

A Welcome New NATO Maritime Strategy



NATO Maritime Component Command, Northwood, U.K., symbol.
Image credit: NATO MARCOM

The latest [Maritime Strategy document](#) issued by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO,) on 22 July 2025 is a welcome refreshing of NATO's commitments to confront aggression within and outside of Europe, and for the need to exercise sea control in that effort. Many knew a [major change](#) was coming. Gone are the days of vanilla statements on maritime security. The new NATO Maritime Strategy focuses on four vital interests: nuclear deterrence, sea control and maritime power projection, freedom of navigation, and protecting sea lanes and critical maritime infrastructure. These points closely parallel those of Admiral Stansfield Turner's "[Missions of the U.S. Navy](#)" document from 1974 and are a welcome return to great power rather than mere security strategy.

The document names as adversaries Russia and terrorism, and calls out China, Iran, and North Korean for challenging the security and prosperity of Alliance members. The document does not pose new means of organization or sourcing for the vital

Standing NATO Maritime Groups that are the backbone of NATO maritime capacity day to day, and it does not talk about specific geographic threat areas. Climate change occupies a prominent role, but as the enabler of access to the contested Arctic, and not as a critique of national policies. The new Strategy also avoids a hyper-focus on NATO protecting sea lines of communication across the Atlantic, a European cultural phobia from the 20th century World Wars, but not a critical point of attack for the Soviet, or successor Russian naval forces.

Lots of New Good

The new maritime strategy sails aggressively into the future in ways its [2011 predecessor](#) could only dream of when issued. Russia's specific threat to underwater maritime infrastructure, and especially that on the seabed is called out as a threat for the Alliance to counter. The malign partnership of China and Russia, and their mutual efforts to undermine the existing maritime order is noted, as is the fact that while Russian land and air forces may be depleted from combat, Russia's maritime force, "retains significant capability and is upgrading its maritime forces and introducing new technologies, particularly in underwater reconnaissance and underwater warfare." Unmanned systems and hypersonic weapons are noted as emerging, disruptive technologies. Best of all, there is a renewed call to seize and retain sea control as part of Alliance maritime operations and to project power from the sea and provide a base of operations for Allied command and control.

Some Challenges

The new Maritime Strategy does have some points that the Alliance will be challenged to achieve. A 24/7, sea-based missile defense is a distant goal, outside what the United States Navy provides in terms of missile defense from *Arleigh*

Burke class destroyers [based in Rota, Spain](#) as part of the 6th Fleet organization. European naval forces did not [cover themselves in glory](#) in recent Red Sea operations where German and Danish ships had technical challenges, the UK Royal Navy had intermittent presence, and other NATO nations abstained from anti-missile operations entirely. Those were legitimate political decisions and familiar points within an Alliance where so-called “[national caveats](#)” often take a ship(s) out of a coalition of the willing. Such moves, however, deprived some Alliance members of missile defense experience and could make that maritime strategy goal of 24/7 coverage hard to achieve. The new strategy does not discuss the reorganization of the [Standing NATO Maritime groups](#) (surface combatants SNMG and mine warfare forces SNMCMG) along geographic lines as some rumors in the bazaar suggested. Such changes would see a NATO Standing Maritime Group Baltic or Standing NATO Maritime Group Black Sea in place of the usual North/South division of NATO maritime forces. Sustainment of the SNMG’s was incredibly good at the outset of the Russian invasion of Ukraine but has fallen off in recent months. NATO is correct to say that the standing maritime groups are the backbone of NATO maritime capacity and really its only forces likely ready for a “fight tonight” in defense of Alliance member states. Getting a regular drumbeat of maritime group sustainment has always been an Alliance challenge in the post-Cold War period and it is hoped that NATO can yet achieve regular member state participation in maritime group sourcing.

Conclusion

The new June 2025 NATO Maritime strategy is a welcome return to the aggressive posture at sea NATO possessed during the late Cold War. The new document ticks multiple boxes that should be welcomed by the United States and by other democratic nations around the globe that regularly partner with NATO in both policy and operations. The new strategy could be [more aggressive](#) and talk about attacking the Russian

maritime bastion in the Barents Sea rather than defending closer to alliance nations. It's certainly a more aggressive document than the new [British Atlantic Bastion concept](#), and a favorable course change back on the strong warfighting track the Alliance last navigated in the 1980's.