 km long. Therefore, India needs to build and operate a large and strong navy that is always at a high level of readiness so that during a security crisis, or natural disasters such as floods, droughts, cyclones, earthquakes, and other hazards, it can efficiently and safely fulfill its missions. India’s soft power has always preceded its hard power. However, in the past decade it has tried to strike a balance by expanding its naval power, without threatening its neighbors but still defending its interests. Many factors have influenced the paradigm shift in India’s maritime security strategy. These include bordering countries with nuclear capabilities, such as China and Pakistan; the United States, which since the 2000s has considered India to be an important power that should be engaged in its battle against China in the Indo-Pacific region; and other non-state actors, who also play a vital role. India is concerned about China, which is clearly moving toward becoming a global superpower by directing its resources toward the maritime domain in general, and the geopolitical importance it attaches to the Indian Ocean in particular in its Belt and Road Initiative.

***India’s Maritime Force Buildup***

The Indian Navy is one of the largest navies in the world, ranking seventh in the Global Naval Powers Ranking for 2022 while the British and French navies are ranked eighth and ninth, respectively. Its primary combat fleet includes ten destroyers, 13 frigates, 17 submarines, and one aircraft carrier. In 2022, India was expected to launch its second SSHN Arihant-class submarine into its strategic arsenal, as well as a second domestically designed and built aircraft carrier. However, in India, plans and execution can be separate matters, and delays may occur in this project.

To cope with the imbalance opposite the Chinese Navy (which serves as a reference), the Indian Navy plans to acquire a number of new and advanced vessels, particularly submarines (both nuclear-powered and conventionally powered). Two additional Arihant-class submarines are in various stages of construction and are scheduled to join the Indian fleet by 2025. Three larger S-5-class submarines are scheduled to be built in the latter half of the decade. The Indian Navy is preparing to build six nuclear attack submarines and replace the leased SSN INS Chakra by 2025 with a newer Russian SSN Akula-class submarine.

By the end of the decade, the Indian Navy plans to complete the construction of seven low radar cross-section (stealth technology) Nilgiri-class frigates and four Admiral Grigorovich-class frigates, with two being built in Russian shipyards and two by India itself.

As noted in the 2020–21 Maritime Strategic Evaluation for Israel, the Indian Navy is building a new naval base as part of the Varsha Project (INS Varsha), which is intended to be the homeport for the navy’s new fleet of nuclear submarines and ships. The base was planned to be located within a radius of about 200 km from Visakhapatnam, where the headquarters of the Indian Navy’s Eastern Fleet Command is situated, at a site called Rambilli, 50 km from Visakhapatnam.

***The Indian Navy’s Budget***

The Indian Navy’s 2022–2023 defense budget reflects a 17.57% increase for research and development (R&D) compared to the 2021–2022 budget. Twenty-five percent of the R&D budget is allocated to industry, start-ups, and academia, in an aim to promote innovation, development, and manufacturing in India.

India’s defense budget for 2022–2023 requires thorough examination in the context of the country’s changing geopolitical environment and the modernization of its armed forces. The current Indian defense budget features a renewed focus and reorientation of security policy aimed at moving away from the land-centric focus that characterized previous years. In a speech delivered by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Swavlamban Naval Seminar held on July 25th, 2022, Prime Minister Modi described India’s vision for development and security, which is centered around the pursuit of Atmanirbharta, or self-reliance, in developing military capabilities. The prime minister noted that India’s defense must address a vast array of security challenges, which are no longer limited to land, sea, and air, and argued that the armed forces must work together to strengthen the country’s military capabilities. Highlighting the importance of self-reliance in the defense sector, the prime minister said dependence on imports for small requirements of the armed forces could pose serious strategic challenges. Cautioning the armed forces against new threats, Prime Minister Modi said that the contours of national security have become widespread and the challenges are moving towards space, cyberspace, social space and the economic sphere.[[43]](#footnote-43)

**Table 10:** The Indian Armed Forces Budget for 2021­–2022 compared to the 2022–2023 budget

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Fiscal Year | Capital outlay for Indian Navy (figure in crores) | Overall capital outlay for all three services  (figure in crores) | Share of IN in overall capital expenditure (in percentage) |
| 2021–22 | 33,253.55 | 1,35,060.72 | 24.62 |
| 2022–23 | 47,590.99 | 1,52,369.61 | 31.23 |

Source: Notes on Demands for Grants, 2022–2023, *India Budget, No. 21/Capital Outlay on Defence Services*

The most significant portion of the defense budget for 2022–2023 (65.19% of the total allocation, including revenues and capital) is allocated to the Indian Navy, more than the 58.73% allocated in 2021–2022.[[44]](#footnote-44)

***The Goals of the Naval Force Buildup Plan***

Self-reliance on equipment, platforms, and systems has become a strategic necessity. The same concern has resonated in the indigenization and “Make in India” scheme. In alignment with the modernization of the Indian Navy under a rejuvenated national focus on self-reliance, a ten-year Integrated Capability Development Plan (ICDP) has been adopted, which has replaced the earlier 15-year Maritime Capability Perspective Plan (MPCC). The major change in planning will cater to the development of maritime theatre command and will provide more flexibility in modernization given rapid changes in technology. In line with this, the Indian Ministry of Defense published three lists of import bans, including items intended for local production. This publication effectively set the roadmap for the Indian defense system to operate in accordance with the Atmanirbharta mission in the local defense sector. This will also apply to the upgrading of major platforms that were previously tied to foreign parties and projects under development.

**Figure 24:** Indian Armed Imports by Country[[45]](#footnote-45)

***Platform Upgradation***

In 2022, the Indian Navy introduced into operational service a fully indigenous twin-engine, multi-role, new-generation helicopter designed and developed by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL). Similarly, the DRDO developed an indigenous Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) system, which is a critical technology that once upgraded and integrated into submarines, will increase their subsurface endurance, resulting in improved operational capabilities. The first upgrade will be carried out for Kalvari-class submarines by 2025. Another significant development are the Scorpene-class conventional submarines (supplied by France) worth $5.78 billion. The development of the submarines in this series has led to an increase in local production reaching 40% of the cost of the project. In addition, for the first time India is developing a marine diesel engine for these submarines. These submarines will feature advanced stealth characteristics, equipped with long-range guided torpedoes, as well as an anti-ship missile sensor suite.[[46]](#footnote-46)

***Major Projects in the Pipeline***

The domestically-built Vikrant aircraft carrier will consume a significant portion of the budget allocated for procurement within India. In the field of anti-submarine warfare (ASW), the Indian Navy is preparing to build new ships at the Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers Ltd. (GRSE) shipyard, which are planned to replace the Russian Abhay-class corvettes.

The Indian Navy is preparing to complete the acquisition of seven Nilgiri-class advanced stealth frigates from Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd. (MDSL) and Garden Reach and Shipbuilders Ltd. (GRSE). The local content in this project is expected to be around 75% of its total cost. In addition, the Indian Navy has allocated an initial budget for the development of eight next-generation corvettes (NGC).

Indian Navy commanders are eager to continue the long-term modernization plan of acquiring a twin-engine combat aircraft capable of operating from its aircraft carriers (a naval version of the Tejas) developed in collaboration with the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), and the Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA).

Undoubtedly, this is a challenging plan that will require the Indian industry to undergo a cultural shift in regard to competition (as the Indian shipbuilding industry is dominated by public company monopolies), production quality, and meeting the delivery deadlines for vessels and weapons systems – an area in which significant problems have previously arisen.

***The Indian Navy’s Activity***

This year, we have also decided to highlight the Indian Navy’s activities in the western Indian Ocean: the Gulf of Aden, the Horn of Africa, and the Red Sea.

In 2015, Prime Minister Modi launched the national initiative for the Indian Ocean region called Security and Growth for All the Region (SAGAR). The vision is to build broad trust and promote mutual respect for maritime laws and peaceful resolution of disputes among the countries in the region. This initiative was also a response to China’s Belt and Road Initiative and its disregard for international rulings on sovereign water boundaries in the South China Sea region.

The Gulf of Aden and the Gulf of Oman form the western sector of the Indian Ocean and are included in this initiative even though its more pressing targets were countries like Sri Lanka and the Seychelles Islands, where the Chinese penetration was more immediate and conspicuous. Thus, for example, as part of this initiative, India built and delivered two patrol boats to the Seychelles Coast Guard in April 2021.

With the increasing importance of the Red Sea for international trade, the Indian Navy’s activity in the western part of the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea has expanded along with more and more navies that are increasing their activities in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. In the context of the Indian Navy, the previous review already noted that in 2018, India signed an agreement with the Sultanate of Oman and gained access and use of the facilities at Duqm Port, intended to serve the Indian Navy operating in the western part of the Indian Ocean. The geostrategic location of Duqm Port allows it to serve both the eastern and western corridors, as it is located far from the Hormuz Strait, in the middle of the Indian Ocean, directly open to international waters, and situated near the international trade route between Asia and Europe. Moreover, Duqm Port is easily accessible to the shipping lines serving the Indian markets as well as Africa. This reflects, among other things, the importance India attaches to preserving its shipping routes, especially for energy imports from Gulf countries, which are a crucial component of the energy the developing Indian economy requires. In May 2021, India renewed two central defense agreements with Oman, its oldest strategic partner in the region. In February 2022, Oman’s top defense official, Mohammed Nasser Al Zaabi, visited India to co-chair the tenth meeting of the Joint Military Cooperation Committee (JMMC). During the visit, Al Zaabi met with Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh, and at the end of the visit, the Indian Ministry of Defense released a statement regarding new avenues of cooperation between the two countries. These involve military-to-military engagements, including joint exercises, industry cooperation, and various ongoing infrastructure projects. The two countries decided to enhance cooperation in the defense industry, strengthening the assessment that India is increasing its defense partnership in the western Indian Ocean region in light of China’s growing presence in the area.[[47]](#footnote-47)

With the aim of enhancing mutual maritime operational capabilities, the Indian Navy ship INS Tarkash conducted a joint exercise with Sudanese Navy ships Almazz (PC 411) and Nimer (PC 413) in the Red Sea near the naval base in Port Sudan in early July 2022. According to Indian Navy sources, the exercise provided “an opportunity for exchange of professional experiences and strengthening Maritime Cooperation between the two countries.”[[48]](#footnote-48) The Indian Navy frigate INS Talwar, deployed in the Gulf of Aden to combat piracy in the region, visited the port of Djibouti between May 25th and May 28th, 2022. During its stay, the ship’s crew participated in several bilateral meetings and activities aimed at strengthening stability and improving mutual operational capabilities with other multinational forces deployed in the region. The ship conducted joint training exercises with the Djibouti Coast Guard to enable its crew to better respond to emerging challenges and piracy threats.[[49]](#footnote-49)

Despite India being a member of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), which is committed to supporting a free, open, inclusive, and resilient Indo-Pacific, and Prime Minister Modi’s participation in the Quad’s second summit held in Tokyo on May 24th, 2022, along with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, US President Joe Biden, and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, India continues to maintain close relations with Russia. The defense relations between India and Russia are nearly half a century old and the Indian armed forces have been and still are equipped with Soviet weapon systems. India’s Vice Chief of Naval Staff, Adm. SN Ghormade, said that the construction of Indian Navy ships in Russian shipyards is proceeding as planned, an interesting remark considering the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war that has cast a shadow on defense supplies from Moscow. At this stage, two Talwar-class frigates are being built in Russia for the Indian Navy. In addition, the Indian missile-guided destroyer INS Kochi conducted an exercise with the Russian Federation’s naval forces led by the Admiral Tributs destroyer in the Arabian Sea in mid-January 2022. The exercise showcased cohesiveness and interoperability between the two navies and included tactical maneuvers, cross-deck helicopter operations and maritime activities.[[50]](#footnote-50)

In conclusion, the Indian Navy will continue to position itself as an ocean-going navy, with strategic capabilities and naval power aimed at deterring India’s traditional rival, China, from exerting influence in the Indian Ocean region. Despite the United States’ ongoing efforts to bring India closer as an ally and sever its traditional ties with Russia, India, in the spirit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) policy, will seek to maintain the diversification of its procurement sources and its cooperation with countries like Russia. In light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the annexation of breakaway regions to Russia, India has expressed its stance against the Ukraine war more firmly to counter criticism of its lax policy toward Russia. However, it has refrained from holding Russia responsible for the invasion and will not change its policy on importing cheap Russian oil and coal.[[51]](#footnote-51) India will also maintain its membership in the Quad, which is a strategic dialogue between the United States, Japan, Australia, and India, held through talks among the member countries, as well as the strategic relationship it has developed with the United States in recent years. This issue will also be reflected in India’s maritime strategy, which is updated periodically.

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