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AN ITALIAN PERSPECTIVE**

by Marco Carnovale

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Introduction

Conventional and nuclear arms control has achieved considerable results in Europe. The Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) and the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) treaties are producing sizeable cuts in the land-based arsenals of the once opposing alliances in the continent. Italy was affected by both these treaties, as host of American Cruise missile in the first case and as a direct participant in the latter. After considerable initial reluctance, the Soviet Union agreed to exclude naval forces both from the INF and from the first stage of the CFE negotiations. While the treaties concluded so far are important for the once paramount preoccupation of NATO with the Central Front, it is self-evident that naval forces, which have been excluded from them, are especially relevant for the flanks. The military and political equilibria in the Mediterranean region are strongly affected by naval forces. These equilibria are made even more complex on the one hand by the presence in the region of important non-European naval actors; and on the other by non-European and non-NATO naval missions of some NATO members, notably the US, which is the foremost naval power in the Mediterranean.

This chapter is an overview of the military, political and legal issues involved in the possible inclusion in the arms control process of the naval forces deployed in the Mediterranean. While the overall perspective will necessarily be a regional one, a special emphasis will be placed on how these issues are seen from an Italian point of view.

The problem of naval arms control in the Mediterranean presents not only military but also political aspects, because in this region the erstwhile Cold War East-West confrontation has always been intermingled with several other conflictual relationships among riparian and adjacent countries. These assume an even greater relative significance in light of the subsiding of that confrontation in Europe at a time when, quite on the contrary, the Middle East and the Maghreb regions are once again simmering with political instability and war.

In particular, the political and military role of the US naval presence in the Mediterranean, vis-a-vis both allies and potential opponents, can hardly be overemphasized. Naval forces are of paramount importance for the US political presence in the Mediterranean because the US has virtually no permanent land or air forces based in Southern Europe. (The major exception is the 401st Storm of 72 F-16 fighter-bombers currently based at Torrejon, Spain and soon to be moved to Crotona, Italy; but, as of late 1991, the political fate of even this base seems uncertain.)

Also the political and military role of the Soviet Eskadra in the Mediterranean has been considerable, though the loss of permanent bases after their ejection from Albania and Egypt has made it impossible for the Soviets to reach the same order of magnitude as the US. The détente of the late eighties and early nineties has so far failed to produce a sharp cut-back in the Soviet naval presence in the

Mediterranean. Soviet annual ship-days still number over 15,000.¹

Finally, it is less often considered that naval arms control in the Mediterranean would involve important legal issues which stem from the fact that the jurisdiction over the seas is much more subject to controversy than that over the land areas and the air-spaces which are involved in current arms control negotiations in Europe.

In Italy, the national debate on questions related to naval arms control has been both rather primitive and heavily politicized. The foreign ministry disarmament staff is too small to deal with the all too many disarmament issues which have come up for negotiation in recent years, and naval arms control has not received as much attention as other, more pressing matters. In addition, one must note a generalized lack of expertise in military affairs in the Italian media, in the political parties and in Parliament. Few decision-makers are well informed, or even well briefed, on naval arms control.

Successive "center-left"² government coalitions have consistently thought it sufficient to take positions on naval matters closely following that of the US and NATO. On the other hand, the left opposition (mainly from the Communist Party, which in 1991 renamed itself Democratic Party of the Left), and the small Green movement have usually taken politically inspired positions (anti-American in the first case and especially anti-nuclear in the latter). The most articulate opinions on naval issues can perhaps be found in the Italian Armed Forces, and there exist strong divergences among them. As will be discussed below, the main cleavage is between the Navy, which is trying to expand its own role through, among other things, the acquisition of a sizeable naval air arm, and the Air Force, which is trying to prevent it from doing so. The Army, too, has grown to be somewhat uneasy with the greater stature acquired by the Navy through its several military operations in the Middle East since the beginning of the eighties.

1. Military Significance

Several factors contribute to make naval arms control in general, and in the Mediterranean in particular, a more complex and delicate issue when compared to other kinds of arms control negotiations. Aside from the classical goals of all arms control (save economic resources, improve crisis and arms race stability, reduce tensions) one needs to account for the extent to which the grand strategies of the various powers, and of the two superpowers in particular, would have to adjust to possible negotiating scenarios. The US would have a much more difficult task to adjust because it is still maintaining global responsibilities from which the USSR, chiefly for domestic economic reasons, is disentangling itself. In the US view, these responsibilities require, among other instruments, a naval capability to produce a global reach.

¹ See International Institute for Strategic Studies: *The Military Balance* (London: IISS and Brassey's, various years).

² Including the Christian Democrats, the Socialist party, and the Liberal, Social Democratic and Republican fringe parties.

This is not only a matter of force or deployment asymmetry, as for the land and air forces, but also of grand strategy. NATO is an alliance divided between two continents with many insular or peninsular member states. On the contrary, the USSR, now deprived of its erstwhile satellites of the Warsaw Pact, is geographically contiguous to its areas of geopolitical interest. In addition, the US is a maritime power with vital sea lines of communication, while the USSR is a continental power with no such maritime interests. Moreover, US naval forces in the Mediterranean constitute the only effective link among the several NATO operational theaters and would provide a decisive amount of time-urgent reinforcements. These forces also perform a crucial intelligence and communication mission for the whole Southern region of the alliance. This is not the case for the Soviets, which performs these same missions with land-based systems. These asymmetries must be considered when setting the goals of possible future naval negotiations in the Mediterranean.

A second complicating factor of most naval arms control propositions is the difficulty of verification. While remote sensing could play a role as far as naval nuclear weapons are concerned, verification of conventional naval weapon-systems limitations might involve painstakingly complex fine-combing of the vessels to be verified. There is also a special problem for submarines, which could easily hide in the unevenly warm, shallow and salty waters of the Mediterranean, where they can mask their sound emissions much more easily than in deep blue-ocean waters.

Another important factor of complexity is that the role of third countries in the East-West correlation of forces is more pronounced for naval forces than it is for land forces in Europe. Several Arab states possess significant naval—including submarine—forces, and so does Israel, and their relative weight would be significantly increased should the US and Soviet fleets in the region be substantially reduced or withdrawn altogether. These non-European navies do not pose a serious threat to the security of Western Europe proper, but might represent a significant risk for international shipping.

The superpowers in the Mediterranean

The Soviet Union vigorously insists that naval forces be included in East-West arms control negotiations, for several reasons. All of these reasons apply to the Mediterranean region. First, the Soviets argue, NATO—and particularly US—naval forces constitute a threat to their homeland which they can not afford not to address since the process of arms control is significantly reducing most of their main land-based forces. The Soviets are insisting with special tenacity on naval arms control in the Mediterranean/Black Sea region.³ They see the US Sixth Fleet as their main naval concern in Europe. That they probably overestimate (or purposely exaggerate) the nature of that threat more than is warranted by the limited offensive value of NATO Mediterranean navies does not lessen the need to address their arguments. This is especially true for Italy, since any naval arms control agreement between the US and the USSR in the Mediterranean would directly affect Italian security, where the Sixth fleet is based.

Second, Moscow argues that, just as it gave in to Western requests for

³ As exemplified for the first time by Gorbachev in his Belgrade speech in March 1988, and later many other times, including at the Malta Summit with President Bush in 1989.

asymmetrical cuts on land forces where it was clearly superior, it is only logical that NATO should now accept asymmetrical cuts of naval forces, where the USSR is qualitatively and quantitatively outdone. In the Mediterranean, the Soviet Eskadra, while a considerable threat to NATO SLOCs, is no match for the US Sixth Fleet, even without taking into account the other NATO navies. The Warsaw Treaty as a whole never had other navies in the Mediterranean (the only other naval force in the region was the small Bulgarian fleet in the Black Sea and, until 1961, the Albanian navy). Therefore, the dissolution of the Pact, from the Soviet viewpoint, should not change the naval equation. As for supporting ports, the Soviets enjoy only the use of Tartus in Syria, which is altogether of a questionable military value. NATO, on the contrary, enjoys virtually unchecked control of the Northern shores and of all the main islands except neutral Malta (which, however, enjoys Italy's guarantee for its neutrality).

Arguably, there are also other reasons for Soviet insistence which have more to do with the perception of the Soviet military than with the correlation of forces with NATO. One has to do with the prestige of the Soviet military, recently repeatedly wounded by political and military humiliations, both at home and abroad. After recent cutbacks in their procurement plans, many Soviet military leaders are likely to see the US Navy as unmatched in hardware and in operational capabilities (especially after the several US uses of naval power for political and demonstrative purposes in the Mediterranean in the eighties) and hence wish to bring it down to levels more comparable to its own.

Another reason is the still very much alive political exigency for the maintenance of equal military superpower status with the US (or at least the appearance of it) especially now that USSR has been forced by budgetary considerations to give up all significant power projection ambitions, both globally and regionally in areas like the Mediterranean. That military superpower status is one of the few things left for the Soviets to be proud of, and to use as an international political currency, and they are unlikely to give it up easily. US naval superiority, especially in a high priority area like the Mediterranean, puts it in question.

In light both of this Soviet insistence, and of the objective superiority enjoyed by the West, it is likely that NATO will soon have to at least address the issue of naval arms control in the Mediterranean. It is difficult to imagine that it will be politically feasible to simply continue to ignore it as has been the case so far. To address the issue would not of course mean to accede to Soviet demands, but only to examine what, if anything, could be done to advance Western security through naval arms control.

Bush's September 1991 announcement of US unilateral reductions of naval nuclear weapons do of course go a long way toward addressing this long-neglected problem. However, the residual naval forces that will remain after the unilateral cuts, while de-nuclearized (except for SLBMs) will remain a formidable force against which the Soviets might have to hedge. In fact, it is conceivable that one of the objectives of Bush's plan was precisely to renounce some of the least militarily useful systems in order to diffuse pressure toward conventional naval arms control.

To date, the West, including Italy, still refuses to include naval forces in any formal negotiation with the USSR. As will be discussed below, this stance stems from both military and political considerations, which are especially complex in the Mediterranean context. Yet, it must be emphasized that this preclusion is not as

total as it may seem from most discussions on the subject. Some measures of naval arms control have in fact already been implemented for a long time (as in the case of the US-USSR agreement on the prevention of incidents at sea and, more recently, of analogous treaties between the USSR and several other Mediterranean naval powers—see below.

The general Western position on why it is not in its interest to engage in naval arms control in the Mediterranean can be summarized as follows. First, NATO needs to control sea-lines of communication (SLOCs) just as much as the Soviets need to control their railways, which are not subjected to any form of arms control. In the Mediterranean, NATO SLOCs are essential to link the various non-contiguous Southern tier Allies. In this respect, a special role befalls to Italy both for her central position and as headquarters of the NATO Southern Command of Allied Forces (AFSOUTH) which, not coincidentally, is co-located with the command of the US Sixth Fleet in Naples. In this respect, it is worth recalling that the AFSOUTH Commander in Chief (CINCSOUTH), based in Italy, at Naples, is always a US Admiral who is also the Commander of the US Naval Forces in Europe (CINCUSNAVEUR)—though the latter command headquarters is in London. Also, the NATO naval commander for the Mediterranean is an Italian admiral, and therefore, arguably, Italy would lose an important instrument of influence within NATO (and vis-a-vis the US) should NATO naval forces be reduced as a result of a US pull-out of the Sixth fleet.

Second, control of Mediterranean SLOCs is a condition to allow the unimpeded passage for vital supplies coming through the Suez Canal (especially oil). Overall, the US has been most intransigent on this score. So far the West Europeans have not openly challenged the US position. In the future, however, they are likely to show more flexibility, particularly in the CSCE context.

The US Sixth Fleet, in recent times, has consisted of one or two carrier battle groups. The main mission of the Sixth fleet has been to ensure sea control in order to protect NATO SLOCs against the Soviet submarine threat. The power-projection mission against the USSR has never been emphasized, and in fact the highly lucrative targets constituted by an aircraft carrier would probably advise their withdrawal from the Mediterranean in case of war with the USSR. The impact of US naval land-attack capabilities on the land correlation of forces between NATO and the Warsaw Pact has arguably always been limited. The land-attack potential from aircraft carriers is relatively small compared to both what the US could do from European land bases and to the anti-aircraft potential that these aircraft would have to face. More important in this respect are US SLCMs, especially the nuclear-tipped version. This is however considered a "strategic" weapon under START definitions, and it is already an issue at that negotiating table. It is doubtful that it would be useful to include in naval negotiations as well—unless, of course, they were altogether and definitively excluded from START.

However, outside of the official NATO framework, the US has also used the Sixth Fleet as a tool for out-of-area power projection missions in North Africa (notably against Libya in 1981 and 1986) and in the Middle East (as in Lebanon in 1982 and in the Gulf in 1990). In this role, the impact of the US fleet has been paramount. This non-NATO role endures after the end of the Cold war, and if anything it has been rendered more significant by recent political developments in the

region.

On its part, the USSR has long kept a sizeable naval presence in the Mediterranean. The Soviet Eskadra has steadily increased its ship-days until the early eighties well over the ten thousand mark, but then began to reduce them, especially during the Gorbachev tenure, at least in part because of budgetary reasons. The Eskadra has sought to perform mainly three missions. First, contribute to satisfy the long-time Russian and Soviet historical ambition at military and political presence in Mediterranean. Second, be a part of a power projection effort which the Soviets pursued world-wide, but with particular vigor in Middle Eastern Mediterranean countries: first in Egypt, then in Syria and Libya. Finally, the Soviet submarine force in the Mediterranean has constituted an effective threat against US carriers as well as NATO communication and re-supply lines.

It must be noted that the Eskadra has always had a very limited land-attack capability against Southern European NATO members. The Soviets never seem to have placed much importance on that mission. As in the case of the US, only Soviet SLCMs have constituted an effective threat to NATO territory, but they have always been few and dependent on the Northern Fleet command. That the Eskadra was never attributed an autonomous submarine force may testify to the secondary character of the mission assigned to them.

That the Soviets have proposed to withdraw their Eskadra altogether if the US does the same with the Sixth Fleet testifies to the fact that they have probably given up on their long-term goal of influencing the military balance in the Mediterranean. If so, it is only logical that they try to reduce the capability of the US at the same time.

Naval nuclear weapons

Despite the planned unilateral withdrawals of tactical naval nuclear weapons from the US and Soviet fleet, these systems will not be destroyed, and may be re-deployed in the future. Therefore, a separate word needs to be spent on naval nuclear weapons in the Mediterranean. Depending on their deployment patterns and numbers, their contribution to a land battle in Europe may or may not be significant. Carrier-based aviation is more relevant for potential operations in the Middle East or North Africa, as was the case in the 1986 American use of such forces for power projection missions against Libya. Even in this field, the developments of the war in the Gulf seem to show that carrier-based aviation *per se* (that is, not aided by massive armies and land-based air forces) is of limited utility even against a non-nuclear opponent.

On the other hand, an important military role of US naval nuclear weapons in the Mediterranean in case of a war in Europe would be to produce a coupling effect among various theaters in the continent. This is a particularly important aspect from the Italian point of view, because Italy has traditionally worried about being relegated to the margins of NATO's attention because of its decoupled position in the Southern flank. Specifically, US naval nuclear weapons in the Mediterranean could link operations in the Central region with the flanks, thus tying Italy into the central European correlation of military forces, while at the same time reducing the probability of a limited conflict and thereby enhancing deterrence.

Because of this, it is with some reason that the Soviets see the US

nuclear SLCM as a *de facto* circumvention of the INF treaty. For the same reason there is some resistance in Italian (as well as other West European) defense establishments to encourage the rescission of the last remaining US missiles based in the European theater which can reach deep into Soviet territory. The withdrawal of nuclear warheads from SLCMs makes the question mute for the time being.

As for the specific contribution of naval nuclear weapons to the land-battle, one needs to distinguish between carrier-borne and non-SLBM submarine weapons, and particularly SLCM. The latter would be especially valuable for a land-attack, deterrent role, and therefore need to be considered separately from the naval balance of power per se. Carrier-borne aircraft, on the other hand, have a more limited deterrent role: their strike capability is in fact altogether negligible against the USSR, and it would likely be politically unusable against non-nuclear powers. Perhaps because of this, nuclear-capable carrier-based aviation was considered the least essential naval element in the Mediterranean also by the US Navy, and there had been discrete rumors on its possible denuclearization even before Bush's announcement of September 1991.

In light of the above paragraphs, the following can be deduced with respect to Italian concerns with arms control agreements on naval nuclear weapons. A complete ban on naval nuclear weapons in the Mediterranean is a step toward the decoupling of Italy, which after the the INF treaty no longer hosts any US long range nuclear systems, from the general deterrence equation in Europe. The deployment of the 401st squadron of F-16s in Crotona would attenuate this conclusion, but the probabilities of that base ever being completed today are declining rapidly. On the other hand, given both the unilateral control by the US over its naval nuclear forces, and the unusability of such systems against possible non-nuclear threats to Italy coming from the South, a denuclearization of the US fleet will not affect Italy's defenses against possible Arab attacks such as the one by Libya in 1986.

Confidence Building Measures

After the denuclearization of the US and Soviet navies, a category of naval arms control which may hold promise for the future is that of Confidence and Security-building Measures (CSBMs). In assessing possible CSBM proposals in the Mediterranean, one should start from an evaluation of what agreements have already been concluded and how new ones could improve on them. Several agreements of a confidence-building nature for naval forces bear directly on the situation in the Mediterranean. Many did in fact originate from incidents between the superpowers' fleets in the Mediterranean or the Black Sea.

The US-USSR Agreement for the Prevention of Incidents at Sea (INCSEA), signed in 1972, specifically forbids provocative or dangerous activities such as attack simulations. Allegedly, the agreement originated from the filming by the US Navy of close contact episodes with the Soviet Eskadra in the Mediterranean.⁴ The US-Soviet agreement has been imitated by the UK (in 1986); Germany (in 1988); France, Italy, Norway and Canada (in 1989). As of 1991, Turkey, the Netherlands and Spain are negotiating their own INCSEA agreements with the USSR. These

⁴ Hilton, Robert P.: "A Confidence-Building Measure at Work: The 1972 US-USSR Incidents-at-Sea Agreement", in *Naval Confidence-building Measures* (New York: United Nations, 1990), p.150.

agreements have a direct bearing on the Mediterranean, because the navies which are parties to them include all the major ones that are present in that sea.

A complementary agreement, which however has not been replicated by other countries, is the US-Soviet agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities was signed in Moscow in 1989, and it applies also to naval forces. It establishes, among other things, procedures to deal with the entry of each party's forces in the territorial waters or air-space of other. As in the case of the INCSEA, it was prompted by several incidents, the most publicized of which was perhaps that involving several near collisions in the Black Sea in 1988 when US ships entered Soviet territorial waters. Because of the frequent problems concerning the passage through territorial waters that have arisen in the Mediterranean, it would be advisable that this agreement be replicated among other countries and possibly multilateralized.

The Stockholm agreement of 1986 also covers naval activity, but only if it is "functionally related" to other military activities on land. Specifically, it requires notification 42 days in advance of amphibious landings in excess of 3,000 men, and the invitation of observers for those over 5,000. This agreement could be a relevant model for a naval agreement in the Mediterranean, which is a staging area for frequent amphibious operations.

Geographic constraints on fleet mobility might easily conflict with each state's sovereign right to enter into alliances with other states and host the forces of the latter; they would therefore hardly be acceptable. This type of measure might also pose a problem with the principle of free navigation in the high seas. Limited options would entail the establishment of partial exclusion zones for certain types of naval armaments only. After Bush's initiative of September 1991, nuclear exclusion zones in the Mediterranean has become a mute issue for the time being, though it might be argued that it would be useful to institutionalize the nuclear-free status of the Mediterranean through a binding agreement of unlimited duration. (The only remaining nuclear weapons on vessels (SLBMs) are not deployed in the Mediterranean in any case.) This is not likely to be an attractive proposition, however, since West European governments by and large wish to retain at least the option of a US nuclear role in the future.

Exclusion-zones have been considered for weapons other than nuclear ones, e.g. for submarines with land-attack SLCM (which, while denuclearized, remain in the superpowers' navies). It has sometimes been suggested that in order not to be provocative these weapon-systems and their platforms should be kept farther from the coast of potential target countries than their range. Such a measure would be difficult to negotiate in the Mediterranean because quite a few states (both riparian and not) now have long-range weapons (notably guided missiles) on board their ships, even on light vessels. Thus, keeping them farther away from other parties to a range-based treaty could easily block off the whole Mediterranean. Alternatively, it has been suggested that the depth of exclusion zones could be linked to the 200-mile EEZ band: again, in the Mediterranean, which would be almost completely covered by 200-mile zones, the effect would be equivalent to total ban.

A variation on the above could be to limit naval maneuvers per se, as a distinct activity compared to others, such as transfers, permanent stationing or actual force employment. However, to make this distinction could be difficult in practice. In addition, it could pose a problem if one state wanted to use naval power for actual

operations, and not for exercises. In principle, an agreement to limit maneuvers should not affect such operations, but the state concerned would have to declare that a particular naval activity was not a maneuver, and thus imply that it is about to use naval power; this would hardly be feasible from a tactical point of view. Also, in the Mediterranean these limitations would constrain the US more than any other power because it does more large exercises away from home ports. The Soviets, as well as all other Mediterranean naval powers, do fewer and smaller exercises, and they are considerably closer to home. This measure would likely be feasible only if all movements of naval vessels were considered as maneuvers.

With these caveats, limits on maneuvers would have to specify the number of participating units, the number of participating states, and what length and size of deployment would constitute a "maneuver". These numbers could not be too low or it would be too cumbersome to manage the agreement in a multilateral setting like the Mediterranean (with many small navies) and might actually make it irrelevant because it would confuse noise with signal.

Following the pattern of the Stockholm agreements of 1986, numerical thresholds could be agreed beyond which states or groups of states would be required to notify naval maneuvers. Many of the issues discussed in the previous section with respect to limits on maneuvers would apply also in the case of notification requirements. In order to be workable, an agreement on notification could leave a small margin of flexibility in case unforeseen circumstances force last-minute changes in the composition and structure of the maneuver. A notification regime would also have to include provisions for timing exercises; thus it would need to define when an "exercise" starts and when it ends, and how long before that moment it would have to be notified. That time span must not be too wide to interfere with operational planning, but not too short as to be meaningless. A basis for negotiation could be the CSCE 42 days rule. This scheme could be implemented in a multilateral form, so as to make it possible for all states in the Mediterranean to accede. To make the scheme more appropriate to the disparate sized of Mediterranean navies, it could be possible to devise moving threshold in terms of ships and advance days: the more ships participate, the earlier notification.

One could also envisage regional military hotlines. These already exist at political level bilaterally between Moscow and several Mediterranean naval powers (US, France, UK, Italy). Similar hotlines for crisis-management could be established at the military level between the Sixth Fleet and the Soviet Eskadra; perhaps this could be done on a multilateral level among the major navies in the area.

The creation of a naval crisis prevention center could also be envisaged; a small international staff should monitor all naval activities in the Mediterranean and signal alarm every time that a potentially ambiguous or dangerous situation may develop. This would likely be better done in combination with other CSBMs so that it would have specific bench-marks against which to measure the development of potential dangerous situations.

Finally, transparency in naval strategies would have some confidence-building power: one way to tackle the problem could be to proceed to a partial standardization of Rules of Engagement. This would have to follow an exchange of information on existing rules and could obviously not be done fully because this would imply the revelation to a potential enemy of vital tactics which must of course

remain strictly secret. But it probably could be done at a fairly general level, though in that case the challenge would be to make these principles vague enough to be acceptable but not too vague as to be meaningless.

The Italian Standpoint

With respect to naval arms control in general Italy has taken an official position which closely follows the US stand: it refuses both any naval reductions and any linkage between naval and other arms control negotiating tables. This general position applies to both Italian national naval forces and to other NATO (and primarily US) forces in the Mediterranean. This general official policy notwithstanding, there is reason to believe that Italy does support the contention that regional naval arms control in the Mediterranean should be addressed, albeit in a primarily political context and in a long-run perspective aimed at increasing security without necessarily reducing the quantitative levels of naval forces. This is what can be inferred from recent Italian proposals concerning a Conference for Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean (CSCM)—see below.

In Italy, much of the national expertise on military matters is concentrated in the services. The Italian Navy is concerned only with the conventional aspect of naval arms control: it does not have nuclear weapons of any kind, as Italy is a party to the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). It does not even share any with the US under dual-key arrangement, and neither does it have any nuclear propelled vessels. Proposals for the acquisition of the latter, which would not have violated the NPT, were seriously considered but eventually discounted in the sixties.

In general, the Italian Navy is opposed to the expansion of arms control to the naval sphere. This stems from two separate kinds of considerations. First, the Navy shares the view of the US navy about the unrenounceable necessity for NATO to maintain dominance in the high seas in order to protect SLOCs and specifically, in the Mediterranean, to link the non-contiguous Southern allies.

Second, Italy has growing ambitions of playing a role in national power projection, particularly in the Mediterranean region and in the Middle East. The Navy has been the main instrument to implement this increased national political role. A naval contingent is part of the UN force in the Sinai; naval units were used in 1987-1988 to escort merchant vessels in the Gulf during the Iraq-Iran war; minehunters were deployed in 1988 to clear the Red Sea; and several cruisers, supply ships and frigates were rotated to the Gulf after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. (The Italian use of Army units in the Lebanon in 1982, and the deployment of a small Air Force contingent in the war against Iraq in 1991 are the only two exceptions to this pattern.) The navy maintains that the experience of the Gulf war proves that a strong navy is essential to the new security threats to the West, and thus also to Italy. It supports this argument with the observation that 95% of the «Operation Desert Storm» equipment was transported by sea.⁵

Accordingly to this perception of a greater naval role for the post-Cold War security of Italy, the Italian Navy has been pursuing an expansion program which would have been even more considerable had it not been for reasons of budget

⁵ See a piece by the Chief of the Naval Staff, Adm. Filippo Ruggiero: "La Marina Militare Dopo il Golfo Persico" (The Navy after the Gulf), speech to the Center for Higher Defense Studies, Rome; published in *Rivista Marittima*, June 1991.

limitations and inter-service rivalry. During the eighties it completed the *Garibaldi* program, which resulted in the first operational Italian aircraft carrier (though it is euphemistically called a "full-deck cruiser"). For several years after its launching the *Garibaldi* complement of fixed-wing aircraft was under discussion. Until 1991, the ship has been endowed with helicopters only. In 1989 the Parliament approved plans to buy Harrier STOL aircraft. In the summer of 1991, the first training aircraft were delivered at Norfolk, Virginia, but the procurement process is not yet completed.

Because of the Navy's requirement for two battle groups, and because maintenance and overhaul would keep the *Garibaldi* out of operations for prolonged periods at a time, there are now plans for a second *Garibaldi*-class carrier under discussion. The case for a second ship is strengthened by the fact that Italy's other main command ships are scheduled to be decommissioned sometime in the mid-nineties.

Against this background, it is easy to understand why the Navy is likely to oppose any arms-control limitations on carrier-based aircraft. Even if Italy were not directly included in superpower reductions, the Navy would see its position weakened in the context of such an agreement. Domestic opponents of the *Garibaldi* program would have a strong argument in questioning an Italian build-up at a time of reduced tensions and superpower reductions. The proposition that the likely reduction of the US military commitment to Europe requires a greater Italian effort does not seem to have gained much currency.

One opponent of an increased role for the Navy is the Italian Air Force, which has sternly resisted the procurement of a fixed-wing air arm for the Navy. Until recently it has been aided in this policy by the remnants of Fascist legislation which forbade the Navy to acquire fixed-wing aircraft. The Air Force argues that it can cover all of the necessary missions in the Mediterranean from Italian land bases and from those of other NATO allies. If it should prove absolutely necessary to actually put fixed-wing aircraft on-board ships, for example in order to perform operations out-of-area where no land bases were available, the Air Force maintains that it would be ready to put *its* fixed-wing aircraft on the *Garibaldi*! The Air Force thus concludes that fixed-wing aircraft for the Navy are a waste of resources and a useless duplication of effort. It actually takes offense at the Navy's alleged lack of trust in the ability of Air Force pilots to wage an air war at sea!⁶

There are few other vested opinions in the Italian society on the matter of naval arms control. Some environmental groups have sporadically argued for the elimination of nuclear propulsion vessels from the Mediterranean, but this has never been a prominent issue in the national public policy debate. Environmentalists have concentrated their attention on killing civilian nuclear power, which they successfully did in the eighties. They have not been aided by the fact that in Mediterranean there has never been any serious accident or environmental contamination by US nuclear forces, and neither any spectacular sinking or stranding of Soviet nuclear submarines of the kind that produced so much impression in the North of Europe. (That there have been occasional findings by marine researchers of higher than usual radiation levels near US naval bases does not seem to have provided sufficient ammunition to the

⁶ Associazione Arma Aeronautica: *Costituzione di una Aviazione Navale: Il Perché di Un Dissenso* (Building a naval air-arm: the reason for our dissent), Rome, 1987.

naval arms control lobby.)

In conclusion, one can argue that the Navy emphasizes its unique role in Italian national security, and in the changing security scenario of Southern Europe. With its greater emphasis on the threat from out of NATO area contingencies, it is therefore more sensitive to the acquisition of power projection capabilities. The Air Force's position is more ambivalent, on the one hand argues that these power projection capabilities are not needed, on the other it offers to provide aircraft for them as long as it remains within its administrative sphere of influence. It even accuses the Navy of lack of cooperative interservice spirit.⁷ These positions reflect a mutual desire for greater clout and budget allocations, but less forward-looking strategic thinking than it would be desirable to see in the Italian armed forces, especially at a time of shrinking defense budgets. It would be desirable if the Italian armed forces devoted more effort to the realization of a coherent interservice program of development and procurement.

2. The Political Framework⁸

The security scenario of the Mediterranean is not determined solely, and probably not even mainly, by the presence of naval arms, nor, indeed, by military factors in general. Other factors, of a mainly political nature, contribute to shape a complex web of security relationships in the region. Italian scholars and officials have long pointed this out in the national security debate, but until recently they had a difficult time to attract the attention of their European and American colleagues, who have for decades concentrated all of their attention on the Soviet threat coming from the East toward the Central front. Only in recent years, with the simultaneous decline of the Soviet threat and increasing instability in the Middle East, has the West as a whole begun to turn its attention to the threats to its security coming from the South.

Studies on the feasibility of naval arms control, too, have tended to gravitate on the East-West relationship. Indeed, NATO and the USSR have the largest naval presence in the region, but in the Mediterranean there exist a web of other military forces which operate quite independently of that relationship. The armed forces (naval and not) of North African and Middle Eastern countries (with the exception of Israel) are by and large not a match for the USSR or NATO. They do however pose a military danger insofar as they might be an instrument for regional conflicts which may draw in, by virtue of strategic interests or just of mere proximity, NATO countries or the Soviet Union.

In light of this, while naval arms control, like all arms control, must be considered in the first place for its military value—it is, after all, *arms* control—in the Mediterranean the political role of the naval presence of NATO and the USSR in the regional balance of power must also be taken into account. In addition, naval forces in the Mediterranean also serve non-East-West national political purposes, as recent use of the US Sixth Fleet for non-NATO contingencies has demonstrated. In

⁷ Nardi, Catullo: unpublished speech to the Air Force Association, May 1985.

⁸ The author is indebted to Roberto Aliboni for his contribution to my understanding of the issues covered in this section.

both of these cases, the political value of having a naval presence in the Mediterranean applies in disproportionately greater measure to the US than to the USSR.

American unilateral use of naval force in the Mediterranean has underscored the fact that, even for non-regional powers, in this region the North-South dimension of security is not less important than the East-West dimension. In Central Europe, the existence of the two great alliances and their cohesion around the hegemony of the two superpowers has greatly simplified the political framework and has allowed for important and useful arms control negotiations. This applies also to the Northern region of Europe, where the regional security picture coincides with that of the East-West relationship. On the contrary, in the Mediterranean a national fragmentation of interests and relationship prevails, and it could make arms control negotiations more difficult, if not impossible.

In other words, the centrality and the multidimensional character of naval arms in the Mediterranean is not paralleled anywhere else in the continent, even though naval arms do play a role in the other regions of Europe. In fact, in both Central and Northern Europe the mission of naval arms has been confined to the East-West relationship and is of a predominantly military nature. On the contrary, in the Mediterranean, naval arms play a role in both the East-West and the North-South frameworks and their mission is political as well as military.

All of this means that any East-West naval arms control agreement in the Mediterranean would have limited impact on the security and stability of the region, certainly much less than that which similar accords would have in the Northern theater. Therefore, the most important political problem which must be addressed in addressing hypotheses of East-West arms control in the Mediterranean is what repercussions such an accord might have on the regional level.

On this plane, three hypotheses can be formulated. First, an East-West accord is explicitly tied to a wider accord—multilateral or multi-bilateral—which involves the non-aligned countries of the Mediterranean. Second, an East-West accord creates a vacuum at the regional level, eliminating an important political and military instrument of crisis-management. Third, after such a vacuum is created, European and Arab powers move in to fill it and pick up the stabilizing role which is now performed by the superpowers.

The first hypothesis is consistently supported by the neutral states which participate in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE,) and it is also supported by the Italian government and by numerous North-African riparian countries. The extension of the CSCE process to the Mediterranean is often used as a propaganda tool, as it is an easy way to reaffirm the militant Third-Worldism of some of the countries in the region. This was the case, for example, with the former Labor Government of Malta and of that of Algeria. Be that as it may, the Mediterranean dimension has always been present in the CSCE process through the various Forums which have been organized at its margins. Recently, one of the CSCE follow-up conferences—Palma de Majorca, in September 1990—has been dedicated to the Mediterranean, though it has been rather unproductive as far as arms control is concerned.

The idea of extending the CSCE process has so far been rather inconclusive. It could be re-examined in the future with the aim of highlighting its connections to the naval arms control process and its political implications. A related

proposal is that of either multilateralizing or duplicating the US-USSR agreement on the prevention of incidents at sea among countries of the region.

The second hypothesis could materialize in case of a general framework of European weakness and fragmentation, in which nationalism gain new momentum. The lack of any hegemonic power and incompatible national interests would make for an explosive blend, as they would exacerbate existing tensions and might catalyze latent ones—such as that over the application of the Law of the Sea.

The third hypothesis involves an assessment of the prospective development of the West European military potential and of military cohesion among Southern European states. In the last several years, France, Italy and Spain have begun to develop their maritime presence in the Mediterranean and more recently they have set up a network of bilateral cooperation agreements, with some multilateral cooperation in air and naval communication. Also of interest in this respect are the hypotheses developed by the Western European Union with respect to the elaboration of a common European security concept. The WEU's Platform of 1987 explicitly mentioned the Mediterranean as one region where such common concept should apply.

In the context of the third hypothesis, some attention should be paid to the possibility of concluding North-South security agreements. In the past few years, several Mediterranean leaders, such as Mitterrand, Craxi, Mubarak and González, have often called for the creation of an informal group modeled on the Contadora group in Latin America. This group would be charged with managing crises at the regional level and could fill in the vacuum of potential instability which might be created by substantial reductions in the military—and particularly naval—presence of the two superpowers.

More recently, Italian Foreign minister Gianni De Michelis has proposed the launching of a Conference for Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean (CSCM). In broad terms, this should be modeled after the CSCE, and include all riparian countries, other Middle Eastern countries all the way up to Iran, the two military superpowers and an as of yet unclear number of other European states.

While Italy has not explicitly proposed that naval arms control should be part of a future CSCM, neither has it ruled that possibility out. Therefore, at least in the form of CSBMs, it seems difficult to see how it could *not* be included. To exclude naval issues from any discussion of military security in the Mediterranean would be as if a CSCE arms control agreement for continental Europe had been devised excluding tanks.

On the other hand, even under the most favorable auspices, the CSCM would only be a very indirect approach to the issue of naval arms control. Much like the CSCE, and perhaps even more so, it would not deal only, or even mainly, with arms control, but with a long list of issues ranging from border security to economic cooperation to human rights, etc.

So far, the idea of a CSCM has not elicited much response from either the US or other Mediterranean countries, with the exception of Spain (whence the idea actually originated before Italian Foreign minister De Michelis picked it up with vigor) and, somewhat less warmly, France. Two main orders of objections have been raised against the CSCM: first, the Conference would be difficult to manage because

it would not be about a clear problem like the CSCE was about the East-West confrontation. On the contrary, it would be about a set of very different problems and bilateral and multilateral confrontations. Second, the area concerned (De Michelis has spoken of the CSCM as spanning from Morocco to Iran) is politically too heterogeneous for all the countries in it to be able to come around the same table and conclude meaningful agreements. In the end, it is unlikely that the CSCM will materialize into a useful forum for concrete arms control initiatives unless others among the major West European countries will put their economic and political weight behind it, and this is not probable in the short term.

The idea of the CSCM is but one symptom of the fact that Italy in recent years has re-evaluated its regional role in international relations in general and in the Mediterranean region in particular. There is a long tradition of Italian geopolitical interest in the region, which dates back to the early days of the Italian state in the second half of the nineteenth century. It had been dormant since the end of World War II, but with the recent rising of its international political and economic stature, once again Italy sees greater opportunity for influencing foreign affairs, and particularly developments in the Mediterranean, where it enjoys strong bilateral ties with many countries. Italy sees a greater role in Mediterranean affairs also as a means to increase its contribution to NATO's overall defense burden. This is particularly true at a time when out-of-area issues are gaining importance in the alliance, especially with respect to areas adjacent to the Southern region. Given the geography of the region, this greater Italian contribution can be accomplished mainly, though not only, through naval forces. The recent Italian participation in various military missions in the Middle East, discussed above, has in fact strengthened the political position of the pro-navy lobby.

Part 3: Legal Aspects⁹

Naval arms control has also a legal aspect connected with the Law of the Sea. The following aspects are particularly relevant for Italy: Legal problems of fleet mobility; transit passage and innocent passage through international straits; the Mediterranean as a closed or semi-enclosed sea and the idea of proclamation of a zone of peace; the establishment of CSBMs in the naval context—for this aspect, see also the first section above.

All warships currently enjoy freedom of navigation in the high seas. However, this freedom is threatened by the extension of territorial sovereignty of the coastal states and by the establishment of new marine areas. A number of Mediterranean states have established a system of strait baselines, and some of them now claim vast marine areas as internal waters. For instance, Italy claims the Gulf of Taranto as an historic bay, while Libya has the same claim for the Gulf of Sidra. While the Libyan claim is flatly contested by many other states, the problem remains.

Freedom of navigation could also be endangered should coastal states proclaim Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs.) As a matter of fact, most Third World

⁹ The author is indebted to Natalino Ronzitti for his generous contribution to my understanding of the issues covered in this section.

countries affirm that naval exercises can not be held in the EEZ of a foreign country. Up until now no state has proclaimed an EEZ in the Mediterranean—aside from the theoretical Egyptian proclamation which, however, has never been concretely defined. But it is possible, indeed likely, that this might happen in the future.

One issue which may push in this direction is that there is a growing concern against marine pollution provoked by military navigation, and particularly by nuclear propulsors. Pollution provoked by warships is not disciplined by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Hence, this concern could bring the Mediterranean states to put forward proposals for forbidding or limiting access to nuclear warships and submarines, or even to unilaterally adopt measure to restrict fleet mobility on the ground that they are necessary to protect a vital national interest such as the integrity of the environment. Italy has consistently been against any restrictions to the rights of navigation.

Passage through the straits of the Mediterranean is of vital importance for the exercise of the right of collective self-defense in NATO. Foreign fleets must enter the Mediterranean for the Alliance's members to implement this right. The UNCLOS convention set up a right of transit passage which implies a right of passage for surface fleets, a right of overflight and a right for submarines to navigate submerged. However, the coastal states around Gibraltar—and particularly Morocco—dispute the content of this right. Other states submit innocent passage through straits to particular limitations. For instance, Italy has forbidden navigation through the Messina straits to tankers of more than fifty-thousand tons. With the extension of territorial waters, many choke-points have become straits in juridical sense. For instance, this would be the case of the Corsica choke-point (between Corsica and the Tuscanian archipelago.)

Many Aegean choke-points could become straits if Greece extended the limits of its territorial waters up to twelve miles. This could create additional burdens for the mobility of foreign fleets because of the control exercised by the coastal states on the strait waters.

Obviously the access to the Black Sea is of fundamental importance. The Montreux Convention is fairly obsolete and should be revised. However, a revision of this convention raises problems of participation to the revision procedure since the United States is not a party to it while the Soviet Union is. A revision could also be politically sensitive since the Soviet Union will likely claim a right to pass the strait with aircraft carriers, whose right to pass the strait is currently highly disputed. However, a revision seems necessary since the control of the application of the convention is entrusted with organs no more in existence, as those of the League of Nations. A revision of the Montreux convention could be also an occasion for establishing and possibly widening rights of navigation through the Black Sea, which are threatened by the policy of the coastal states.

According to the Articles 122 and 123 of the UNCLOS, the Mediterranean can be considered as an enclosed or semi-enclosed sea. These provisions set up a framework for regional cooperation which has to be implemented among coastal states and with the help of proper international organizations. Third states could also be invited. However, Articles 122 and 123 preserve the rights of third states and the notion of enclosed or semi-enclosed sea has no influence on the right of navigation and access to this kind of waters. Moving from the institution of

enclosed or semi-enclosed seas, a number of states (particularly Third World and former socialist countries) want to establish "zones of peace". The establishment of such zones might however hinder the international right of navigation, especially for warships. For these zones are barred to nuclear warships and generally to all warships of third countries. Thus, should the Mediterranean become a "zone of peace", the US Sixth Fleet could be forbidden access to it. The establishment of a "zone of peace" also limits the rights of the coastal states, since it would be inherent in such an institution that they would be more prone to unbalanced demilitarization.

The current trend in the CSCE process is to extend its geographical scope to the Mediterranean, including its naval dimension. A first step could be the establishment of naval Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBMs.) However, CSBMs and "zones of peace" are quite different concepts. The treaties for the prevention of incidents at sea between the USSR and several Western countries are a genuine CSBM; on the contrary, a prohibition of access to nuclear submarines would fall within the notion of "zone of peace".

Conclusions

The main conclusion that emerges from the above discussion is that the most immediately practicable avenue for naval arms control in the Mediterranean goes through CSBMs. In particular, this could be efficiently done by extending existing ones. Thus, it would be highly desirable to multilateralize the existing network of "incidents at sea" agreements, perhaps somewhat along the lines of past Swedish proposals. This rather uncontroversial agreements could be a useful start in such a heterogeneous strategic environment like the Mediterranean. After the US-Soviet agreement on the prevention of incidents at sea of 1972, several other countries signed similar agreements with the USSR, and these agreements closely resemble the US-Soviet one, so there is no reason why they should not be harmonized into a multilateral arrangement which could be easily accessible to other interested partners in the region. Unfortunately, neither Italy nor any other Mediterranean country has thought it advisable to seek making these treaties into a multilateral and homogeneous agreement, involving the largest possible number of participants.

Because of the inherent flexibility which stems out of fleet mobility, superpower negotiations on ceilings of naval weapons will necessarily have to be conducted on a global scale. The Bush initiative of September 1991, and Gorbachev's response to it, seems to confirm this requirement. It could be argued that aircraft and tanks are (though less easily) mobile as well and yet are negotiated upon on a regional basis; but navies are much less dependent on host-country support, and therefore have a much more resilient staying power than aircraft. Nonetheless, regional naval sub-ceilings are also conceivable. This would mean limits on deployment patterns, and the Mediterranean region could be one of these. This issue is particularly complicated in the Mediterranean due to the non-homogeneous claims of riparian states.

Italy has so far failed to launch any meaningful initiative in naval arms control agreement, and in fact it has been generally opposed even to discussing the matter officially. This is at least in part because it is in the process of expanding the role of its own navy. The recent acquisition of an air-wing for the *Garibaldi*, and the

planned procurement of a second *Garibaldi*-class carrier, seem to indicate that, despite budgetary difficulties and inter-service rivalry, this process will continue. Italy's greater international military presence in the last decade, particularly in non-NATO out-of-area operations in the Middle East, have reinforced this trend.

The third section in this essay has provided a brief review of the legal problems which would be involved in the limitation of fleet mobility in the Mediterranean. To be acceptable, no naval arms control agreement should jeopardize freedom of navigation. Again, CSBMs seem to be the most practicable avenue in this respect.