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The long and controversial ongoing process in the European common defense created several potential instruments to reach a common vision among the European countries. After twenty years, the European Amphibious Initiative (EAI) did not create a sufficient outcome. The Helsinki summit in 1999 was the trigger for better defense cooperation in the old continent. Thus, the European countries felt the need to create an initiative to collaborate in the amphibious contest.

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TITLE: The European Amphibious Initiative: a Strong Instrument in European Future Scenarios?

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Executive Summary

Title: European Amphibious Initiative: a Strong Instrument in the European Future Scenarios?

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Thesis: As a product of European common defense as well as the long and controversial process, the European Amphibious Initiative (EAI) could potentially work as a flexible tool to restore the crisis in the European geographic area, avoiding duplication with existing NATO amphibious capacity.

Discussion: The European comprehensive approach to resolve the crisis imposed an appropriate tool to satisfy the desired outcome. The fluid mutation of the threats, as well as the globalization interconnection accelerated in Europe the debate in the defense environment. The long and controversial ongoing process in the European common defense created several potential instruments to reach a common vision among the European countries. After twenty years, the European Amphibious Initiative (EAI) did not create a sufficient outcome. The Helsinki summit in 1999 was the trigger for better defense cooperation in the old continent. Thus, the European countries felt the need to create an initiative to collaborate in the amphibious contest. Despite the initial effort to cooperate, the lack of trust among the members, the rapid change of the geopolitical situation with the rise of global terrorism, and the financial constraints imposed a stagnation over the EAI. In early 2010, Netherlands began to revise EAI initial intent and opened to other countries to bring in the common amphibious capacities and to contribute properly the aim of the final goal. The capability of EAI members created a robust amphibious task force ready to deter a potential enemy and showed their allies an efficient instrument to resolve several different threats in the European area of interest.

Conclusion: The interoperability of the EAI will be the trigger to implement a credible instrument to resolve the crisis in the European contest. Moreover, the clarification of the EAI

objectives, avoiding duplication, sharing information, and a strong co-operation among the members of the initiative will increase the trust of the project in the international environment.

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Preface

In my almost twenty years of military career, I have held several assignments as an amphibious officer at the tactical level in national and international organizations. At the national level, I served as a commander of small units as well as a staff officer at the Italian Navy Amphibious Headquarters in Brindisi while at the international level my primary experience was in Afghanistan during the operation ‘International Security Assistance Force’ (ISAF). With my primary education in the Naval Academy and with the following experiences in many exercises, I saw how the different countries used the military instrument to resolve disputes or crises, especially in the littoral environment. Italy and most of the European countries had several features related to this environment, and they developed one suitable military force to be employed in such contests. But as Europe continued its enlargement, its commitment grew in too far and difficult scenarios. The comprehensive approach could be effective with a credible joint military effort. The expeditionary concept is easily tied with amphibious units, wherein the geopolitical location of Europe made a high level of probability to have such a tool ready in the entire conflict spectrum. This product is related to the will of a few European countries, with the European Amphibious Initiative, to establish a common amphibious identity to give a strong tool to the international organizations as well as to the single countries to achieve or restore security in the European area of interest.

For the development of this paper, I wish to thank all the people whose assistance was a milestone in the completion of the project. I am grateful to Doctor John W. Gordon. He has believed in my idea and encouraged me to elaborate properly on the project; without him, I would not have analyzed this topic correctly. I also benefitted from debating issues with my military faculty advisor, LtCol Anthony Zachariah. If I ever lost interest, he kept me motivated. Moreover, I cannot forget CPT VIZZINI, the Italian naval Attachè in Washington, D.C. who decided to follow my work and advised me during the research timeframe. A particular thanks goes to my wife Denise and both my sons Fabio and Edoardo, for their patience and their faith, because they always understood.

Introduction

The European comprehensive approach to resolve the internal conflicts as well as those among states imposed a specific method to satisfy the desired outcome. The fluid mutation of new actors, such as Russia and terrorist groups, as well as the globalization interconnection accelerated in Europe the debate in the defense environment. The long and controversial ongoing process in the European common defense created several potential instruments to reach a common vision among the European countries. As a product of this intent, as well as the long and controversial process, the European Amphibious Initiative (EAI) could potentially work as a flexible tool to restore the crisis in the European geographic area, avoiding duplication with existing NATO amphibious capacity. After the Helsinki summit in 1999, five European countries decided in Brussels to sign a Declaration of Intent (DoI). This document aimed to begin cooperation in the amphibious sector of the main European amphibious forces already set up. After the first meetings, the main idea was that the EAI has unreach ambition and it seemed an elite conclave of only a few countries. The outcome was that the first concrete European Amphibious Initiative (EAI) exercise took place in 2010 ten years after the signature of the DoI. The watershed to revitalize the initiative happened in 2012. Under the *pro tempore* Netherland chairman, the EAI members discussed the admission in the initiative to other nations with a credible amphibious capacity in order to create a better consensus of the initiative.

The geopolitical situation around Europe evolved rapidly in the last two decades. The repercussion of 9/11 left the European security sector uncovered, and both NATO collectively and its members in a coalition of willing has been involved in the Middle East. Moreover, the Russian threat, the consolidation of global terrorism, and the disengagement of the United States from the Mediterranean Sea raised the perception in the European countries to act. Thus, the

European Union established the foundation in the defense sector in order to build a common security strategy. In detail, the Maritime security strategy had a big role due to the intensification of multiple threats, such as Russia's navy capabilities and its anti-access area denial (A2/AD), piracy, and terrorism. The EAI is nested in this strategy, and to satisfy the European approach to find as much collaboration as possible in its area of interest, it is open also to other non-EU countries such as Turkey or Finland.

Each member of the EAI contributed to share assets and personnel to build a credible amphibious task group. The amphibious exercises conducted so far showed the ability to conduct a joint and combined amphibious operation in several scenarios. The single capacities of each member grow the whole capacity to operate in different environments (littoral, archipelago, and riverine). The future challenges will be the operation duration in terms of sustainment and command and control. Moreover, the size of the landing force to project on the battlefield, the military approach to resolve the crisis once the landing has occurred, and the full plug and play of the different systems will be the key to success.

Avoiding the duplication with NATO initiatives such as NALES, the potential employment of the EAI could be in the first part of the conflict's spectrum. The rise of population numbers in the littoral cities, climate change, and natural disaster hallmarked the European area. In addition to those, the European approach to resolve the crisis characterized by the use of soft power made the EAI a flexible and credible expeditionary tool to fix the emergencies or set the initial condition to develop a robust plan to seize the crises.

This paper analyzes the potential effectiveness of a tied relationship among the countries in the European continent. The several projects and initiatives sponsored by the European Union as well as each country's defense strategy could potentially energize the EAI to stabilize and seize

the main threats. A strong co-operation and successful interoperability will enable the amphibious initiative to become a multi-purpose military instrument to preserve, maintain, and concur with the global security.

[History of the European Amphibious Initiative.](#)

Origin of the Initiative

The main aim of the European Amphibious Initiative (EAI) is “to enhance European amphibious capability, primarily through establishing greater co-operation and progressively improving interoperability between existing forces.”¹ The Ministers of Defense of five European Union members signed the chart in 2000. Even if the agreement was among members of the European Union, the initiative is a multilateral pact out of the main international organizations. The purpose of the foundation document was to search for a European common mindset tied with NATO and EU but primarily correlated with the European sentiment to research its identity. The DoI came from the Helsinki summit of December 1999 where EU announced its European Security and Defense Initiative. The council adopted a headline goal defining the repertory of force capabilities needed for EU-led operations and launched the process of getting European states to pledge national contributions to it. The European council, chaired by all the heads of European states, decided to create an independent tool to respond, if NATO was not involved, to the crises. This decision reflected the ex-Yugoslavia emergency where the EU didn't have a flexible instrument to resolve that conflict. Thus, this crisis helped to open the discussion about a common defense and proper military forces ready to quickly deploy. Another important aspect of the Helsinki summit was the formal request for, without interfering with the EU decision, an appropriate arrangement to open the military crisis management to non-EU States as well as non-NATO members in order to contribute to establish freedom and peace in the Euro-Atlantic area of interest. Moreover, this summit together with the NATO Washington summit were the trigger to reinforce the synergy between EU and NATO. The sign of Berlin Plus agreement was the

outcome to reinforce the ability to conduct military operations led by EU using NATO facilities, assets, or procedures. As mentioned before, the difficult way itself of a common defense in Europe didn't establish the European forces because the aim was to avoid duplication with existing international organizations such as NATO. Despite this central point, that was express in a presence of NATO asset and facilities on the European continent, the European countries felt it was necessary to create an independent amphibious common mentality through a military initiative. Before EU starts thinking about building a joint amphibious force, the main concern was direct to which countries had a credible amphibious capacity in the old continent. Tradition, common value and belief, and similar tactical, techniques, and procedures (TTP) matched in the past two military-political decisions: the SIAF between Italy and Spain and the UK/NL LF between England and Netherlands. The amphibious framework offered by those joint forces helped the Ministers of Defense of those countries plus France to sign the multilateral agreement in 2000.

The first ten years of EAI

Since the signature of agreement in 2000 there has been the lack of common interest, and a poor bureaucracy structure behind this military initiative. The original five members had a different range of intervening: Italy and Spain were focused in the Mediterranean area, UK and ND were in the north, and Europe and France were in both the areas. Moreover, only two years before in Bologne, Italy and Spain created the Spanish Italian Amphibious Forces (SIAF), and the two Mediterranean nations were deeply involved in the multination exercise as well as the creation of standard procedures and the reorganization of the headquarter structure, which added on both sides the joint positions. All of these aspects made the Initiative goals very ambitious to reach. The EAI organization didn't have a permanent chairman but only a secretariat belonging

to England. Thus, every year, each member headed the initiative enhanced requests or defined topics. The DoI defined three main levels of commitment inside the initiative:

- Political-military: the Steering group led by nominated representatives of each member It was attended annually and the aim was to coordinate what each nation wanted to bring in the meeting about its requirements as well as the amphibious concept to develop together.
- Operational: the Force Commander Conference was a meeting among the CATFs of each member. The purpose was to discuss the decided agenda of the steering group and translate it in multilateral activities and exercises.
- Tactical: the Working Group is the most frequent meeting among the different representatives of each amphibious nation. Each semester the five nations gathered to discuss technical aspects in the amphibious environment as well as develop possible programs in the specialist contest of the amphibious operation.

Despite the DoI that established timing for the meeting talking before, the only one that was not mandatory was the FCC because it was up to each country to decide if it was necessary or not.

On the other hand, the tactical meeting changed the initial timing schedule due to poor arguments among the members. The great initial effort to search for a common amphibious mindset got decreased and produced a decade of stagnation. The first EAI exercise called Emerald Move happened in Senegal in 2010. It was a huge exercise that involved the members and other observer nations like Belgium. The great value of that complex exercise was the command and control, the long range of the landing force operation, and the interaction of the different units. The challenges for multination amphibious forces were several compared with a navy or army. The transfer of authority of command, as well as the language barrier made some frictions in the exercise. On the other hand, the advantage of each member of the EAI was in the NATO gave a

foundation to conduct the amphibious operation. In fact, NATO developed doctrine and English as a common language to increase the interoperability. It was also reported in the DoI that the doctrine for EAI was the alliance doctrine. The last important aspect that caused a slow involvement in that project during the first ten years was the financial crisis over all Europe. Indeed, the country prioritized the different military initiatives and gave a ranking that influenced the commitment in several agreements such as EAI.

The rebirth of EAI

The year of the revival for the amphibious initiative was 2012 when the Chairmanship was led by the Netherlands. At that time, after more than ten years, the EAI needed a step change; the original aim to establish a common European amphibious mindset to reinforce the European defense as well as to give a credible flexibility in the hand of NATO and the other international organizations did not get the expectation desired. The effort of only five nations was not enough to gain the international credibility to project a solid amphibious force. Thus, the Netherlands' idea was to open the initiative to other nations interested in the amphibious environment. The consensus to enlarge the military initiative was structured in a new DoI. Despite the will, it took a while to write a new document that covered this aspect. In 2015, a new declaration of intent was signed and unlike the previous one, there was a dedicated paragraph specific for the member that wants to join the initiative.² The creation of the associated member gave the possibility to other nations to join the initiative, participated in the different meeting but didn't follow the chairman rotation to lead the EAI as well as the decision to adopt TTPs or other important decisions. Moreover, the original five members could decide to elevate to the status of full member an associated member that requested officially the intention to become a full member. From the initial group narrow in scope of only five members, the organization grew in

the numbers of six full members and seven associative members.³ The revitalization of EAI was made also to encourage the members to find new exercise events, because only a specific exercise was not enough to build the capacity and the interoperability among the forces. The several proposed to add the EAI exercises inside a NATO exercise as well as the national one, found all members agree. Thus, the future Emerald Move (ERMO) will be inside the Brilliant Mariner NATO exercise.

As for the other military initiatives, the EAI grew with several inputs that came from both inside and outside sources. The addition of other members was not the only factor that influenced the military initiative through the years. The lack of a common amphibious capacity in the European continent was one of the factors that made friction in the evolution of the project. But also a large portion of the change came from the geopolitical contest where Europe and its neighbors lived in the last decades.

The geopolitical situation in the European environment

European continent after 1989.

At the beginning of the new Century, Europe was preparing to look at a new phase of enlargement toward the east. The end of the Cold War, as well as the following political events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, invigorated a European Union reform. The Maastricht Treaty in 1992 and the regeneration of the WEU were the main factors that drove the internal and external situation in Europe. The first package of Maastricht established the European Union as we know it today, recognized the European citizen with the consequence of no boundary among the European nations, and established the euro value as well as a European Central Bank. The effect in the foreign policies didn't produce a common response, especially in the Yugoslavia

crisis. The only European initiative was under the WEU. The Petersburg Declaration defined so-called Petersburg tasks, such as humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping operations responding to the future crisis in Eastern Europe. The WEU adopted those concepts and basically started the period of so-called peacekeeping operations in all the EU neighboring areas. Thus, the following year the WEU launched a naval operation in the Adriatic Sea to monitor the blockade decreed by the United Nations against Yugoslavia, under the aegis of the WEU.

On the other hand, once the Soviet threat was gone, NATO had to discuss its meaning and started to reorganize its strategy. The three foundation pillars vanished, especially Russia out and Germany down. With the dissolution of communism, the Alliance faced the decision to continue to maintain the relationship between the United States and Europe. The Russian rebirth after the Soviet Union seemed to collaborate with the Western hemisphere, thanks to globalization, the European needs of raw materials, and the growth of the internet that shared information and connected all the world. Thus, the European continent had almost two decades of peace and stability. The peer-to-peer competition was gone and the hegemony of the United States, first ally and trade partner, helped to facilitate that process. The defense budget shifted to other sectors like welfare, education, health care, and infrastructures. Thus, the huge war machine was employed in the peacekeeping operation overseas, leaving the previously reinforced borders unprotected. Some military initiatives arose in this period, especially in those countries that shared common values and interests. According to the explicit message of the Petersburg declaration, in the maritime domain, four states (Italy, France, Spain, and Portugal) stated their willingness to create a Multinational Maritime Force. This was the starting point of the work that would later lead to the signing of the European Maritime Forces (EUROMARFOR) Constitutive document in Lisbon on 15 May 1995. The timeframe where this

force was born was perfect to create the proper interoperability and cooperation to show how these tools could be employed. In fact, after a couple of important exercises, such as 1996 EOLO, where the flexibility of the EUROMARFOR (EMF) emphasized the solidity of the naval instrument, in 2002 the EMF participated in the first Real World Operation. The operation was involved in the Mediterranean Sea, and it was tied with the NATO Active Endeavor operations; both started right after the terrorist attack in 2001 on the United States.

Following this naval force and with the input of the Helsinki summit in 1999, the other five European nations decided to establish the EAI to create the foundation of a common European amphibious capacity. Geopolitical moment seemed quite stable and peaceful to build this capacity. However, 9/11 shook the geopolitical situation and the world order that the United States set up right after the dissolution of the Soviet bloc. The period of the far peacekeeping operations overseas and the peaceful stability was broken by a new threat of global terrorism and the rise of the new character of war: the asymmetric and irregular warfare.

The new disorder and the asymmetrical threat

The Twin Towers attack in 2001 broke the peaceful sensation in Europe, where most of the countries were focused on domestic issues instead of building a robust defense against a near threat. The European Union continued the long process of enlargement as well as its common defense. But primarily NATO played a big role in the geopolitical contest, and all the agencies as well as the new European policy turned in favor of the Alliance against global terrorism. Thus, the European military initiatives and forces already set were used alone or tied with NATO. On the other hand, the new one, like the EAI remained blocs because it was not so developed and the countries did not have the chance to exercise together to find the proper cooperation as well as the main aim of the amphibious initiative. The rise of failed states along with the European

neighbors (Libya, Somalia, and Yemen) that caused piracy, human traffic, and guns smuggling created in the maritime environment several problems to the sea trade, an essential element for most of the European nations. NATO and the European Union created a task force to contrast these threats, but once again there was a need to ready trained units, with a long road map behind. In addition to that, once the major commitment was gone or each European state found the balance to send overseas the units and equipment for the two main conflicts (Afghanistan and Iraq), the financial crisis hit Europe and all the countries as well as the European Union made the decision to cut again the defense budget. NATO tried to convince all the allies to stop reducing the defense budget because the European bastion was no longer safe, and the old continent showed a weak domestic policy faced to the multiple terrorist attacks that happened inside the EU border. At the beginning of the 2010s, another major concern shocked the European Union: the Arab Spring. All the south flank of the Mediterranean Sea began to revolt against the dictator regimes. The Libya crisis in 2011 showed again the different approach to resolve the crisis close to the European border. First Franco-England operation and then the NATO one reinforced the weaker EU effort to manage a dangerous situation. Europe was not only weak in the commitment to restore the order in Libya, but also in the second phase when the regime was overturned. The comprehensive approach still maintained a too-small military component and put all the effort in the diplomatic and economic instruments. Additionally, according to Biddle in his article about a new way of American war, the Washington tendency was to get involved in a small-scale conflict for a little amount of time with a minimal footprint.⁴

The European deterrence against Russia didn't work anymore, especially with the weak instrument used. So, if the East enlargement was working so far, when the trade started with Ukraine, Russia felt a threat and did not hesitate to invade Crimea. Once again, the slow

European reply and the new Russia way of war, hybrid warfare, (I need to use a source of the grey zone) disarmed the old continent and pointed out the tiny EU commitment to provide security in its borders.⁵ The Russian invasion in 2014 didn't have a quick repercussion in the European defense; however, the United States and again a fragmentary EU condemned that both the allies didn't want to be involved in a conflict and wanted to avoid an escalation. Additionally, the soft sanctions imposed by the EU, the unclear situation in Crimea and Donbass, and the annexing of the Crimea declared a Russian victory.⁶ In the military aspect, the repercussion of this aggression event made a drastic cut and stop in several bilateral defense industry agreements. In fact in the following year it was relevant the France decision to cancel the delivering of two warships to Russia.⁷

The second related external problem that affected the European defense was the Trump election. The election narrative used by Trump and the will to renegotiate many different foreign dossiers made several issues to the heads of European states. According to the European Political and Strategy Centre brief about the geopolitical outlook, the return of great power rivalry increased the paradigmatic feature of today's world.⁸ This element helped the EU and US to find a common enemy, but the question of a common defense in the European continent is still attached to the NATO presence as well as the US. A persistent point highlighted in the report cited above was the ambiguity in US foreign policy. The two main concerns for the European countries were the climate change and conflict resolution. The fight against ISIS and the commitment in a far theatre moved the security attention outside the European borders and left free space to Russia and non-state actors to achieve significant objects in the long strategy against the EU unity of effort.

Finally, the most relevant internal problem was England's decision to leave the EU. From

the European defense perspective, Britain didn't leave any agreements or initiative, but it was implicit that the future absence in the European Union institution could affect the future project, especially in the maritime environment, where the UK has a lead in most of the initiatives. This first breakdown in the Union helped the Russian strategy as well as China's. The Putin strategy is to disrupt the possible whole European response against his act, and China's economic strategy through the new Silk Road is focused to orient the European trade to the eastern side.

The capabilities of EAI

The main aim of the EAI project was to embrace the European countries that belong to a credible amphibious unit. It means to count only nations with both large-scale amphibious ships and a landing force. As mentioned in the RAND paper and in figure 1, the number of ships and units is enough to deter the European threats; Russia and new emerging threats in the European area don't have robust and consolidated amphibious forces able to conduct doctrinal amphibious operations.⁹ However, the Russian hybrid strategy posed several challenges to the European amphibious force, such as the A2/AD asset, information, and cyber operations. Additionally, for the land aspect, the Russia strategy to split the common NATO/UE response could potentially compromise the advance of the multinational initiative. So, the unity of effort is vital to deter Russian aggression. However, it is not enough to justify the ability to conduct an amphibious operation. As the revised text remarked in the DoI 2015, to achieve the status of a full member it is mandatory to possess the capabilities as well as the instrument to conduct a credible and independent amphibious operation.¹⁰

When the EAI formed in 2000, the original five members had already amphibious capabilities, and except for France, all the other components had also a bilateral agreement in the amphibious sector. The full members of the EAI are also all inside NATO. This factor helped as

a foundation to give a common understanding of the amphibious doctrine. In fact, the ATP-8 is the NATO common doctrine for conducting an amphibious operation. As the publication is also the foundation for the EAI, the European amphibious force has to be structured and gather proper assets to conduct all the five different types of amphibious operations. The original level of ambition said to land a landing force in almost every environment, conduct, and sustain from the sea for up to thirty days of operations.¹¹

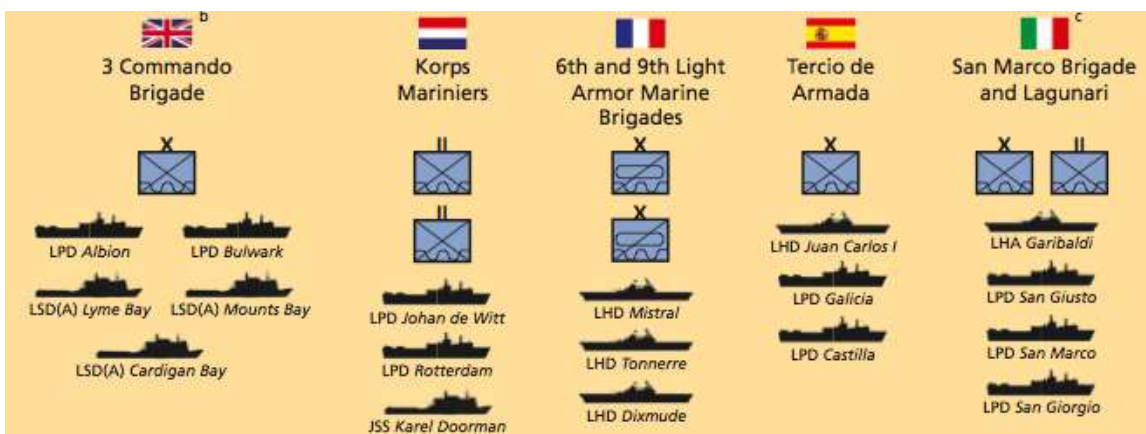


Figure 1. NATO and Partner Amphibious Forces in Europe.

Germanovich, Gene, J.D. Williams, Stacie L. Pettyjohn, David A. Shlapak, Anthony Adler, and Bradley Martin, *NATO's Amphibious Forces: Command and Control of a Multibrigade Alliance Task Force*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2019, 53. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2928.html.

In order to satisfy that level of ambition and the expeditionary hallmark of the EAI, it could be helpful to analyze some of the main features of EAI, such as the command and control, the sealift, and the logistic capabilities.

Command and control

One of the main purposes of the EAI was to establish deep interoperability through the European amphibious forces. In the warfighting function of Command and Control (C2), the six full members of the initiative have the advantage to be part of NATO as well as get a high level

of standard to develop in a bilateral amphibious initiative. As stated in the original DoI, the primary source of C2 is the NATO doctrine. Thus, the main figures of Commander Combined Amphibious Task Force (CCATF) and Commander Combined of the Landing Force (CCLF) are the pillars that exercise overall the command of the European amphibious forces.¹² The two main bilateral initiatives, UK-NL and SIAF-SILF helped the EAI members to reach a proficient level of interoperability, but they trained and equipped below the level of ambition.¹³ The real strength of the European amphibious forces is the amphibious capabilities of each nation. An underestimated commitment potentially compromises the current NATO advantage against the main threat, with a particular focus against the near-peer competition. Moreover, the structure of the C2 is not trained, as it will fight in a hypothetical future. The problem, issues, and friction don't show up and help to overcome the matters. The last point is the internal C2 procedure that all EAI members adopted. In fact, inside each nation, the adoption of its procedure is the primary structure, especially for the force arrangement. The rotation in the lead of the initiative chosen by the original members allows everyone to have the chance to get the lead in some activities of interoperability as well as the main exercise called Emerald Move (ERMO). All the six full members have a C2 platform to conduct a combined amphibious operation.

Sealift

The air superiority in an amphibious operation is one of the main requirements to land the landing force. Additionally, the air connectors give the capacity and the option to support the initial beachhead as well as to bypass it. The characteristic of amphibious forces is to operate in the littoral contest and project quickly the combat power in a complex environment. The surface and air connectors get the landing force flexible enough to build quickly the structures and facilities to conduct the mission. In the EAI contest, the capability to reach any part of the

European area is a fundamental requirement to get to the EAI credibility in front of the international organizations.. England and France are the most ahead in terms of sealift. During the invasion of Iraq, Operation “Telic”, the British implemented the concept of sea basing and the use of RO-RO to support two Royal Marine commandos.¹⁴ This unique and autonomous capability among the other European nations allows the UK to conduct in every part of the globe an amphibious operation (example Falklands) with or without a marginal impact in the host nation. After the decision to leave the EU, the other European countries were afraid of a potential lack of commitment of the UK in the power projection due to the budget cut, and the reorganization of the British Navy as well. The two options explained in the UK defense journal showed one more defense cut oriented and the second one pretty strong with the lead of HMS *Queen Elisabeth* carrier battle group. In both cases, the United Kingdom’s commitment is strong with the allies and trade partners to keep and preserve the free sea trading.¹⁵ The France MISTRAL class is considered similar to the US LHD because it is capable to hold sixteen helicopters and launch six helicopters at a time, and the stern can provide simultaneous surface connectors. The amphibious ship is interoperable with the foreign units, such as USMC CH53 and LCAC.¹⁶ Less capable are Spain, Italy, Netherlands, and Greece. All the EAI members bear several amphibious ships, but the width of stern, the tiny flight deck, and the small numbers of vectors, both surface and air, limit the capabilities to project power and the follow-on forces.

Logistic capabilities

One of the goals of the EAI was to operate for thirty days. Looking at the European continent and the facilities spread in it, the net of road, railroad, and dock help to move and displace quickly all the countries’ supply. Mainly for the south area of Europe, the Mediterranean Sea is not too wide to create a strong civilian commitment of RO-RO.

Additionally, using the new concept of EBAO, the multiple islands like Cyprus, Crete, and Sicily could help to reinforce the concept of logistic supply. A potential shortfall could be once the landing force establishes the lodgment and starts the operation. Especially in a hostile environment, the capacity to establish an expeditionary pier, airfield, and a hasty hospital is a logistic lack. Another problem is the range of operation. All the different members have different ranges, and the EAI didn't identify a common one. For example, the 100 km France ambition didn't match with the Italian one.¹⁷ These impact on the logistic ability of each member to react to joint forces. Another problem is the different assets that all land forces use and hold. In terms of logistic sustainment, it is a problem because the diversity of assets multiplies the effort for the logistic element. This is also connecting with the concept of interoperability. A possible solution could be the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) project that matches the requirements of each European country for a specific sector. For the amphibious sector, Italy is leading the project of a common amphibious vehicle.¹⁸

Overall, the capabilities of the EAI are solid and enough to conduct a credible amphibious operation in the European scenario. All the members have unique capabilities, such as Sweden that is the only one that gets an amphibious force specialized in the archipelago scenario.¹⁹ The lack is the capability to establish robust interoperability as well as autonomy over the operation. The continuous commitment in the participation at the joint exercise, exchange, and a development program through a common project could move ahead of the capabilities of the EAI.

Possible Future employment of EAI

After the analysis of the capabilities and an overview of the geopolitical situation in the European continent connected with the return of the old and new threats, it could be possible to guess the likely future scenario where the EAI could employ. The main five areas of friction close to the EU border are illustrated in figure 2. Three of five are against a peer-to-peer threat, Russia. The hallmark of those areas is the A2/AD enemy capabilities, where a potential European amphibious force has to remain far from the beach. Thus, the EBAO and Sea Basing concept will get the primary concern in that scenario. Additionally, the denial capacity provided by the Russian submarine component and the ability to conduct land offensive operations had challenged the EAI as a single and autonomous European response. It's also an important factor in the time and space constraint that the EAI could use.²⁰ It's not accidentally that in 2018 NATO conducted a major amphibious exercise in the North Sea close to Norway, with a huge displacement of the navy group as well as a big amphibious demonstration.²¹ The approach to conduct exercises in a similar scenario and close to the main threat satisfies the capacity to deter and train for the fight. All the EAI members participated in that exercise to reinforce the amphibious capacity of the European allies, share the TTP with the US, and build robust interoperability in a joint/combined scenario. It could help in the future NATO exercise, the role of EAI as independent elements but connected in the NATO task organization. This could facilitate the relation of C2, the ability of the EAI to work under NATO and build the correct credibility for future real-world employment. Looking also at the numbers of active duty, (figure 3) it's improbable that one can conduct a large-scale operation alone against a near-peer enemy.

Another important consideration is tied with the amphibious doctrine that all the EAI members adopted as the guide to train, equip, and fight in the amphibious environment.

Although it's important the constant presence of an expeditionary force in the maritime environment to deterrence, the three most likely amphibious operations that EAI could conduct are raid, withdrawal, and amphibious operations in support of other operations. The last one is very broad and could include operations like non-combatant evacuation operation (NEO), humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and small-scale landings. The common features of all of these operations are the limited period of time, an important aspect for the commitment of the EAI. The EAI goal is too ambitious so far, but fifteen days of independent commitment rather than the thirty days inside the DoI could be a great success, especially if the mission will be an evacuation or a rapid deployment to help the civilians due to an earthquake. The only solution to verify these capabilities and eventually adjust or implement the goal of thirty days is to hire the amphibious force in a real-world operation. Another option could put the EAI asset into the NATO Response Force (NRF). Such an idea came from a France request in order to create expeditionary readiness.

The other possible areas of intervention are in Libya and Syria. The first theatre, although there is a UN-recognized government, is classified as a failed state and there is a civil war ongoing. The presence of non-state actors inside the African country make the posture of the possible EAI employment different, especially in the force protection against a possible asymmetric attack, and the connection with the local population. The Libya theatre doesn't present a denial area or any sort of A2/AD capability so far. However, the presence of several Italian islands, such as Pantelleria, Lampedusa, or Crete makes possible the implementation of the EBAO concept to support a hypothetical landing force deployed. A Syria civil war is more complicated. In the Levant, the Russia presence, especially in the Tartus port makes the ability to land challenging. Additionally, the A2/AD capability along the Syria coast (figure 3) makes that

theatre a contested area. In that case, the employment of EAI forces needs the reinforcement of a strike group that suppresses the enemy anti-air and establishes robust and permanent air supremacy.

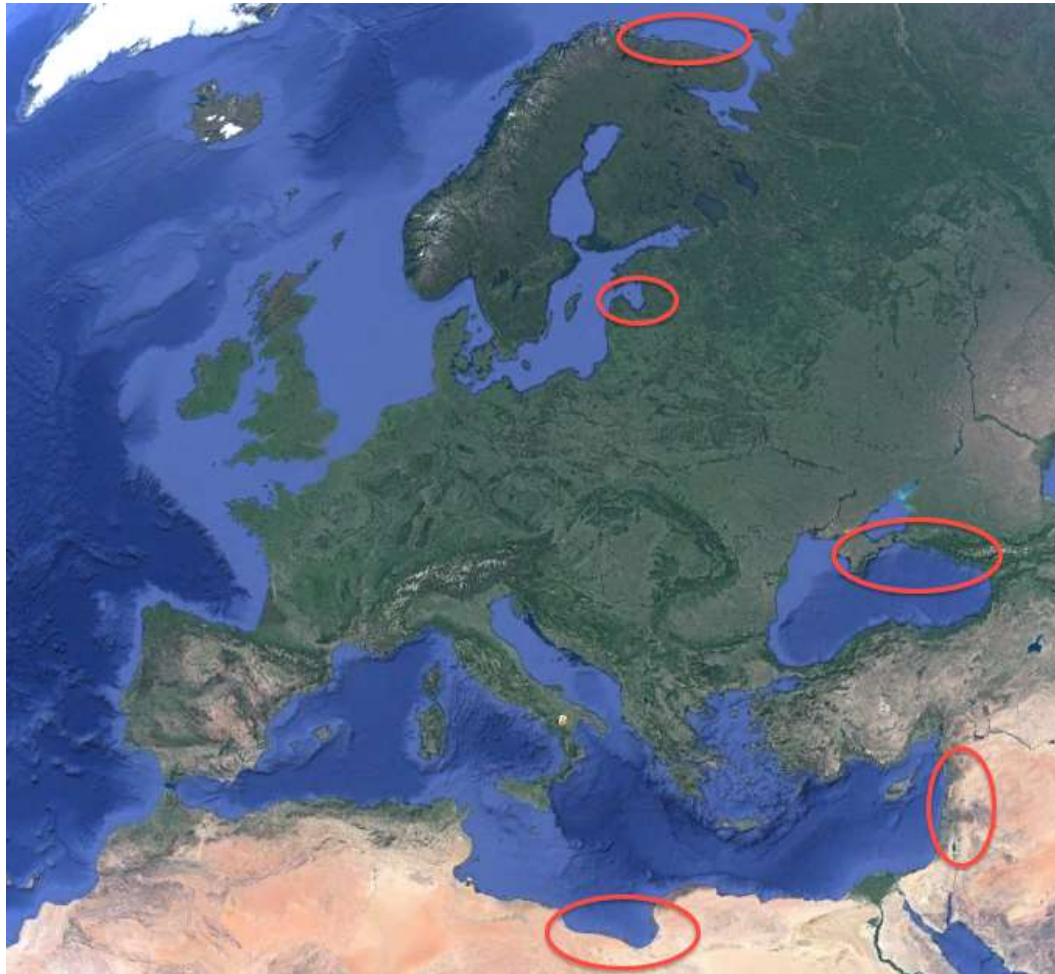


Figure 2. Map of European Continent. Five major area of friction

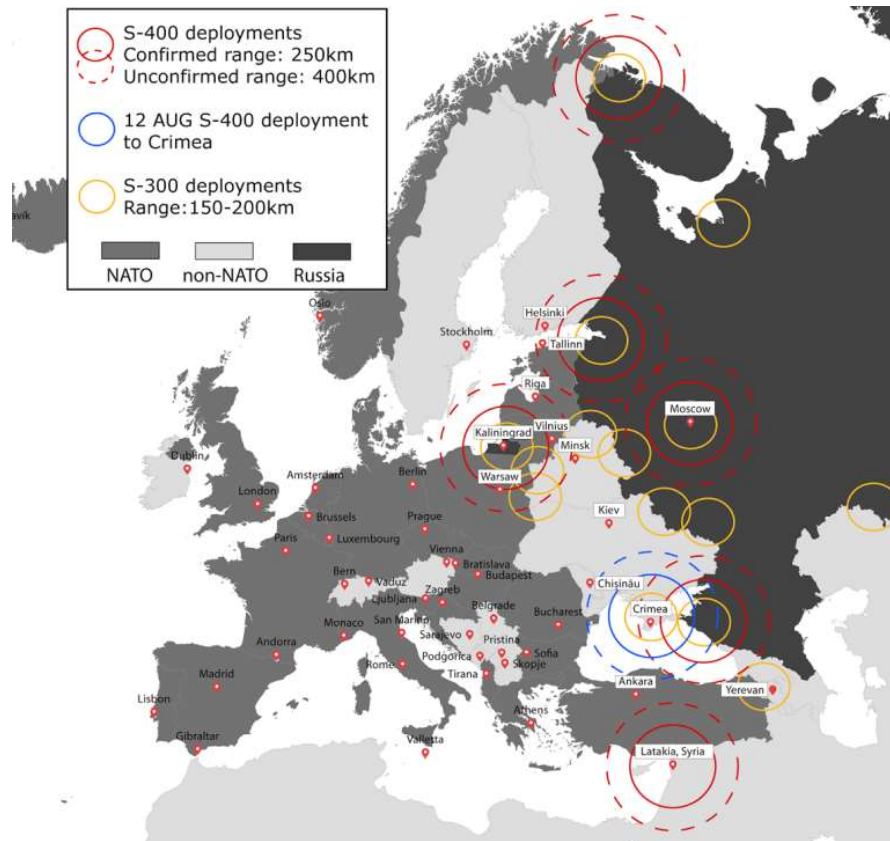


Figure 3. Russian A2AD systems deployment – August 2016 Chart

Source: Kathleen Weinberger, Institute for the Study of War.

<http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/08/russian-anti-access-and-area-denial.html>

As analyzed in the paper of Corentin Brustlein, the ability of the US to respond quickly to the crisis is the ability to have maritime preposition forces (MPF) already deployed close to the threat. For the EAI members, although the size of the seas around Europe facilitated the reach of the main threats, a huge caveat is the domestic policy choice of each European country.²² Thus, the different approaches didn't find a whole and unity of response and effort to restore and conduct an amphibious operation. Additionally, it could be helpful to identify at least one harbor and facilities in the Mediterranean Sea and one in the Atlantic Ocean dedicated or with the ability to activate the future EAI Headquarters and the space to move ships, marines, vehicles,

and logistics as a whole. Two potential sites could be Taranto in Italy for the south area and Netherland for the north area. The choice it could limit the logistic chain of support and make the proper flexibility to react quickly.

The climate change with the consequence of rising water levels, the melting of ice in the Arctic region, and the movement of the population close to the coastline due to the increase of the desertification challenged the littoral environment where the EAI could be employed. The melting of ice in the Arctic started to open new routes and sea lines of communication where Russia could exploit its predominance.²³

The south side of the Mediterranean Sea is menaced by the increase of over-crowded towns close to the coast. This phenomenon makes a possible operation tricky, due to the huge presence of civilians in a probable battlefield. But also it's connected with the probability of humanitarian assistance due to the pandemic of famine. Finally, in the European continent, there are numerous active volcanoes and tons of earthquakes happened frequently. Thus, the EAI should be used to rescue and provide rapid aid to the hit population.

Despite the Cold War the European area of interest grew exponentially and shifted to reach the Indian Ocean. The scholar and major geo-politicians considered the term the Mediterranean more wider than the real size to explain the new European area of interest that gathered several areas far from the homeland after a period of more restriction where Europe was over the American influence.²⁴ But the reality was that the Mediterranean Sea in its original geographic size has become an important and strategic mirror of the sea where multiple superpowers, nation states, and non-state actors interact and grow their economics and military interest. Thus, today it's more correct to think about multiple seas inside the Mediterranean area, where actors imposed its supremacy. For that reason, it is important to have a robust expeditionary force ready

to operate inside the Mediterranean Sea, which could facilitate and restore the equilibrium imposed during the Cold War, and Europe could regain the centrality over the sea border around it.

Conclusions

The long process of European common defense is still ongoing. As a complicated development, the common defense opened the choice through several European countries to the agreement made by different warfare as well as domains. The European Amphibious Initiative is a multilateral initiative to find a common mindset in the amphibious domain. The sense of creating an effective tool to contrast the European threats was the main goal of the initiative. However, as part of the difficult integration in the defense contest, multiple frictions rose during almost twenty years following the original declaration of intent. Only few nations in the European continent had a robust amphibious force to share capabilities, knowledge, and equipment. Thus, this inner circle, like NATO, had to make the open door policy to survive. The main concept of interoperability allowed the EAI members to adjust their available forces and the endurance of the operation. It's desirable to review the ambitious goals of the initiative in terms of possible employment of the European amphibious forces. For example, it could be easy to identify the readiness of the forces, make a standby force rotation, and ensure more commitment from the members. For the readiness, one solution could be integrated into the NRF or in the Joint Rapid Response Forces. Additionally, the creation of a dedicated cell tied with MARCOM better satisfies the potential use of the EAI inside the NATO structure and avoids duplication of effort.

For the future challenges in the European continent, a flexible and expeditionary tool is the correct approach that most of European nations have to develop to restore crisis and quickly

intervene in the European area of interest. EAI could reply to those requirements, but to move from an initiative to a structured forces have to participate in real world operations. Operation Sophia was a good example to employ some EAI capabilities, such as amphibious task groups with surface and air connectors, to show the C2 system, to get deterrence, and it was a chance to conduct an amphibious demonstration in order to build real credibility in the Mediterranean Sea. Operation Atlanta could be considered another suitable operation, but for a first time employ it too far, especially for the logistic chain of supply, because it was carried out in the Indian Ocean. EU could think to create a standing group like the NATO mine group or submarine that every year performed in the Mediterranean Sea and set the condition for safety and free maritime space.

Finally, the EAI is not just a tentative agreement among the major amphibious forces in Europe, but it's the ambition to create a European amphibious common mindset to develop a European expeditionary concept, continuing to keep the Europe continent and its border safe and free. The best answer to maintain this equilibrium is a multi-purpose force able to reach any place, to integrate other assets or work under other international organizations. The aims of the EAI satisfy those requirements, but it's necessary to have the full commitment of each member to train and cooperate to reach such a level.

Note

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