

# Holding the Bridge in Troubled Times: The Cold War and the Navies of Europe

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**ABSTRACT** European navies made a fundamental contribution to the Cold War at sea, ensuring the effectiveness of deterrence even as Soviet naval forces grew to ominous proportions. European fleets were tasked with containing a Soviet attack until US forces could arrive on the scene. Many European navies pursued essential niche capabilities tailored for their own unique maritime environments. Others made important contributions to broader NATO efforts in the high-stakes arenas of sea control, power projection and even nuclear deterrence. Contentious issues did arise, for example concerning burden-sharing, but true to its name, the alliance succeeded collectively in wielding formidable sea power. This paper is based on the premise that the maritime players in the Cold War at sea were by no means restricted to the US and Soviet navies. The navies of Western Europe and Canada had major roles to play as well within the NATO area. They contributed a great deal to the political cohesion crucial to an essentially maritime alliance, and in many cases had a real operational contribution to make as well. What follows, then, is the Cold War at sea from a European point of view.

**KEY WORDS:** Naval History, Cold War, Europe, UK, France, Germany, NATO, burden-sharing, Soviet Navy

## Other Concerns and Distractions

While the imperatives of the Cold War generally provided the main determinants of naval policy in Europe, many other influences were at play as well. World War II experience was hugely important, for one. The searing experience of being over-run by a stronger adversary had convinced erstwhile neutrals like the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark

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and Norway into a clear choice for coalition, and a historic de-emphasis on strategic independence. The great powers of Europe, Britain and France, likewise had to accommodate themselves to a major loss of power relative to the US and the Soviet Union. In 1944–45, the Royal Navy had assembled the greatest strike fleet it could produce only to find it regarded as a relatively small task force in the huge US Pacific Fleet. The memory of the vulnerability of their sea lines of communication to German U-boats was equally sobering for the British and, especially in the early days of the Cold War this shaped their response to the apparent threat of the Soviet Navy. For them, At the operational level the real purpose of the Striking Fleet in northern waters was to provide cover for the defense of sea lines of communication (SLOCs); tactically the issue was how to control Soviet submarines and ‘kill’ the Sverdlovs.<sup>2</sup>

For the Germans and the Italians, the experience of World War II was so searing they were forced by history into a process of re-inventing themselves, and this was to have a major impact on the composition, nature and function of their navies.

The major powers of Europe had also to adapt to the related realities of de-colonization, but that was a slow and sometimes painful process. Nor did it mean that, at the end, the Europeans would abandon their interests in the wider world. The process of decolonization absorbed many of the naval energies of the Portuguese into the 1970s, the Dutch until 1962, the Belgians and the British until 1968. For the French, the Indo-Chinese and Vietnamese wars were a major and awful commitment but the habits of empire still help determine the unique French approach to naval policy and construction.

The same might be said of the British. A glance at the leading British naval memoirs of the period demonstrates the importance of its traditional East of Suez role to the life and policy of the Royal Navy.<sup>3</sup> European security however, was in fact Britain’s top priority even before the historic decision of 16 January 1968 to terminate its East of Suez role, but the greater emphasis on it afterwards led to a major re-configuration of the Royal Navy into an antisubmarine warfare (ASW) specialist force. Nonetheless, and whatever the politicians might apparently say, there was a clear desire to chip away at that ‘decision’ from the very start. Less than four weeks afterwards the Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff (Policy) Rear Admiral Lewin was publicly talking about the ‘...continuing capability to go to the assistance of our friends anywhere in the world if we are required to do so’. He added:

I hope that in the future the navy will have an opportunity to range the oceans and seas of the world...One of the most important parts which we have played in NATO is to persuade the

Europeans that there are important countries and important things going on in the world outside Europe.<sup>4</sup>

Lewin instituted a growing series of 'global deployments' to ensure that the Royal Navy would continue to 'range the oceans of the world' and in fact the next couple of decades saw a steady increase in naval activity outside European waters.<sup>5</sup> The Dutch, Italians and Spanish likewise maintained a modest but continuing watching brief over the outer oceans; for their part, the French had never said they would abandon them in the first place, and so maintained a considerable capacity for 'external action' throughout the Cold War period.<sup>6</sup> Commitments outside the NATO area therefore continued to be a significant determinant of the size and shape of European fleets.

The point was that there were tensions between the two requirements of the NATO and extra-European roles however much the advocates of a balanced fleet sought to obscure them. The French investment in *avisos* (of limited utility in general war) and the British neglect of organic Airborne Early Warning (AEW) (as demonstrated in the Falklands War) exemplified this, especially at times when resources were painfully finite.

For some European countries, other much more local strategic concerns were a major distraction from the task of deterring the Soviet Union. For the Greeks and Turks, the main problem in the aftermath of the Cyprus invasion of 1974 could seem to be 'the threat in the Aegean' – in other words, each other. For years, this 'considerably weakened NATO's solidarity and defense posture', made the Aegean a major area of confrontation and greatly affected the size and shape of two significant European navies, casting a heavier burden on the Italian and other allied fleets.<sup>7</sup>

### **Resource Constraints**

This aggravated a systemic problem affecting all the European navies through most of the Cold War, though perhaps especially in the 1960s and 1970s, and that was the steady decline in the size of most of their naval fleets. Even though, ship for ship the quality of Europeans fleets was rising, the result, by the end of the 1970s was marked disparity between the power of the US Navy and that of the navies of Europe (see Table 1).

This downward trend, admittedly shared by the US Navy which itself suffered something of a crisis of confidence in the 1970s was in stark contrast with the burgeoning power of the Soviet Navy. But it proceeded from a set of domestic social and economic constraints, which actually had nothing to do with East-West relations, maritime or

**Table 1.** Alliance naval burden-sharing, 1979

Mission Category		United States	Other NATO (incl. France)
Sea Control	Strike Groups	5	0
	Support Groups	3	4
	Escort Groups	10	20
	ASW Naval Aircraft	261	175
	Mine Countermeasure Groups	0.5	39.5
Sea Denial	Attack Submarines (Nuclear)	68	9
	Attack Submarines (Diesel)	10	124
	Strike Aircraft	312	149
Deterrent	Ballistic Missile Submarines	31	6

Source: Catherine Kelleher, *et al.*, 'The Structure of European Navies', in Jan H. Veldman and Frits Th. Olivier (eds), *West-European Navies and The Future* (Den Helder: Royal Netherlands Naval College 1980) p. 194.

otherwise. When defense resources were more than usually tight, and when the power and sophistication of the Soviet Navy became increasingly obvious, say from 'Okean' 1970, the choices and tensions became starker still.<sup>8</sup>

Worse, the extent to which the SSN USS *Nautilus* was able to run rings around allied forces in 1955 showed how much the problem was aggravated by the revolution in maritime affairs that was going on at the time across the spectrum of naval technology.<sup>9</sup> This threatened to cast doubt on the relevance of the hard-won experience of World War II. As one senior British authority wrote in 1946:

It would appear to be most unwise to base our future organization on a type of warfare which is not likely to recur. Caution appears to be all the more necessary in view of the probable development of guided missiles, atomic explosives and submarines with schnorkel and high submerged speeds.<sup>10</sup>

Very obviously, the Europeans would have to pay an increasing price even to stay in touch, let alone keep up, with the Americans. Securing technical support from the US therefore became a major concern for all Europeans. In the early days, this was a question of gratefully receiving platforms and weaponry from them. For the

British, the need to maintain access to American nuclear technology in terms of SSNs, SSBNs and SLBMs was a major justification for their assiduous cultivation of a 'special relationship' with Washington. Over the years, this investment has paid off handsomely.<sup>11</sup> The same goes for all the other Europeans too, if to a lesser extent.

Even so, all of them wished also to maintain a certain distance from their greatest ally. For the Norwegians and Danes, the arcane imperatives of the Nordic balance put a Scandinavian twist into their defense cooperation with the US: no permanent deployment of foreign troops, no nuclear weapons, pre-positioned equipment at Trondheim rather than Tromsø where it was really needed. During Exercise 'Silver Tower' in 1968, there were pained comments that:

Norwegian airfields generally only operate during normal working hours (0800–1600). On two occasions, an awkward situation arose when these fields were used outside these hours and on a Sunday<sup>12</sup>

The French were the most marked in maintaining *la difference*. The recovery of national greatness, the maintenance of specifically French interests inside and outside Europe and a prevailing skepticism that the US really would risk New York to save Paris led to their withdrawing from the NATO command structure.

Admiral Marcel Duval put the matter with some elegance:

As far as France is concerned, its resources – naval forces, mobile air-land forces, and permanent installations throughout the oceans – enable it to act differently from and in other places than the United States. Thus it contributes more effectively to the cause of the Free World than would be the case if French forces were totally integrated into the US system – where their weight might only be marginal.<sup>13</sup>

As a result the French Navy focused on the out-of-area role, developed its capacities for conventional power projection with the construction of the *Foch* and the *Clemenceau*, concentrated its conventional effort in the Mediterranean rather than the Atlantic and operated an independent nuclear deterrent with six SSBNs. Nonetheless as Exercise 'Dawn Patrol' in 1970 demonstrated, the French were certainly willing to participate in NATO activities in the Mediterranean. This would help keep them up to the mark operationally, and preserve the French voice within the counsels of a grand alliance which they still considered essential for their own

and European security.<sup>14</sup> Despite their progressive withdrawal over the 1959–63 period from NATO maritime command structures, this was indeed, a difference with limits.

The British approach was equally informed by a strong sense of specifically national interest, when it came to dealing with NATO and the Americans. One abiding aspect of this approach was a very strong sense that the US needed to be guided by wiser (that is by British) heads. It was all summed up back in 1944 by one Foreign Office official like this:

If we go about our business in the right way, we can help to steer this great unwieldy barge, the United States of America, into the right harbour. If we don't, it is likely to continue to wallow in the ocean, an isolated menace to navigation.<sup>15</sup>

Maintaining an independent deterrent and exploiting the policy and activities of the Royal Navy were seen as especially valuable means of influencing American behavior and preserving British interests. This approach was based on a recognition that the perceptions and interests of the two countries did not necessarily coincide. If nothing else, the Suez campaign of 1956 had demonstrated that.

This sense of the need to maintain and defend their national individuality applied to the other Europeans too and explains distinctive European naval and military responses to the Iran–Iraq tanker war, the Lebanon crisis of 1982–84, and Operation ‘El Dorado Canyon’ against Libya in 1986. All these differences were justified partly by a sense of what public opinion would support and partly by an estimate on what policies would actually work.

Nonetheless, and despite all the qualifications, there was, at the official level in the capitals of Europe, a universal acceptance that NATO was an essential alliance that had to be preserved and defended. Moreover there was equal recognition that the centrality of the Atlantic in its title was more than merely presentational. It determined the nature of the alliance. Rather unexpectedly, in some ways, one of the clearest statements to this effect came in the midst of the German Defense White Paper of 1983:

NATO is an alliance of maritime orientation, much more so than seen in the Central European perspective. It is an alliance spanning the North Atlantic. Its leading power, the United States, is both an Atlantic and a Pacific power. Owing to the situation of the North American continent between two oceans, the weight and prestige of the United States depend on its determination and ability to bridge oceans and to protect its overseas allies.

This implies an essential geo-strategic disadvantage for the West; Western Europe is separated from the strategic reserves of NATO's leading power, the United States by some 6,000 kilometers of Atlantic Ocean.

But European NATO territory as such also has a strongly maritime orientation. West Europe is a heavily broken peninsula-like appendix to the European land mass, bordering on maritime areas in the North, West and South. In this general topography, numerous individual countries in turn are of peninsular character. In fact, almost all the European NATO countries border on seas, some of the having coastlines of considerable length. A number of these countries are by tradition sea powers operating and recognized as such worldwide.<sup>16</sup>

This plainly required the Europeans to help provide the conditions in which any aggressive thrust by the Soviet Union could be contained on land while their navies did all they could to ensure, politically and operationally, that sufficient support from Canada and the US would arrive over the 'Atlantic bridge'. That bridge had to be held in peace and in war.

Operation 'Broiler' of 1948 and other such plans of the period which envisaged overwhelming Soviet attack and the evacuation of most of Western Europe seemed to demonstrate just how demanding these tasks could be.<sup>17</sup>

### **Peacetime Efforts to Maintain the Bridge**

Deterring the Soviet Union obviously required the presence and indeed the leadership of the US, and securing both was the essential strategic justification for the establishment of the Western European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty. But accepting the full consequences of this level of dependence was particularly hard for the British to take. Their reluctance to face unpalatable truths about the new balance of naval power was exemplified by the ferocious opposition they put up to American proposals for naval command and control arrangements in the new military structure. This particularly centered on American insistence that they, and not the British, should command in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. This dispute got so bad that, at one stage, Britain threatened to withdraw from the Atlantic command but in the end London accepted a compromise in which British commanders were awarded a disproportionate number of subordinate commands as a compromise.<sup>18</sup> Later, France under General de Gaulle went further and left NATO's military command structure altogether.

The rest of the Europeans were broadly content with American command leadership because they saw it as a natural reflection of the

fundamental correlation of forces and as the best guarantee of American support. Nonetheless, they too insisted on appropriate representation and this sometimes led to local tensions, such as those between the Greeks and the Turks, and much more mildly, the Portuguese, the Spaniards and the British.

One particular difficulty was the American insistence that platforms armed with American nuclear weapons could only be commanded by Americans. The complexities of nuclear command were a continuing difficulty, and were exemplified by the long-running political sagas over the constitution, prerogatives and functions of the Nuclear Planning Group and the sea-based nuclear Multilateral Force.<sup>19</sup>

The clear linkage between political representation and maritime capability reinforced the Europeans' more narrowly operational incentives to make sure they had something useful to offer the alliance. At the outset of the Cold War, therefore, their first task was to rebuild in the wake of World War II and, in many cases, to re-configure their forces into more of an alliance format.

The Dutch Navy was among the first to realize the need to think and plan for a coalitional future after the war as early as 1943–44, modeling their force on the British and Americans. They switched from their primary emphasis on a global role instead concentrating on the provision of a small but high class ASW and MCM fleet for North Sea, Channel and Eastern Atlantic operations. Later, the Marine Corps was earmarked for operations on the Northern Flank. In many cases this process of re-configuration led to a kind of informal region-specific specialization with countries like Belgium concentrating on mine countermeasures in the Channel, and Norway, Denmark and West Germany developing effective means of asserting control of the coastal waters and narrow seas of Northern Europe. This took some of the pressure off the US Navy which could therefore afford to concentrate on high intensity operations on the open ocean.

The Dutch were also among the first to realize and to advocate the advantages of European cooperation in training and in the development and acquisition of material. In 1975, for example, in a joint venture with the French and the Belgians, they started the process that led to the tripartite mine-hunter.

And, it is important to note, the navies of Europe *were* good, at least within the limits of their resources. The Dutch produced the Goalkeeper close-in air defense system, and a number of high-quality sensors. The Royal Navy was a world leader in some aspects of carrier construction and operation (such as the landing of jets on carriers, the angled flight-deck, mirror landing systems and steam catapults). As early as the late 1940s, the British actively explored the particular



problems of strike carrier operations in the Arctic through a whole series of difficult exercises and cruises in that area. In Operation 'Rusty', in March 1949 HMS *Vengeance* and escorts operated around Jan Mayen Island '... to test the performance of ships, men and aircraft under conditions of extreme cold'. The same interest in the 'articization' of fleet operations was later exemplified in Exercise 'Autumn Bear' with trials of ASW weaponry in Arctic conditions. The British were the first to apply 'vertical envelopment' through helicopter assault during the Suez Campaign. Despite their owing much to American technical help in the 1950s and 1960s in the provision of SSNs and SSBNs, the British demonstrated real capability both in the design and construction of nuclear submarines and weapons, and in their operation. In some areas such as sea-keeping, quiet running and SSN hull construction, indeed, the British claimed to be ahead of their American mentors.<sup>20</sup> Throughout the Cold War, the British developed special expertise in ASW.

France under General de Gaulle was equally determined to maintain and to display independent capability in both its carrier and its nuclear submarine programs, and by dint of considerable effort stayed in the first division in both these areas. While to some degree the effort required to do this 'unbalanced' the general purpose fleet, France's clear lead in SSM technology with the world beating Exocet program compensated for this. In their own coastal disciplines, also, the Norwegians, Danes and Germans were first-class. They knew the particular challenges of their own waters much better than anyone else.

The results of this, and of the evident need for the Europeans to be there, and be useful, were manifested by the extraordinarily high level of European participation in early NATO exercises such as Operation 'Mainbrace' in 1952 and Operation 'Mariner' in 1953 (see Table 2).

In large measure this satisfied the American preference for not 'marching alone... If our effort is not joined by all who are threatened, we could lose at home the critical public support for which we have labored long and hard'.<sup>21</sup>

### Keeping Up the Numbers

However, throughout the Cold War period the Europeans continually reduced the size of their fleets. Whereas they could deploy some 800 mine countermeasures vessels in 1960, this total fell to less than 300 over the next two decades. While new vessels were undoubtedly far more capable than their predecessors, there was good reason to doubt that Europe's mine clearance capability was keeping up with the increasing technological challenge of the task, or with the growth in Soviet maritime capability. Moreover, the decline in visible force

Table 2. Exercise 'Mariner' 1953

	Total	US	U.K.	CDN	France	Denmark	Norway	Portugal	Netherlands	Belgium
Carriers	6	3	2	1						
Battleships	2	1	1							
Cruisers	6	3	2	1						
Escorts	96	40	31	5	7	3	2	3	5	
MCM	32				11	2	16			2
Submarines	33	9	17			2	2		3	
Patrol Sqn's	7		4				3			
MS/Trawlers, etc	18		8 + Trawlers		2		3		5	
Totals	200	56	65	7	20	7	27	3	13+	2

Figures extracted from: Exercise 'Mariner' General Instructions NHB

numbers confirmed American doubts about the Europeans' fundamental willingness to take their own defense as seriously as they should.

Moreover, NATO, being an alliance, was beset with other difficulties too. The Europeans themselves were not a homogenous group; their maritime perspectives were diverse. Although they all acknowledged the centrality of the Atlantic connection, they tended, not unnaturally, to focus on the threat closest to them. Southern nations worried about the situation in the Mediterranean, the Greeks and Turks worried about each other and the North-Western Europeans were mainly concerned about the Baltic, the North and Norwegian seas. Their relative proximity to Soviet land/air forces and to the continental rather than maritime threat it seemed to pose also helped shape their particular maritime priorities. This meant that the Europeans as a whole did not necessarily see things the same way.

The British, who regarded themselves as the maritime leaders of Europe, did what they could to reconcile such differences in maritime outlook. As Admiral Lewin remarked, 'The United Kingdom, has tried for years in a quiet way to impress the fact of the maritime case on our NATO partners'. Lewin even raised the 'not too fanciful' concept of a European Navy, under British leadership.<sup>22</sup> Even before NATO's naval commands were established, the British were instrumental in setting up a series of European naval exercises in 1949–51.<sup>23</sup> The British saw their mission in the Mediterranean as one of helping to unite and elevate the operational performance of their local partners;<sup>24</sup> their 1964 proposal for extended exercises by a small but mixed group of frigates led to the 'Matchmaker' exercise series and ultimately to the establishment of the Standing Naval Force Atlantic and its activation at Portland in January 1968.<sup>25</sup> Of course the British were not alone in seeing the need for the closest possible operational and political integration of Europe's disparate fleets if their maximum deterrent potential against the Soviet Union was to be achieved. In the Baltic, the Germans, for example, were well aware of the danger that their dominance of the Western maritime defense of the Baltic might lead an adversary '... by challenging just us, to single out one country. That is why we are so interested in Denmark maintaining the level and composition of her naval forces'.<sup>26</sup> The US Navy was also aware of the need for an integrated effort, not least given the charge of unilateralism leveled against the Maritime Strategy.

Finally, the NATO area itself was a large and operationally diverse one, calling for a complex and variegated military command structure spreading across a continent and beyond. Inevitably, there would be severe problems in coordination across command boundaries. 'Testing command relationships' was accordingly a major feature of all Cold War exercises. 'Mariner' in 1953 was the first

tricommand exercise and revealed the scale of the problem. 'Lifeline' the following year was considered a big improvement, but the problems continued. They were dramatically demonstrated in 'Fallex 57' in the north, when post-exercise analysis revealed 'ignorance throughout N[orthern] E[urope] C[ommand] of the Strike Fleet's atomic program'.<sup>27</sup> That something as basic as this could slip between the cracks showed how easily such a diverse alliance could become less than a sum of its parts – and the Europeans were well aware of the dangers this posed them.

Against this background, there were three aspects to the requirement to 'hold the bridge' especially in northern waters. The first, most obviously, was to deter the Soviet Navy. This became more difficult as the Soviet Navy got bigger and better, more assertive and more willing to test NATO's resolve at sea. The 1970 collision between a *Kotlin* and HMS *Ark Royal*, and the 'defeat' in 1972 of an American/British/French group of ships by Soviet submarines in the Mediterranean<sup>28</sup> all showed how challenging this could be. For the Europeans the problem was that the US Navy had its own problems and distractions, and as the British Defense White Paper of 1985 put it:

It must be assumed that only limited US Navy forces would be available in the Eastern Atlantic at the outbreak of hostilities. European Navies, and in particular the Royal Navy, must therefore be ready to play a leading role in initial operations.<sup>29</sup>

European navies would need to maintain a significant presence in the north to act as a deterrent to the Soviet Navy and to provide the time and the conditions for the 'heavy mob' in the shape of the US Navy-led Strike Fleet to arrive. Among the navies of North-West Europe, there was no significant dissent about the operational necessity of this policy.<sup>30</sup>

As the Soviet Navy grew in power and spread, the deterrence task increasingly called for more surveillance and picture-building capacities and systems, especially for times of tension, when the apparent Soviet readiness to engage in a 'battle for the first salvo', say in the Mediterranean, might imperil the US Navy's capacity to reinforce the north. The Europeans participated in the task of tactically monitoring the activity of Soviet aircraft, ships and submarines and, as far as they could, and often with substantial American assistance, developed the surveillance systems they need in order to do it.<sup>31</sup>

Nonetheless, in order to avoid the danger that deterrence of the Soviet Navy could slide into provocation, some of the Europeans put

some emphasis on the need to conduct such operations with restraint. This was made clear from the very start. The instructions for 'Mariner' for example said that Soviet units had a perfect right to be within the exercise area. Operations to 'shake them off' should be undertaken to minimize their capacity to gain useful intelligence of NATO operations, but these should not be aggressive or provocative:

Normal international courtesies are to be observed...In the event of an attempt by Soviet or Soviet controlled forces to interfere with units participating, evasive action is to be taken and no offensive action in defense of forces under command is to be taken unless directly attacked.<sup>32</sup>

Rightly or wrongly, there were also those in Europe who felt that the US Navy was less inclined than many of its partners to follow this long-standing requirement to reassure, as well as deter, the Soviet Navy. Sometimes, American rules of engagement were likewise criticized by Europeans for being overly aggressive.<sup>33</sup> This contributed to caveats about the role of US naval forces in Europe's northern waters:

To guarantee security and stability in the north-Western corner of Europe, and to preserve the state of low tension in the area, it is important to Norway that allied naval forces are present in the Norwegian Sea with reasonable regularity, but without indicating any wish for permanent presence.<sup>34</sup>

### **The Europeans and Rehearsals for War**

Their naval exercises illustrated the extent to which European expectations for the conduct of maritime war followed the broader strategic concepts of the time. In the later 1940s and early 1950s, for the British at least, the prevailing notion was of 'broken-backed warfare' in which an initial nuclear exchange did not in fact decide outcomes but was instead followed by a long period of conventional military operations. These operations would be aimed at supporting NATO forces ashore, especially on the flanks, and providing the conditions for US and Canadian reinforcements from across the Atlantic. This was no artificial contrivance designed simply to save traditional forms of naval power – the British really believed it, and based their maritime preparations on the expectation that many of the ancient verities of maritime strategy would still hold true.<sup>35</sup>

In 1953, the Eisenhower administration challenged this with the introduction of the concept of Massive Retaliation, and the British

government followed suit in 1957. By this time, the prospective scale and devastation of an initial nuclear exchange was becoming very clear in such exercises as 'Fallex/Strikeback 1957' when hundreds of air-delivered atomic strikes were simulated against Orange forces attacking Blue forces in Norway and Denmark, while the NATO Striking Fleet and land-based air forces were likewise subjected to severe atomic attack by Orange.<sup>36</sup> This represented a considerable challenge to traditional British (and indeed American) naval ways of thinking.

In Britain, the navy, especially through the controversial views of Rear Admiral Sir Anthony Buzzard, then Director of Naval Intelligence, moved against the crude and common expectations of Massive Retaliation by arguing for a concept of graduated deterrence which emphasized the naval role *before* rather than after a nuclear exchange, and which put a much greater emphasis on deterring major attack. Crisis management was an increasingly important aspect of exercises through the 1960s. The first 'Teamwork' exercise in 1964 involved 160 ships from seven nations, centered on the deterrent effect of a large-scale maritime reinforcement of Norway. Such reservations about the practicality of Massive Retaliation grew throughout the 1960s, until Flexible Response was formally adopted by the Alliance in 1968. The maritime implications of this shift in emphasis were to prove the major issue for all the navies of the Alliance until the Cold War ended.

Among the Europeans, only the British and the French got seriously into the 'deep cold war' business of maintaining a nuclear deterrent at sea, protecting it from the adversary and seeking out his. Initially, the Royal Navy was less than enthusiastic about getting into this kind of maritime operation for fear of what it might do to the more traditional forms of naval power.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, the British were well aware of the strategic influence an independent deterrent would confer on them and were anxious to exploit the special relationship with the US in order to secure the maximum technical help in establishing it.

Inevitably, there were difficulties with this approach. The Polaris/Trident mission was expensive, and represented a substantial commitment which threatened to have an adverse effect on the rest of the fleet. There was, for example, a widespread view in the Royal Navy at the time of the Nott Defense Review of 1981, that the naval budget had suffered disproportionately because the nuclear role was seen, in practice if not in theory, as part of it. Despite the very close nuclear relationship with the Americans that developed,<sup>38</sup> the British were determined to ensure that their deterrent was as independent as they could make it, even if this implied extra design, construction and maintenance costs. It also meant that in their dealings with one another, neither the British nor the Americans necessarily put all their cards down on the table.<sup>39</sup>

Ensuring that an SSBN was securely on patrol at all times was a demanding commitment, but the Royal Navy claimed at the time and since that it had achieved this.<sup>40</sup> This task required sanitizing the Clyde, and for that matter Holy Loch, against the occasional intruding Soviet submarines with submarines, surface ships and aircraft<sup>41</sup> and for the SSBN to evade detection once on patrol. For the British who had only one SSBN, or very occasionally two, on patrol at any one time there was absolutely no margin for error. The British were aided in this achievement first by the fact that they had constant access to SOSUS and other alliance information about the position and activity of Soviet submarines and, second, their submarines were generally much quieter and their ASW techniques superior. The gap, however, was narrowing all the time.

The French approach to the maintenance of a sea-based nuclear deterrent was similar in some respects, although their political insistence on absolute independence meant that they had no access to American technical assistance in constructing their SSBN/SLBM program or to the Alliance for operational assistance in deploying and running it. Accordingly, the whole package came at much greater costs for them, both in terms of the money spent and of the effects it had for the rest of the fleet. Inevitably, the high priority attached to the SSBN program for 20 years inevitably unbalanced the rest of the fleet. The first French SSBN put to sea in 1971 three years after the British. The French maintained an eventual fleet of six SSBNs, up to three of which might be on patrol at any one time, and this provided them with greater margins of safety than the British.<sup>42</sup>

The mirror image of this was the Western effort to prosecute the Soviet SSBN effort. The Europeans had a strong strategic interest in Alliance success in this task since it would strengthen American resolve – but they had operational interests at stake too. From the early 1950s, for example, the British had been concerned at the operational consequences of the US Navy pulling its assets back in order to deal with the developing Soviet submarine threat to cities on the American east coast.<sup>43</sup> As Soviet capabilities grew, so did the level of concern and Alliance efforts to counter them. In 1970, British, US, Canadian and Dutch ships and maritime patrol aircraft participated in Exercise ‘Steel Ring’ – a not very successful campaign to interdict transiting *Yankees* before they reached their launch positions, under exercise conditions.<sup>44</sup>

From the start, however, there were strong incentives for Western submarines to conduct surveillance operations in northern waters. The first Arctic patrol conducted by the Royal Navy took place in 1952 when HMS *Artful* entered the area; this was something of a special operation in which the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, took a personal interest. These were dangerous operations; one British

submarine was detected in the Murmansk area in 1966 and there were unsubstantiated reports of others returning in a damaged condition thereafter. By 1970, British SSNs particularly HM Submarines *Valiant* and *Dreadnought* regularly participated in the Holystone intelligence gathering missions in the Barents Sea.<sup>45</sup> In many ways these were among the most novel, technologically demanding, sensitive and frankly dangerous aspects of the Cold War at sea. In this more than in any other aspect of their long confrontation, the two sides were at their most assertive, testing each other's resolve in an underwater contest that could easily have gone wrong. The continuing quality of the British ASW effort is still a matter of conjecture but there is now at least anecdotal evidence that it kept pace with Soviet achievements. In 1981, for example, HMS *Spartan* appears to have achieved a prolonged and successful trail of one *Victor*, two *Deltas* and a *Charlie* submarine.<sup>46</sup>

### The Protection of Shipping

The defense of the sea lines of communication that bridged Europe and North America together was at the very centre of the more traditional aspects of the Cold War at sea. In Europe, it was almost universally held that the rapid expansion of the Soviet submarine force, together with the incorporation of German technology, posed a very real threat to these crucial strategic linkages. After their experience in World War II, the British were particularly sensitive about the need to defend this shipping, and one of the reasons for their push for command positions was a fear that American operational priorities might not sufficiently emphasize this.<sup>47</sup> Other Europeans shared Britain's perspective. The first Western European Union exercise, Operation 'Verity' in 1949, for example, saw 109 British, French, Dutch and Belgian vessels engaged in a large-scale convoy defense exercise fought off southern England. The Dutch commanded the 1950 and the French the 1951 follow-ons.<sup>48</sup>

Exercise 'Mariner' likewise had a substantial component dedicated to the exploration of the defense of SLOCs across the Atlantic, involving the protection of convoys from the US to Gibraltar, and from Britain to the Mediterranean and to Scandinavia and the rehearsal of naval control of shipping procedures. Exercise 'Lifeline' in 1955 was, by contrast, a tricommand paper exercise which also gave emphasis to the 'coordinated operations for the control, reception and protection of shipping and for the onward distribution of cargoes and personnel to inland destinations', 30 days into war with Orange. Interestingly, it was assumed that atomic attacks had already taken place, and more were expected, but Blue ports had all been restored to near normal working order. The near-traditional debate about the relative efficacy of close



escort, support groups and hunter-killer groups operating offensively was fully rehearsed.

By 1957, however, views about the possible impact of atomic weapons on the traditional focus given the defense of shipping were noticeably shifting. In Exercise 'Stand-Firm' in September 1957 for example, the problem of the evacuation of major ports and the dispersal of shipping at the outset of a world war was exercised in a reasonably realistic manner for the first time. There were many highly diversified Orange attacks on shipping with considerable multinational representation in the responses. The mine counter measures force for example comprised 25 British, ten Dutch, six Belgian, 25 French and eight German warships. Nonetheless, the extent of the nuclear strikes on Blue cities would clearly have played a much bigger role in determining the outcome of this hypothetical war, and this was a level of conflict in which the Europeans would only play a small part, except, of course, as victims.<sup>49</sup>

By the late 1960s, however, there was renewed emphasis on the kind of SLOC protection in which the Europeans could contribute to a much greater degree. The NATO Planning Board for Ocean Shipping sought to re-invigorate the alliance's capacity for sea-lift and secured European promises to augment US efforts with 600 ships earmarked for the purpose.<sup>50</sup> After something of a gap in formal convoy exercises, Exercise 'Silver Tower' was held in 1968. American and Canadian forces were joined by Dutch, Norwegian, Belgian, German and British forces. The biggest lesson to emerge from an ambitious exercise series was how vulnerable all forces at sea were to Orange missile-firing submarines and, indeed, to fast attack craft armed with the Styx missile, especially given the shortage of escorts. The post-exercise report concluded that:

The UK national technique for the employment of a high-flying reconnaissance aircraft couple with the use of a low-flying maritime patrol aircraft to investigate contacts, provides a repaid and economical means for the surveillance of large sea areas.<sup>51</sup>

A major conclusion was that low escort numbers made the direct defense of shipping increasingly infeasible.

Effective protection of short-haul convoys can only be ensured by preventing enemy forces and, in particular, small fast surface craft equipped with missiles, from getting within weapon range. It is considered, therefore, that area and distant support operations should take priority over close support operations, particularly as shortage of escorts in a future war might prevent the use of both distant and close support.

It was suggested that 'safe routing' and 'sanitized lane routing' be considered. Maritime patrol aircraft had not prevented any submarine from firing its missiles, and if this could not be achieved by conventional means then nuclear weapons might have to be used, assuming release had been agreed. Overall, 'the vulnerability of convoys and task forces to submarine surface-to-surface missile attacks was again clearly demonstrated'. There was an urgent need radically to improve ASW techniques.

In 1975, the 'Ocean Safari' exercise series began and these were primarily intended to explore the Alliance's capacity to move its reinforcement and resupply shipping across the Atlantic before and during hostilities. All manner of SLOC defense strategies were tried out, including the direct support of the shipping by a Striking Force deliberately held back, in 1983 for example, from passing through the Greenland-Iceland-UK gap.

In 'Ocean Safari' 1985, however, the Striking Fleet did move into the high north, taking the battle to the adversary, and illustrating an alliance response to the Soviet threat to shipping that had been important from the start – namely the attack on the source of the threat.

### **Sea Control Operations in the High North**

From the very beginning, all Europeans were quite clear in their Mahanian assumptions that 'If we were to surrender sea control to the Soviet Union, we would stare defeat in the face through strangulation of our supply lines'.<sup>52</sup>

But sea control was variously understood. Many Europeans thought of it largely in inshore terms, a variant that was distinctive and demanding in different ways, and they prided themselves on the quality of their responses to this particular requirement.

British thinking on the other hand was more conventional. The acuteness of the perceived threat at particular times, as far as they were concerned, depended on a range of things. In the early days of the Cold War, the rapid expansion of the Soviet submarine force and its incorporation of much advanced German submarine technology led to the 1949 argument that:

In view of the increased threat from the 'modern' submarines and our shortage of escorts, it is essential to attack the powerful Russian Submarine Fleet at its source by every means in our power. For this reason, the Joint Planning Staff decide to recommend that a zone of maritime control be established in the Arctic.<sup>53</sup>

This chimed in perfectly with the offensive spirit so traditional to a Royal Navy whose *Fighting Instructions* for 1947 stated:

It is imperative that we develop offensive operations against the enemy's maritime forces in the bases at the earliest propitious moment for the following reasons:

- To reduce the scale of an enemy attack
- To reduce the heavy commitments imposed on us by an enemy unwilling to face battle who prefers to keep his forces in being as a threat to our communications
- To release us from having to maintain an inactive concentration merely to watch and prevent the enemy from interfering with our communications.
- Similar considerations also lead to combined operations for the occupation of strategic points, to forestall the enemy from establishing a zone of control, or to capture one that is already established.<sup>54</sup>

The British were adamant that they should resist a policy of 'yielding to the Americans all responsibility for offensive maritime operations while accepting for the British Navy the defensive role of convoy escort'.<sup>55</sup> This explains the stress on the 'articization' of the fleet and the aggressive style affected by British SSNs.

Of course this was a British rather than a 'European' naval response. Because British naval experience was different from that of other Europeans, their response was different too. The other Europeans were much more content with a defensive and direct-support role. But there could also be substantial differences in attitude between the British and the Americans too. During 'Mainbrace' and 'Mariner' for example, the British clearly saw the Striking Fleet to which they made a major contribution, acting mainly as a World War I and II-style 'Covering Fleet' designed basically to provide the operational conditions under which the 'Control Fleet' of escorts and support groups could directly defend shipping. The British suspected that the US Navy, however, thought of the Striking Fleet largely as a power projection tool. It was partly to be able to do what they could to prevent the US Navy from going too far off the rails, that the British were so adamant about their participating in Striking Fleet Operations.<sup>56</sup>

### **The Shift to Nuclear Power Projection in the North – and Back**

Nonetheless, it was clear that there would be a power projection role for the Striking Fleet in the much explored scenario of a Soviet attack

on Norway and the Baltic approaches. This became quite clear in 'Mainbrace' in September 1952. This large-scale and very successful exercise 'operationalized' both the SACLANT structure under Admiral Lynder McCormick and the whole concept of the Striking Fleet. It assumed that Germany had already fallen and that Orange was now seeking to conquer Norway and Denmark. Although the British supplied two fleet carriers (HMS *Eagle* and HMS *Illustrious*) and one light carrier (HMS *Theseus* fresh from operations off Korea) – and the Canadians likewise supplied the light carrier HMCS *Magnificent* – the bulk of the power projection capacity had to be from the two US carriers, USS *Midway* and USS *Franklin D Roosevelt*. Limitations on British capability restricted their role to the provision of fighter and ASW defense. Interestingly, this exercise saw Dutch fighter squadrons operating from HMS *Illustrious* – early confirmation of the particularly close military relationship between the two countries and of the need for the Europeans to work together if they were to stay in touch with the Americans.<sup>57</sup>

The scenario for 'Mariner' in 1953 was similar, although the weather was much worse, and much impeded carrier operations. In both exercises the main strikes on land targets were carried out by American aircraft that were nuclear capable. Although all maritime disciplines of force protection and the defense of support shipping continued to be exercised, especially by the North-West Europeans (the British, Danes, Norwegians and Dutch), such exercises in maritime power projection had become much more nuclear by the end of the decade. In the 1957 exercise series, for example, hundreds of atomic strikes were made on targets in Norway and the Kola Peninsula; one of the clearest lessons to emerge was the need to de-conflict the large-scale atomic strike plans of the carrier force and 'external air forces'.<sup>58</sup> Although with the acquisition of the 'Red Beard' atomic bomb, the British seemed set on developing their own nuclear strike capability, this remained almost exclusively an American capacity: even so, the British seemed to be thinking largely of using Red Beard against naval targets, including bases, ships at sea and in harbor, rather than in direct support for the land campaign.<sup>59</sup>

By the mid- 1960s, however, there was more stress on conventional maritime power projection. Operation 'Straight-Laced' in 1966, for example, was a follow-up to the Rip Tide series and involved a high-speed run-in of a carrier striking force to a launch area from which conventional air strikes were launched on D-day to D+3, with an escalation to nuclear strikes on D+4 if necessary. The carrier force comprised the USS *Newport News* and HMS *Ark Royal*. There was a particular interest in gauging the force's capacity to handle Orange submarine attack – in this case represented by British, Dutch,

Norwegian, French and American submarines. Here the notion was that the Europeans, and especially the British, would provide the conditions in which the American dominated Strike Fleet would be able to operate in the Norwegian Sea.

Concern about the feasibility of this strategy in the face of the burgeoning Soviet submarine and air capacity steadily grew, however. In the 1968 Exercise 'Silver Tower', for example:

Analysis has shown that by the end of the second day of Strike fleet operations, two carriers and several ships of the URG would have been lost for two ORANGE submarines sunk<sup>60</sup>

While hostile air attack was getting increasingly troublesome, Orange SSNs armed with anti-ship missiles represented the most serious threat – and dealing with them would need to attract the highest priority. The problem was a steady fall in the number of ASW escorts being made available to the Striking Fleet, not least by the Europeans. The fact that this exercise coincided with the British decision radically to reduce their carrier force in the future and with the Canadians paying off their last carrier HMCS *Bonaventure*, was a worrying portent for the future, that could, if fully realized, have undermined the political and operational feasibility of forward NATO operations north of the GIUK gap. In 1969, SACLANT's Brosio study came to pessimistic conclusions about the Alliance's capacity to handle the Soviet Navy in northern waters by the mid- 1970s.<sup>61</sup> These concerns were echoed by many leading figures in the US Navy too. A major disconnect emerged between the Alliance's focus on the strategy of Flexible Response as originally envisaged and its access to the conventional forces needed to put such a strategy into effect, and the Europeans were partly responsible for this.

By 'Northern Wedding' in 1978, these concerns had risen still further. The last British strike carrier HMS *Ark Royal* had paid off and there had been substantial reductions in the numbers of available European escorts, mine warfare vessels and merchant ships. These trends were replicated in the US Navy too, with more emphasis on sea control ships/ASW carriers operating largely in the gaps, rather than the Norwegian Sea. There was discussion about 'pre-enforcement' before hostilities began rather than reinforcement afterwards. The Norwegians were getting increasingly concerned at their potential isolation, because this was seen as a consequence of the Alliance's apparent inability to keep up with the challenges posed by the growth in capacity of the Soviet Navy.

However, from then on things began to improve. NATO commanders in 1980 produced the Concept of Maritime Operations designed to reverse these worrying trends, while, in parallel, the Maritime Strategy

was clearly intended to rescue the notion of substantial operations forward of the GIUK gap. This intention was exemplified by the 'Teamwork' series of exercises which grew steadily more ambitious in their aspirations to go north and to secure the operational initiative by launching attacks on Soviet forces ashore and afloat. This trend culminated in the closing days of the Cold War in 'Teamwork 88' when, for the first time, carriers made positive use of the sheltering possibilities of Norway's northern fjords. These had been suggested by the Falklands campaign of 1982, and by the experience of a number of amphibious operations on the Northern Flank from the late 1970s. The idea seemed to work.<sup>62</sup>

European involvement in this trend back towards a strong northern presence was diverse but significant. Most European navies continued to focus on sea control operations in their own distinctive waters, and maintained degrees of specialist expertise in their own disciplines unmatched elsewhere in the alliance. This informal specialization led the Belgians to focus on mine clearance, especially of ports crucial to SACEUR's re-supply. The Danes and the Germans concentrated on the Baltic Approaches and the Baltic and developed a fleet of fast attack craft and land-based aircraft ideally suited to fast and complex operations in the narrow seas.

Interestingly though, in 1980, in parallel with the renaissance of the northern operation, the German Navy lifted its self-imposed operational restrictions on proceeding above 61 degrees north so that it could make a larger contribution to the European effort to 'hold the ring' until the Striking Fleet arrived.<sup>63</sup> The Norwegians developed real sea denial and sea control capabilities in their quite unique waters. The emphasis in these northern exercises on the conduct of amphibious operations and, later, the switch to carrier fjord operations made these capabilities increasingly important to the Alliance. The British and the Dutch continued to work closely together in developing the UK/NL Landing Force, with its particular familiarity with the difficult conditions of northern Norway. They also continued to provide ASW support for the Striking Fleet operations, with the arrival of the *Invincible* class of CVS proving a particularly welcome development. Given the level of concern in the US about sending their capital ships into hazardous northern waters, these 'precursor operations' which were designed to improve the odds for the Striking Fleet, as well as hold the ring until it arrived, were particularly important.

#### **Epilogue: Exercise 'Strong Express 1972'**

Many of these points emerged in what Secretary General Luns called 'one of the most important land, sea and air exercises that NATO has

ever held in its 23-year history' – Exercise 'Strong Express', in 1972. This pivotal exercise encapsulated many aspects of the European role in the Cold War at sea, and foreshadowed many of the issues that characterized its end in the late 1980s. In short it acts as a useful final case study of all the themes addressed in this paper.

The exercise came at a bad time for the Alliance. There was some concern that neutralist/isolationist opinion was gaining ground in Scandinavia, a concern apparently confirmed by Norway's rejection of membership of the Common Market at the time of the exercise and the fact that the Icelandic Cod War was in full swing. Moreover in 1972, the US Navy had its distractions too – most obviously the Vietnam War. These were difficult times for the Alliance.

On top of this the Soviet Navy was seen to be growing strongly and becoming much more assertive. The British, pointing to incidents between HMS *Juno* and a *Kotlin*-class destroyer, and by the dangerous attentions of the survey ship/trawler *Nakhodka* close by HMS *Ark Royal* concluded that the Soviet Navy was intent on making it clear that the Incidents at Sea agreement recently signed between it and the US Navy applied to no one else. Both sides actively tested each other. *Bears*, for example, suddenly started dropping from 30,000 feet to sea-level when passing through the Iceland-Faeroes gap, a tactic which meant British *Lightnings* soon required tanker support to avoid running out of fuel. A year later the Soviet Navy in the Mediterranean really made its presence felt.

Against this somber background, the exercise was clearly designed specifically to deter the Soviet Union from adventures in the north, while providing reassurance to Norway and the other allies in the region that substantial help would come if and when needed. Here is Dr Luns again:

There are very large Soviet forces concentrated in the Kola Peninsula area. It is essential that it is well understood that an attack against the allies in the far north will result in the whole alliance coming to their assistance.<sup>64</sup>

To achieve this, NATO demonstrated its collective will by assembling a large force of 64,000 men, 700 aircraft and some 300 ships for the exercise. These included five Canadian vessels, 21 Danish, 33 West German, 12 Dutch, 18 Norwegian, three Portuguese, five Belgian, 53 British and 36 US warships in the main part of the exercise. Significantly, one French submarine participated directly while other French naval forces conducted a large-scale mine clearance exercise along the French Atlantic coast. The Standing Naval Force Atlantic was also in action in the Baltic, in deterrent mode.

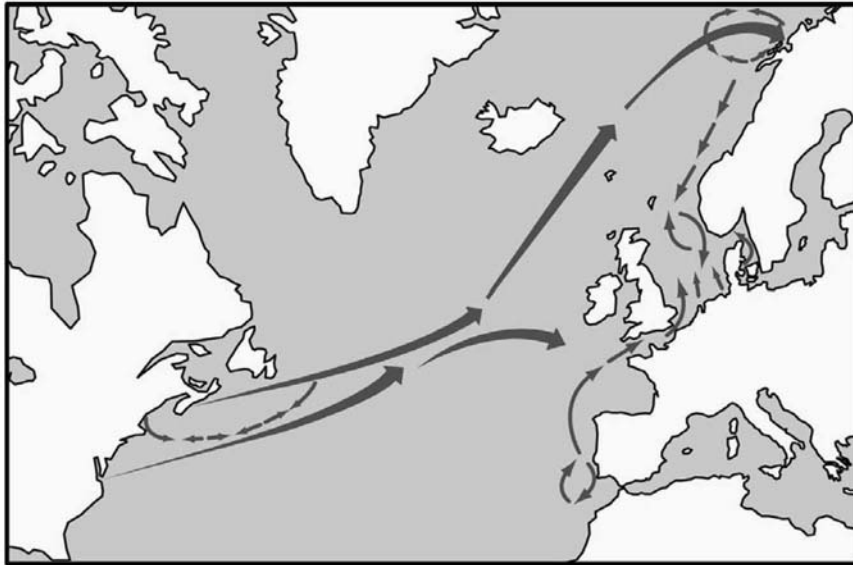


Figure 1. Exercise 'Strong Express'. Planned Convoy and Fleet Movements.

The exercise included a large-scale unopposed amphibious landing on the Lofoten peninsula in northern Norway intended to deter Orange from attacking in the first place. Controlled by Rear Admiral McManus flying his flag in the USS *Mount Whitney*, NATO's Amphibious Task Force 402 was landed, an operation supported by five Norwegian ships, six British and eight American, covered also by Striking Force elements led by HMS *Ark Royal*. The Soviet Navy and the media were both very attentive, giving the exercise all the public visibility its organizers would have wished for. Considerable effort was attached to getting the Western press, and public opinion, on side.

It was also made clear that the exercise did not include the rehearsal of the use of nuclear weapons. The emphasis on conventional force deterrence in this exercise contrasted most markedly with that in the 'Fallex/Strikeback' exercise of 1957. It was also one of the last large-scale exercises in which *Ark Royal* was able to participate, and this was symptomatic of a run down in European maritime assets that seemed likely to threaten conventional deterrence in the longer run, especially given the US Navy's Vietnam War preoccupations.

The exercise scenario assumed that Orange was not in fact deterred by the presence of the Striking Fleet in northern waters and full-scale conventional hostilities ensued. There were four maritime aspects to these.



First was the general struggle for sea control, on the open ocean and in coastal waters. European forces participated in all aspects of this, focusing particularly on ASW, mine countermeasures and coastal operations. In the Baltic the SNFL exercised in independent but linked sea control exercises with Danish and West German naval and air forces.

Second, the forces ashore both in the north and on the Central Front needed the safe and timely arrival of reinforcement/re-supply convoys which had to be defended against Orange air, surface and sub-surface attack, again with considerable European participation, including Portuguese frigates supporting a Lisbon-UK convoy, and Belgian MCM forces operating in the southern part of the North Sea. These exercises required the activation of the NCS system and involved 60 merchant ships forming six convoys; they took place in the North Sea, the South Western approaches and the American Eastern seaboard.

Third, as one press release said, it was common knowledge that NATO air forces were outnumbered. 'One means of alleviating this disparity and to increase the air support available to the Allied Command Europe and to utilize aircraft based on carriers from the Allied Command Atlantic'. This was indeed practiced and it was pointed out that nearly one-third of the aircraft available for the exercise came from the USS *John F Kennedy*, HMS *Ark Royal* and USS *Intrepid*. At one stage, *Kennedy* was diverted to provide support for ACE forces operating in the Denmark area. This effort was considered to be a real contribution to Allied forces fighting ashore. The British conservative press made the point that the exercise revealed the continuing value of aircraft carriers whatever the Labour government of the 1960s might think.<sup>65</sup>

Fourthly and finally, the exercise included a large-scale opposed landing; 3,000 Dutch, British and American marines were landed largely by helicopter in the Tromsø area. The British and Dutch came from HMS *Fearless* with fire support from HMS *Blake* and *Fife* and were 'opposed' by 4,000 Norwegian troops. Their aim was to link up with elements of the seven-nation ACE Mobile Force already fighting in the area.

Sixteen years later, 'Teamwork 88' showed that many of these lessons and conclusions had been taken to heart by the Europeans. The reassurance/deterrence remit applied in just the same way, against much more sophisticated possible opposition. The navies of North-West Europe played a full part in the precursor operations in the gaps through which the Striking Fleet would have to pass, and in the local defense of the US carriers when they arrived in Norwegian waters. Getting forces ashore and effectively integrated into the land campaign in the difficult conditions to be found in Northern Norway was now a

familiar and well-rehearsed requirement. Of course, problems were still legion – especially in logistics, command and control and increasingly in getting the number of merchant ships and crewmen that the exercise required. Indeed the fundamental irony that Forward Operations were partly justified as a means of providing distant and indirect support of reinforcement and re-supply shipping, but increasingly depended on it in theatre was well-appreciated.<sup>66</sup>

### **Conclusion**

So, in conclusion, what difference did the Europeans make to the Cold War at sea? How inaccurate actually is it to regard this confrontation as essentially an American–Soviet show? Certainly, there can be no doubting that that the two superpowers would call the shots, and the collision between their two forces would have decided the operational outcome.

But this should not conceal the fact that at every level of war, the European role and contribution was important. Strategically, the Europeans' fate was in large measure what the Cold War was about. Accordingly, Europe, as a location, in effect decided the geographic and very largely the operational character of the Cold War at sea. Europe provided most of the bases from which the US Navy would operate and European naval forces were a kind of existential deterrence of the Soviet Union, reminding them the waters around their shared continent were not a Soviet reserve. By constantly demonstrating maritime togetherness with their allies on both sides of the Atlantic, they established that an attack on one would indeed be regarded as an attack on them all. Coalition-building between the Europeans themselves and between them and the US was an explicit and conscious aim of their exercises, deployments and command structures. The emphasis given to the business of influencing the present and future behavior of friends was thoroughly Clausewitzian in the sense that it provided the essential political conditions for the Cold War at sea, not least by convincing the people of the US that indeed they were not 'marching alone'. Given the systemic vulnerabilities of NATO, an alliance of one giant and 14 dwarves, it is hard to exaggerate the importance of this set of politico-strategic naval functions.

The Europeans were important at the operational and tactical levels too, even if somewhat less so as a simple consequence of the wide gap between the quality and quantity of the US Navy when compared to the navies of Europe. Nevertheless, and especially in the north, they took on important precursor and supporting roles for the operations of the US-dominated Strike Fleet and some of them, mostly the British, participated in the underwater Cold War. Europeans predominated in

the battle for control of inshore waters, and took a leading share in the task of exercising that command through assuring the safe and timely arrival of reinforcement and re-supply shipping and in some aspects of the projection of power ashore.

In sum, the Cold War at sea was not a two-power confrontation and the presence of a third player made a material difference to its nature and final outcome. If sea power is indeed the capacity to influence the behavior of other people (adversaries, bystanders – and friends) by what you do at sea,<sup>67</sup> the Europeans' use of their navies in support of strategic objectives at this time provides an interesting example of what can be achieved with limited resources.

## Notes

- 1 The views which follow should not be taken necessarily to reflect British official opinion in any way.
- 2 D.K. Brown and George Moore, *Rebuilding the Royal Navy: Warship Design Since 1945* (London: Chatham Publishing 2004) p.186.
- 3 For example, Richard Hill, *Lewin of Greenwich: the Authorized Biography* (London: Cassell 2000); Philip Ziegler, *Mountbatten: the Official Biography* (London: Collins 1985); Henry Leach, *Endure No Makeshifts: Some Naval Reflections* (London: Leo Cooper 1993). See also Eric Grove, *Vanguard to Trident: British Naval Policy Since World War II* (London: Bodley Head 1987), esp Chaps 4, 5 and 7.
- 4 'The Royal Navy in the Next Decade' a lecture by Rear Adm. T.T. Lewin. *Journal of the RUSI* (May 1968) pp.207, 209.
- 5 See G. Till, 'Return to Globalism', in G.K. Kennedy (ed.), *The Royal Navy Easy of Suez* (London: Frank Cass 2004).
- 6 Marcel Duval, 'French Naval Forces and the Defense of Western Europe', in H.F. Zeiner-Gundersen *et al.*, *NATO's Maritime Flanks: Problems and Prospects* (Washington, DC: Pergamon-Brassey's 1987) pp.31–4.
- 7 Sergio Rossi, 'NATO's Southern Flank and Mediterranean Security', in *ibid*, pp.55, 69.
- 8 Lawrence Sondhaus, *Navies of Europe* (London: Longman 2002) pp.295, 303.
- 9 Eric Grove, 'The Royal Navy, 1945–90', in Phillips Payson O'Brien (ed.) *Technology and Naval Combat in the Twentieth Century and Beyond* (London: Frank Cass 2001) pp.185–6, 190.
- 10 Comment by Director of Naval Air Organisation and Training, 25 March 1946, Adm 199/118. Public Record Office, Kew.
- 11 For the illustrative acquisition of the 'Outboard' surveillance system, see Grove, *Royal Navy* (note 9) p.196.
- 12 Exercise 'Silver Tower', Report II-C-2-2, Naval Historical Branch Library, [hereafter NHB]. I am very grateful to Capt. Chris Page, Kate Tilney and all their colleagues for their help in preparing this chapter.
- 13 Duval (note 6) p.44.
- 14 Exercise 'Dawn Patrol', Report NHB; Joel J Sokolsky, *Seapower in the Nuclear Age* (London: Routledge 1991) pp.50–2.
- 15 Memo of 21 March 1944, FO 371/38523, Public Record Office, London [PRO].

- 16 Defense White Paper of the Federal Republic of Germany (Bonn 1983) p.40.
- 17 Sean M. Maloney, *Securing Command of the sea: NATO Naval Planning 1948–54* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press 1995) p.60.
- 18 Ibid, pp.203, 3–4, 31, 45, 134–5; Robert S Jordan, *Alliance Strategy and Navies* (London: Pinter 1990) pp.12, 15ff, 33, 38, 79, 86, 112; Sondhaus (note 8) p.291.
- 19 Sokolsky (note 14) pp.58–66.
- 20 For evidence of this in regard to the cowling of propellers, the rafting of machinery and sound deadening tiles in submarines, see Jim Ring, *We Come Unseen: the Untold Story of Britain's Cold War Submariners* (London: John Murray 2001) p.97; also Gary E. Weir and Walter J. Boyne, *Rising Tide: The Untold Story of the Russian Submarines that Fought the Cold War* (New York: Perseus Books 2003) p.4; Brown and Moore (note 2) pp.120, 187.
- 21 Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger at Nuclear Planning Group, Bonn, April 1981, quoted by E.F. Gueritz *et al.*, *NATO's Maritime Strategy: Issues and Developments* (Washington, DC: Pergamon-Brassey's 1987) p.1.
- 22 Lewin (note 4) p.204.
- 23 Sokolsky (note 14) pp.16–17.
- 24 Leach (note 3) pp.133–5.
- 25 Eric Grove, *Battle for the Fjords: NATO's Forward Maritime Strategy in Action* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press 1991) p.23.
- 26 Cdr. F.U. Kupferschmidt, 'A German View', in G. Till (ed.), *Britain and NATO's Northern Flank* (London: Macmillan 1988) pp.107. While space precludes detailed analysis of the still important but lesser navies of Europe, the development of the German navy, and its role in the Baltic is discussed, for example, Peter Monte, "Die Rolle der Marine der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in der Verteidigungsplanung für Mittel- und Nordeuropa von der 50er Jahren bis zur Wende 1989/90" in Werner Rahn [Ed] *Deutsche Marinen im Wandel. Vom Symbol nationaler Einheit zum Instrument internationaler Sicherheit* München: Oldenbourg, 2005. Pp 565–598. See also David R. Synder, 'Arming the *Bundesmarine*: The United States and the Build-up of the German Federal Navy', *Journal of Military History* 66 [2002] pp 477–500. The Italian Navy was equally pivotal in the Mediterranean, see, for instance, Adm Giuseppe di Giovanni, "Maintaining Naval Security in the Mediterranean, *NATO's 15 Nations*, Special edition, 1982, pp 52–6 and Adm S. Majoli, "The Italian Navy in the Defence of the Mediterranean," *NATO's 16 Nations*. Sept 1989 pp 55–7.
- 27 *Fallex 57*, Exercise Report, NHB.
- 28 David F. Winkler, *Cold War at Sea* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press 2000) p.1.
- 29 Statement of Defense Estimates, 1985, Cmd 9430 (London: HMSO 1985) p.53.
- 30 See British, German and Norwegian comments in Till, *Northern Flank* (note 26) pp.70, 105, 112, 118; also Statement of the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs, in Parliament, 9 Dec. 1987. Accessible through Danish Parliamentary Records.
- 31 N. Friedman, *Seapower and Space* (London: Chatham Publishing 2000) pp.52, 82, 175, 189.
- 32 *Exercise Mariner*, General instructions, p. P Q-2, NHB.
- 33 For evidence, see Francis J. West *et al.*, *Naval Forces and Western Security* (Washington, DC: Pergamon-Brassey's 1986) pp.45–9.
- 34 J.J. Holst, *Nordic Security Perspectives*, address to the Oxford University Strategic Studies Group, 10 March 1987.
- 35 Richard Moore, *The Royal Navy and Nuclear Weapons* (London: Frank Cass 2001) pp.65, 144–5.
- 36 Ibid. p.141; *Fallex/Strikeback 1957*, Exercise Report, NHB.

- 37 Peter Nailor, *The Nassau Connection: The Organisation and Management of the British Polaris Project* (London: HMSO 1988) pp.3–4.
- 38 VADM Sir Hugh Mackenzie, *The Sword of Damocles* (Stroud, UK: Sutton Publishing 1995) pp.193, 204ff.
- 39 Ring (note 20) p.237.
- 40 Ibid. pp.164, 213, 223.
- 41 Ibid, p.108–9; Weir and Boyne (note 20) p.176–7.
- 42 Duval (note 6).
- 43 Moore (note 35) p.142.
- 44 *Steel Ring*, Exercise Report, NHB.
- 45 Ring (note 20) pp.83–6.
- 46 Ibid. pp.169–72.
- 47 Maloney (note 17) p.195.
- 48 Grove, *Vanguard* (note 3) pp.165–6.
- 49 *Exercise Stand Firm*, Exercise reports, NHB.
- 50 Sokolsky (note 14) pp.150–1.
- 51 Exercise Silver Tower, NATO: Military Central Analysis Team Report, March 1969, NHB.
- 52 ADM Sir William Staveley, ‘An Overview of British Defense policy in the North’, in G. Till (ed.), *Northern Flank* (note 26) p.67.
- 53 Trident Conference, Notes, NHB.
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