

The Royal Netherlands Navy's perspective on cooperation

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Galle Dialogue 2016

Abstract

The fairy tale of the *Bremen Town Musicians* by the Brothers Grimm teaches us that change and seeking new paths may bring you an unexpected and better future. Furthermore it teaches us that cooperation is more than the sum of all parts and will enable you to achieve things that are out of reach as an individual. For those reasons, the Royal Netherlands Navy advocates cooperation with international partners.

The Netherlands government has defined three strategic security interests: defence of the Netherlands and Allied territory, the international rule of law and economic security. All three imply international cooperation and indeed the Royal Netherlands Navy hardly operates anymore without cooperating with a variety of (international) partners.

To enable these international operations and maintaining the required operational readiness, the Royal Netherlands Navy seeks participation in international exercises, preferably with an integrated international staff; *train as you fight, fight as you train*. Also technological developments, increasing costs, and international developments have led to close cooperation with industry and knowledge centres. The Royal Netherlands Navy has ample experience in this cooperation, leading to delivering more effect for less money.

Some two decades ago further steps were taken by integrating large parts of the Belgian and Netherlands navies, thus reducing overhead and generate a larger scale of forces under unified command while retaining sovereignty. This integration includes command, maintenance, education and training and sharing infrastructure.

Scientific research has derived criteria that are useful to balance ambition and realism in international cooperation. Important criteria are:

- Trust, confidence and solidarity are the most important success factors
- Sovereignty and autonomy make you independent but may render you also less effective
- Number of partners adds to complexity and may reduce effectiveness
- Countries and forces of similar size and quality reduce domination of a partner
- Mind-set, defence culture and organisation: '*national first thinking*' has to be replaced by '*multinational first thinking*'
- Standardisation and interoperability will take cooperation and integration further
- Realism, clarity and seriousness of intentions prevent misunderstanding and ultimately failure
- Involvement of parliaments or other supreme decision making bodies are crucial to take away obstacles

Other successful cooperation is achieved with the UK such as the UK/NL Amphibious Force, advanced ship training (FOST) and submarine cooperation. Also the long standing cooperation with Germany has recently been extended by developing a combined capability for secure military sealift and the

integration of the German sea battalion into the Royal Netherlands Marine Corps and other naval units.

In retrospect, the Royal Netherlands Navy concludes that cooperation has increased effectiveness and secured capabilities that otherwise might have been lost. In the process of cooperating in the past decades, the Royal Netherlands Navy has learned the following lessons:

- Overcome the differences in culture and language
- Take time to gain trust
- Cooperation often requires investment at the front end. Financial benefits come later
- Define a common goal
- Size does matter
- Being ambitious is a necessity but must be balanced by a fair share of realism
- Don't expect big steps; incremental ones will get you there as well, but with more solid foundation
- Look for possibilities for cooperation. Bottom-up initiatives usually work better
- By cooperating, you will have to rely on your partner(s)

International cooperation is a prerequisite for global success. Only through acting at an international level, higher degrees of effectiveness and solidarity can be achieved, political ties can be strengthened and the protection of shared interests can become more effective.

*Ladies and gentlemen in the end we have a mutual interest: **prosperity through stability and security.***