On 13 July 2016, the Federal Government of Germany issued its “White Book 2016,” on German’s security and the future of the Bundeswehr, its armed forces. It described the cornerstones of Berlin’s security policy and was the first such publication since 2006, and only the third time in post-Cold War history that the Federal Government deemed such a document important enough to issue.

Two years later, on 20 July 2018, the German Armed Forces published their derivation, the “Concept of the Bundeswehr.” According to the official MoD website, the 2018 capstone document seeks to refocus on the dichotomy between national and alliance defense, the area where the most backlogs have been identified. It deemed cyber, hybridity, readiness, and mobility as well as support for allied operations as the shaping characteristics and challenges of defense in the 21st century.

For civilian and uniformed leaders of Germany’s defense community, these were hardly novel ideas. In fact, a few years earlier, in December 2014, an informal strategic advisory group to the Chief of the German Navy had been convened. In the wake of Russia’s annexation of Ukraine’s Crimea peninsula with the emerging hybrid warfare concept, the navy felt that a fresh strategic start was needed, something that would crystalize existing thinking and new and emerging challenges. Ultimately, this led to a “Dachdokument Marine” (or “Capstone Document Navy”). It somewhat preempted the White Book and the Concept of the Bundeswehr. Later, in fact, the Navy’s capstone paper was closely coordinated

with the superseding top-level document. Once the White Book was published, the MoD no longer saw the need for a separate, dedicated naval or maritime strategy.\footnote{The author of this essay was a member of the strategic advisory group, thus serving as a participant to the process, an observer, and now an (ex-post) analyst. Conscious of this narrative challenge, this chapter seeks to display the process of arriving at a German naval strategy. It does not seek to focus on individual efforts in the making and unmaking of the strategy. Instead, it will lay out the thinking that drove the German Navy, so that its political masters, allies, and even those who seek to challenge it may arrive at a better understanding of the particulars of German strategy. The views of this author are his own, and should not be construed as those of the German Navy, the Ministry of Defense, the federal government, or any other entity.}

While the resulting document was ultimately never officially published, the strategic concepts and ideas in the navy’s draft document dovetailed with the White Book and the Concept of the Bundeswehr. This chapter tells the story of the work of this group and puts the efforts of the strategy writers into perspective. It also suggests an approach for how the German Navy should conceptualize its role in the national and international framework in the future.

1. Prologue: Little need or desire to strategize “from the sea”

From the outset, Germany’s Cold War navy—the Bundesmarine—had been planned for and operated as an alliance service, deeply embedded in multinational commands and operations, while remaining politically as well as geographically limited. With West Germany’s position at the Iron Curtain front line between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and given previous naval ambitions leading to two world wars, this was very sensible. It also aligned with the Federal Government’s tendency to rely heavily on NATO for its military framework and later on the European Union for its economic incorporation. Likewise, allies had well-founded interests in curtailing any attempt of Germany to go about strategizing on its own again.

The West German Navy’s operational environment was strictly dictated by the geography of the Baltic Sea and the North Sea. Its strategic rationale came from top-level NATO plans and policy. This effectively eliminated the need for strategic force planning in the navy, at least for a wider set of...
missions and the interlinkage of theaters. Had the Cold War turned hot, Germany was bound to be a battleground for land and air forces, independent of nuclear or conventional exchanges. The Central Front thus dominated any military and strategic considerations in Bonn, West Germany’s capital and seat of government 1949-1999. It took until the 1980s to inject some conceptual verve into the military thinking. It was not a coincidence that during this decade, a focus on the roles and missions of the West German Navy came in the wake of the NATO’s Concept of Maritime Operations (CONMAROPS), with its emphasis on integrating the naval strategy with ground and air strategy, as well as the United States’ “Maritime Strategy,” which stressed forward deployment and challenging the Soviet Navy close to its home waters such as the Baltic Sea and the Norwegian Sea. Allied operational and tonnage restrictions were lifted, and maritime strategic intellectuals took more of a public stage.

With the end of the Cold War, Germany had to cope with managing its political-economic reunification and the substantial rebuilding of East Germany. In addition, the new world order and its security and defense problems was just taking shape. The East German People’s Navy was all but dis-

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7 On ConMarOps, see Peter M. Swartz, “Preventing the Bear’s Last Swim: The NATO Concept of Maritime Operations (ConMarOps) of the Last Cold War Decade,” in *NATO’s Maritime Power 1949-1990*, ed. by I. Loucas and G. Marcoyannis (Piraeus: INMER European Institute of Maritime Studies and Research, 2003).


mantled, its ships mostly sold abroad or scrapped, and most of its people discharged from the military. East Germany’s navy had always been under the firm grip of the Soviet Union’s Red Banner fleet; hence it possessed no strategic flagpoles and conceptual forward-thinkers to speak of. It was designed as a maritime border protection force and to serve in support of a Warsaw Pact amphibious assault on Jutland and Schleswig-Holstein rather than as an ocean-going navy. Its strategy was written in Moscow or Leningrad, not in the command bunker in Rostock-Gehlsdorf or in the defense ministry in Strausberg near East Berlin.

At the time, the Bundesmarine leadership had just formulated “Marine 2005.” Anticipating a thawing Cold War with shrinking defense budgets and the need for fleet recapitalization, but not German unification, Vice Admiral Hans-Joachim “Jimmy” Mann, chief of naval staff, presented a reduced fleet capable of warfighting, but compatible for less-intense crises and peacetime operations. The concurrent conceptual paper, “Zielvorstellung der Marine,” was published in 1991—just as the Soviet Union dissolved and the Gulf War signaled the dawn of what U.S. president George H.W. Bush previously described as a “new world order.” All of this spelled drastic cut-backs for the German armed forces in an environment eager for a peace dividend, and the Navy—which had thought purposefully ahead—was confronted with even more drastic reductions than its own thinking had insinuated. The numbers in “Marine 2005”—16-20 frigates, 20-30 patrol boats and corvettes, 20-30 mine countermeasure boats, 10-14 submarines, 15-17 tenders and support ships, 38-42 helicopters, 12-14 Maritime Patrol Aircraft, and 60-65 naval strike aircraft—were deliberately low; more of a lowest common denominator than wishful thinking. Now, they were seen as the Bundesmarine’s top-level numbers which could easily be scaled down significantly. This must have shocked witnesses and heirs

10 For an account of the final years of the Volksmarine, see Henrik Born, Es kommt alles ganz anders: Erinnerungen eines Zeitzeugen an die Volksmarine der DDR und das Leben danach (Hamburg: E. S. Mittler & Sohn, 2018). Vice Admiral Born was the last Commander of the East German Navy, 1989-1990.
to this process. Any future flag officer could very well conclude that strategic thinking was a potentially harmful exercise that significantly risked force structure and ship numbers. Consequently, he would not undertake such potentially harmful endeavors.

In the 1990s, an era of constant expeditionary operations emerged. The German Navy no longer remained bottled up in the North and Baltic seas when its political leadership was increasingly looking to deploy the force beyond its traditional home waters as a politically inexpensive move minimizing actual military force. This was and remains an important point in Germany. Absent the Red Banner fleet and the Warsaw Pact, the Baltic Sea operating area turned into little more than a flooded meadow for exercises and training. From naval presence missions in the Mediterranean and mine-clearance operations in the Persian Gulf to embargo operations in the Adriatic, the declining force eventually became a very busy one, even before out-of-area operations for the German armed forces were officially sanctioned by the Federal Constitutional Court in 1994. Except for the White Book of that same year, national strategic guidance during the decade was scarce. Navy documents hovered on the doctrinal and operational level as the reunited Germany began its long, arduous (and some may argue still ongoing) process of defining its foreign and defense policy and its national security contract. Strategic thinking such as the call by General Klaus Naumann, Chief of Defense (1991-1996), for a conceptually expeditionary mindset that would, inter alia, yield a Joint Support Ship comparable to an LHD, was widely ridiculed (“Arch Naumann”). Meanwhile, the ongoing naval operations, which included evacuation operations from Somalia in 1994/1995 and support of NATO air strikes on Yugoslavia in 1999, were conducted by remnant forces from Cold War days amidst an ever-declining number of ships, aircraft, and personnel. It


15 For a personal account aboard the frigate Rheinland-Pfalz (F 209), see Heiko Herold, Aufmarsch in der Adria. Meine Erlebnisse bei der Marine vor und während des Kosovo-Krieges (Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2001).
emerged that in light of this drastically changing world and land wars in the Balkans, conceptualizing a genuine German naval or maritime strategy document was not in the books.\footnote{16}

The terrorist attacks on the United States of America on 11 September 2001 and NATO’s call for Article V operations soon thrust the renamed \textit{Deutsche Marine} into operations geographically wide-ranging for counter-terrorism and maritime security operations far from the homeland: Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and NATO’s Operation Active Endeavour (OAE). The Bundeswehr had undergone repeated reductions since the 1990s, which left the military bewildered and deepened the fight for ever-scarce resources among the \textit{Luftwaffe}, the Army, and the Navy. The fleet structure of the 2005, nominally not much different from Admiral Mann’s planning, had lost its naval bombers and had begun to age.\footnote{17} After 2001, while NATO and allied land operations in Afghanistan and elsewhere dominated the headlines, the Navy found a new \textit{raison d’etre} in its vast spectrum of low-intensity maritime security operations in areas of the European periphery, using its legacy Cold War and modern units side by side. Additionally, while cuts continued, policy leaders in the new capital of Berlin found that sending the \textit{Deutsche Marine} was beneficial as it did not risk actual German “boots on the ground” in a very conflict- and war-skeptical society.\footnote{18}

Over-stretched, underfunded, stripped of its naval jet-air arm, and concerned with its public perception and future recruitment after the end of conscription (2011), and suffering a number of incidents creating unfavorable press, the navy was determined to make do, keep a low profile, and avoid disseminating lofty strategies that might upset the body politic.

“Jimmy” Mann’s ghost loomed large. A generation of naval officers seemed to internalize that strategizing and presenting a force structure plan would yield political pushback and a further unraveling of those very ship numbers. A notable exception from the rule was “Zielvorstellung Ma-
rine (ZvM) 2025+,” a plan published in 2008 in reflection to the White Book (October 2006) and the Concept of the Federal Armed Forces (August 2004). The proposed outlook of roughly 15 years reminds the reader of the same viewpoint taken in 1989 for “Marine 2005.” The counterintuitive evolution of documents is notable: First came the military strategy, then a national level document, then a navy statement. ZvM was issued by then-Chief of German Navy, Vice Admiral Wolfgang Nolting.\(^\text{19}\) He drew on a think piece that was written with MoD department heads between 1995 and 1998, and cleared by then-Chief of German Navy Vice Admiral Hans-Rudolf Boehmer and then-Secretary of Defense Volker Rühe. It was increasingly clear that on-going army operations of the Bundeswehr and considerable Luftwaffe procurement programs left little wiggle room for the sustainable growth and fleet regeneration of the navy. It was only after 9/11 and the invocation of NATO’s Article V with Operation Active Endeavor missions in the Mediterranean and Operation Enduring Freedom commitments off the Horn of Africa that the need to increase and modernize naval platforms was recognized by the MoD. Conscious but not outspoken about the particulars of seapower, the prevention of German “boots on the ground” became the overarching mantra and hence naval operations were increasingly welcomed.\(^\text{20}\) Nolting’s document drew from a seabasing concept paper issued by the Chief of Defense in 2007. It was also heavily informed by the emerging anti-piracy operations on the low end of the spectrum as well as Germany’s supporting participation in the “European Carrier Group Interoperability Initiative,” trying to align protection and projection in the maritime domain.\(^\text{21}\)

Throughout the period discussed, the German Navy maintained its significant commitments to Standing NATO Maritime Groups of large surface combatants and smaller mine countermeasure ships, respectively.\(^\text{22}\)

19 Wolfgang E. Nolting (ed.), Zielvorstellung Marine 2025+ (Bonn: Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, 2008). Nolting makes a point in his accompanying letter that this would not be a Navy document, but rather the base for joint force planning under the Inspector General of the Bundeswehr.

20 Wolfgang E. Nolting, E-Mail to author, 16 October 2019.


22 SNMG = Standing NATO Maritime Group, usually composed of larger surface combatants. SNMCMG = Standing NATO Mine-Countermeasures Group, usually composed of a larger number of small mine-warfare ships.
training, joint and combined exercises (bi- and multilateral), as well as submarine operations.

Table 1: Major German naval operations, 1989-2019. Year connotes German participation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Operation</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>What</th>
<th>Umbrella</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Southern Guard</td>
<td>Persian Gulf</td>
<td>Mine-Clearing</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-1995</td>
<td>Sharp Guard</td>
<td>Adriatic Sea</td>
<td>Embargo Control</td>
<td>WEU/NATO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Southern Cross</td>
<td>Horn of Africa</td>
<td>Combatant Evacuation</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Allied Force</td>
<td>Adriatic Sea</td>
<td>Support of Strike Operations</td>
<td>NATO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-2008</td>
<td>Enduring Freedom</td>
<td>Horn of Africa</td>
<td>Counter-Terrorism Operations, Counter-Piracy Operations</td>
<td>NATO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-2015</td>
<td>Active Endeavour</td>
<td>Mediterranean</td>
<td>Counter-Terrorism Operations/Maritime Domain Awareness</td>
<td>NATO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td></td>
<td>South-East Asia</td>
<td>Tsunami relief operation by German Navy vessel in the vicinity</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since 2008</td>
<td>EU NAVFOR</td>
<td>Horn of Africa</td>
<td>Counter-piracy, Naval Diplomacy</td>
<td>EU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>RecSyri</td>
<td>Eastern Mediterranean</td>
<td>Maritime Security Operation</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-2019</td>
<td>EU NAVFOR</td>
<td>Central Mediterranean</td>
<td>Maritime Security Operation</td>
<td>EU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since 2015</td>
<td>Counter-Daesh/</td>
<td>Eastern Mediterranean</td>
<td>Support of Strike Operations against “Islamic State”</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since 2016</td>
<td>ISIS</td>
<td>Aegean Sea</td>
<td>Maritime Security Operations</td>
<td>NATO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SNMCMG 1/2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mine-Countermeasure Operations, Naval Diplomacy</td>
<td>NATO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The naval missions were intensive on the low-end of the spectrum—and ever on-going. Recapitalization and reserves were increasingly hard to come by, and the *de-facto*-abolishment of conscription in 2011 robbed the Deutsche Marine of a key recruitment platform. The acquisition of human
capital emerged as a concern nearly as pressing as that of new warfighting platforms.

Domestic and international politics were thus the background under which the German Navy tried once again their hand at formulating a strategy. Referring to the fall of the Berlin Wall (and perhaps Admiral Mann’s naval planning), Vice Admiral Krause, a career submariner, stated that, “We were very optimistic in 1989. […] 2014 [Russia’s incursion into Crimea and Ukraine] came like a surprise.”

2. Conceptualizing and Writing Naval Strategy: The Process

To push back against this strategic surprise, a working group was called for by the German Navy Command in Rostock. Vice Admiral Andreas Krause directed setting up this group on 17 December 2014, tasking the participants to start from scratch with the development of a capstone document. On 7 January 2015, at the 55th Historisch-Taktische Tagung der Marine (HiTaTa) in Warnemünde, a traditional annual gathering of hundreds of German Navy officers, Krause communicated widely about this directive in his keynote, thus making the effort public.

The advisory group was deliberately not institutionalized so that it would stand outside of established chains of command, but it drew on uniformed and civilian individuals with a high degree of intrinsic motivation, a multifaceted operational naval background, and a policy-strategic sensitivity. This combination provided the German Navy with a degree of free thinking that is so very important for strategy, which is commonly characterized as both, an art and a science. It also signaled a new start after collaborative work on a working document tentatively entitled “Dimension See


24 The following section largely draws on a presentation and notes held for Führungskreis Marine, a naval leadership group in uniform. “Kapitän zur See Jan C. Kaack, Dachdokument Marine. Weiterentwicklung, Dimension See 2030+, ‘Sachstand’,” undated. The author holds a copy.

2030+” had come to a grinding halt over the summer.\textsuperscript{26} In the wake of Russia’s annexation of Crimea in the spring of 2014, a widening sense emerged that this geopolitical move fundamentally changed the security environment, not least for Germany, one of Europe’s economic powerhouses (and defense policy hopefuls). Together with a multitude of concurrent developments such as the increasing instability around the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, the U.S. re-balancing to Asia (Pacific pivot), a weakening of the European Union after the Euro crisis, climate change, demographic challenges, immigration, and an ever-shrinking, aging and costly fleet, there was fresh appetite in the Navy Command to consolidate naval thinking and to mold it into a fresh document. In parallel, the Ministry of Defense in Berlin began work on a new White Book in earnest while NATO, EU, and many allies reassessed their security strategies and produced documents—ongoing processes, no less.

The task for the new document, aimed at policy-makers and the society at once, as well as at the armed forces, allies, partners, and even antagonists, was very wide-ranging. First, its goal was to think ahead – and explain – the strategic orientation of the Deutsche Marine. Second, it sought to define areas of responsibility, both politically and geographically. Third, it necessarily needed to set priorities in an ever-more complex (and confusing) world. Fourth, it underlined the indispensable integration of current events and emerging and existing policy, strategy, and operational documents. Fifth, the capstone document needed to form the base for the maritime component of the White Book, in close cooperation and coordination with the MoD’s policy and planning directorates.\textsuperscript{27} Sixth, and finally, the strategy was designed to create publicity for the Navy among experts, policy-makers, and the community of interest in Germany. It was established, from the start, that cooperation with other ministries would be necessary. This turned a naval strategy into a broader maritime strategy that still sought to not superimpose on other departments. Concurrently, a

\textsuperscript{26} The members of the strategy group drew on the previous, unpublished draft document and also utilized a piece published in Germany’s leading daily, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, a few years earlier. Lutz Feldt, with Carlo Masala, Hans-Joachim Stricker and Konstantinos Tsetsos, “Kein Land in Sicht,” Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 1 April 2013, 5.

\textsuperscript{27} Great care was taken to harmonize the advisory group’s thinking (and, by implication, that of the Navy) with the policy and planning staffs. The policy directorate in the MoD greenlighted the Navy’s effort; the security policy derivation was those previously approved by the ministry; it took into consideration the contents and results of a number of agreed and coordinated previous documents, but now focused on the maritime domain.
communications strategy was designed to take along the addressees of the strategy, to reduce reservations, and to gather support.

This ambitious program rested in part on full awareness of the host of corresponding defense and security policy documents. The documents included, inter alia:

- NATO’s (3rd) Alliance Maritime Strategy, issued on 19 November 2011;
- Africa-policy guiding principles of the Federal German government, 12 May 2014;
- European Union Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS), 16 June 2014, and its corresponding action plan, 16 December 2014;
- Readiness Action Plan and NATO’s Summit Communique from Newport, 05 September 2014;
- The G-7 foreign minister Lübeck Declaration, 15 April 2015.

Corresponding initiatives and developments included, inter alia:

- Harmonization of policy guidelines and planning regarding the EU MSS action plan since June 2015.
- EU Common Information Sharing Environment (CISE) 2020;
- Participation in the development of a new European Security Strategy 2016;
- Coordination on EU Naval Forces Mediterranean; and
- Planning for a high-level meeting in Germany, June through November 2015.

The writing group consisted of eight individuals hand-picked to reflect a broad background and to include civilian expertise. Aspects of note included strategic theory and practice, war gaming, maritime security, naval strategy, strategic communication, and scenario development. While a number of meetings were held over the period of almost two years, informal conversations often took place via the mobile phone messaging service WhatsApp.28 The group’s approach was inclusive and yielded an iterative process with both, senior German Navy leadership and experts from other navies, the German Coast Guard, and industry. The first official meeting took place in the MoD in Berlin in December 2014. It featured a presentation by the author of this chapter on “A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Cen-

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28 Discussing strategy over a commercial messaging application run by an American company was not considered through the prism of information security, but solely for convenience.
tury” (2007), and its revised version which was set to be published in 2015. In mid-March 2015, the U.S. Navy had published its revised version of CS-21, providing momentum to navalists in Germany as well. It was obvious the U.S. maritime strategy would be one of the first documents to reflect the changing global security environment. In an alliance still dominated by the United States and in light of the German Navy’s self-understanding as an “alliance navy,” it was prudent to align any German strategic approach with the American posture. Most importantly, the first session featured a translation and German adaptation of Peter Swartz’ invaluable guidance paper on issues to consider for naval strategy writers. A sound analysis of the maritime security environment, the overarching strategic guidance from national and international/multinational sources, and a clear definition of geographic/functional areas for German naval action complemented the methodology over the coming months.

A core word that soon emerged was “responsibility.” In a self-conscious and positive tone, the document sought to set the bar high. With it, the capstone paper created a proactive wording rather than a dull bureaucratic strategy. It was, for instance, quite conscious of the different tones of naval vs. maritime (for which the German language does not have a clear translation). It also reflected that the authors were well aware that a “strategy” might raise a few eyebrows. Hence, the essence was clear. This was not to be a national or even nationalistic strategy, but rather an international document shaped by the multinational DNA so instilled in what noted naval strategist Geoffrey Till described as post-modern navies, referring to those which guard the international system rather than solely defend national territories. Referring to Russia’s incursion into Ukraine in early 2014, the authors underlined that national defense remained the key responsibility of the Bundeswehr. Hardly a surprise today, but after a couple of decades where alliance defense and collective security worldwide had put the Navy to the distant shores of the Adriatic, the Horn of Africa, and the Eastern

Mediterranean, this was a useful starting point. At the same time, an ever-
more complex world mandated national and international cooperation.
This included comprehensive approaches inside Germany as well as in the
EU/NATO realm. Conscious of the idea that in crises and conflict situa-
tions the Deutsche Marine could actively shape the battlefield (or, rather,
the diplomatic dancefloor), the strategists underlined the intimately relat-
ed responsibility this spelled out.

A very recent example at the time of writing was the quick evolution of
EU NAVFOR “Sophia,” the European Union’s maritime security mission
in the Central Mediterranean. The flexible and versatile naval means al-
loows the Navy to react quickly to the deteriorating situation on this human
trafficking and migration highway. It demonstrated German will and ca-
pacity to act upon saving lives at sea – not just for immediate political gain,
but to buy time to develop and integrate a sustainable long-term maritime
contribution that would not bind the few naval vessels available to Ger-
many for extended periods of time (something that, sadly, was not sus-
tained). A maritime security regime for the Mediterranean and Africa, syn-
thesized cooperation with the German Federal Police’s Coast Guard, and
enabling tools for Third World security and defense (such as good govern-
nance) have all since been floated to help navigate the maritime security
challenges on the Mediterranean route. Low-intensity humanitarianassis-
tance missions were in the news, where part of the group of writers had
just spent a significant amount of time conceptualizing the high-end con-

cflict roles and missions of navies. In the spirit of Samuel Huntington, who
had written about this conundrum sixty years earlier, naval forces could
obviously “do” low-end; but that is not what they were procured for.32

Expanding on the ability of naval forces to shape the political spectrum,
the document reiterated that maritime presence by ships and experts
ashore and embarked – in strategically relevant geographic areas, that is –
was a very useful medium- and long-term investment. In line with an old
saying, “A ship in port is safe. But that is not what ships are built for,” this
mandated the Deutsche Marine operations, to contribute to international
naval missions, and to build and retain relevant expertise in naval strategy,
regional studies, and military-to-military as well as civil-military issues. Ide-
ally, that approach would also include advisory groups, multinational
training and exercises, maritime security regimes, and military assistance to
stabilize certain regions of the world. In an echo of the gallantly framed

32 Samuel Huntington, “National Policy and the Transoceanic Navy,” in U.S. Naval
1992 US Navy document, the German paper emphasized the opportunities of a naval force that effected “… From the Sea.” An increasingly self-confident German Navy would assert itself as the key enabler to guard national interests worldwide, as a reliable ally and ambassador of NATO and the EU, in order to shape the environment based on its own values and overarching policy. Informed by the understanding that genuine military threats decreased, but political and economic interdependencies surged and created significant vulnerability, the German Navy was comprehensive in its approach to include:

- Territorial integrity and defense of Germany’s population;
- Safe and secure global sea lines of communication;
- Containment of organized maritime crime (such as illegal migration, human trafficking, weapons and drug handling);
- Maritime counter-terrorism;
- Defense of critical infrastructure (such as ports, terminals, undersea cables, locks);\(^{33}\)
- Security of energy;
- Defense from ecological threats to the environment;
- Reaction to geopolitical shifts and changes;
- Future maritime areas of interest.

The final draft of the strategy, after describing the likely maritime environment of 2035 and beyond based on general trends and broad scenarios, developed a two-part methodology. The document used a point of view based on legally established responsibility, if only to make clear that a bureaucratic infight with other departments ought to be avoided at any cost.\(^{34}\) From national territorial defense to alliance/collective defense, a clear responsibility rested with the armed forces. For a trans-regional, even global approach to freedom of the seas and SLOC protection, this also held true. The second part of the methodology clearly stated that tension exist-

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\(^{33}\) The German constitution sets strict boundaries between domestic security (typically a role for policy forces) and national/international security (typically a role for military forces) which would have to be managed through legal means prior to an extended German Navy mission inside German territorial waters.

\(^{34}\) In 2009, the German-flagged container ship *M/S Hansa Stavanger* was hijacked off the coast of Somalia. The ensuing lengthy legal discussion in Berlin about whether the federal police or the Bundeswehr special forces should free the hostages and take control of the ship led to the US Navy’s withdrawal of the staging platform it offered, *USS Boxer* (LHD-4). The mission was aborted and the cargo vessel was later freed in exchange for ransom.
ed between “known” and “unknowns” (once again echoing erstwhile US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld) when assessing future security challenges and operating factors. The German capstone document therefore described its naval and maritime ambition as the responsibility to frame policy; not as an end itself, but for the federal government’s ability to shoulder 21st century security obligations and challenges.

From that objective, the strategists derived three layers of responsibility – national defense, alliance defense, freedom of the seas – based on legal, historical, operational, and geographic factors. In essence, the nearer and dearer the layer, the larger the Deutsche Marine’s responsibility was. The further one moved outwards, the more reduced was the Navy’s genuine responsibility. This asserted that other countries, alliances, international organizations, and/or federal ministries would have to shoulder more as the German-centered perspective broadened. For instance, the Baltic Sea – instrumental for German national defense and for collective security – was a much larger area of responsibility than the Mediterranean, where only alliance aspects, but not territorial defense of German soil, were of direct concern. Other countries would ideally shoulder more responsibility in these areas and their maritime challenges (an idea to ensure that the German Navy would not be depleted in maritime security missions which carried in disproportionate political weight for Berlin but soaked up resources that were needed closer to home). Challengers to freedom of the seas, likely far away from German shores and much regulated European rimland waters, would then only see an even more limited presence of the Deutsche Marine.

Finally, the document discussed the consequences of this unique and useful approach in addressing courses of action and identifying areas (both functionally as well as geographically) where action ought to be taken. This anticipated follow-up documents that were planned at that stage, inter alia a shipbuilding concept and a recruitment strategy. Rather than a top-down approach, the capstone strategy advocated a bottom-up strategy establishing positions that could later be connected through overarching strategic policies. For the time being, permanent naval cooperation, temporary as well as permanent integration (such as through certification), multinational (EU) crewing, and a permanent integration of training components, the defense logistic chain, and ship maintenance were called for. In addition, the capstone document suggested a new direction with regard to the sea-going units. Only through more standardization and modularity, the authors continued, could combatting the strategic challenges of the future be paired with the necessary quick reaction ability in naval forces. Innovative concepts and ideas – such as moving away from building batches
of classes of warships in favor of a more dynamic shipbuilding concept, and the force-wide implementation of “green technology” – rounded out the document.

In total, three versions of the main corpus were produced. First, a German-language document; second, an English translation to inform a much wider international audience; third, an informal “Geheime Erläuterungen” (rather, “confidential annotation”) to the paper where some aspects were clarified and expanded on. The latter was strictly for internal purposes, but not classified, and was not translated into English. It was, like all work, unclassified.

As 2015 drew to a close, the group’s work had been all but delivered. Some aspects from the document had already found their way into public statements and speeches by Admiral Krause and others. In mid-January, the group learned that the German Air Force published a glossy document of its own, the “Militärische Luftfahrtstrategie.” This somewhat complicated a truly evolutionary and otherwise rather harmonious strategy-making process. At the time, it was increasingly clear that the dedicated naval strategy would be held back until after the White Book was published.

Vice Admiral Krause’s February 2016 “Wilhelmshaven Declaration on the future of the German Navy” contained much of the original thinking of the strategy experts and previewed the capstone document. The Chief of German Navy discussed a renewed focus on the high-end but also covered the low-end of the conflict spectrum (and not the other way around as naval reality had been practiced). The overarching ideas were to form centers of excellence in naval cooperation and integration (as opposed to a more top-down European Army approach), varying areas of responsibility for Germany (in other words, a prioritization of national interests along geographic and political boundaries), a focus on maritime security regimes and the Law of the Sea, a system of systems approach for procurement, tightening links between national/territorial defense and alliance defense, and highlighting the three major maritime focus areas: Northern Flank/Baltic Sea, Southern Flank/Mediterranean, and Indian Ocean.

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36 Andreas Krause, “Wilhelmshavener Erklärung zur Zukunft der Deutschen Marine. Ansprache des Inspektors der Marine Vizeadmiral Andreas Krause anlässlich des Zeitzeugensymposiums 60 Jahre Marine am 12. Februar 2016 in Wilhelmshaven”. It deserves note that the Chief of German Navy chose a naval historians’ conference on the occasion of the West German Navy’s 60th anniversary as a platform for his message.
A timeline for a roll-out conference, a presentation of the document in Berlin, and wing-man publications in journals and magazines was scheduled for the summer of 2016. Meanwhile, the point of contact within the German Navy had been relegated from a Rear Admiral (who took command of the EU counter-piracy operation in the Indian Ocean) to a Captain. With limited top-brass cover, the process of finalizing and publishing the document came to a screeching halt. In addition, the demands of the participants’ day jobs reduced both personal availability and intellectual capacity to a bare minimum. The fact that all participants of the writing team shouldered this task in addition to their regular jobs took its toll.

In mid-July 2016, the German ministry of defense issued its long-awaited “White Paper.” Although little of true maritime substance could be found in that capstone document save for some words on the security of sea lanes and the freedom of the high seas, the concept of EU citizens serving in the German forces could be claimed by the naval strategists as one of their own. In the meantime, a roll-out speech and conference in Berlin were scheduled for November. As an aside, it was also decided that a final wrap-up meeting would be held in the Hanseatic city of Bremen in mid-September 2016. Coupled with a lavish dinner and a behind-the-scenes tour of the Bremen Ratskeller winery on the night before, the group met in a small conference room right behind the world-famous Bremen town musicians’ statue. The town musicians is one of the most famous fairy tales in Germany.

The location of the final meeting was telling. The Bremen town musicians—a donkey, a dog, a cat, and a rooster—talk to each other, they are sympathetic and emotive from the beginning and show both courage and ingenuity. Before the four beastly companions find each other, they are working animals who are kept by humans. They lead a life of hardship over which they have no control, and their aged appearance and frailty show the damage such an existence can wreak. By freeing themselves from servitude, escaping their masters and embarking upon a journey together to a new life, they are able to put their weaknesses aside. It is only when these animals band together that they become strong, brightening their somber mood to the extent that they no longer shy away from confrontation. Similarities to the naval strategy group were, obviously, purely coincidental.

The Bremen conference proved the final official meeting, as new jobs and projects, as well as uncertainty about the future of the group as an institution, loomed large. More so, the document was, by all accounts, finished and could be submitted to Naval HQ Rostock and the MoD in Berlin. Copies of the strategic document featuring a preface penned by...
Vice Admiral Krause were printed in late October and circulated. Soon thereafter, in an eleventh-hour decision, the conference in Berlin and the unveiling speech were cancelled. The prevailing view in the capital was that the White Book, to which the German Navy capstone document was only a precursor, covered all necessary ground. Interpretational sovereignty on defense matters lay with the MoD, and no one else. A genuine naval document, although there was much overlap between it and the White Book, was no longer desired. In light of the absolute prerogative of civilian policy-making in German defense policy, given this country’s history, this was understandable. Although personally disappointing to the author of this piece (a citizen without a uniform, no less), the decision did not infringe on the professional contents of the document. In fact, the underlying ideas developed by the group persist in other formats. MoD actively encouraged use of bits and pieces from the document in presentations and keynote addresses by Deutsche Marine leadership.\(^{37}\) The process yielded, however, some interesting academic insights. Military historian David Rosenberg reminds us that,

> “Process is the key to understanding and explaining naval strategy. It does not suffice to identify and analyze ideas and concepts. In order to elucidate the history of naval strategy, one must move behind the ideas to consider where they came from, and how they were translated from theory into practice.”\(^{38}\)

Key aspects from it were published in other formats, i.a. in a chapter in the Routledge Handbook of Naval Strategy and Security and in a MarineForum editorial.\(^{39}\) Vice Admiral Krause’s Wilhelmshaven Declaration retains much of the original thinking of the writing group and has served as a useful point of departure for those wishing to grasp the evolution of the German

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37 I am indebted to Rear Admiral (ret.) Torsten Kähler, former Chief of Staff at Naval Command Rostock, for providing to me some critical insight into this usage. E-mail to author, 15 & 16 October 2019.


Navy in the 21st century. While ownership of such ideas can hardly be claimed by any one member of the strategic writing team, recent discussions about EU citizens serving in the German armed forces, and the building of five (possibly ten) additional Braunschweig-class corvettes and two more advanced submarines (together with Norway) all mirror ideas of the capstone document. Process is key in naval and maritime strategy.

3. Findings & Way Ahead

The German Navy and those who serve in her navigate a difficult strategic environment. Its political masters eschew the active use of military force, often pointing to the history of two World Wars in the 20th century. Much of the public has a negative bias towards the military—remember the large crowds of the “peace movement” in the 1970s and 1980s in West Germany. When one considers that a sizeable percentage of today’s German population was raised in former East Germany, a biographical reluctance to align strategically with the transatlantic alliance and, by implication, the United States of America, also factors in. The rise of populist political parties to the left and right, both of which are sympathetic to closer alignment with Russia, amplifies this challenge. The fallout of the 2020 Corona pandemic on defense budgets and public support of a robust maritime strategy is yet to be assessed.

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43 Deutsche Marine (ed.), Gemeinsam. Meer. Verantwortung. Chancen nutzen im maritimen Raum des 21. Jahrhunderts (Rostock, 2016); and German Navy (ed.), We Shape the Sea. Together. Responsibly. Using maritime opportunities in the 21st century (Rostock, 2016). The author of this article holds hard copies of each document. Follow-up documents to these 31-page long working pieces, such as a recruitment strategy and a force structure strategy, were planned to be drawn up once the capstone document was rolled out. The MoD’s directive that relegated the naval strategy to the shelf made such plans obsolete for the time being.
The shift in the international environment since 2014 has refocused the military mindset on the nexus of territorial defense (pursuant to Article 87a, German Basic Law) and alliance defense (pursuant to Article 24, German Basic Law). Other obligations stem from Germany’s signature to the United National Convention on the Law of the Sea (1994), NATO’s Allied Maritime Strategy (2011), the European Union’s Maritime Security Strategy (2015), and a host of other documents and declarations in these systems of collective security and collective defense. The return of a sea-control challenge by Russia and its unwelcomed cousin, a hybrid anti-access area denial approach, caught the German Navy unprepared. It was coming off of 25 years of low-end maritime security operations, which, by all accounts, are not going away, but will remain a task that Berlin policy-makers will continue to expect from its sea-going force. The Baltic Sea is back on the minds of policy and military planners alike, joining the North Sea, the Norwegian Sea, and the North Atlantic. At the same time, the more traditional operating areas for the German Navy such as the Central and Eastern Mediterranean, the Black Sea, and the Horn of Africa and Western Indian Ocean will remain important for Germany’s sea lines of communication, forward defense, and crisis management and conflict prevention. This confluence of old and new, high-end and low-end naval operations can easily cognitively overwhelm the shrunken Deutsche Marine, both in numbers and readiness, as well as intellectually. Even so, that matrix does not even address the ramifications of an actual major war in South-East Asian waters, or similar humanitarian assistance/disaster relief operations on distant shores.

It is prudent to focus on the high-end warfighting and combat capabilities in naval design and force structure for the future German Navy. Politics of the day and the lengthy dynamics of warship procurement in the bloated defense establishment—think of the belated introduction of four low-end “stabilization frigates” of the Baden-Württemberg-class into the fleet—can easily challenge this path forward. It appears most useful, therefore, to make an even better case for the use of navies on the whole spectrum of peace, conflict, crises, and war. In an increasingly complex world with a relatively small fighting force, the German financial and intellectual investment in thinking about seapower has been absurdly low. Perhaps it

44 Bruns (2016c).
is due time for a 21st century version of Samuel Huntington’s 1954 essay “National Policy and the Transoceanic Navy,” this one for Germany. In a country where academia and government have lived on different planets for too long, a structured use of talent and knowledge from the civilian field by the military, and an embrace of strategy and defense subjects by political scientists to become true experts in maritime and military strategy (or even war studies), is long overdue.

The Bundeswehr should aggressively drive sound operations research and maritime strategic analysis at its various schools and institutions, from the two universities in Hamburg and Munich, to the General Command and Staff College in Hamburg & its associated think tank, the German Institute for Security and Defense (GIDS). The German Navy HQ should drive a joint effort to develop a cadre of strategic thinkers, both civilian and uniformed. It must be integrated in Rostock (seat of Marinekommando) and in Berlin (the German capital), perhaps even in Bonn (former German capital and still the site of a sizeable German MoD contingent). There, it could provide critical access to senior military and policy leaders, and be tied into the academic world in Germany (such as the key expertise accumulated at the Institute for Security Policy at Kiel University’s Center for Maritime Strategy & Security) and in Brussels (for easier access to NATO and EU).

To reflect the slogan of the U.S. Naval Institute, this common effort must yield the ability to dare to read, think, and write without fear of violating the chain of command or the challenge from obscure civilian university predicaments. If Germany is a “country of poets and thinkers,”46 this is an absolutely vital approach. A nation that has produced such great minds as Alexander von Humboldt, Johann Wilhelm Goethe, Immanuel Kant, Karl Marx, and Günter Grass just to name a few can certainly produce a strategy capstone document. The dean of strategic thought, Carl von Clausewitz, another German, would most certainly agree.

Should writing further documents be considered, there must be a clear process. While top-level cover by Vice Admirals Krause and his deputy (and fleet commander) Vice Admiral Rainer Brinkmann was vitally provided to the 2014-2016 document, the writers’ efforts suffered from several layers of access to leadership. In addition, there was some “friendly fire.” A clear definition of the audience of the strategy—the Deutsche Marine, the

46 Attributed to Edward Bulwer, Ernest Maltravers or the Eleusinia, Bell and Bradfute, Edinburgh; and J. Cumming, Dublin., 1844, v: “To the great German people, a race of thinkers and of critics.”
public, the politicians in Berlin, allies, antagonists, some or all of the above?—was never thoroughly conducted. To understand the imagination of the audience is perhaps the most important enabler for any maritime strategy. In the future, representatives from these stakeholders should gather to discuss the contours of a new capstone document, and give the proposed working group some waypoints to refer to when drafting such a paper. Growing and modernizing a navy is difficult. It needs careful thought and continuous articulation, something which may be a bridge too far for the current German force consumed with having to make do in current operations and on-going procurements. In any case, it certainly does not absolve Germany from creating an integrated maritime and naval strategy. The immediate post-Cold War era where even some European allies were skeptical of the Deutsche Marine discovering blue-water operations at all is long-since gone, as these navies have also dramatically reduced their own inventory as well.47

4. Epilogue

As Vice Admiral Andreas Krause, by then one of the longest-serving Chiefs of German Navy in its history, stated on the occasion of the 60th Historisch-Taktische Tagung der Marine in January 2020, the German Navy is growing again and on an upwards trajectory.48 More ships and boats, better readiness, more billets and significantly more political appreciation and attention will make the 2020s a transformative period for the German Navy. Positioning the force beyond its operational and military spectrum could underline, in a strategic communications framework, a number of innovative roles for the Deutsche Marine. A naval force that understands its inherent ability as a critical forward-thinking strategic institution, as the bearer of key institutional knowledge for maritime security, as a central maritime strategy and defense advisor to political masters, as a civilian-military-industrial integrator and as a problem solver for 21st century challenges can go a long way. For Germany, it is high time to continue to develop and articulate strategy, as an all-hands maneuver for this serving in the Navy as well as its cadre of friends and supports from academia.

47 Stöhs (2018b).
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