

NATO was rehearsing for an amphibious assault on Eastern Ukraine

written by Arnaud Develay
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French Navy's aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle during mission Clemenceau 21.

From November 18 to December 3, 2021, a NATO maritime exercise was organized by the French Navy (Marine National) off the Mediterranean coast and along France's Atlantic seafront.

Code-named POLARIS 21, the large-scale simulation aimed to "mobilize all components of the French Navy, including its latest-generation assets, land and air assets from the French Army and Air Force, as well as combat ships and aircraft from France's partner nations: the United States, Spain, Greece, Italy and the United Kingdom."

Billed as a ["laboratory for tomorrow's warfare,"](#) POLARIS 21 was to be conducted around what was termed "high-spectrum" military actions, corresponding to the future missions of the French Navy in a hardened strategic context. It in turn completed the preparation of the naval air group before its next operational deployment, which began in February 2022.^[1]

The technical file for POLARIS 21 described "Mercure" (the Russian Federation) as the main threat in this war-game simulation.

"Mercure is a huge country straddling North Asia and Europe that forms a federation of 16 autonomous regions with no direct access to the Mediterranean. The legislative power is represented by a parliament of 400 deputies elected by direct universal suffrage for 5 years. There are several political parties all represented in parliament. The executive branch headed by the head of government appointed by the president. The president elected for 6 years. Current president Virgo Medvetine has managed to stay in power for 20 years and has silenced his main opponents. He advocates a strong Mercure and exacerbates the nationalist feeling of the Catharist people..."

... Mercure's foreign policy is expansionist. Leader Mercure seeks to reaffirm his country as a major player on the world stage, after years of self-effacement from the

U.S. superpower. Moskulova (capital of Mercure) is today essential in the resolution of the crisis of Mercmania, which could lead to a civil war at any time. The President of Mercure does not hesitate to challenge the Western countries to which he blames the overthrow of the VIOLETA regime in 2011 and the support for OTSOE against the independence of MERCMANIA in 2015. Moskulova could intervene militarily to support the independence of this separatist territory. The ambition of President Virgo Medvetine is to restore the unity of the 'Catharist world'"^[2]

The file goes on to describe MERCMANIA (Crimea) as:

"almost autonomous and the government of Otsoe (UKRAINE) does not really care because there is hardly any exchange with the rest of the country because of the Catharist community. The latter, completely infiltrated, by the mafias who take advantage of its geographical location outside the direct control of Mercure. The secret services of Mercure also use the enclave to settle a few miscellaneous cases outside of any jurisdiction. During the 2015 Mercmania crisis, Otsoe sought diplomatic and military support from Akitania, but with no real success. It was ultimately from the UN and the threat of action by a few members of the Security Council that restrained the ardor of Mercure, which obtained a status quo. It is now an autonomous enclave recognized only by Mercure since 2015. The Septime inhabitants driven out of almost the entire enclave and kept around the edges with Otsoe. As early as 2013, Catharist militias appeared, demanded autonomy, and refused to recognize Otsoe as an official language. The young Catharists refuse their incorporation into the army and join the self-defense forces set up by Mercure's military secret service. In 2014, the Otsoe government attempted to negotiate a rapprochement with the Catharist majority. The self-appointed parliament of Montluqon (capital of Mercmania) refuses any discussion and officially calls for its attachment to Mercure. In 2015, Mercure paramilitary troops sent by 12 NATO UNCLASS RELEASABLE TO EXERCISE POLARIS 21 plane to Mercmania and established barbed-wire borders. Europe is sending observers who stationed in a

sort of buffer zone near Saint-Yorre. Under international pressure, Mercure returns half of its troops and maintains a contingent of 500 men. Mercmania is the cradle of the Catharist royalty of the 9th century and of the orthodox Catharist religion.”

At this point, it is of interest for the reader to recall three notable elements:

- a) The first involves the Western refusal to ever recognize the result of the referendum held in Crimea in 2014, which saw the local population vote overwhelmingly in favor of rejoining Russia.
- b) The second deals with a naval agreement between Ukraine and the UK that was signed on June 21, 2021, which calls for the United Kingdom “to sell two refurbished [Sandown-class mine-hunters](#) to Ukraine and produce eight small missile warships for the country. The Agreement also calls on the United Kingdom to construct a new naval base on the Black Sea as the primary fleet base for the [Ukrainian Navy](#) and a base on the Sea of Azov. The agreement [further] provided for the sale of [missiles](#) to Ukraine, and for training and support for these.”^[3]
- c) The last is an incident involving UK warship “HMS Defender” in the Black Sea on June 23, 2021 (two days after the signing of the above-mentioned naval agreement).

Wikipedia recalls the latter incident as follows:

“On 23 June 2021, the United Kingdom’s HMS Defender undertook a [freedom of navigation](#) patrol through the disputed waters around the [Crimean Peninsula](#).^[6]

In an account partially contradicted by the UK government, the [Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation](#) and border guards said they fired [warning shots](#) from coast guard patrol ships and dropped bombs from a [Sukhoi Su-24](#) attack aircraft in the path of Defender after, according to the [Russian Defence Ministry](#), it had allegedly strayed for about 20 minutes as far as 3 km (2 miles) into waters off the

coast of [Crimea](#), which Russia annexed in 2014 in a move mostly [unrecognised internationally](#). The UK military denied any warning shots were fired and said the ship was in [innocent passage](#) in Ukraine's [territorial sea](#), later clarifying that heavy guns were fired three miles astern and could not be considered to be warning shots....

On 27 June, secret documents relating to the passage of HMS Defender through Ukraine's territorial waters were discovered at a bus stop in [Kent](#). These documents revealed that the Royal Navy considered different hypothetical reactions from Russia in response to the ship's passage and was prepared for the possibility that Russia may respond in an aggressive manner.” ^[4]

What are the implications of these events when viewed through the prism of the Russian Federation's initiating of the Special Military Operation?

The West never recognized the reattachment of Crimea to Russia. It was therefore likely that, not unlike what is transpiring on a regular basis off the western coast of Syria, American Poseidon reconnaissance flights would have gained in frequency in order to probe the coast off the peninsula and supervise the movements of ships based in Sevastopol.

The naval agreement between Ukraine and the United Kingdom was to act as a tripwire. These “Ukrainian” naval bases in the Black and Azov Seas were likely going to be used as hubs for NATO ships to prepare an amphibious assault on the port cities of Odessa and Mariupol while Kyiv was massing ground troops on the western front lines of these regions.

Had Moscow ignored the quickly developing situation, it would have been forced to confront a situation which would have impeded its ability not only to prevent a genocide on its doorstep but also to preserve its own territorial integrity. With NATO warships allowed to roam in the area, time was of the essence and Moscow could not

afford *not* to act.

The POLARIS 21 simulation under these circumstances was likely designed to prepare to engage the Russian fleet before it got the chance (as it did in Syria) to create a buffer zone in order to confront the incoming NATO fleet and thwart its amphibious operation.

This could help explain POLARIS 21's stated goal of "winning the war before the war."^[5]

1. Martin Manaranche, "[French Navy to Kick Off 'POLARIS': Its Largest Ever Exercise,](https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2021/11/french-navy-to-kick-off-polaris-largest-exercise/)" *Naval News*, November 16, 2021, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2021/11/french-navy-to-kick-off-polaris-largest-exercise/> ↑
2. <http://eurasia-sever.by/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/nato-unclass-releasable-to-exercise-polaris-21-1.pdf>↑
3. Alan Tovey, "Ukraine navy deal to boost British shipbuilding," June 23, 2021, *The [London] Telegraph*, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2021/06/23/ukraine-navy-deal-boost-british-shipbuilding/>; Dan Sabbagh, "UK-Russian naval dispute: both sides will claim victory," *The Guardian*, June 23, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/jun/23/londons-recent-naval-deal-with-kyiv-will-add-to-russias-concerns>; <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-signs-agreement-to-support-enhancement-of-ukrainian-naval-capabilities> ↑
4. Lucy Fisher, "[Exclusive: Dominic Raab warned MoD about Royal Navy's Crimea plans,](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2021/06/24/exclusive-dominic-raab-warned-mod-royal-navys-crimea-plans/)" *The Telegraph*, June 24, 2021, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2021/06/24/exclusive-dominic-raab-warned-mod-royal-navys-crimea-plans/>; Paul Adams, "[Classified Ministry of Defence documents found at bus stop,](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-57624942)" *BBC News*, June 27, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-57624942> ↑

5. Paul Adams, "[Classified Ministry of Defence documents found at bus stop](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-57624942)," *BBC News*, June 27, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-57624942> ↑

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