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NAVAL ARMS CONTROL AND MARITIME SECURITY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN - A BRITISH PERSPECTIVE

by Gordon Wilson

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An assessment of the Mediterranean Region underlines the significance of this maritime area in a much broader context than its geographical limits and its relationship to what we call the Near and Middle East, as well, of course, to Europe and this has always played an important part in British strategic thinking.

From a British viewpoint the Mediterranean has always been important as the meeting point between East and West, even before the opening of the Suez Canal, and has had a major significance in coalition wars. Subsequently its geographical relationship as a waterway to most of the major elements of the Empire with its vital links in the form of Gibraltar, Malta and the Suez Canal enhanced the significant strategic value of the area. This accounted for the value placed upon the retention of British influence during the Second World War in spite of desperately stretched resources which, to some strategists commenting in later years, suggested that it would have been better to have abandoned the area.[1] Had in fact Britain given up its marked influence in the Mediterranean and its vital adjunct the Suez Canal, it would never have recovered it, with all that involved for the then British perspective of its Empire. In the post war years Britain has continued to recognise the importance of the area, latterly making its major contribution under the auspices of NATO, which has now become the keystone of British policy in the area.

With the exception of the last decade and a half, Britain always kept a significant number of permanently based forces in the region and still makes a substantial contribution in the form of personnel in the various headquarters. Maritime force levels are considerably augmented for major exercises and the UK has had a regular presence in the NAVOCFORMED activations and will now be a member of the STANAVFORMED, which is seen as a most welcome innovation. The contribution to this latter newly constituted force is seen by the United Kingdom as a redirection of national operating and training patterns and we are certain that full time participation in standing naval forces provides considerably better training opportunities than those obtained from on call forces. Whenever the real world strategic situation has demanded it force levels have been enhanced and for an example one only has to go back to the coalition operation after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and note the large British force centred around the carrier Ark Royal operating in the Eastern Mediterranean in addition to the substantial presence in the forward areas of the Persian Gulf participating in DESERT STORM. The current (August 1992) employment of STANAVFORMED with its British presence and other British warships in the Adriatic in support of the operations concerned with the Serbia-Bosnian crisis reflect the British support of efforts to resolve matters of grave international security concern, not least in the maritime sphere.

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[1] See, for example, Corelli Barnett: Engage the Enemy More Closely (London: Hodder and Stoughton 1991)

Since the formation of NATO the Mediterranean has been fundamental to alliance strategic thought, with the Southern Region centred around this sea and its headquarters at the heart of the area, first at Malta and subsequently at Naples. Thus we had as one of the five major sea campaigns postulated in the NATO document Concept of Maritime Operations (CONMAROPS), the battle for control of the Mediterranean on a par with that for the North Norwegian Sea. Whereas the latter has until recently been seen by strategists to have been the more important, who is to say that the emphasis has not now been reversed, albeit in a different strategic environment? This is likely to be reflected in the rewrite of this NATO document. We have also seen over the years the premium placed on maritime strike operations in the area by both the United States and NATO, such that it has been one of the prime areas for responsive sea borne strikes against the USSR should they be needed. The Soviets for their part were very much aware of this and, prior to the new order in Eastern Europe, countered the NATO fleets with large surface and subsurface forces of their own.

Subsequently, in the Gorbachev years of arms control initiatives, the Soviets adopted a different tack and made many proposals that the Mediterranean should be a sea of peace with all military forces withdrawn or alternatively that naval forces, which include those of the Soviets, should only operate in the region as a combined force under the auspices of the United Nations. These were resisted by NATO and in the relatively short time that has passed since then such has been the change in the world balance of power, let alone the diversity of opinion coming out of the former Soviet Union, that one heard, for example, proposals that supported the strength of the NATO commitment to the Mediterranean in the interests of the security of the region[2] or that NATO and USSR forces should operate together with the same aim in mind.[3] This was a far cry from an ocean of peace and reflects the reality of world affairs.

NATO's approach in this changing strategic environment needs to be looked at in the light of the revised Alliance Strategic Concept published at the end of 1991. In the discussions on a new alliance strategic concept we read about a "strengthening European pillar of the alliance" and "the preparedness of the European allies to take a greater share of responsibility for their own security", although under this changing balance it states that the "European security environment cannot be addressed without recognition of the broader global context. Substantial military power, including ballistic missile technology and weapons of mass destruction, already exists in the hands of states outside the CSCE process that may be hostile toward Alliance members. If such states either border on Alliance territory, or have weapons with sufficient range to reach NATO nations, they could put Alliance populations and territory at serious risk. These potential threats on the Alliance's periphery are clearly covered by articles 5 and 6 of the Washington Treaty." Later it goes on to discuss the implications for the Southern Region which must not only address Soviet capabilities, but "a different order of potential risks must also be considered, stemming from the substantial military capabilities of states outside the CSCE process or from other regional instabilities."

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[2] Georgi Sturua, Paper at Conference on Naval Arms Limitations and Maritime Security, Dalhousie University, 27 June 1990

[3] UK/US/USSR discussions Adderbury series, Brown University, R.I. November 1990

Manfred Worner addressing the North Atlantic Assembly at the end of November 1990 was very imaginative in his vision of the future, speaking of "variable geometry" in his concept of the limitations imposed by NATO's boundaries and, after all, this is a very important consideration in considering the response to such threats. He said that the Gulf Crisis demonstrated that "risks can arise from new and unexpected quarters" with the result that "threats to NATO's territorial integrity from beyond Europe cannot be downplayed as out-of-area threats". He believed that as a result "increasingly [the] Alliance must factor these risks into its defence planning" for they all required "a collective response and renewed focus on long term crisis protection".[4] This approach will have the inevitable effect of pulling the centre of NATO's gravity south towards the Mediterranean and, I suggest, that without a more realistic and pragmatic approach it is going to be very difficult to deal with the threats that do exist to NATO's Southern Flank in an effective way.

The previous Commander of NATO's Southern Region, CINCSOUTH, Admiral Jonathan Howe, spoke illuminatingly on these matters to the IISS in January 1991. He said that NATO is in transition and would have to adjust quite rapidly to major political and strategic change and, looking beyond the traditional threat, the Balkans were an area of increasing instability, as has most manifestly subsequently been proved. Looking further afield it was getting very difficult for NATO to maintain a firm distinction between in area and out of area(OOA) in view of the growing sophistication of weapons and the increasing number of OOA interests of the member nations - and here of course he impinged on the debate on Europe's future defence posture, which I feel is the fundamental strategic question that has to be addressed by us Europeans and which is very high on the British agenda. Post 1992 Europe, with economic strength greater than that of the US, must be seen to be doing more to protect its obvious interests and this will be as much on the US agenda as on that of the European nations themselves.

Taking Worner's inference further, Howe vividly described this new emphasis as NATO's centre of gravity sliding down to the Southern Region. From this new perspective there were three major concerns. The then USSR; the Balkans and particularly the ethnic effects on the Italians and the Greeks (very prophetic in view of the impact last year of Albanian migration on the Italians); the south and south-east areas. With regard to the last, a combination of acute economic and demographic problems, irrational leaders, improved air to air refuelling techniques and ballistic missile proliferation gave rise to major concerns.

The traditional OOA zones had changed to direct, such as Iraq, Syria and Libya, which bordered NATO's territories, albeit Libya lay across the Mediterranean, and those a little further afield, no longer OOA, but now, he suggested, near area because they were able to impact directly on NATO's own territory. In any case NATO's interests extended beyond the direct geographical area, as illustrated by the then current Iraq crisis.

The experience of the British and Americans in moving forces to the Gulf region underlined the enduring significance of the Mediterranean as a highway for sea movements between east and west. According to the testimony of Vice Admiral

[4] Manfred Worner, Address by Secretary General of NATO and Chairman of the North Atlantic Council to thirty sixth annual session, London 29 November 1990

Donovan, the commander US Military Sealift Command, to the House Armed Services Committee on 19 February 1991, the United States moved 94% of its total cargo to support DESERT SHIELD/STORM by strategic sealift. Of this 75% went through the Mediterranean. From the UK perspective it took 72 ships to move 4 Brigade, the reinforcing brigade to 7th Armoured Brigade in order to make up 1st Armoured Division, from Germany to the Gulf and by the time the land offensive opened against Iraqi forces a total of 146 vessels had been chartered for the movement of military equipment in support of Operation GRANBY (the UK name for DESERT STORM).

In this context it is also well worth bearing in mind that in one of the proposals for a new United States Strategic Structure, which stands a very good chance of being adopted, the Atlantic, which is to be one of the four major commands, encompasses not only the Mediterranean but also the western Indian Ocean. This emphasises the link of the Mediterranean between the two areas of interest, hitherto regarded as separate, into one homogeneous region by the force of new strategic realities.

I hope I have shown that this has always been a region of significance to Great Britain, both from the perspective of an individual country and, subsequently, as a major actor of the NATO Alliance for sound historical and strategic reasons. It is now one of growing importance, not only to the Alliance, but to Europe as a whole as, from all perspectives, the centre of gravity shifts southwards, a perception that can only have been heightened by the Gulf war. Thus Europeans, within and without NATO, see the Mediterranean as an area of great significance to their security interests. New threats in a changing world include demographic pressures from the Maghreb as it looks across the sea to an affluent and relatively underpopulated southern Europe. Migration pressures are not only a threat from the south but also from the east and north east, as illustrated by the Albanians, and it should be noted that the Italians used their navy to respond to the problem. Drugs, ballistic missiles and chemical warfare are all growing threats from a southerly direction to add to the established, if now somewhat less immediate concerns to the east. New organisations such as the Hexagonale reflect the concerns of regional nations to respond to such pressures. Manfred Worner has described the area to the south and south east of Europe from the Maghreb to the Middle East as an "arc of tension"[5]. In his view NATO has to improve its crisis response and management attitudes to such threats and in tackling them in a wider area. His use of the term "variable geometry", mentioned earlier, is very much a call not to be hidebound by artificially restricting boundaries.

Central to this debate is that of the US presence in Europe. While there may be conjecture over the number of troops or aircraft to support them in Germany, I do not see the US drawing down too greatly its significant maritime contribution to the Mediterranean and this may therefore well become the residual American commitment of substance to the defence of Europe, albeit it will doubtless be reduced somewhat from the force levels of the last few decades. Looking from a directly associated European perspective the Italians see the area as one of increasing maritime importance and are as aware as any of the potential threat from the south, especially as it was at the island of Lampedusa that Gaddifi fired Scud missiles shortly after the US Libyan air raids, while the French have recently announced that they are to base

[5] Manfred Worner: address to North Atlantic Assembly, London, 29 November 1990

the major elements of their fleet at Toulon.

Therefore I see the region as one of increasing NATO interest and concern in which it is seen to be necessary to have the potential to be able to respond to any crisis, rather in the manner as the Inner German Border has been viewed in the past and this would reflect the official British line. Certainly, as there is no question over limits of operational areas in the Mediterranean itself, I would expect any potential response to be robust. Whether Manfred Worner's vision of NATO's defence of firm interests somewhat beyond but associated with this vital area is viable is open to considerable debate and there is still much to resolve in this sphere. The inertia of the NATO system and the reluctance of several nations to move from the cosy assurance provided by the old form of NATO and address difficult questions hampers the introduction of imaginative ideas to address the changing world. Nevertheless the Mediterranean needs more than ever to remain a direct area of NATO interest - as long, of course, as NATO lasts - and the US will certainly demand that, in tandem with the US efforts, Europeans contribute substantially to the security of the area and still the only effective means by which they can do so in concert is through the infrastructure of NATO.

I have addressed the NATO perspective at length because it is very important to the region and certainly to the British approach to strategic issues of the area. It is also important to have a comprehensive appreciation of these issues, past and present in order to address the maritime arms control debate as it applies to this region, which is unique in so many ways. Of course so much of the arms control debate is a legacy of the Cold War era and we have to bear this very much in mind before addressing the issue in the very dissimilar strategic climate that exists today.

Maritime measures were very firmly excluded from the mandate of the formal CFE arms control processes. The Madrid Mandate for the CFE negotiations specifically stated that "naval subjects.... will not be addressed" and in general this was accepted by the then Warsaw Pact, although the Soviets considered that naval forces could not be excluded from some forum similar to CFE, if not specifically contained within that body. The only area in which maritime forces have been considered is in the START talks in which SSBN missile numbers are a focus for discussion as part of a broader agenda and therefore as a consequence SSBN numbers themselves are obliquely affected. In their attempt to bring the issues of constraints on maritime operations and declaration of maritime exercises onto a formal negotiating table, the USSR primed the Warsaw Pact to present an 11 point proposal dealing specifically with naval subjects at the opening session of the CSCE talks on Confidence and Security Building Measures in March 1989. This mainly concerned thresholds above which exercises had to be declared, which itself was an unacceptable principle, but was also seen as an initial position leading to further more constraining proposals. By this approach the USSR fuelled the Western apprehension that the acceptance by the West of any proposal would be the "thin end of the wedge" or the "slippery slope" to further and more substantial proposals which would be more difficult to resist once hooked into a negotiating climate. As a consequence any proposal of any sort was resisted by the West with considerable robustness. The principle of no negotiating over maritime forces and weapons nor on their movement is a fundamental tenet of Western strategy and the United Kingdom, in concert with the United States, was most assiduous in holding to this line. Nevertheless, had the Soviets not been so obviously eager to constrain this freedom of the seas, and

aggravate the fear from the Western perspective that they would follow up with proposals for structural reductions, then it is likely that the major western navies might possibly have looked slightly more favourably on some of the more simple confidence building measures that were raised in the margins.

During the years of the Cold War the inviolability of maritime forces was a strong Western principle, particularly at the official level, which was also reflected in the views of many independent commentators and academics. Admiral Richard Hill was certainly one of the most authoritative of this latter group and definitely did not let his previous military service influence his judgement on these issues. Perhaps the most comprehensive assessment from an independent British perspective of the issues of that time was given in his book Arms Control at Sea.[6] In this he very clearly expounded the arguments for the various measures discussed in both formal and academic fora explaining why practically all of the recommendations of those favouring maritime arms control were either too difficult or counterproductive, or even unnecessary. Certainly one can read the clearest arguments I have seen against the practicability of SSN and SSBN exclusion zones, with a very logical explanation of all the numerous operational disadvantages that would only serve to underline what an imprecise art undersea warfare can be. The considerations so often forgotten or not appreciated by the theorist are very clearly expressed in this work by the practitioner. He is not necessarily against arms control as such, but explains how important it is to avoid confusing rather than clarifying the picture. Thus he did, for example, feel that there was certainly a place for confidence building measures, such as exercise notification or more incidents at sea agreements, each with greater scope than those which then existed. He also considered that the West was being myopic in failing to examine all the issues in order to put itself into a better position to articulate a coherent arms control strategy and thus be on stronger ground if it wished to reject many of the ideas. In another publication he expressed how essential it was for major maritime nations to appreciate the limitations of their capability when assessing the objectives of maritime power, which is most important in this context. He considered that unrealistic objectives must be discarded and of these "the most important is any notion that maritime hegemony can now be achieved. In the complexity of modern conditions, with all the challenges available from law, economic assets, force of arms and world opinion, an objective of maritime hegemony is simply not sustainable,and it is very doubtful if responsible statesmen in any state ever dream of it."[7]

The favourite Soviet proposal of mutual SSBN bastions and ASW free zones exercised many minds, but most rejected the theory because of the imbalance it created. Even an advocate of bastions could articulate the NATO case very clearly.

"The principal objections to such an agreement raised in NATO and by proponents of the US Maritime Strategy are that it would prevent NATO from tying up Warsaw Pact forces in defensive roles, thus releasing them for offensive use, and that NATO would receive no comparable advantage in return."[8]

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[6] Rear Admiral J.R. Hill: Arms Control at Sea (London: Routledge, 1988)

[7] Richard Hill: "Superpower naval arms control: practical considerations and possibilities", in Richard Fieldhouse (Ed.) Security at Sea: Naval Forces and Arms Control (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.119

[8] George Lindsay: "Strategic Stability in the Arctic" in Adelphi Papers , No 241, (London: Brassey's/IISS. 1989) p.67-8

Perhaps the clearest summary of the difficulty of the West in stating its case for rejecting maritime arms control measures was given by Professor Geoffrey Till in saying:

"The fundamental presentational problem derived from the strategic asymmetry of the two alliances. The Western alliance was maritime in a sense that the Warsaw Pact was not and that meant it was vulnerable in ways that its putative adversary would not be, especially given the technological advantages that offensive forces have at sea. The only solution to the problem was for the West to maintain a level of force that on paper looked superior and, therefore, potentially offensive, but which was, in reality, essentially defensive when viewed from the perspective of a maritime alliance. This was not an easy message to put across and it was not surprising that Western sailors might be wary of entering into a public debate with so many presentational disadvantages. But sometimes bullets have to be bitten."[9]

However, there were also opposite perspectives and some who considered at the time of the CFE process that by its approach the West missed a major opportunity for change and exhibited a marked degree of inflexibility in retaining its entrenched position. Others felt that there was little justification in the insistence on retaining the principal of freedom of restraint from any limitations on movements. Ken Booth, for example, in looking at the impact of UNCLOS III, suggested that there might be a move to redefine the word "peaceful" in the phrase "exclusively for peaceful purposes", used in the official documentation, to mean non-military or non-armed rather than non-aggressive, which would consequently constrain the movements of warships beyond their own coastal seas. He felt that if such a change of perspective were carried to its ultimate end, the outcome would be a decisive shift in the attitudes of the international community towards the peacetime use of the sea for military purposes. He suggested that in such a situation forward naval deployments would be a thing of the past and naval mobility would be restricted, although he still considered that naval utility would not thereby be neutered. He appreciated that we were a long way from such dramatic change, but suggested that an informal arms control regime based on a 'mare clausum' is not unthinkable.[10] He would receive some support on the basic premise, although not necessarily on the rationale behind it, from Derek Boothby, who writing from a United Nations perspective on the new international issues and relationships particularly of third world states said that "There will inevitably be encroachment on the traditional absolute freedoms of the high seas, but as we approach the millennium it is apparent that we no longer live in the world of Hugo Grotius of almost 400 years ago."[11] Although his ideas seem to have been put forward with the open oceans in mind, and would be strongly resisted by those who advocate the 'mare liberum' philosophy as outlined below, it is interesting to consider if such ideas are tenable in the Mediterranean or even relevant to the area. They could be a severe constraint on operational considerations which in this complex area allow for a large degree of international interdependence.

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[9] John Pay and Geoffrey Till (ed): East-West Relations in the 1990s, The Naval Dimension (London: Pinter, 1990)

[10] Ken Booth: Law, Force and Diplomacy at Sea (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1985), p.92-3

[11] Derek Boothby: "Maritime change in developing countries: the implications for naval arms control", in Richard Fieldhouse (Ed.): Security at Sea: Naval Forces and Arms Control, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.87

Another proposal raised by Ken Booth was for what he called an ASWEEZ based on the idea of prohibiting ASW activities in the EEZs of the superpowers for all but their own and allied naval activity, which would he suggested, greatly enhance the international significance of the EEZs by closely identifying security interests with the 200 mile limit.[12]

Nevertheless, in spite of the dissenting views, there has been strong consensus on the line that there should be no constraint on either operational deployments or force levels among the major maritime nations of the West and in retrospect it could be assessed that this approach has been vindicated.

On the other hand the erstwhile Soviet Union pressed very strongly for maritime forces to be included in the formal arms control negotiations. This approach really achieved significant status and a high profile after Gorbachev's Murmansk speech in October 1987, which was followed up by further high level speeches on closely related issues in 1988 by Gorbachev himself at Krasnoyarsk in September and earlier that year by the then Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov in Oslo in January. The emphasis of these initiatives was primarily on northern waters, but there were many proposals applicable on a world wide basis and the Soviets always had major concerns in the Mediterranean region which exercised their diplomacy in such matters. Thus they proposed constraints on maritime activities close to coastal waters, the number of exercise permitted and the composition of exercise forces. They also sought a ban on concerted groupings of maritime forces in international straits and the approaches to them, which, if accepted, would have had considerable restraints on exercise activity in the Mediterranean. Concurrent with these initiatives were others reflecting a desire to initiate some form of structural arms control process. There were two reasons for this high profile Soviet attitude. One was a reaction to the US "Maritime Strategy", a concept of US naval operations for the first time published in an unclassified form, which was put to the world in 1986. This spoke in fairly strong terms of the need to adopt an active and forceful forward presence in the event of potential conflict and certainly gave the Soviets cause for concern. The second was that at the same time the CFE negotiations were taking place and the Soviets were about to make marked concessions in the land environment. From their continental perspective they felt that the West, with what appeared to them to be a marked superiority at sea, should make reductions in this area of perceived superiority commensurate with those being made by the Soviets on land. Their then Chief of the General Staff Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev never lost an opportunity to point this out, even as the dialogue between the two blocs brought a significant thaw in relations.

The philosophy of those who wished to avoid the arms control process was founded on the perspective of an alliance and strategy held together by sea links and this can be traced back to the theories of such eminent writers on maritime affairs as Mahan, Corbett, Coulomb and Richmond, hardened by allied experience during the Second World War, particularly in the Atlantic. In short, to preserve the integrity of the Alliance, there could be no restrictions on the passage of military and merchant ships outside territorial waters under Grotius' principle of 'mare liberum', which permits free use of international waters without let or hindrance. This was an essential tenet for an alliance that depended on sea links for its very existence, not only in terms

[12] Ken Booth: Law, Force and Diplomacy at Sea (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1985), p.186

of reinforcement capability, but for its trade of essential commodities without which the European countries could not exist. This was also interpreted in its broadest sense to include forward deployments by naval forces in order to protect these essential trans-Atlantic links and also the security of military forces on the ground in Europe. In simplistic terms it was generally agreed that to conduct a defence at sea (as opposed to an attack on land) a ratio of 3:1 superiority was needed and even forward deployments were considered part of this overall defensive concept, although, perhaps not unnaturally, this was not the view taken in the Soviet Union. However,there was no doubt that both strategically and economically the Western Allies relied to a much greater extent than the USSR on free use of the oceans.

Behind these formal positions there was some dialogue, not least being the Adderbury series of conversations in which views on matters of naval policy and strategy were exchanged on an unattributable and unactionable basis. This series of highly significant talks commenced in 1988 as a consequence of an initiative of the British organisation The Foundation for International Security which approached the USSR Ministry for Foreign Affairs with the aim of establishing a forum in which matters of mutual concern in the maritime sphere could be discussed on a totally unattributable basis. The initial gathering of this UK-USSR-USA group consisted almost exclusively of academics and retired senior naval officers representing all three nations, with official representation from the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The author has been present at all these gatherings and it has been fascinating to watch over the period of four years during which this arrangement has existed the change that has occurred, both in the approaches of the participants, as well as in the level of representation. Initially there was a considerable degree of reserve on both sides, engendered by the polarised positions of the Cold War. However, even in those days the purpose of the dialogue was fulfilled in that discussion broached those subjects that were officially not even under consideration, which was most useful in that hypothetical views were passed up to the higher official echelons of all parties, without in any way being attributable. As the years have gone by the mood has relaxed and although national positions are firmly held, there is a much more amenable meeting of minds on the various issues. The Soviets were very quick to bring in representation at serving flag rank level; after a while the United Kingdom followed suit and a year after that the United States conformed to the pattern. This has not altered the basic principle of the proceedings in that all conversations are unattributable, but the representation at serving flag rank level gives them a considerably greater status and impact. In a gesture of openness the visiting delegations have visited naval bases and ships of all three host nations in turn. There is no doubt that this forum has achieved and continues to achieve much and in itself acts as a confidence building measure.

It was by such means that both sides in the argument began to develop a better understanding of the concerns of the other and the rationale behind their national strategies. The benefit from such discussions may be gauged from the fact that Ambassador Vladimir Kulagin of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who had attended the first four talks in the series, speaking in Copenhagen in early 1991 said that he had come to appreciate the reasons for the western preoccupation with the sea lines of communications (SLOCs) and realised that the axiom was which so frequently espoused was not merely rhetoric, but founded on sound principles. A major

international conference held in Moscow in February 1990[13] brought into the open many of these views and subsequently it has become apparent that by and large the Soviets themselves, when it came to the crunch, did not want structural arms control any more than did the Western navies.[14] Other conferences have identified this outlook, although Admiral Chernavin, Commander in Chief of the then Soviet Navy, when visiting the United States in November 1991 did say that he still felt there was a place for some form of structural arms reductions.

There is a widespread feeling among quite a lot of observers that while there might be little to be gained from attempting structural maritime arms control, not much would be lost by either side in having some form of dialogue and introduction of confidence building measures. However, as has already been mentioned, there was a fear that these might prove a slippery slope to further substantial arms control measures, although in the current climate of cooperation it remains to be seen whether such an outlook will prevail, especially as the Russians now say that each navy's force levels are its own responsibility.

In a time of reducing defence expenditure among the major military powers of the world, driven, if nothing else, by financial imperatives, structural arms control is actually unrealistic and counterproductive. For a start it leads nations to hold on to ships and weapons they might otherwise put up for disposal, because they could be used as bargaining chips, even though they might be militarily worthless.

Perhaps a more important result of this financial pressure is reflected in the unilateral reductions that occur as a consequence and these seem to be much more significant and speedy than any that might be brought about by more formal methods of negotiation and is a most interesting observation when compared to the inter-war years arms control process of the Washington and London treaties. This most commentators consider to have been a failure which created more problems, such as insecurity, suspicion and resentment, than it solved and ultimately failed to prevent conflict.

Richard Hill has pointed out with regard to the European process that, although unilateral measures clearly do not fall within the Madrid Mandate, since they are not politically binding in international terms, they nevertheless have a place in confidence building and are definitely a CBM. Thus the US decision in 1990 to remove several varieties of tactical nuclear weapons[15] from their ships did have a significant effect and cut a considerable amount of ground from under the Soviets' feet. In reality these weapon systems were getting obsolescent and difficult to maintain and in theory there would have been nothing to stop their being replaced in

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[13] International Seminar on the Problems of Naval Arms Limitations conducted by the Peace to Oceans Commission, 6-10 February 1990

[14] In this context it is most interesting to read the Greenpeace reports of the visits made by their officials to the Severodvinsk and Vladivostock areas in the latter part of 1991. The visitors appreciated that, because it was revealed that the enrichment of the fuel of Soviet nuclear submarines was much lower than the commonly accepted norms for those of the Western navies, the submarines required refuelling and repair work much more often than their western counterparts. The consequence of this was that, to maintain the numbers considered necessary for operations and to counter their perceived threat, they needed many more boats to meet these requirements. Thus any proposed reduction in submarine numbers would certainly not have met their aims.

[15] ASROC, SUBROC and Terrier

due course if the US had wished, although in practice that would have been a very counterproductive decision to have made in the public forum of world opinion. Nevertheless, the step did have a confidence boosting factor, albeit many professional naval officers had serious doubts about the utility of nuclear weapons at sea, on the basis that they would probably create more problems than they would solve. For example, a nuclear depth bomb dropped on a submarine would make the water unusable as a medium for detection, for which it is virtually the only effective means, for several hours.

One of the three major fears of the Soviets in the maritime sphere has been the capability of sea launched cruise missiles (SLCMs) and they worked very hard to achieve a limitation on their numbers, tacked on to the START treaty as a politically binding agreement. This concern must have been markedly accentuated by the effectiveness of this weapon during DESERT STORM. Thus the unilateral announcement by President Bush in September 1991 that all tactical nuclear weapons (TNW), including nuclear armed SLCM, would be removed from ships at sea must have been a major surprise but a great confidence boost to the dialogue between East and West. It also has had a significant impact on the hitherto sacrosanct "neither confirm nor deny" (NCND) policy and a realistic approach to this principle has still to be reached by those western navies concerned. For the first time in recent years the West had seized the initiative and the Soviets were certainly caught off guard such that their response, when it came, was in a rather staccato fashion, although in general it matched that of the West, since the US had now been joined by the UK in the intention of removing TNW from ships at sea. There is one loophole in the exchange. The US regards SLCM as a tactical weapon, whereas from the Soviet, and now presumably Russian, perception it is a strategic system and therefore probably not covered by the Soviet declaration, which did not specify weapon systems. However, because the US announced that all but outdated and old depth charges would be stored, Ivo Daalder, in assessing this measure, proposed that all nuclear weapons thus removed from ships should be destroyed, criticising the US for storing the tactical bombs and missiles withdrawn from its surface vessels and submarines. This, he felt, reflected a desire to reverse the decision in time of need and perpetuated the idea that tactical nuclear weapons at sea have a future utility, which he doubted. He proposed that the United States, Britain and France should accept the Russian proposal to destroy all tactical naval nuclear weapons.[16]

The general improvement in the atmosphere generated over the last eighteen months is such that weapon systems and potential confrontation at sea between the world's major navies is fast slipping of the agenda as the one major naval issue to be replaced by that of multinational cooperation. For that one can credit not only the thaw in relations, but also unilateral disarmament moves and not formal arms control treaties, albeit unilateral measures are driven by self interest. We have to wait and see what happens in due course, but these measures could well prove more productive than the naval arms control steps of the inter-war years.

For example, Russia has stated that it does not consider any state or union of states as its enemy, nor does it see any military threat from the world's oceans. Thus it does not link the naval arms control issue with the progress of other disarmament fora. "It considers the limitations of naval power and the means for naval warfare as

[16] Ivo H. Daalder: "The Future of Arms Control", in Survival, Spring 1992, p 56-7

an exclusively internal matter of any other state." However, it still feels that there is no necessity for movements of combat ships and naval aviation close to the water and air spaces of other nations "who share the principles of democracy and jointly with many states have entered the post confrontational era of partnership and a more close military-political and commercial and economic cooperation. The rank and file people of Russia simply will not understand if there will be some other cases of violation of our territorial waters by any friendly vessel." In the positively changing world there is much greater need to enhance confidence building measures between naval powers.[17]

Thus the British position on maritime arms control in the Mediterranean or elsewhere remains very much what it has been over the past decade. This is that force levels or weapon systems are not a matter for negotiation, nor should the freedom of the seas be constrained by limitations to the movements of warships outside territorial waters, and this includes proposals that constrain movements in international straits and traffic zones. There have been suggestions that there might be merit in having a regional arms control regime in the Eastern Mediterranean because of considerable problems with instabilities on the flanks, particularly as the old order of Europe breaks up. There is certainly pressure for land and air agreements and this could lead to similar approaches in the maritime sphere. There could be merit in constraining these emerging forces from developing a capability that would have application for anything more than protection of their own exclusive economic zones, but definitely not at the expense of having some reciprocal restraint on those traditional navies of the region. In the longer run it might be possible to have a dialogue on maritime issues on a confidence building basis and most independent commentators advocate such exchanges. What is without doubt is that Russia is now speaking openly about arms control at sea being a subject whose time has passed and the matter for immediate attention is cooperation in the maritime sphere to develop more effective procedures to stabilise the new world order.

This proposal has particular relevance to the Mediterranean region and all the indications are that cooperative ventures will be even more important than hitherto, particularly as at the time of writing in August one only has to look at events in former Yugoslavia to appreciate this. Of course the NATO infrastructure provides a ready made and well tried means of cooperation, but in due course and sooner rather than later this will probably have to be broadened somehow to accommodate the French, who officially do not participate in the military sphere of NATO, although in practice they are well experienced in Allied Mediterranean operations, and also possibly the Russians, who, as pointed out above are very keen to be associated in international ventures. Nevertheless, the pressures to reduce spending as other imperatives arise in a world recession will mean that governments will continue to cut defence allocations which will lead to unilateral rather than treaty based reductions in naval armaments. The inherent utility and flexibility of maritime forces in a very unstable world, however, will demand that there must be a bottom limit, which prudence would dictate is fast being reached, below which it would be counterproductive and indeed dangerous to fall. Those who control the purse strings must be constantly made aware of these considerations. As far as the broader arms control issues are concerned, the

[17] Statement at the RFN-RN-USN meeting on maritime issues Moscow, 24 June 1992, by V P Kozin, Senior Counsellor, Disarmament and Military Technology Control Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation

introduction of confidence building measures into the region is very possible, particularly if the Russians become involved in cooperative ventures, although confidence itself will fall automatically out of such operations without formal agreements. In general, therefore, the potential maritime developments in the Mediterranean present a most interesting prospect and could well establish the pattern for the remainder of the world to follow.