A new RUSI study published today calls for NATO to 'broaden its strategic aperture' to include the North Atlantic, a maritime area overlooked due to priorities in the Middle East, Afghanistan and most recently in Ukraine.

Entitled 'NATO and the North Atlantic: Revitalising Collective Defence' and edited by John Andreas Olsen, this RUSI Whitehall Paper includes research and perspectives from leading experts in the field, including former Supreme Allied Commander Admiral James Stavridis. (link on page 2)

It sets out to provide both new and updated perspectives on defence and security related to the North Atlantic by examining the current and historical geostrategic context of NATO' s northern region. In doing so, the paper highlights the strategic importance of Western cohesion and the 'transatlantic link'.

The paper states that while 'NATO has taken the first step towards re-establishing defence and deterrence through forward bases on its eastern flank...it is now time for the Alliance to adopt a more comprehensive approach by addressing the maritime domain as well, with an emphasis on the strategically important North Atlantic Ocean.'

Colonel John Andreas Olsen, the editor of this paper states: 'The North Atlantic must yet again be recognised as an operational space in its own right as well as a continuous and interdependent transatlantic theatre of operation. There is no substitute for NATO being the prime structural driver for improving credible deterrence and capable defence, and within the Alliance the United States, the United Kingdom and Norway have a special role to play in strengthening the defence of NATO' s northern flank due to their geographic locations and capabilities.'

The paper highlights how Russia is challenging the collective defence and the political cohesion of the West. The paper observes how 'the Russian Federation Navy now operates in areas and at a tempo not seen for almost two decades'. Coupled with increasingly hostile rhetoric and behaviour emanating from Moscow, the authors observe the 're-emergence of a strategy that many in the West assumed had dissipated in the aftermath of the Cold War.'

'This "second coming" in the North Atlantic' the paper states, is the new strategic reality for European security: in broader terms, the 'new normal.'

The paper warns that if 'NATO does not have effective control of the North Atlantic, or at least the ability to deny Russia naval access to this maritime domain, Russia could block or disrupt US reinforcement to Europe.'

According to Admiral James Stavridis, 'NATO must understand that because the North Atlantic plays an important part in Russian military strategic calculations – as evident in its growing naval and air force laydown – it is essential that the region become more central to NATO's own planning, deployments and preparations. This requires an updated maritime strategy and a solid command and control structure specifically designed to deal with threats to the North Atlantic. It also necessitates updated intelligence and contingency plans for the region.' This conclusion is supported by General Philip Breedlove, Vice Admiral Hudson and the other authors in the book.

Overall the paper makes six recommendations including:

1. Renew NATO's Maritime Strategy

Accounting for the dramatic changes in the security environment since 2011, address evolving capabilities and chart a credible defence of the North Atlantic.

2. Reintroduce Extensive Maritime Exercises and Sustained Presence

More extensive training and focused Article V exercises, founded on formalised collective contingency planning, are imperative to communicate cohesion, strength and determination and thus to achieve

effective defence and deterrence. Exercise Trident Juncture, to be hosted in Norway in 2018, is an excellent opportunity to test this.

3. Reform NATO's Command Structure

A reformed command structure should reintroduce geographic areas of responsibility and ensure strong links with relevant national operational headquarters. Consideration should be given to considerably strengthening the 300-person NATO Allied Maritime Command.

4. Invest in Maritime Capabilities and Situational Awareness

NATO needs interoperable naval forces capable of establishing and maintaining all-domain access at short

notice.

5. Enhance Maritime Partnerships

NATO should continue to operate, train and exercise as seamlessly as possible with key partners through

multinational and bilateral agreements. NATO should build on US naval partnership concepts to unlock even greater potential for integration and cooperation among NATO forces.

6. Prepare for Maritime Hybrid Warfare

NATO needs to exercise various maritime hybrid warfare scenarios, including reactions to attacks on high-value targets at sea and under the sea.

In sum, it is a call for 'A New Security Approach to the North Atlantic'. NATO must relearn some of the maritime concepts that dominated the Cold War period, while acknowledging that the present security environment differs greatly from that of the earlier period.

The RUSI Whitehall Paper, 'NATO and the North Atlantic: Revitalising Collective Defence', is available at www.rusi.org/NorthAtlanticPaper2017 . Â Its editor is John Andreas Olsen with contributions from: Malcolm Chalmers, Heather A Conley, Svein Efjestad, John J Hamre, Peter Hudson, Peter Roberts, James Stavridis and Rolf Tamnes.