

Hosted by Ifri

Conférence navale de Paris 2026



02 & 03 February 2026

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TO
review
OR

Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the Paris Naval Conference 2026, the inaugural event of the celebrations marking 400 years of the Navy!



Every year, this international conference is firmly anchored in the agenda and landscape of the naval and maritime ecosystem. For all of us, it is a remarkable opportunity for exchange. It is also an opportunity to nurture and compare our thoughts, those of practicing sailors and researchers, as well as those of industrials and political decision-makers. Above all, it is a necessary step back to better understand our strategic context and its implications for the Navy, our Defense, and more broadly its consequences and opportunities for the maritime world.

We have entered a new era, one of assertive powers. Threats are diversifying, evolving, converging, and intensifying. The international order is being challenged, sometimes rendering the organizations and systems that regulated the post-Cold War era—as best they could—inaudible. The law is being circumvented by certain actors for political or economic gain, to the benefit of local and private interests. Alliances and partnerships are being questioned and sometimes shaken to their foundations. Competitors are rearming and acting behind the scenes on all levers of power, when they are not openly attacking their neighbors, as Russia did in Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

As a result, the ocean is no longer the sanctuary it once was. At sea, our freedom of action is being challenged, and the operational environment is becoming more difficult. Our sailors are already operating in more demanding conditions. “In a world of carnivores, we cannot remain the last European herbivores, [...], France must remain a maritime power”¹. France is therefore maintaining, adapting, and renewing its instruments of power. First and foremost is deterrence, the cornerstone of national defense. There is also the carrier strike group, which provides strategic mobility to deter the adversary, control air and sea space, and project air power from every sea in the world.

This year, we will have the opportunity to further deepen our reflection by extending the discussions over two days. This new format will allow us to hear from a wide range of experts and cover all the selected topics. In addition, this year, the National Maritime Museum honors us by hosting us for the second day of the conference in its majestic new setting.

From the open sea to the coastline, the Navy operates in all fields and environments, from protecting critical infrastructure to projecting forces to the shore, not to mention combating trafficking. For sailors and all our partners in the maritime ecosystem, both domestic and foreign, this requires everyday reflection, organization, logistics, training, and practice to be ready!

For 400 years, the Navy has protected France, the French people, and their interests on all the seas of the world. This message resonates in two ways: in our immediate efforts to adapt and be agile in the face of new threats, and in our enduring determination, required to carry out major projects together. I hope that this 2026 naval conference will be a great success, and I look forward to discussing these issues with you there.

¹ French president Emmanuel Macron, Maritime Economy Conference, La Rochelle, 4 November 2025

**Amiral Nicolas Vaujour,
Chief of the French Navy**

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 2

Strategic opening

[French Institute of International Relations]

13h45 – 14h15 **Arrival** and registration.

14h15 – 14h30 **Opening** Welcome speech by Dr. Thomas Gomart,
Director of Ifri, and Vice-Admiral Alban Lapointe,
Deputy Chief of the French Navy.

14h30 – 16h00 **PANEL 1**

**The Revival of Naval Confrontation:
Decisive Factors for Victory at Sea.**

16h30 – 18h00 **PANEL 2**

**Industrial Logic and Issues for European
Countries in Responding to the Challenges
of Naval Rearmament.**

18h00 – 19h30 **Cocktail** for participants.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 3

Plenary session

[National Naval Museum in Paris]

10h15 – 10h40 **Arrival** and registration.

10h40 – 10h45 **Opening:** Welcome speech by Dr. Thomas Gomart,
Director of Ifri

10h45 – 12h10 **PANEL 1**

Chiefs of Navies

**Build and Maintain Air-Sea Superiority in a
Contested Operational Environment.**

12h15 – 12h45 **Press Conference**

12h15 – 13h45 **Standing lunch**

13h45 – 14h00 **Keynote** from Air Force General Fabien Mandon,
French Chief of the Defence Staff.

14h00 – 15h30 **PANEL 2**

**Protect Critical Infrastructure at Sea, from
Space to the Seabed, from the Coastline
to the High Seas.**

15h30 – 16h00 **Coffee break**

16h00 – 17h30 **PANEL 3**

**Support and Sustain Distant Naval Operations,
in the Face of Prolonged, High-Intensity Conflicts.**

17h30 – 18h00 **Conclusion** by Guillaume Ollagnier, Director General
for International Relations and Strategy at the French
Ministry of Armed Forces.

18h00

Closing speech by Dr. Thomas Gomart, Director of
Ifri, and Admiral Nicolas Vaujour, Chief of the French
Navy.

[National Naval Museum in Paris] **Invited guests only**

20h20 – 20h35 **AWARDING OF CASTEX'S PRIZES 2026**

20h35 – 22h30 **Cocktail buffet**

Welcoming Remarks



Dr. Thomas Gomart

has been the Director of the French Institute of International Relations (Ifri) since 2015. He is a member of the Institute of Advanced Studies in National Defence's (IHEDN) scientific committee and on the editorial board of the French journals *Politique étrangère*, *Revue des deux mondes*, and *Études*. Thomas Gomart was a member of the French Ministry of Armed Forces' strategic review committee for its Strategic Review of Defence and National Security 2017. He has published extensively on Russia, digital issues, think tanks, and geopolitical risk. Thomas Gomart's most recent book is *Qui contrôle qui ? Les nouveaux rapports de force mondiaux* (Tallandier, January 2026), and he has also authored *L'accélération de l'histoire – Les nœuds géostratégiques d'un monde hors de contrôle* (Tallandier, January 2024), *Les ambitions inavouées : Ce que préparent les grandes puissances* (Tallandier, 2023), *L'Affolement du monde* (Tallandier, 2019) and *Guerres invisibles* (Tallandier, 2021). He received his EMBA from the Hautes Études Commerciales de Paris and his PhD from the Pantheon-Sorbonne University.

H OPENING SPEECH

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 2



Vice-Admiral Alban Lapointe

has been appointed *Major général de la Marine* (Deputy chief of the French Navy – Director of the Naval Staff) in September 2025. He joined the Naval Academy in 1990 and served mainly as an officer in the submarine forces from 1995 to 2017, both on nuclear attack submarines and nuclear ballistic missile submarines. He attended the War College in Paris in 2009 – 2010 and the NATO Defense College in Rome in 2013 – 2014.

In addition to his operational assignments, he served in Paris at the General Inspection of the Armed Forces, and at the General

Direktorat for International Relations and Strategy as head of the NATO office. In 2017, he was appointed as the Defense advisor to the General Secretary for Defense and National Security, in charge of the preparation of the Defense and National Security Councils. In 2022, he was sent as territorial advisor to the French commander in chief for the Mediterranean Operational Area. During his last tour (2022-2024), he served as commanding officer of the joint headquarters coordinating the support services for the 55 French defense bases (mainland, overseas and abroad).

01. **Guillaume Furgolle** is a researcher at the Security Studies Center (CES) at Ifri and a member of the Defense Research Unit (LRD). An active-duty officer in the French Navy, his professional career has provided him with the opportunity to take on responsibilities in a wide variety of environments and fields, both within the Navy and in joint services, at various levels of responsibility. He has served on six different combat ships, in both operational and administrative headquarters, and in a military cabinet. He has commanded at sea twice, including a polar ship. A graduate of the Naval Academy, he also has a War College certificate from 2015. He has participated in numerous naval operations, both national and coalition, as well as various operations in the domain of state action at sea, across a wide range of maritime theaters. His operational experience enables him to contribute to studies related to strategic defense thinking, maritime security issues, and the employment of naval air forces.

02. **Captain Bryan McCavour** has served as DACOS Information Warfare and Deputy Head of the Royal Navy's Information Warfare specialisation since November 2024, leading the delivery of assured Command & Control, Battlespace Awareness and Integrated Fires capabilities. Commissioned in 2003 as a Warfare Officer, his early sea service included deployments in HMS OCEAN and HMS NORTHUMBERLAND, where he was Navigating Officer during ASW, anti-piracy, and humanitarian operations. Specialising in Naval Intelligence from 2011, McCavour led the Levant team at PJHQ J2 through the Egyptian uprising and Syrian civil war. He subsequently served as Principal Warfare Officer (Communications) and then Operations Officer in HMS BULWARK, before moving to Defence Intelligence Counter Intelligence. Following graduation from the Advanced Command and Staff Course, he joined COMUKSTRKFOR as ACOS UNDERSTAND/N2, supporting NATO's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. From 2023, he contributed to capability strategy and force development in MOD FinMilCap. Promoted to Captain in 2024, he now leads on the delivery of Information Warfare capability and transformation for the Royal Navy.

03. **Captain Jérôme Henry** is currently head of the Training Division of the Naval Action Force. A 1999 graduate of the Naval Academy, specializing in electromagnetic detection, he has spent his career in the surface forces. He has served in several positions on La Fayette-class light frigates, on FREMM air defense frigates, and on the aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle. He commanded the frigate Vendémiaire and the FREMM-DA Alsace. His extensive operational experience includes missions beyond the Arctic Circle and in the South China Sea, Operation Harmattan in Libya in 2010, Operation SAGITTAIRE to evacuate nationals from Sudan in 2023, protecting maritime traffic in the Red Sea against the Houthi threat, and numerous aircraft carrier group deployments. Ashore, he served as Combat System Program Officer, then Combat-Engagement Coherence Officer. In the latter role, he led the PA-Ng, FMAN-FMC, and laser weapons programs for the Navy. A graduate of the Advanced Command and Staff Course and the War College, he holds a Master's degree in Engineering from the Naval Academy and a Master's degree in Defense Studies from King's College London.

04. **Captain Florian El-Ahdab** has commanded the FREMM Languedoc since July 2025. A 2001 graduate of the École Polytechnique, he became a Navy officer after completing his studies, specializing in "underwater warfare submariner." After an initial posting on the patrol vessel La Boudeuse, he joined the submarine forces in 2007 and served on the SNA Saphir, Perle, and Casabianca. He then attended the "School of Combat Systems and Naval Weapons," specializing in "Above-Water Warfare" (ASUW/AAW). Within the surface forces, he served in various positions on the anti-submarine frigate Jean de Vienne and then on the air defense destroyer Chevalier Paul. He commanded the minesweeper Eridan and the light stealth frigate Courbet. He is a graduate of the War College. Ashore, he held various positions within the Ministry of Defense's Human Resources Department (DRH-MD) as a special advisor to the Director, within the Rapid Response Naval Forces Headquarters in Toulon, and as Director of the Toulon Transformation and Reinforcement Group (GTR/T). From 2023 to 2025, he headed the Naval Combat Center.

05. **Captain Alexandre Tachon** is currently in charge of major armament programs within the French submarine forces. A graduate of the Naval Academy in 1997, he has spent most of his career in the submarine forces. He has completed 14 deployments on nuclear attack submarines and seven patrols on ballistic missile submarines. He commanded SSN Casabianca and Rubis and SSBN Le Triomphant. He also served as head of the Submarine Forces and Submarine Deterrent Operations Center, in charge of doctrine, planning and command & control for all French submarines. He is a graduate of the Ecole de Guerre and is currently an auditor at the Institut des Hautes Etudes de la Défense Nationale (IHEDN). He holds a degree in signal processing engineering and a master's degree in contemporary history.

PANEL 1

The Revival of Naval Confrontation: Decisive Factors for Victory at Sea.

CHAIR :

Guillaume Furgolle
Research Fellow at the Security Studies Center, Ifri



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01. **Héloïse Fayet** is a Research Fellow at Ifri's Security Studies Center and manager of its Deterrence & Proliferation research program. Her work focuses on Nuclear Weapons States' doctrines, strategic risks reduction, and articulation between conventional and nuclear forces. She also writes about the geopolitics of the Middle East, the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, and new methods for strategic foresight. She is a member of La Pérouse network of naval researchers, and a regular speaker for conferences and training courses in France and abroad. Before joining Ifri, she worked for several years at the French ministry of armed forces as an analyst on the Middle East. She is a graduate of Sciences Po Paris.

02. **Defense Engineer General Marie David** has been Deputy Director of the Naval Combat Management Unit within the French Defense Procurement Agency (DGA) since December 2024. A graduate of the École Nationale des Ponts et Chaussées, she joined the Corps of Defense Engineers and the DGA in 2005. From 2005 to 2011, she held technical positions in the naval field: fire safety, nuclear safety, and weapons and ammunition integration on surface vessels. From 2011 to 2015, she devoted herself to preparing the Charles-de-Gaulle's major technical shutdown No. 2, a program for which she served as architect. After a stint in finance, she joined the office of the General Delegate for Armament in 2017 as a technical advisor. In 2019, she took up the position of deputy director and then, in 2020, director of the SCORPION program, a major program to renew and transform the Army's medium combat capabilities.

03. **Jean-René Gourion** was appointed Deputy CEO of MBDA France in June 2021, while retaining his role as Director of Sales & Business Development France at MBDA, which he has held since 2018. He is responsible for preparing and managing MBDA France's action plans to ensure the sustainability of its missions and prepare for the company's future. He also ensures consistency between investment plans and the needs of the "Missile Sector," as well as appropriate support for the French Defense Industrial and Technological Base. As Director of Sales & Business Development France at MBDA, he leads all commercial developments and business/contract acquisition activities, managing the interface with national and industrial customers. Since beginning his career as an engineer in the Programs Department in 1989, Jean-René Gourion has held various positions as Program Manager (notably as Director of the ASTER missile program) and in MBDA's Finance Department. He is a graduate of SUPELEC (1989) and IHEDN Defense Policy 69th Session (2016-2017).

04. **Vincent Martinot-Lagarde** has been a member of the Executive Committee and Director of Surface Ships at Naval Group since September 2024, with responsibility for surface ship programs (FDI, PA-NG, Gowind, etc.) and the Lorient shipyard. He joined Naval Group (formerly DCNS) in 1994 as naval architect for the Horizon frigates. In 1996, he took charge of the Sawari II frigate program for Saudi Arabia. After a period as defense procurement attaché at the French Embassy in Washington from 2003 to 2006, he rejoined Naval Group and took over as head of the engineering teams in Cherbourg, then as head of the FREMM programs, and finally as head of the Lorient site. In 2014, he took charge of the Barracuda program and worked on the launch of the Suffren, the first in the series. In 2020, he became the new Director of Services, responsible for the maintenance and modernization of Navy vessels and the development of services for foreign Navy customers.

05. **Thierry Weulersse** has been appointed Vice President of Thales' Re-Arm Europe division in Sept. 2025. A graduate of École Polytechnique and École Nationale Supérieure des Mines de Paris, he worked for Alcatel Space Industries before joining the Thales Group in 2003. During his career there, he has held various management positions, notably in financial results management, site management, project management, and engineering in several sectors (radar, ballistic missile defense, electronic warfare, surveillance and reconnaissance, maritime patrol aircraft, and air command and control). From 2018 to 2022, he served as CEO of Thales Raytheon Systems, a joint venture focused on air defense solutions. More recently, from 2022 to 2025, he was CEO of Thales for the China/Mongolia region, covering the company's entire civil portfolio.

06. **Olivier Burin des Roziers** has been Navigation Programs Director and director of the Inertial Navigation Business Line at Safran Electronics & Defense since March 2023. A former French Navy officer and captain, his military career has been marked by key positions in the submarine forces, notably as Director of Operations for Nuclear Attack Submarines (SNA) and Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations with the Strategic Oceanic Force. He was commander of the nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) Le Vigilant from 2018 to 2020. Before leaving the armed forces, he held the position of head of the Oceanic Deterrence Office within the Nuclear Forces Division of the General Defense Staff. He attended the Ecole de Guerre in 2012 and the IHEDN in 2022.

PANEL 2

Industrial Logic and Issues for European Countries in Responding to the Challenges of Naval Rearmament.

CHAIR :

Héloïse Fayet

Research Fellow at the Security Studies Center, Ifri



ADDRESS FROM THE FRENCH CHIEF OF THE DEFENSE STAFF

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 3



Air Force General Fabien Mandon

was appointed Chief of the Defense Staff in September 2025. He joined the Air Force Academy in 1990, graduating with a fighter pilot's license. He initially served on Mirage F1CT, then on Mirage 2000D in the 2/3 "Champagne" squadron, which he commanded. He also commanded the 702 nuclear air base in Avord. He holds a war certificate from the Spanish Armed Forces Higher School and, in 2014, attended courses at the College of Higher Military Studies and the Institute of Higher National Defense Studies. He participated in air operations in the Central African Republic, Chad, and Afghanistan, and in defining the air strategy for NATO's Operation Unified Protector campaign

in Libya. He has completed a total of 144 combat missions.

His staff positions include advisor for aerospace within the Strategic Affairs Delegation, the "Plans" office of the Air Force Staff, and the North America-Europe-Russia office of the Directorate General for International Relations and Strategy of the Ministry of the Armed Forces. He was also head of the "Capability Coherence" division of the Armed Forces Staff. From 2020 onwards, he successively held the positions of Chief of Staff to the Minister of the Armed Forces and then Chief of Staff to the President of the Republic.

01. **Elie Tenenbaum** is the director of Ifri's Security Studies Center. After years of focusing on irregular warfare, counterinsurgency and counter-terrorism, his research now leads him to cover more general strategic issues, in particular European security and defense policy. He holds PhD (2015) in History and graduated from Sciences Po (2010), he has been a visiting fellow at Columbia University (2013-2014) and spent a year at the War Studies Department, at King's College London (2006); he has taught international security at Sciences Po and international contemporary history at the Université de Lorraine. He is the author of numerous articles and books on history and strategy, including *The Twenty Year War: Jihadism & Counter-Terrorism in the 21st Century*, with Marc Hecker (Robert Laffont, Prix du Livre Géopolitique 2021).

02. **Admiral Nicolas Vaujour** was appointed Chief of Staff of the French Navy in September 2023. During his career, he took command of the air defense frigate Chevalier Paul in July 2012. In early 2013, he was deployed to the Indian Ocean and integrated with the American Carrier Strike Group. Following this, in July 2015, he joined the Defense Staff as the officer responsible for operational coherence and capability development in combat operations. In August 2017, he was appointed Deputy Commander of the French Maritime Rapid Reaction Force (DCOM FRMFOR). Promoted to Rear Admiral in April 2018, he assumed the responsibilities of Deputy Chief of Staff for Naval Air Operations at the Naval Staff. He was appointed Admiral in charge of International Relations for the French navy in 2020 and Chief of Staff for Operations of the Armed Forces in 2021, overseeing operations conducted by French forces, both at home and abroad.

03. **Admiral Daryl Caudle** was sworn in as Chief of Naval Operations in August 2025. A licensed engineer, he holds a Master of Science in Physics and one in Engineering Management, and a Doctor of Management in Organizational Leadership (I.T.). At sea, he served aboard several submarines, both SSN and SSBN. He commanded three SSNs, USS Jefferson City, Topeka and Helena. Ashore, he held several positions within the submarine forces of both the Atlantic and Pacific fleets. He worked on the Joint Staff (J-5) in Washington, D.C., first as assistant Deputy Director for information and cyberspace policy and later as Vice Director for Strategy, Plans, and Policy. His flag officer assignments include numerous US Command duties at operational and strategic level, the latest being U.S. Fleet Forces Commander. He was also Commander, Allied Submarine Command for NATO. He has a connection with Europe, having been Deputy Commander, U.S. 6th Fleet, and Director of Operations, US NAVFUR-NAVAF.

04. **General Sir Gwyn Jenkins** was appointed First Sea Lord in May 2025. He joined the Royal Marines in 1990 and spent his time early career in the Commando Logistics Regiment and on operations in Northern Ireland with 42 Commando RM. Graduated from the Advanced Command and Staff Course in 2004, he went on to serve in PJHQ, before a Commanding Officer appointment in 2009. Then, after one year in Afghanistan, he went back to the UK in 2012 as the Military Assistant to the Prime Minister. After completing the Higher Command and Staff Course, he was made Brigadier and appointed in the Cabinet Office as Deputy National Security Advisor for Conflict, Stability and Defence. From 2017, he commanded of 3 Commando Brigade for two years. He then served first in the Royal Navy as the Assistant Chief of Naval Staff and subsequently commanded a tri-service organization. After that, he was appointed the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff, then Strategic Advisor to the Secretary of State for Defence.

05. **Admiral Giuseppe Berutti-Bergotto** has been appointed Deputy, then Chief of the Italian Navy (Nov. 2025). After the Naval Academy, specializing in Fire Control Systems, he spent his early career on frigates and destroyers. He commanded supply ship Ticino and frigate Scirocco. Ashore, he served at the U.S. Naval Academy and commanded midshipmen at the Italian Naval Academy. He also worked at the Navy New Constructions and Outfitting Center, directing the final outfitting of ITS Andrea Doria which he then commanded, and served as Head of Financial Department in the Navy Staff. As a flag officer, he commanded the 2nd Naval Division Command and NATO COMITMARFOR, and the Rome Local Maritime Command. He went on as Head of the General Affairs Department at the Navy General Staff, then Director of the Navy Personnel Directorate. He also had two duties as Force Commander of EU operation Sophia. Lately, he was Chairman of the Steering Committee of the National Underwater Dimension Pole.

06. **Vice Admiral Harold Liberegs** has been appointed Chief of the Royal Netherlands Navy / Admiral Benelux in Sept. 2025. He joined the Navy in 1987 and spent his early career in the submarine forces, commanding Walrus and Zeeleeuw. From 2004 to 2011, he held several positions on the Defence Staff, both in Operational requirements and Planning, attending the Advanced Command & Staff Course in 2008. He was then executive Officer on board HNLMS Tromp then commanding officer of HNLMS De Ruyter, conducting anti-drug operations in the Caribbean and counter-piracy ones near Somalia. After serving as a senior advisor to the Policy Directorate on budget and operational readiness, he commanded HNLMS Rotterdam in 2015. He then worked at the Defense Staff as head of the maritime plans department, then was appointed Director Materiel, Real Estate and Sustainability at the Directorate-General of Policy. Promoted to Rear-Admiral in Nov. 2022, he was appointed Deputy Commander Royal Netherlands Navy.

PANEL 1

Build and Maintain Air-Sea Superiority in a Contested Operational Environment.

CHAIR :

Dr. Elie Tenenbaum

Director of the Security Studies Center, Ifri



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PANEL 2

Protect Critical Infrastructure at Sea, from Space to the Seabed, from the Coastline to the High Seas.

01. **Nicolas Mazzucchi** is the Head of Naval Strategy and Wargaming at the Center for Strategic Studies of the French Navy (CESM). He is in charge of naval, energy and cyber issues. He is also supervising wargaming development and implementation for the French Navy. Dr. Mazzucchi holds a PhD in Economic Geography from Université Paris-1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. Before joining the CESM in 2022, he was Research Fellow at the Foundation for Strategic Research in Paris. Earlier in his career, he held several positions at the French MoD, as a researcher and as an operations specialist at the Joint Staff. Nicolas Mazzucchi also attended the 25th session of the French War College and nowadays is a lecturer for the French military superior education (War College, CHEM). He is also advisor in strategy and foresight for the Deputy Chief of the French Navy and scientific advisor for Futuribles International. His latest book, *La confrontation en mer, l'avenir de la stratégie navale*, was published in fall 2024.

02. **Marc Delorme** joined Thales in 2012 after 26 years in the French Navy, including 20 years of shipboard service, mainly on submarines. He was commander of a training patrol boat in 1993. He commanded a nuclear attack submarine from 2002 to 2004, then a nuclear ballistic missile submarine from 2010 to 2012. He has logged nearly 25,000 hours of submarine diving. From 2005 to 2008, he served on the Navy General Staff as Head of Forecasting and Strategy for the submarine and nuclear deterrence domain. In 2012, he decided to leave the navy as a captain and continue his career in the world of submarines at THALES, where he took on responsibilities in Business Development, then in the submarine sonar product line. He is now Project Director for Autonomous Underwater Warfare and Seabed Surveillance. Marc Delorme is a graduate of the Naval Academy (1986), the Underwater Warfare Specialty School (1994), the Military School of Atomic Energy Applications (2001), the War College (2005), and the HEC Executive Master of Business Administration (2007).

03. **Vice Admiral (ret.) Didier Maleterre** joined the EXAIL Group in October 2025 as Vice President and Defense Advisor. He entered the Naval Academy in 1986 and graduated from the Military School of Atomic Energy. He spent his career in the submarine forces, serving on conventional submarines, nuclear attack submarines, and on ballistic missile submarines. He commanded the SSN *Saphir* and the SSBN *Le Triomphant*. He was Director of the Operations Center of the Strategic Oceanic Submarine Forces. He is a graduate of the Advanced Command & Staff Course and has taken courses at the Center for Advanced Military Studies and the Institute for Advanced National Defense Studies. In the second half of his career, he held a wide variety of positions: Director of the Fight Against the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction and Head of Export Control at the Ministry of Defense, Defense Advisor to the Secretary General of Defense and National Security, Coordinating Authority for International Relations at the Navy Staff, Deputy Chief of Staff for Performance at the Armed Forces Staff, Government Advisor for Defense, and Director of the Ministerial Task Force 'Ukraine' under the authority of the Minister of the Armed Forces. From 2018 to 2020, he also commanded French forces deployed in the United Arab Emirates and the Indian Ocean, and later served as Deputy Commander of Allied Maritime Command (MARCOM) from 2023 to 2025.

04. **Captain Henk Warnar** joined the Dutch Navy in 1984. He served on several submarines and frigates and had postings at the Ministry of Defence in The Hague and NATO Maritime Command in Northwood. His operational experience includes submarine patrols, counter drugs and piracy operations and civil military affairs in Afghanistan. Warnar graduated at the Naval War College, Newport in 2010 and holds a master's degree in public administration. Since June 2019 he is associate professor in Naval Strategy and Operations at the Netherlands Defence Academy and director of the Dutch Seapower Course. Henk is a PhD-candidate at King's College London, researching Dutch naval thought in period 1850-1940, under supervision of prof. Andrew Lambert.

05. **Annabelle Livet** works as Research Fellow at the Foundation pour la Recherche Stratégique and a PhD candidate at the Geography Institute of the University of Paris 1 – Panthéon-Sorbonne, under the supervision of Professor Yann Richard. Her researches focus on energy security issues, including the security of energy supply, the protection of critical infrastructures, and the industrial aspects of the energy sector, with a particular emphasis on their implications for Europe. She also covers topics related to operational energy for armed forces, civilian-military cooperation, societal resilience, and multi-level governance between European states, the European Union, and NATO. She has a specific focus on energy networks (electricity, oil, and gas), nuclear energy, hydrogen, and offshore wind power.

CHAIR :

Nicolas Mazzucchi

Head of Naval Strategy and Wargaming at the Center for Strategic Studies of the French Navy (CESM)



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PANEL 3

Support and Sustain Distant Naval Operations, in the Face of Prolonged, High-Intensity Conflicts.

01. **Héloïse Fayet** is a Research Fellow at Ifri's Security Studies Center and manager of its Deterrence & Proliferation research program. Her work focuses on Nuclear Weapons States' doctrines, strategic risks reduction, and articulation between conventional and nuclear forces. She also writes about the geopolitics of the Middle East, the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, and new methods for strategic foresight. She is a member of La Pérouse network of naval researchers, and a regular speaker for conferences and training courses in France and abroad. Before joining Ifri, she worked for several years at the French ministry of armed forces as an analyst on the Middle East. She is a graduate of Sciences Po Paris.

02. **Vice Admiral (ret.) Marc Aussedat** served for 37 years in the armed forces and at the French Defence Procurement Agency (DGA). Amongst a rich panel of appointments at sea he held command at sea on three occasions, notably during operations in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. As Commander of the French Maritime Rapid Reaction Force (FRSTRIKFOR) from 2019 to 2021, he led the carrier strike group during major missions (CLEMENCEAU, FOCH, NRF 21). At the central staff level, he worked in the field of military programming and future capability planning within the Plans division of the French Armed Forces Staff, contributing to the development of the last two French Military Programming Laws. From August 2023 to December 2025, he served as Deputy for Forces to the Délégué Général pour l'Armement.

03. **Rear Admiral Ricardo Gómez Delgado** has been appointed Deputy Chief of Staff for Support at Allied Maritime Command (MARCOM) in August 2025. He joined the Armada as Sub-Lieutenant in 1996, then specialized in AAW weapons a few years later. He served on several ships, including the minehunter *Sella* and the frigates *Navarra* and *Almirante Juan de Borbón*. He commanded patrol boats *Ízaro* and *Vigía*, as well as the frigate *Álvaro de Bazán* and the LHD *Juan Carlos I*. Ashore, he had various postings, in the Operations/AIO section (Action Information Organisation) of the CEVACO (Spanish Fleet Combat Qualification and Training Centre), as Assistant Chief of Staff N3 for Naval Action Group 2, as Military Assistant to the Spanish Chief of Defence (JEMAD), and in the Plans & Policy Division of the Navy Staff. He led the Plans and Policy Division of the Spanish Chief of Navy People staff for one year before joining the Allied Maritime Command.

04 **Dr. Francesco Zampieri** is Professor of Strategic Studies at the Italian Naval Staff College in Venice and Senior Researcher at the Centre for Military Maritime Studies. He is also Adjunct Lecturer in Maritime Geopolitics at Sapienza University of Rome. He holds a PhD in European History from the University of Verona and specializes in geostrategic dynamics, the evolution of warfare—particularly naval warfare—and the role of sea power in global affairs. His research focuses on maritime geopolitics, naval strategy, and the strategic relevance of seas in contemporary international politics. Dr. Zampieri is the author of numerous books and articles and actively contributes to strategic debate within both academic and defense communities. His most recent publications include *The Competition Continuum in Maritime Geopolitics of the 21st Century* (2024), *Global Mediterraneans: Policies and Strategies for the "Narrow Seas" of the 21st Century* (2025), and *From Military Geography to Maritime Geostrategy* (2025).

05. **Eric Balufin** has been Director of Services at Naval Group since September 2024 and is a member of the Group's Executive Committee. An engineer by training, he is a graduate of the Ecole Polytechnique and the Ecole Nationale Supérieure de Techniques Avancées. He also holds an Executive Master's degree in Business Management. He joined Naval Group in 1999, where he has held various positions: Project Director for the maintenance of Nuclear Attack Submarines, then in charge of the department bringing together all the management, project management and shipyard teams of the Services Department in Toulon. He then served as Director of Equipment and Services Procurement for programs (notably Barracuda and FREMM) at Naval Group's headquarters in Paris. Since 2010, Eric Balufin has been at the heart of the Group's construction activities, where he served as Director of Scorpène International Programs for Brazilian (Scorpène Brazil) and Indian (P75) customers until the delivery of the first submarine to the Indian Navy. From 2017 to September 2024, Eric Balufin was director of Naval Group's Brest site, responsible for maintaining the operational readiness of the French Navy's nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines and surface vessels based in the Atlantic.

CHAIR :

Héloïse Fayet

Research Fellow at the Security Studies Center, Ifri



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Guillaume Ollagnier

has been the Director General for International Relations and Strategy (DGRIS) at the French Ministry of Armed Forces since November 2025. After graduating from Sciences Po, he joined the French diplomatic corps in 2000 and has held strategic positions at NATO in Brussels, in the Prime Minister's office, and at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where he notably managed dossiers on Russia and the CIS. From 2017 to 2021, he served as Minister-Counselor at the French Embassy in Berlin, before returning to France to lead the Europe, North America, and Multilateral Affairs Department at DGRIS. In 2023, he was appointed Director for Strategic, Security, and Disarmament Affairs at the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

food for thought

NAVAL
REARMAMENT:
OPERATING IN
CONTESTED
WATERS



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French and Indian combined naval operations during exercise VARUNA 25.

FREEDOM OF ACTION AT SEA long unchallenged

It must be noted that between the Falklands War in the early 1980s and Russia's war against Ukraine, examples of naval confrontations have been rare or limited in scope, especially at sea. This observation illustrates quite clearly the fact that, since the end of the Cold War, the navies of NATO countries have enjoyed a strategic environment in which they have long appeared to be hegemonic.

Indeed, the United States remained the sole naval superpower following the fall of the USSR in 1991 and led NATO to preeminence in the naval field. The Russian Federation's navy, heir to the Soviet navy, has suffered severe erosion, leaving it unable

to compete with the West, except marginally in the submarine sector. It has therefore remained essentially confined to a defensive posture against NATO or protecting Russia and its direct interests.

Thus, the power of Western navies, often combined with strategic convergence or alignment even outside the NATO framework, did not encounter any real opposition during this period from any country capable or willing to do so. This fact can also be explained by the framework of engagement that has often justified their actions, whether through UNSC resolutions or multinational coalitions bringing together a large number of countries.

This has resulted in three decades of almost total freedom of action at sea for Western naval operations, both for those of lesser intensity, such as the evacuation of nationals or the fight against trafficking at sea, and for more demanding operations: power projection, in the context of the war on terrorism in Afghanistan (*Operation Enduring Freedom*) or against Gaddafi's forces in Libya (*Operation Unified Protector*), or even more specifically against Bashar Al-Assad's regime in Syria in 2018 (*Operation Hamilton*), or the transport of forces in the context of the war against Iraq in 2003 (*Operation Iraqi Freedom*).



Amphibious task force training for high-intensity operations



Rafale Marine taking off from carrier vessel Charles de Gaulle during mission CLEMENCEAU 25

PROJECTING POWER on a global scale

Western navies were thus built on the operational premise of relatively unchallenged freedom on the seas, as well as to respond to a Western political desire to intervene in distant conflicts with a logic of layered defense and stabilization. To this end, they developed and maintained their ability to operate far away and for long periods of time.

Key elements of this capability, naval power projection assets (aircraft carriers, or to a lesser extent carrier vessels and cruise missiles) and amphibious force projection assets, have emerged as crucial to contemporary naval power.

However, beyond the assets themselves, this capability also requires the ability to sustain operations in a distant theater, which rests on several pillars:

- regular activity for naval forces, including training and deployments, to maintain their skills and resilience;
- a solid and extensive network of forward support points, built around an access strategy underpinned militarily and diplomatically by a partnership approach;
- knowledge of potential maritime theaters of operation, maintained through long and regular deployments in situ, as well as knowledge and intelligence sharing;



Refueling at sea between fleet support ship Jacques Chevallier and FDI frigate Amiral Ronarc'h.

- the ability to maintain air and sea assets anywhere in the world, which requires appropriate logistical and industrial organizations.

This operational capability is built up over time and must be maintained. It therefore shapes the structure of navies that want to have it, both in terms of the size of their fleets and the nature of their operations.

However, decades of budgetary pressure on Western navies, resulting from the “peace dividends,” have forced them to optimize their size as much as possible, with a focus on strict sufficiency of assets for a permissive environment. This has also led to a gradual decline in their activity rates, thereby eroding their ability to sustain this activity far from their bases.

NAVAL REARMAMENT

and the desire to be impactful at sea

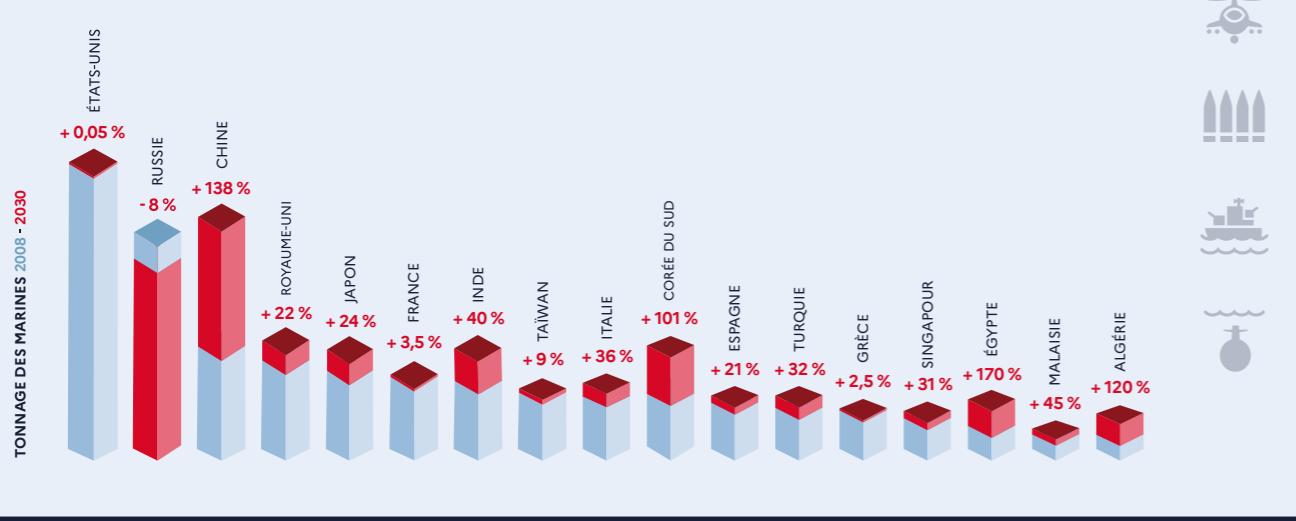
The international context heralds a new strategic reality. The sluggishness of the United Nations Security Council and the current strategic realignments reflect a profound trend towards challenging the established international order, particularly by certain states that aspire to be powers. This is reflected in a gradual questioning of most of the main instruments on which it is based. In naval terms, this particularly affects the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, whose principles are increasingly being undermined: unilateral territorialization in the South China Sea, granting of mining rights in international waters without consulting the International Seabed Authority, and increasingly vocal challenges to the international status of certain maritime passages (the Taiwan Strait, the Northern Sea Route). Beyond this, and more broadly, it is the fundamental principle of freedom of the seas that appears to be challenged or exploited for the purposes of power.

Recognizing this strategic reality, most states with ambitions or a desire to exert influence on the international stage, assert their claims, or simply defend their interests, have decided to rearm, particularly in terms of naval power, after decades of peace dividends marked by the gradual erosion of their fleets of warships, at least in the Euro-Atlantic area.

This primarily concerns states with new naval ambitions, such as China, India, and Turkey, but also those that perceive a growing threat in their strategic environment, such as Japan, South Korea, and Australia.

This rearmament is obviously reflected in an increase in the size of naval fleets, but also in the accelerated development of critical or disruptive capabilities (cyber, AI, quantum technologies, etc.), with the ultimate goal of achieving operational superiority over potential adversaries in the context of a multi-domain engagement.

Réarmement naval 2008 - 2030



© L.BERNARD/MN

A French navy ship assisting a merchant ship on fire



© M.AUDIN/MN

S100 drone from LHD Tonnerre monitoring a suspect vessel during an interception operation



© MARINE NATIONALE

Vessel being escorted under operation APSIDES

Alongside the expansion of fleets and military support capabilities, the predictable resurgence of conflict at sea is prompting many defensive states, such as China, Taiwan, and Iran, to develop access denial strategies based on multi-layered defensive systems (known as A2/AD, for anti-access/area denial), whose reach is constantly extending out to sea.

This naval rearmament process goes hand in hand with a strategy of consolidating bilateral or multilateral strategic partnerships in an effort to secure the regional environment as much as possible. This strategy seems likely to increase the global and regional trend towards polarization, and therefore confrontation, particularly at sea. The destructive actions of the Houthis against maritime traffic in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, targeting in particular Israeli interests in support of the Iranian regime or the Palestinian cause, are a good illustration of this phenomenon.

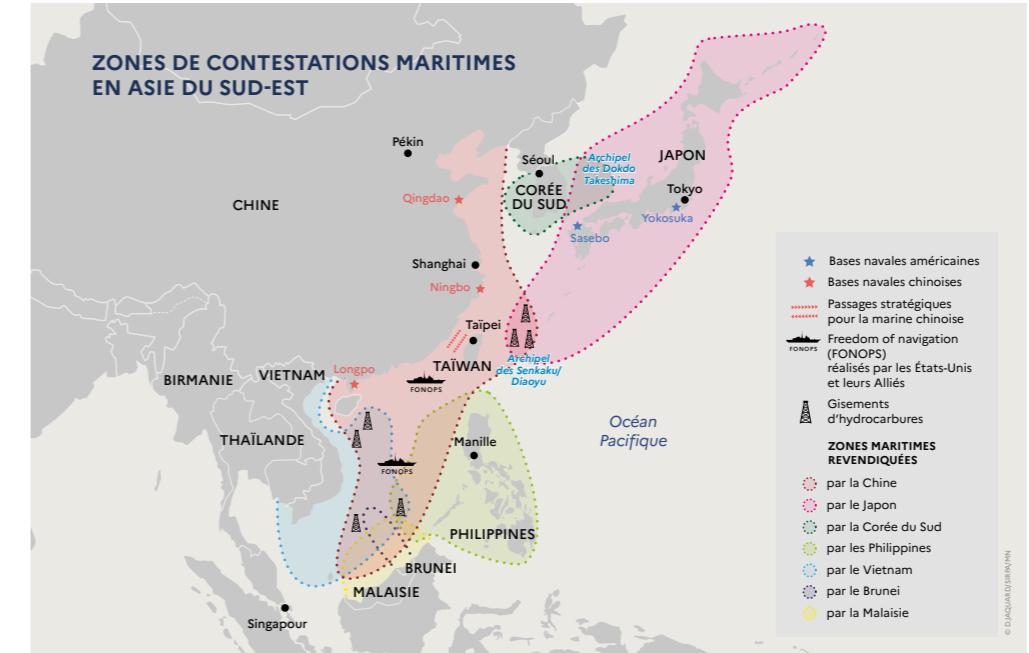
Finally, the planned advent of autonomous drones in all three areas of the maritime space (surface, airspace, and underwater) raises the specter of a massive and overwhelming threat to naval operations, a threat which, as is often the case in naval strategy, clearly favors the sword over the shield.

NEW CHALLENGES for naval operations



© M.BAILLY/MN

Commissioning of nuclear-powered attack submarine Tourville, Suffren-class, in Toulon naval base



Fa Faced with this increasingly challenging operational environment, and with the ocean no longer the sanctuary we once imagined, the navies of the Euro-Atlantic area must prepare to operate in more demanding conditions by re-examining their success factors in light of this new context.

This approach is all the more necessary for navies such as the French Navy, which, beyond its military role, is called upon to act at any time across the entire security-defense continuum at sea, addressing a wide range of issues from environmental protection to nuclear deterrence.



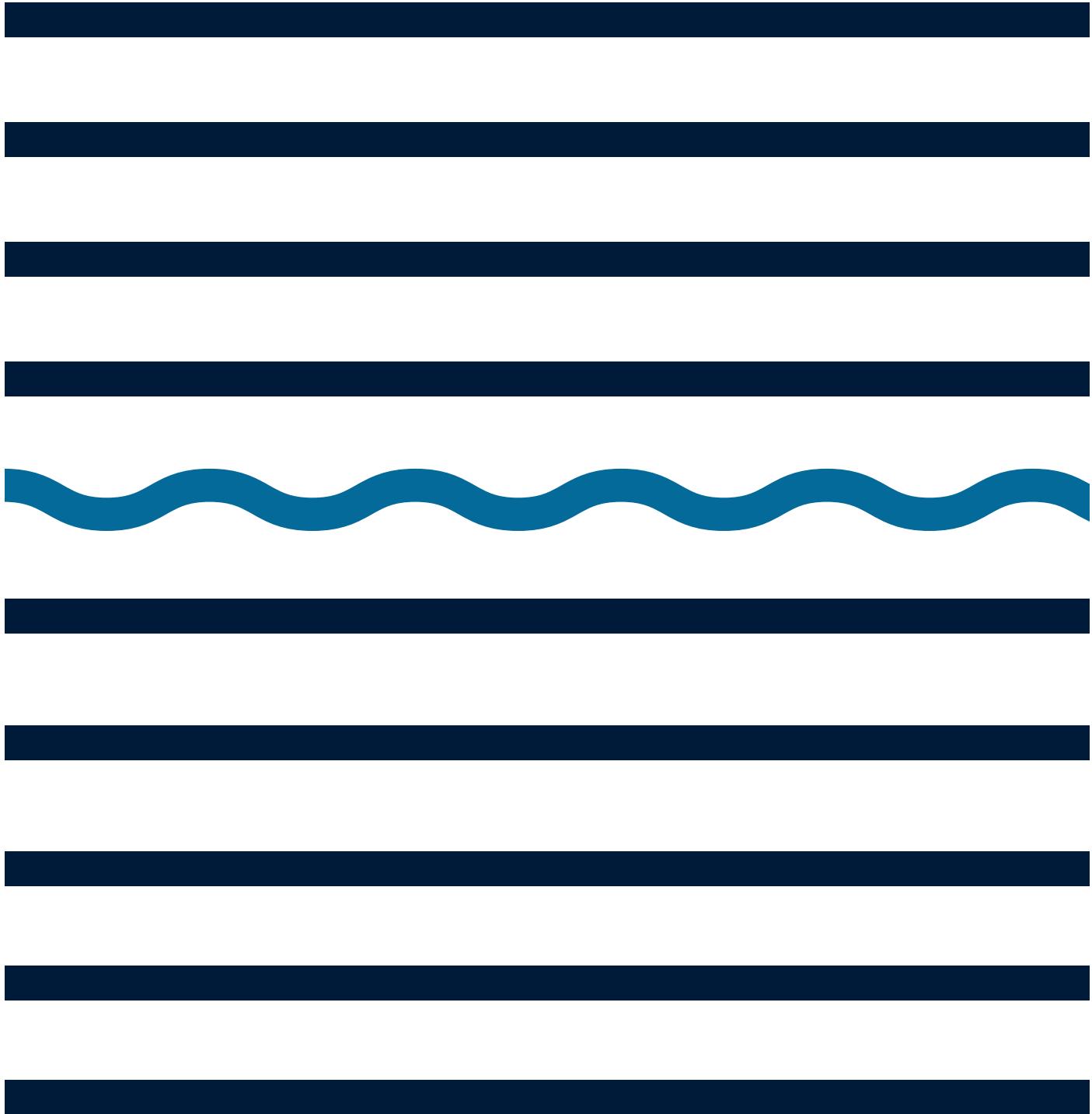
Experimentation of DT46 UAV during exercise DRAGOON FURY 2025, amphibious training in a contested environment



Impact tests on refitted light frigate Courbet – 2025.

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