



# Operationalizing Allied Maritime Strategy - Rule the Ways

Kiel International Seapower Symposium 2021  
Conference Report

## Imprint

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Special thanks to Dr. Sebastian Bruns, Head of Center for Maritime Strategy and Security at ISPK 2016-2021.

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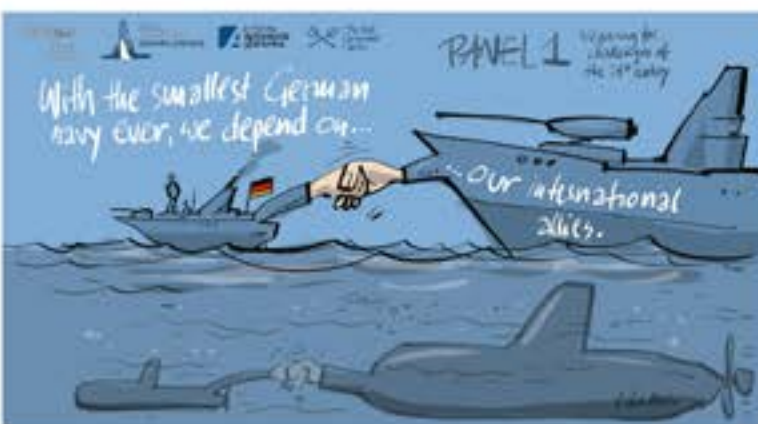


# KISS21

Kiel, September 7th, 2021



## Allied Maritime Strategy "To Rule the Ways"





# Operationalizing Allied Maritime Strategy - Rule the Ways

Kiel International Seapower Symposium 2021



Source: U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Kaysee Lohmann/Released



Dear colleague,

KISS21 was a special conference in more than one way - this report reflects that! Initially scheduled for the summer of 2020, the global pandemic forced us to postpone the Symposium to June 2021, and then again to September of that year. KISS21 was successfully conducted in a hybrid fashion, bringing some of the speakers and a good part of the participants together online.

That continuing pandemic has affected the production of this report. It is no small achievement that KISS21 did happen and that you are now able to read about the outcomes of the event. I am grateful and proud of the hard work invested in it.

KISS21 marked the conclusion of a triad, namely the conferences 2018, 2019 and 2021, conducted under the overarching topic "Allied Maritime Strategy in the 21st Century". Each iteration focused on one aspect of strategic theory. First, we discussed the *ends* (KISS18), then followed by the *means* (KISS19) and finally the *ways*. This trifecta brought together some of the leading naval and maritime experts from across the world in the city of Kiel, Europe's

home of seapower thinking. It also laid the foundation for the fourth volume of the ISPK Seapower Series, "From the North Atlantic to the South China Sea - Allied Maritime Strategy in the 21st Century" edited by Julian Pawlak (researcher at ISPK 2017-2021) and yours truly. The book is available for download at the publisher's website.

Organizing and conducting KISS as Europe's dedicated maritime security conference as a small independent think tank would be impossible without a diligent and highly committed team. First and foremost I want to thank my research assistant Mr. Henrik Schilling for his time and accuracy! Dr. Alix Valenti provided a report script "ready for the press". Finally, my sincere gratitude goes to the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation for supporting KISS21 with a substantial grant.

Enjoy the read!

Johannes Peters, M.A.  
Head of Center for Maritime Strategy & Security at ISPK  
Chairman of the Kiel Seapower Series





08:00–09:00

Registration & Welcome Coffee

09:00–09:15

Opening Remarks

- Johannes Peters, *Institute for Security Policy at Kiel University (ISPK)*
- Thomas Birringer, *Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation (KAS)*

09:15–11:00

Panel 1: Preparing for the challenges of the 21st century

- Rear Admiral (DEU N) Christian Bock, *Commander DEU Flotilla 1 and Director COE CSW, Kiel*
- Vice Admiral (FRN) Didier Piaton, *Deputy Commander NATO Allied Maritime Command, Northwood, UK*
- Rear Admiral (SWE N) Ewa Skoog Haslum, *Chief of Royal Swedish Navy*
- Chair: Dr. Alix Valenti

11:00–11:30

Coffee Break, Snacks & Networking



11:30–13:15

Panel 2: Maintaining the Maritime Initiative

- Dr. Deborah Sanders, *Kings College, London*
- CDR USN (ret.) Bryan McGrath, *Ferrybridge Group, Easton, MD*
- Commodore (GBR N) Thomas Guy, *Deputy Director Center of Excellence for COMbined, Koint Operations from the Sea, Norfolk, VA*
- Chair: Dr. Jeremy Stöhs, *Institute for Security Policy at Kiel University (ISPK)*

13:15–14:15

Lunch (Buffet) & Networking

14:15–16:00

Panel 3: Real-World Operations: Plans vs. Reality

- Tania Latici, *European Parliamentary Research Service, Brussels*
- Dr. John Sherwood, *Naval History and Heritage Command, Washington D.C.*
- Captain (DEU N) Sascha Rackwitz, *DEU Navy, Berlin*
- Chair: Dr. Anselm van der Peet, Senior Historian, *Nederlands Instituut voor Militaire Historie (NIMH), Ministerie van Defensie, Den Haag*

16:00–16:30

Coffee Break & Leg-Stretch

16:30–17:00

Wrap-up Conversation: Ends-Means-Ways: Wrap-up of KISS18, 19 and 21; Book Presentation

- Julian Pawlak, *German Institute for Defence and Strategic Studies (GIDS), Hamburg*
- Johannes Peters, *Institute for Security Policy at Kiel University (ISPK)*
- Philipp Dienstbier, *Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation (KAS)*
- Chair: Dr. Alix Valenti

17:00–18:15

Gin & Tonic Reception





# Executive Summary



Source: U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Aleksandr Freutel

The symposium's theme - and that of this report - was inspired by the classic English hymn "Rule Britannia". But, as our Royal Navy friends will readily agree, "to rule the waves" is no longer sufficient as an end in itself.

The old questions beg answers: To what end is sea control desired, how is it exercised and maintained, and how is it relinquished? This is hardly a purely academic exercise, for maritime strategy is both: capstone documents and operational patterns. Preparation of action of strategic intent, it emerges, is as important as maintaining the initiative anywhere from maritime security operations to high-end naval warfare. Emerging domains and disruptive technology require adaptivity, creative thinking and bold action. Finally, the real world - at sea and in the allied nations' parliaments - has the ability to blunt too ambitious strategic concepts. The three-legged stool of strategy (ways, ends, means) might be felt insufficient, but it remains the best point of departure for navalists. This report concludes the series of three symposia which discussed allied maritime strategy - while navigating crises & wars, a global pandemic, and a Kiel Seapower Series leadership transition. Our & your work on maritime and naval strategy has only just begun.

# Panel 1: Preparing for the Challenges of the 21st century



How can navies escape the high-low conundrum, balance between the home-game and the away-game, and in what way do NATO's standing naval forces need to adapt for the future?

The international threat landscape is changing fast. The attacks on US soil on 11 September 2001 marked a shift from intra-state wars to an international war on terrorism that characterised the first decades of the 21st century. Yet as allied efforts in Afghanistan progressively waned, culminating in their withdrawal from the country in the summer of 2021, a new threat had already started to emerge: the resurgence of strategic competition.

Over the past few years, NATO allied nations and their partners have been watching as both Russia and China have started claiming their position of power on the international scene. While the former is continuously increasing the strength, breadth and regularity of its training exercises, the latter has been taking ever-bolder stances in the Indo-Pacific region, often defying international laws. Both have taken considerable steps to build-up their forces and/or modernise their capabilities.

One thing is clear: The twenty-first century is a maritime one.

These actions span across all domains - including cyber and space - but a large number have taken place at sea, sending significant ripples throughout the world. As a number of world powers turn their attention on the strategic implications of areas such as the Indo-Pacific, the Baltic, the Arctic and the Black Sea regions, one thing is clear: the 21st century is a maritime one.

Yet, as noted by the panellists, while strategic competition has brought specific focus on so-called 'grey zone activities' - that is, activities that straddle the threshold for retaliation but never quite





cross it – other areas of maritime security have not lost their importance. Piracy, illegal activities and terrorism, to name a few, have all but disappeared and are contributing to stretching NATO allied and partner navies' capabilities.

From a national level perspective, panellists highlighted the importance of cooperation, interoperability and, where possible, integration to address high-level threats. International cooperation operations, for instance, have been set-up across the globe to address issues such as piracy and illegal smuggling – of people, mostly, but also drugs and weapons. Officers from one country operating onboard another country's platform is also a common form of interoperability, enabling mutual skills' development and understanding. All panellists agreed: facing alone the strategic im-

plications of the return to great power competition is not an option; NATO and its partners must present a united front.

However, cooperation and interoperability alone cannot address issues raised during the panel concerning the limited availability of navies' capabilities. The nature of threat to societies in the 21st century also includes the impact of climate change on people's livelihoods, economies, and habitat across the world. As digitalisation continues to penetrate citizens' daily lives at different levels, the protection of critical

infrastructure such as undersea cables and submerged data centres is also essential. Finally, terrorism may not have made the headlines as much over the past couple of years, but certain countries remain on high threat alert and, generally speaking, vigilance remains crucial.

As part of the solution to this dilemma, panellists appeared to converge toward the notion of 'Total Defence'. 'Total' not as in 'ultimate' but as in 'whole of society'. There was an agreement during the panel that navies cannot be on all fronts at all times; society must play its part. Citizens, but also other related stakeholders such as Coast Guards, police, etc, all have a stake in countries' security and they can all contribute within their remit. 'Whole of society' also implies raising awareness about security issues amongst citizens; they are the ones with the power to vote and to demand of their countries' elites that the means and ways to address security issues must be deployed. Political buy-in is indispensable.



Certainly, at NATO level, important discussions and debates are ongoing to ensure everyone is on the same boat and lead the way. The Alliance's strategic objectives, unchanged since 1949, mandate that security of the Euro-Atlantic area and collective defence of allied nations be preserved. Today, this involves implementing a robust deterrence posture at and from the sea, but also ensuring a very capable military capability and combat readiness. Key strategic

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papers – such as the NATO military strategy, a new Deterrence and Defence concept, and a new strategic concept – are important milestones in the achievement of these aims; so is the implementation of actions that support the building of a shared maritime awareness, interoperable capabilities, combat readiness and multi domain operations.

That panellists highlighted the steps taken by their navies in all the areas discussed is a strong sign that, at least at operational level, the will is there.



# Panel 2: Maintaining the Maritime Initiative



Naval forces, large and small, need to gain a competitive advantage vis-à-vis potential adversaries as well as safeguard and uphold the good order at sea.

The second panel of the day sought to unpack some of the high-level panel discussions around key threats, challenges, and potential ways to address these.

Momentarily leaving aside debates over Russia and its ambitions as a world power, initial discussions focused more specifically on Chinese actions – and potential ambitions – in Europe. These are exemplified in Chinese investments in the Black Sea, particularly port infrastructures in Black Sea coastal countries such as Georgia, Ukraine and Bulgaria.

The importance of the Black Sea for NATO and China is not to be underestimated. The Covid 19 pandemic may have temporarily slowed down the originally predicted increase in maritime freight transport, but the uptick in maritime traffic in the region is undeniable. As regional and international states begin to recover, the Black Sea will become an important international maritime freight hub.

From a Chinese standpoint, the strategic economic value of the Black Sea has made it an important hub for its Belt & Road Initiative (BRI). As maritime freight, in general, increases, it will contribute to Chinese economic growth through regional port revenues; the potential development of the Istanbul Canal, which would enable even larger traffic flows, would only confirm the value of Chinese regional investments.

Beyond economic interests, Chinese actions in the region may also hint at possible wider, geopolitically strategic scenarios. In





Source: U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Israel Chincio

fact, China's presence in the region could serve in the longer term as an obstacle to NATO's access and footprint in the region. China could implement this alone or in partnership with Russia, if their interests were to align. Additionally, should tensions between China – and potentially Russia – and NATO continue to rise, these could potentially play out in the Black Sea as regional countries may find themselves torn between economic – ports – and political – NATO – ties.

The possibility that none of these scenarios play out exists, of course, as does the possibility that Chinese presence in the region may, contrary to general expectations, balance out Russian

ambitions, effectively increasing stability. However, today's uncertainties cannot result in a waiting game, as panellists pointed out, and NATO must prepare for worst-case scenarios.

This is particularly felt in the US, the farthest ally yet to date one of the strongest NATO navies vis-à-vis rising Chinese and Russian capabilities. To support US efforts in Europe but also in the Indo-Pacific – not a NATO immediate area of concern strictly speaking but a geopolitical theatre of rising importance – European allies should focus on two areas of improvement.

First: technological innovation. Over the past few years, civilian technologies have increasingly seeped into the military world, providing the basis for a number of technological advances. Not

least amongst those is the significant development of unmanned platforms that, whether over, on or under the sea, have become ubiquitous to maritime tactics. In fact, these systems have become critical assets to gather ever-increasing quantities of data that, once processed, can provide timely key information to aid decision-making.

This leads to the second area on which NATO and partner navies should focus: information. Maintaining continuous awareness of potential threats to the alliance and its partners is critical, and it relies not only on the ability to gather it, but also on its trustworthiness. As panellists noted, information as an enabler for decision-making can be easily manipulated to mislead decision-makers. It is therefore crucial that, as autonomy in data gathering

continues to increase, decision-makers take more time to draw out and adjust a narrative so as to maintain the strategic advantage.

Ultimately, technological advances will contribute to the battle of narratives that the world is progressively witnessing. Those with the right information, and therefore awareness, will have the power. In this

context, systems like unmanned platforms will greatly contribute to multi-domain awareness and action, and information sharing and data integration amongst allies will be crucial: humans will draw their strength from faster, more accurate decision-making.

Maintaining continuous awareness of potential threats to the alliance & its partners is critical.





# Panel 3: Real-World Operations



History is rich in examples in which even the best trained and equipped maritime forces found themselves faced with real-world operations that differed greatly from peace-time plans.

The importance of working together as an alliance and as partners featured prominently as a transversal topic in the first two panels. But NATO is a far-reaching, very diverse alliance. Within it, different groups of nations may have different challenges and interests. And perhaps even more importantly, within it lies the European Union (EU). As such, working together as allied force also means being capable of successfully integrating different interests and different levels of alliance.

Historically, the EU has been largely overlooked as a strong and reliable defence player. Similarly, it has not featured prominently as a maritime security actor. While this may have held true over many decades, developments at European level in recent years are challenging these assumptions.

In fact, panellists stressed that European interests in maritime security are numerous and wide ranging: economy, environment, migration, lines of communications, lifestyles, to name a few, have all come to depend, to varying levels, on maritime security. They also span across a significant maritime area that stretches, geographically, from the Mediterranean to the Baltic Sea, and geopolitically, all the way to the Gulfs of Aden and Guinea.

To address these multiple challenges the EU, much like NATO, has been working on redefining its strategic priorities. In 2018 it created the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), a defence and military cooperation framework through which 25 Member States cooperate on multinational defence projects. PESCO aims





to create a common strategic culture. In parallel, a strategic compass process is ongoing and seeks, over the course of two years, to better define the goals and objectives of EU security and defence policy. Maritime security features prominently in both processes.

Beyond policy, the EU has also taken concrete steps to implement multiple maritime operations in its strategic areas of interests which evolve as challenges emerge.

Beyond policy, the EU has also taken concrete steps to implement multiple maritime operations in its strategic areas of interests. Of course, as the title of this third panel suggested, not all operations always go according to plan. This is not to say that they fail, but rather that they evolve as challenges emerge and new players get involved.

One key example of this is the development and evolution of Operation Triton, which was born out of the commitment of one country to save migrants trying to reach its shores by sea: Operation Mare Nostrum, in Italy. The latter, which began in 2013, successfully saved over 140,000 lives within the span of a year, but quickly became too demanding for one country alone to sustain. Consequently, in 2014, FRONTEX took over the mandate under Operation Triton. Similarly to Mare Nostrum, Operation Triton successfully saved hundreds of thousands of lives, but crossings continued unabated; in fact, they increased throughout the first year.

Operation Triton is an excellent example of how a mission orig-

inally focused on Search and Rescue (SAR) at sea – which it did successfully – morphed progressively. As the inability to curb migration flows raised new questions concerning the root causes of these flows, the initial focus on SAR was supplemented with a mission to address human trafficking in international waters. Ultimately, European countries took turn to participate in the latter, alongside Libyan Coast Guards, while Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) sought to focus on the former. As a result, crossings decreased from 180,000 in 2017 to 23,000 in 2018. Operation Triton may also, inadvertently, be an excellent example of how lines between low-end and high-end missions may be rather blurred. SAR alone was a mere drop in the sea if addressed only through the crisis response lens. The wider picture of conflict in Libya, and resulting institutional weaknesses, is what ultimately led to expanding the mission's remit and address initial concerns more effectively.

Cooperation is not just a matter of learning to work together - a highly important tenet – but also integrating different strategic cultures, capabilities and skills to build a more comprehensive picture.

Cooperation at sea between Member States, allies and partners is crucial to ensure success, as is collective war-gaming and training in multiple domains. It is not just a matter of learning to work together - a highly important tenet – but also integrating different strategic cultures, capabilities and skills to build a more comprehensive picture. The picture may not be the one originally developed, but it will be the one bringing everyone closer to mission success.



Source: U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Benjamin A. Lewis



# Strategic Findings



Source: U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Brett McMinoway

This year's conference is part of a series of symposia providing an assessment of NATO's Allied Maritime Strategy as well as an impetus for future EU, NATO, and national maritime strategies.

KISS21 marked the end of a series of a three conferences on the strategic ends, means and ways to redefine NATO's Allied Maritime Strategy (AMS). It is interesting to see how, within the relatively short timeframe between KISS18 and KISS21, the international strategic context has undergone a number of important shifts: a less internationally divisive POTUS has moved into the White House, the EU has made significant strides in the development of its own defence structures and strategies, and technological advances have continued unabated – be it in the space, unmanned vehicles or information technology domains, to name a few.

It is also saddening to observe that, as this conclusion was being written, the world balance had changed once again with Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022...

The consequences of such violent act from Russia at Europe's doorstep, beyond the tragedy of loss of human life, have yet to be fully understood. They also give KISS 18,19 and 21 a whole new dimension: the fears expressed in 2018 have become a reality, and the need to redefine the AMS is no longer a strategic necessity in preparation of the future, but a geopolitical imperative to deal with the now.

One of the key issues emerging from the three conferences has been the role of the EU within the wider NATO framework, and how perceptions have evolved. In 2018 many of the exchanges focused on the decline of European naval forces. For participants,







these shortcomings had to be addressed for the EU to become a stronger defence partner on a continent that the US was no longer seeing as a strategic priority. Today, the EU defence project has made significant strides, and numerous European navies have important ongoing procurement programmes to modernise their fleets. In the context of the critical importance of the Black Sea in Russian – and Chinese – ambitions, and in light of recent events, these advances cannot be underestimated.

The importance of technological developments has also emerged as a significant game changer, especially over the past couple of years. As navies shift their focus once again to encompass not only security but also peer-to-peer confrontation, new technologies have the potential to alleviate some of the burden this shift is placing on crews. More critically, they can keep them out of harm's way in a wide variety of missions, such as mine warfare and Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR), to name a few.

Finally, the emergence of two new war-fighting domains – cyber and space – has underpinned many of the KISS discussions on the necessity to ensure better integration and jointness. As noted in the KISS19 conference report, “space and cyber support the Navy

The importance of technological developments has also emerged as a significant game changer.

in its endeavour to go beyond the water's edge, creating a framework for the different services of the armed forces to work jointly.” At KISS21, this was highlighted in the critical importance of space and cyber for information. Whether in the context of information sharing or information war, space and cyber hold significant potential to influence perceptions – be it on the battlefield or at home.

Ultimately, this series of conferences has highlighted the importance of increased integration at all levels – between navies, across armed forces, and between NATO and the EU. Where before this was seen as strategically important in a geopolitical world in constant flux, today, as Russia invades Ukraine and as the world awaits China's next move, such integration is critical for the Alliance's survival. And while Europe is making significant strides in the development of a stronger defence, recent events prove that US' Pivot to Asia strategy will have to evolve alongside its support to Europe – and not in its stead.





# About the Kiel Seapower Series

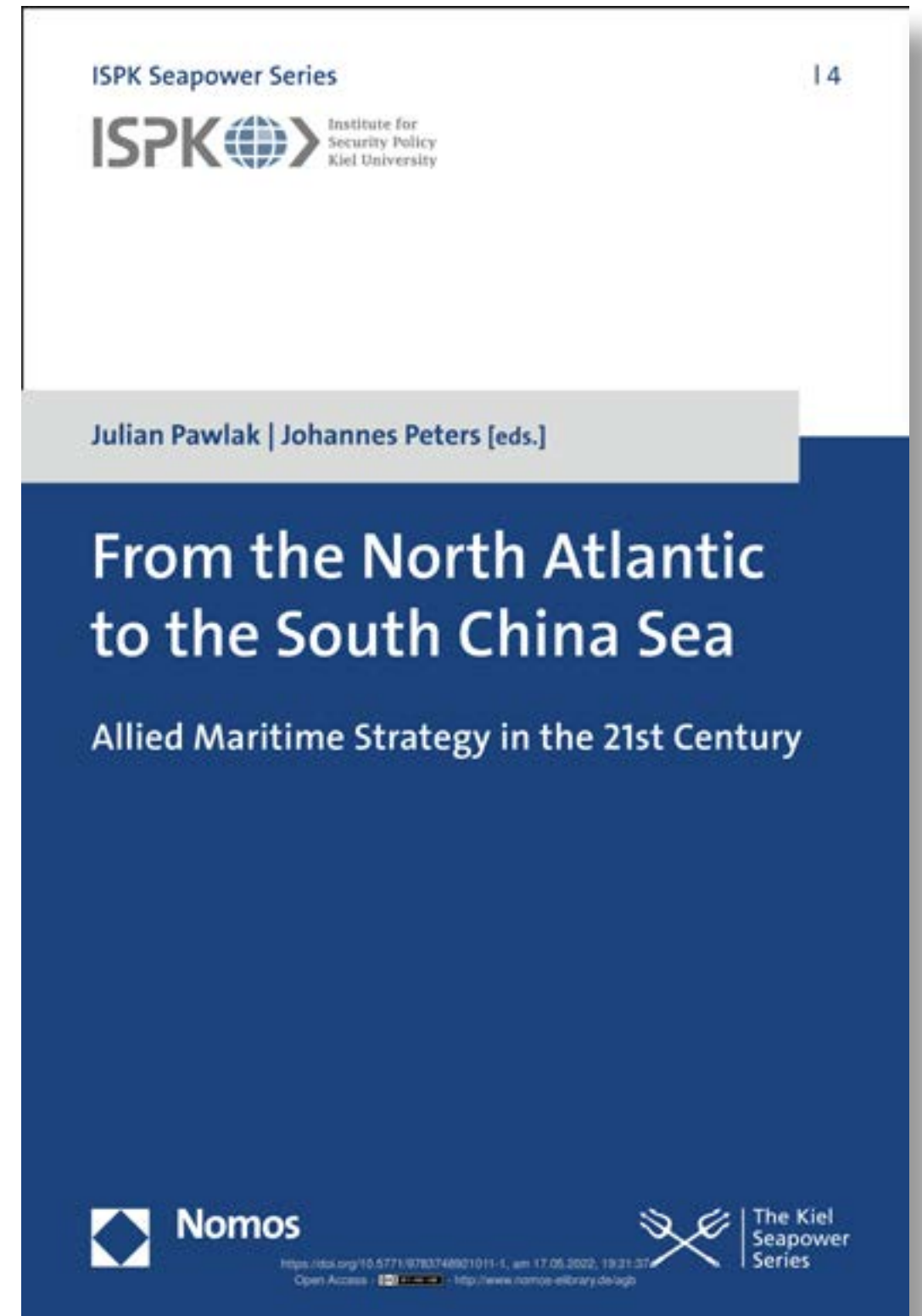


The Kiel International Seapower Symposium is part of the Kiel Seapower Series.

Building on a series of successful maritime security conferences since 2013, the ISPK has decided to establish a designated international forum to discuss maritime security challenges and the roles and missions of naval forces in the 21st century: The Kiel Seapower Series. All events under this series will offer a forum where experts can openly discuss pressing maritime security issues and thus raise awareness to the opportunities and challenges of seapower in a comprehensive fashion. Sensing that the maritime domain remains an opaque area for policy-makers, scientists, and naval officers alike, the series aims to foster dialogue among maritime professionals from diverse, but strategic backgrounds. Ultimately, the series also seeks to create momentum within the community of interest to reach out to a broader audience and make the case for the importance of seapower and the need for further research and discussion on these matters. The series' logo, a trident and a pen, demonstrates our ambitions. Each event marries academic excellence to carefully articulated naval thought anchored in intellectual excellence. It is driven by the conviction that shared knowledge is empowerment.

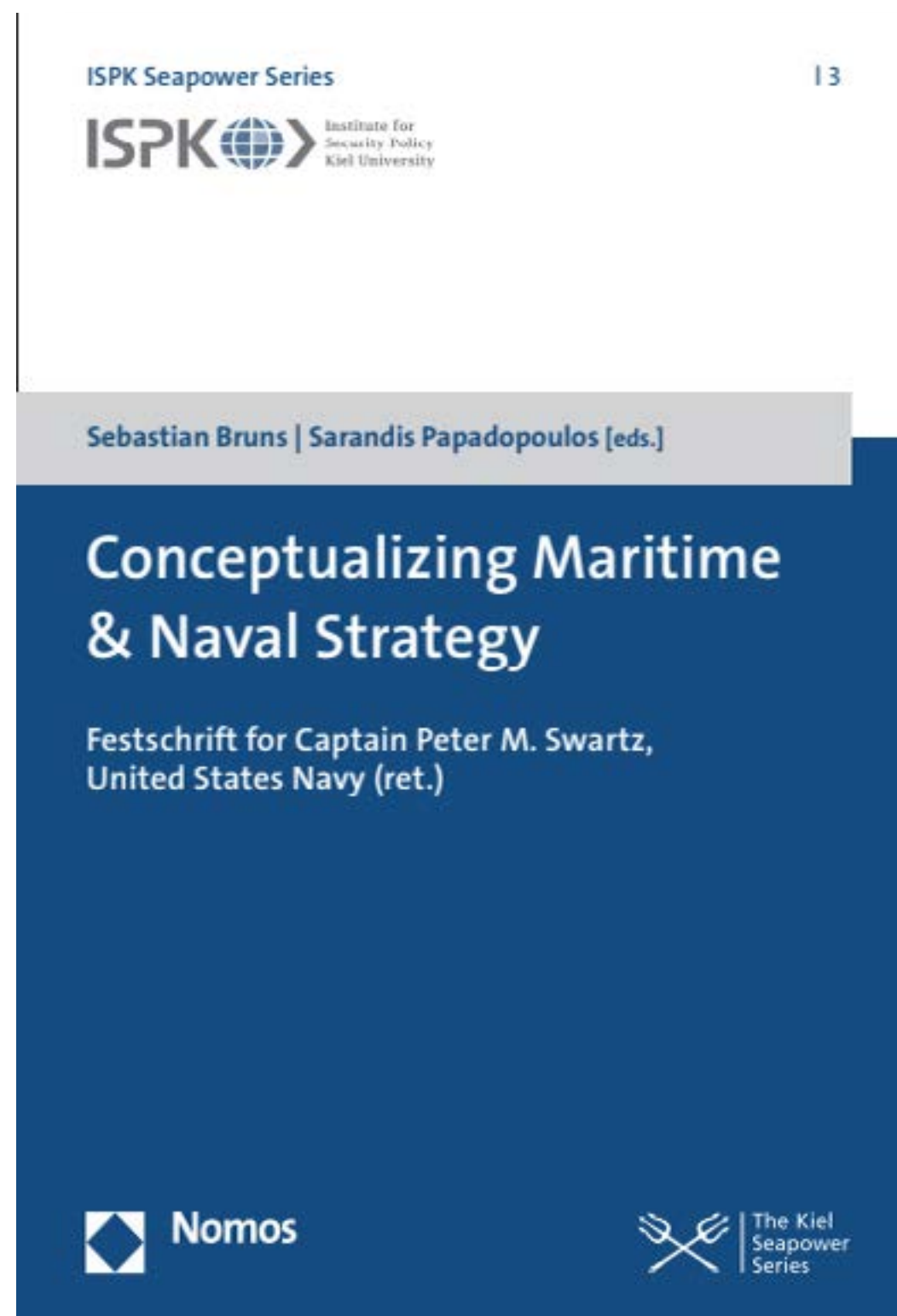


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