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Arms Control: A Naval Perspective

Commander Bruce McKenzie, U.S. Navy

The U.S. Navy recognizes that arms control, both as a process and a goal, is a prominent feature of today's international security environment. Arms control is often portrayed as an attractive method for reducing the threat to national security and thus permitting reduced levels of defense spending. Public enthusiasm and political support for arms control reductions and agreements have been focused by a series of events. These include presidential summits, the INF Treaty, Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, a reduced perception of the Soviet threat, accelerated budgetary constraints in both countries, and the revolutionary political events occurring in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

The positive trend of many of these events is recognized. And while arms control offers opportunities to enhance security and stability, it could pose dangers if potential outcomes are not carefully evaluated. The Navy fully supports the U.S. and Nato position of excluding naval forces from the current conventional armed forces negotiations and the sea-launched cruise missile (SLCM) from the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START).

The purpose of any negotiation for arms control must be a meaningful improvement in the security position of all the participants. While arms reductions may produce reduced governmental spending as a by-product, that must not be the principal focus. The goal must be improved security. From a U.S. perspective, deterrence and stability are the cornerstones of our security. However, implementation of land stability regimes fail when transferred to the high seas. Navies do not occupy territories. Under international law, all nations have free and equal access to the seas. Naval forces, by virtue of their mobility and global access, can be concentrated to deter and then just as quickly depart without the difficulties involved in the use of land forces. And while naval

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forces do not win wars by themselves, their absence can certainly lose wars, especially if a nation is as dependent on the sea as is the United States.

Despite the dramatic political changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, prudent U.S. military planning must proceed on the basis of the *capabilities* of potential opponents, rather than their stated *intentions*. For the foreseeable future, only the Soviet Union has the military capability to threaten the vital national security interests of the United States. U.S. and Nato strategic planning and associated arms control rationale must reflect this reality.

There are fundamental differences in the strategic tenets of the two principal alliances, Nato and the Warsaw Treaty Organization. These differences color alliance perceptions of respective security interests and the resulting arms control requirements. Nato is a maritime coalition vitally dependent on the seas for commercial as well as defense interests. The sea lines of communication are vital to the rapid and sustained reinforcement of Nato in the event of crisis or war. Any disruption in these would seriously place at risk the defense of Nato in the event of conventional conflict. This means that Nato must mount a forward defense, through forward presence of naval forces, to safeguard these vital links for reinforcement and resupply.

In contrast, the Warsaw Treaty Organization is a continental coalition with all members contiguous to one another, and arms control agreements cannot alter the imperatives of this geography. They possess internal lines of communication that are difficult to interdict and have great strategic depth. But most importantly, particularly when one considers the issue of naval arms control, the Soviets are not dependent on the seas as is Nato. When viewed from this balanced perspective, the U.S. position on naval arms control issues is both prudent and rational.

In light of these asymmetries, the Soviets are attempting to diminish Western maritime strength. Soviet political and economic stagnation have combined to shift the burden of some of their security concerns to the arms control arena, to include a variety of naval initiatives. Three issues of particular relevance to this debate are: a proposed ban on sea launched cruise missiles; the continued relevance of the U.S. "neither confirm nor deny" (NCND) policy; and an alleged U.S. Navy reluctance to participate in a serious naval arms control dialogue.

Constraints on Sea-launched Cruise Missiles. The Soviets propose to constrain both conventional and nuclear SLCM variants and limit the number and type of naval vessels from which they can be deployed. For three reasons, the U.S. Navy strongly supports the government position that SLCM does not belong in START negotiations. First, SLCM is an extremely flexible theater weapon system, not a strategic system like the others included in START. Second, the possibility of covert production and deployment potential, as well as the

difficulty in distinguishing between nuclear and conventional variants, make effective verification impossible. Third, SLCM provides a valuable deterrent, resulting from dispersal aboard many surface combatants and submarines, and is a warfighting option outside the Soviet context. There is nothing to gain and much to lose by including SLCM in START.

NCND Policy. The U.S. policy is to neither confirm nor deny the presence or absence of nuclear weapons aboard any U.S. military station, ship, or aircraft. This policy (in place since January 1958) is necessary to enhance deterrence, impede potential adversaries' strategic planning and targeting, and contribute to weapons security (e.g., the threat of terrorist acts).

Naval Arms Control Discussions. Critics argue that the U.S. Navy has avoided serious discussion on issues of naval arms control and is unwilling to engage the Soviets to reduce the alleged "naval arms race at sea." The contention of the existence of a naval arms race is insupportable in fact. On the contrary, due to an improved political climate, both the U.S. and Soviet navies have experienced significant reductions in naval force structure, exercise activity, and deployment patterns. Specifically, the U.S. Navy has reduced active personnel, retired one aircraft carrier early (U.S.S. *Coral Sea*), decommissioned 16 frigates, and has begun the accelerated retirement of 32 destroyers. Further defense budget reductions that are certain to affect the Navy are forecast.

Assertions that the U.S. Navy has somehow excluded itself from the arms control process are equally flawed in fact. Rather than lagging in this process, the Navy has been actively engaged in a wide variety of naval issues. The United States is currently negotiating strategic naval forces in Geneva (START), and notification and observation measures for amphibious operations in the Confidence and Security Building Measures negotiations in Vienna. In addition, the United States has negotiated the 1972 Incidents at Sea Agreement, the 1972 Seabeds Treaty, the 1986 Stockholm Agreement (providing notification and observation of large amphibious landings), and the recently signed Dangerous Military Activities Agreement.

In summary, naval forces are integral to the overall security equation. They promote regional and global stability through credible deterrence of our adversaries and demonstration of resolve to our friends and allies. The fact that the United States is a maritime nation and a great world power with global responsibilities underpins the requirement for a robust navy. U.S. forward deployed and global naval forces support defensive alliances and treaties based on deterrence, political pluralism, freedom of the seas, and the free exchange of commerce and ideas.

