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MARE MOSSO: THE MEDITERRANEAN THEATER

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TABLE OF CONTENTS :

	<u>Page</u>
Introduction	1
Background	1
Origins of Current Situation	2
Peacetime Deployments	5
Soviet Naval Activities	6
U.S. Naval Activities	8
Wartime Strategy and Operations	12
Soviet Options	12
Western Options	15
Prospects for the Future	18
References	20

MARE MOSSO: THE MEDITERRANEAN THEATER¹

INTRODUCTION

Frequent reassessment of the strategic situation in a theater is always useful and for the naval planner always has the same point: does the current and planned U.S. naval posture in the theater make sense? When it comes to the Mediterranean many have argued that the goal of maintaining two carriers continuously deployed with Sixth Fleet does not make sense [1, 2, 3].² The authors are inclined to agree and offer the following assessment of the Mediterranean theater to support this judgment. We will not argue the details of what a remodeled Sixth Fleet ought to be; our research does permit us to conclude, however, if it is the nation's judgment that change is desirable, the situation is ripe for implementing a change at quite reasonable political costs within the Mediterranean theater itself.

Background

From the earliest days of the Cold War, the Mediterranean has figured prominently in U.S.-Soviet rivalry. But the Mediterranean has always been more of a symptom of that rivalry than a driving force in it. The Cold War, after all, arose out of competing U.S.-Soviet visions of what the post-World War II world should look like. And it was in Central Europe that the clash of those competing visions has proved most intense--both then and now. Arguably, the Mediterranean gained early prominence because the sea joined the competing blocs with the region's "arc of crisis"--stretching along the southern shore from Morocco to the Near East and beyond. It was an area where Western maritime superiority could be brought to bear against perceived Soviet superiority ashore, and the fluid political and military situation lent itself to U.S.-Soviet move and countermove without the direct--if not indirect--threat of war.

From the earliest days of the Cold War, the Sixth Fleet has been a fixture of U.S. forward defense. It has been used with great success for the purposes of Western diplomacy in the Mediterranean theater--as U.S. naval power has been used elsewhere--and it has provided vital military support for NATO's Southern Flank in the event of both conventional and nuclear war between the great coalitions.

In the mid-sixties the Sixth Fleet was joined by the Soviets' Fifth Eskadra, which also was assigned both political and military tasks. The

1. The turbulent or "moving sea," as the Italians call the Mediterranean.

2. Others have criticized the prevailing style of forward deployment of the Fleet in general, for example, [4].

world became accustomed to the routine intermingling of the two fleets and their more dangerous augmentation, heightened readiness and combative posturing during the crises that struck the littoral from the mid-sixties through the mid-seventies.

But this situation began to change in the late seventies. As a venue for direct superpower military rivalry, the Mediterranean began to decline in importance relative to other regions to which U.S. attention turned in ever-increasing intensity. The U.S. found itself using its naval forces more frequently in other areas in support of its diplomacy. At the same time, the Soviet Union showed itself somewhat less inclined to use the Fifth Eskadra to support its coercive diplomacy there. But this was part of a larger pattern (with the important exception of operations directed at China) toward a general decline in the political use of the Soviet fleet in the Third World.

In their own right, these changes would seem to raise the question of whether adjustments should be considered in Sixth Fleet's share of the Navy's ships available for forward deployment. A second development would suggest addressal of this question is highly desirable: a consensus has arisen among Western analysts that the center of gravity of Soviet naval efforts in a major war in Europe would be in waters more northerly than the Mediterranean--in the Baltic, Barents and Norwegian Seas and their North Atlantic approaches [5]. Military logic suggests this latter development should encourage the U.S. and its allies to consider shifting some of their peacetime naval operations to the north, both to increase the realism and effectiveness of war-related training and to prevent the development of a belief on the part of the Soviets (and the perception on the part of the Alliance) that the Norwegian Sea could become a Soviet lake.

This paper will attempt to assess the strategic perspective from the Mediterranean in the mid-eighties in light of the changing political and military situation in the Mediterranean considered per se and relative to other regions. To encourage broad consideration of the desirability of changing the Sixth Fleet's style of doing business, the paper traces briefly the main developments that have led to the current situation and describes the recent naval activities of the superpowers. In the Soviet case, it infers the aims these activities seem designed to support; for the U.S., it tries to draw conclusions about the political consequences of the post-1979 decline in the size of Sixth Fleet's carrier contingent. The paper then examines the wartime naval options open to the superpowers in the Mediterranean and concludes with speculation on the longer term consequences of adjusting the Sixth Fleet's posture in the Mediterranean.

Origins of Current Situation

The Sixth Fleet was born in crisis. As the wartime alliance of the U.S., Britain, and the Soviet Union broke down over Moscow's imperial

demands in Eastern Europe, Washington became increasingly determined to resist Soviet territorial encroachments elsewhere. With Britain in decline, the U.S. soon found itself taking over London's traditional role of opposing any power's domination of Europe and preserving the safety of the world's sea lanes for the free flow of trade, capital, and resources.

Sea control in the Mediterranean supported both objectives: It helped sustain friendly regimes in Greece and Turkey--denying the Soviets easy naval and air access to the Mediterranean, thus protecting Western Europe's southern flank and the sea lane to the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Indeed, even before the Soviets provoked a crisis with Turkey over the Dardanelles in 1946, the U.S. had opposed Stalin's request for a Soviet takeover of Italy's former Libyan colony [6]. After the deployment of the battleship Missouri, the carrier Franklin D. Roosevelt, and their escorts helped encourage Ankara to resist Soviet demands for a role in governing the Straits, U.S. naval deployments to the Mediterranean became permanent [7]. By 1948, the naval task force there consisted of two carriers, a cruiser division, an assortment of destroyers, and 1,000 marines. This task force would soon be called the Sixth Fleet [7]. In addition to its role as a peacetime policeman, the Sixth Fleet also became an important factor in wartime planning. The Korean War helped transform NATO from a guarantee pact into the semblance of an integrated military alliance. Concern for NATO's southern flank encouraged the addition of Greece and Turkey to the Alliance in 1952. Control of the air space of those countries would help bottle up the Soviets in the Black Sea. Moreover, as NATO wrestled with the problem of Moscow's conventional superiority on the continent, the Sixth Fleet's nuclear-equipped aircraft were viewed as an important contribution to stopping a Soviet offensive [8, 9, 10].

Imitation is the most reliable proof of effectiveness. And as the Soviet Union recovered from wartime devastation, the Kremlin embarked on a naval program designed to protect the sea approaches to the motherland and later to counter U.S. peacetime naval deployments [11].

The Mediterranean figured prominently in the Kremlin's quest for global influence. The breakup of the British and French empires in the Middle East, the Maghreb after World War II, and the precipitous decline of their influence there after the Suez crisis in 1956 opened opportunities for Moscow. But the Soviets could only watch in impotence as U.S. naval power ruled out efforts on the scene to exploit the Suez crisis [12]. Moreover, the U.S. Marines' intervention in support of a friendly government in Lebanon in 1958 demonstrated that the U.S. intended active counteraction to developments it viewed as undesirable. Indeed, a premature Soviet naval effort to influence events in the Syrian crisis in 1957 may have helped precipitate the ouster of Marshal Zhukov as Defense Minister for "adventurism"--when the U.S. responded by deploying the Sixth Fleet to the Turkish Straits.¹ Even Moscow's attempt in the late fifties to establish a continuous naval presence in the

Mediterranean was frustrated by the Soviet ouster from the naval base at Vlone, Albania in 1961 [14].

However, by 1964, Soviet naval power had grown to the point that the Kremlin felt confident enough to establish a permanent naval presence in the Mediterranean. This bought the Soviets a ringside seat for the 1967 June War. During that conflict, Soviet deployments in support of the Arab cause reached some 70 ships, including 2 cruisers, 15 destroyers, and 10 submarines. U.S. naval operations in the crisis were not seriously hampered, but it was clear the Mediterranean was no longer "our sea." Indeed, the Israeli victory in the conflict forced the Egyptians to depend on Soviet political and military support. In return for that support, the Fifth Eskadra gained access to Egyptian naval and air facilities--substantially improving Moscow's military position in the eastern Mediterranean. Moreover, the Kremlin succeeded in subverting the Turkish notification requirements under the 1936 Montreux Convention by filing contingency declarations. Contingency declarations allowed the Soviets to rapidly reinforce the Fifth Eskadra in crisis situations [15, 16].

The Kremlin's military and political influence in the region reached a peak in 1973. During the October War, the Soviets deployed almost 100 ships and mounted an extensive resupply effort for Egypt and Syria by both air and sea. And after the Egyptians lost the initiative (and almost their Third Army) to the Israelis, the Soviets threatened to intervene to save Cairo. The U.S. found itself virtually bereft of allies in the Israeli resupply effort. In raw military terms, it was not clear whether the Sixth Fleet could defeat the Fifth Eskadra. Washington signalled its determination to oppose Moscow's intervention by raising the U.S. global military readiness to DEFCON 3. The U.S. also acted to defuse the situation by persuading the Israelis to accept a cease-fire, negotiating a withdrawal of Israeli troops east of the Suez Canal and securing an Israeli-Egyptian-Syrian disengagement agreement [17].

As a result, Moscow's influence in the region declined. Even before the October war, the Egyptians had wearied of Soviet heavy handedness, particularly the implied Soviet veto over Egypt's military moves against Israel. In 1972, Cairo expelled 20,000 Soviet advisors and terminated Soviet access to Egyptian airfields in preparation for the October war. In 1976, Sadat ended the Fifth Eskadra's access to Egyptian ports. Soviet naval deployments to the Mediterranean peaked in 1973, then declined and leveled off. Moscow's effort to substitute for the loss of Egyptian ports has met with mixed results in Syria and Libya [18, 19].

1. The authors are grateful to Robert G. Weinland for this observation. See also [13].

In the eighties, U.S. fortunes in the Mediterranean, on the other hand, have been on the rise. Camp David, the Israeli-Egyptian peace agreement, the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Sinai, and U.S.-Egyptian military cooperation has dramatically transformed the military equation in the eastern Mediterranean in Washington's favor [20, 21]. Moreover, by the end of the seventies, the U.S. had largely overcome the effects of the 1974 Cyprus crisis: Greece had been reintegrated, more or less, into NATO; the U.S. had regained access to Turkish military bases.

Many points of weakness remained, amongst which the limited modernization of the Greek and Turkish armed forces was perhaps the most significant militarily. But by 1984, Sixth Fleet access to Mediterranean bases had survived so far the threat of Eurocommunism in Italy and a near Stalinist version in Portugal, two dramatic changes of government in Spain, and even the election of a former Berkeley professor as premier of Greece.¹ Despite a relative decline in U.S. influence in Mideast the general U.S. position in the Mediterranean is reasonably strong. On the other hand, the Soviets found themselves in a weaker position today than in the seventies.² Not only are they virtually frozen out of the Arab-Israeli game, they have little influence on the European littoral and in the Maghreb are reduced to backing the mercurial Gaddafi of Libya.

Let us now turn to the record of superpower naval activities in the Mediterranean for insights into the situation as each sees it.

PEACETIME DEPLOYMENTS

The routine forward deployment of the naval forces of the superpowers usually reflects a combination of motives: (1) a desire to position and train forces for wartime tasks; and (2) the belief that the general presence of one's forces increases one's weight in regional politics and provides the basis for augmentation of forces to increase that weight further or to threaten or actually take combat actions on behalf of diplomacy. In fact, experience shows these motivations are sometimes in conflict and often vary in their importance over time within a given region. Thus, from time to time, the superpowers have

1. This is not to say that U.S. access to Mediterranean bases are immune to the vagaries of political fashion in the region. There is a worrisome trend in both Spain and Greece in favor of reducing U.S. military presence in these countries.

2. This was also the judgment of Admiral William Crowe as commander of NATO's Southern Region, though Admiral Crowe carefully and accurately cautioned that "the Southern Region is undoubtedly the most rapidly changing and unpredictable area in NATO's European Command." See [22, 23].

adjusted their total forward deployment efforts and the distribution of those efforts between regions. This has been particularly true of the Mediterranean, the region the navies of the superpowers first confronted each other on forward deployment in 1964. This section will examine recent trends the forward deployment postures of the superpowers in the Mediterranean, and attempt to interpret their meaning. Somewhat arbitrarily, the Soviets will be addressed first.

Soviet Naval Activities

The size, character, and operations of the forces the Soviets currently deploy to the Mediterranean seem very much in keeping with the objectives they seek, the constraints under which they operate, and the risks they are willing to incur. After reaching a peak of over 20,000-ship days in 1973, Soviet deployments declined to a bit over 16,000 in 1977 and have remained in the 16- to 17,000 range since then [24].

Within these annual averages, the Soviets continued to show considerable variability in routine operations across the year. In 1983-84, for example, the Fifth Eskadra averaged on the range of 35 to 40 ships, led by a cruiser of the older Sverdlov or Kynda classes [25]. In 1984, the new Slava-class cruiser filled this role for several months. Sometimes, however, a cruiser was absent; at others the "duty" cruiser was augmented by a Kiev VTOL carrier or by Kirov, the new nuclear-powered strike cruiser. Likewise, the number of destroyers present (usually of the older Kashin, Kotlin, or Kildin classes) varied between two and four with larger numbers and more modern units present when a Kiev class or other major unit deployed. In the summer months, smaller, though still potent ships, Grisha ASW patrol frigates or Nanuchka patrol guided missile boats also deployed.

This surface combatant contingent was joined by somewhat less impressive amphibious and mine warfare forces. In the last half of the 1970s, the Soviets were generally very consistent in keeping at least one Alligator LST, or two Polnocny LSMs, in the eastern Mediterranean. But from late 1980 to mid-1982, they did not deploy amphibious ships. Since late 1983, an Alligator has been present. Similarly, a large mine warfare ship of the Natya class has generally been in the Sea's eastern basins. With few exceptions, these ships are homeported in the Black Sea.

Soviet submarine deployments continue to originate in the Northern Fleet because of the limitations of the Montreux Convention. Perhaps eight to ten units are present [26], most conventionally powered boats of the Foxtrot and Tango classes. The previous pattern of a 6-month cycle in the Med with massed turnovers (and rough doubling of the force) on a semiannual basis is not currently employed [27]. Today, deployments are generally believed to be by individual or small groups of units and for considerably longer periods of time.

Soviet Naval Aviation (SNA) also currently operates in the Mediterranean. From mid-1972, when SNA was expelled from Egypt, to mid-1981, no units of SNA deployed to Mediterranean bases. Since then, regular deployments have taken place, first to Syria; then Libya was added. In contrast to the earlier period, these aircraft carry Soviet rather than Arab markings. So far, no deployments by strike aircraft have been reported. If this is the case and the Soviets have used only reconnaissance, electronic warfare, intelligence collection and ASW aircraft, they are continuing their pre-1972 practice. Throughout that period, their operations over the Mediterranean were exclusively by these types. Although the Soviets did send strike Badgers to Egypt, those aircraft did not make operational flights over the Med. It appears in retrospect that they were meant exclusively for Egypt's use against her regional adversaries.

The Soviets support the operations of these forces in a variety of ways. They deploy logistics and repair ships, they operate more or less permanent anchorages in international waters of varying degrees of shelter, and they regularly utilize the ports of Syria and (within important constraints) Yugoslavia.

Up to 20 support ships are usually present [28], including at least one submarine tender and a couple of oilers or merchant tankers under Navy "contract." In addition, a pair of specialized intelligence collectors and two more research ships are present. The Soviets continue to maintain an austere repair base at Tartus, Syria, as they have done since a similar, larger scale operation was expelled from Egypt in 1976. It was apparently upgraded somewhat in 1983 to provide spartan overhaul facilities for submarines [29]. They also contract with Yugoslavia to overhaul diesel submarines and usually a submarine tender, with one of each present there more or less continuously throughout the year. This practice lengthens the period of deployment for the ships involved. It also may reflect a continuing shortage of ship repair and overhaul capacity in the USSR, as the Soviets have for many years contracted for overhaul of noncombatant naval ships and merchant ships in other, noncommunist countries, including Greece in the Mediterranean. The Soviets also refuel merchant ships and tankers in Italian, Spanish and Maltese ports; some of fuel going to the latter is then transferred to naval ships [30].

Soviet forces on deployment continue the earlier pattern of spending the majority of their time at anchor or in port. Small scale training exercises involving a few ships are the most frequent activity. Larger scale exercises are infrequent with activity concentrated during the summer months. Land-based SNA often participates in these latter. Marking the activities of Sixth Fleet continues, especially its units located in the Eastern Mediterranean. In the absence of any reports to the contrary, it can be assumed that Soviet aircraft rarely approach U.S. ships, especially during times of great tension ashore.

These military activities are important, but they continue to be secondary to the Fifth Eskadra's mission of supporting Soviet political objectives in the Mediterranean. In keeping with the changing character of the latter, noted above, diplomatic port visiting continues as before, but responses to regional crises and to U.S. actions in such crises has definitely become muted in 80s compared to the early 70s. As Weinland has pointed out, the Soviets did not respond to the major concentration of U.S. forces of Lebanon in mid-1982 (four carriers well within strike range of the USSR) [31]. And while the Fifth Eskadra's size and actions have varied with the pace of events ashore, those augmentations that have occurred have not approached the scale or operational intensity of the Soviet reaction to the October War.

This behavior suggests the primacy of politics in the Fifth Eskadra's raison d'etre. The Soviets do not react automatically with naval forces to U.S. carriers responding to crises in the eastern Mediterranean and thus entering a putative Soviet "security zone." The Soviets may well raise readiness levels of intelligence or other forces to monitor U.S. activities, but a direct military counter is apparently not called for. If this is so, further credence is added to the interpretation that the Fifth Eskadra is not primarily providing for the direct military defense of the Soviet Union in peacetime.¹ On the contrary, in the eighties, as it has continuously at least since 1967, its main assignment is to serve the foreign policy ends of the USSR. The modest scope of those ends (compared to the seventies and before) and the relatively passive means the Soviets have employed in their pursuit are what account for the Fifth Eskadras quiescence. This posture is unlikely to change until the constellation of political and military forces in the region invites greater Soviet participation or the Soviets adopt a more assertive stance in policy.

U.S. Naval Activities

Over the last ten years, the foci of U.S. naval actions in the Third World have shifted from the Mediterranean and North--and Southeast Asia toward the Indian Ocean and Latin American.

The impact of these changes on the Mediterranean can be seen in two ways: in the size of the carrier contingent maintained in the Mediterranean and the rate of naval responses to political events in the Mediterranean compared to other theaters. Let us examine each in turn and see what conclusions seem in order.

The number of carriers in the Sixth Fleet has commonly been regarded as the measure of its combat power and simultaneously an expression of commitment on the part of the U.S. to interests in the region. Throughout the sixties and seventies the continuous presence of two carriers seemed to represent the minimum level required on both

1. The same is, of course, not true in war as discussed below.

scores. Enlargement of the Fleet in response to crises ashore occurred from time to time but with minor exceptions, never its reduction below the floor of two carriers. The year 1979 was the last year this was so. As table 1 shows, in that year two or more carriers were present on 319 days. In sharp contrast, 1980 saw 319 days with only one carrier present and 15 days with no carrier at all. The following year, 1981, this pattern continued with only one carrier with Sixth Fleet 297 days, or 80 percent of the year.

TABLE 1

U.S. CARRIER DEPLOYMENT LEVELS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN
1979-1983

Year	Number of Days in Year		
	No carrier present	One carrier only present	Two/three/four carriers present
1979	0	46	315/4/0
1980	15	319	32/0/0
1981	0	297	68/0/0
1982	0	147	169/35/14
1983	0	215	134/16/0

Source: Data provided by Office of Chief of Naval Operations

This reduced carrier presence has continued through today. Although events in Lebanon resulted in heavy carrier deployments off Beirut in 1982, 40 percent of that year only one carrier was present, and in 1983 the measure rose to nearly 60 percent. In the current year, this pattern has continued.

Clearly, an important change has taken place in the Navy's routine forward deployment posture. The reasons for this change are widely appreciated: the Iranian hostage crisis, the rising salience of Southwest Asia in the perceptions of U.S. defense and foreign policy planners, and changing requirements in the Caribbean. What have been less well appreciated--or even become the subject of public interest--are the consequences of this change for the Mediterranean.¹ It is not the purpose of this paper to attempt an exhaustive answer. Rather, in the absence of significant evidence to the contrary (and the authors are aware of none), it is the hypothesis of this paper that the political consequences in the Mediterranean of reducing the average level of

1. Indeed, only Western commanders have commented on this "setback." See [32].

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The authors have no settled opinions on these issues, but it is this conviction that they very much deserve a general assessment. There seem to be good reasons for the U.S. to consider adjusting its deployment policy to the Mediterranean and strong reasons to expect that such adjustments would not adversely affect the U.S. position there if it did so--assuming a sensible implementation through consultation (public or private) based on a sound rationale for the move. We suggest that this question deserves the attention of the community of analysts concerned with strategic employment of the U.S. Navy in peace and war.

implications for Western maritime forces in the Mediterranean. There is absolutely no reason to question the importance of the Mediterranean to the security and cohesion of the Alliance, nor the centrality of Sixth Fleet in the achievement of Alliance aims in war. However, peacetime operations do not have to reflect wartime requirements on a uniform or constant basis. Let us conclude this essay with an examination of the appropriate level of Sixth Fleet peacetime carrier commitments.

Prospects for the Future

This paper has raised the possibility that U.S. may wish to consider seriously adjusting the forward deployment posture of its naval forces in the European theater, producing a net reduction in the Mediterranean. The underlying rationale is straightforward: Advantages are likely to accrue in realistic training and readiness if some deployments now going to the Mediterranean are shifted to the waters of Northern Europe. These advantages could be extremely important because of the growing consensus that the Norwegian Sea and its approaches are likely to be the area where the balance of naval power is decided in a major war in the European theater. Further, the increased presence of Alliance naval forces there in peacetime advances the Alliance's interests in political cohesion and in answering growing Soviet pressure on the northern flanks. At the same time, experience since 1979 strongly suggests that the number of carriers actually committed to the Mediterranean can be reduced somewhat without deleterious effects in that region. The U.S. position in the Mediterranean has not worsened as a result; on the contrary the U.S. remains as much a fixture of the regional military and political balance as before--if not more so. Moreover, the U.S. has proved itself capable of ready and rapid response to crises in the Mediterranean, even while the average number of carriers present has shrunk.

To raise a policy issue is not inevitably to argue its positive side. Conscious adjustment of a long-standing policy should always be approached with care. One can scarcely be certain that undesirable reactions to a "reduction" in Sixth Fleet might not arise. Greece or Turkey may view a more relaxed U.S. deployment posture in the Mediterranean--that is, more radical variations in its size with the net diminution in its average size--as reflecting lessened U.S. interest in their quarter; the same might be supposed in the case of the hard line Arab states. Within the context of the NATO alliance suggestions to alter in any way long-standing deployments and the wartime commitments they have come to symbolize invariably produce tension amongst politicians and indeed within military staffs. Finally, one would not wish to engender undesirable responses from the Soviets either in the Mediterranean or in the areas in which deployments might be increased. Clearly the operational benefits expected from a change in deployment posture should outweigh the costs by a good measure (and there are almost always costs) in order to offset whatever negative political effects result.

attention on Navy attacks. One cannot be sure of the result, of course, but there seems a genuine possibility that U.S. Navy attackers might suffer damage which could be, at least cumulatively, unacceptably telling. Whether such a situation would continue later in the war, only events can show.

In addition to the U.S. and its NATO allies, Israel and Egypt could well play roles that proved important in determining the early fate of the eastern Mediterranean. Clearly, it would be unwise to permit Alliance naval plans to hinge on expected contributions from those nations (nor to ignore the hostile but lesser potential of Soviet clients like Syria). However, the longer the war goes on the more likely these states will be drawn in--on balance to the net advantage of the West.

As argued above, this assessment has assumed that the Soviet Union would not make a major thrust into Southwest Asia. That does not rule out the possibility that a significant fraction of the RDF might find itself in or enroute to the Persian Gulf when the main event begins. If so, the U.S. will have additional reasons for wanting to ensure access to the eastern Mediterranean: either to reinforce and resupply the forces deployed to Southwestern Asia (which can also be accomplished from the east); or to redeploy some or all first-line RDF forces back to the European theater. The latter possibility would of course produce an excruciating strategic choice for U.S. decision-makers--whether to play for the short run in Europe (presumably to stave off defeat ashore, perhaps especially in the Southern Region) or, if the odds seem poor in Europe, to try to hold in the Persian Gulf for the long haul, when the struggle against Soviet power enters a new phase.

Throughout, these assessments reflect the ultimate primacy of gaining and holding territory in determining the war's winners and losers. Western control of the Mediterranean can only be a means to the end of meeting Soviet ground forces in the Balkans--itself a goal that contributes to but is secondary to holding on the Central Front. Supremacy at sea in the Mediterranean raises a number of possibilities for the longer term in a big war: It can be exploited to buttress Allied forces in Thrace (or if events dictate perhaps at a battle line located deeper into Greece and Turkey); it supports a possible threat to Warsaw Pact forces in Hungary [37]. The latter, supported by or in support of forces in the Southwest TVD, would probably attempt to occupy Austria, Slovenia, and perhaps the North Italian plain as well [37]. If, after time to generate the necessary ground forces, the West can then achieve such ends, the Mediterranean's strategic significance to the Soviets will enlarge steadily.

There are strong reasons to believe that Soviet planners increasingly envision the possibility of a major war becoming protracted at the conventional level [38, 39]. Thus, we have a growing obligation to think through such possibilities for the Southern Region and their

neutralize the sources of Soviet support ashore--whether under the Soviet flag or that of their allies.

The main strategic objective of Fleet operations would be to keep Greece, Turkey, and Italy fighting (the last presumably a somewhat less urgent problem). A wide variety of approaches seem possible and a considerable number of Western forces is available to achieve these ends. Convoying sea-borne reinforcements and resupply may well be necessary--certainly if civil traffic at sea has ceased. If the press of events allows in the initial period, perhaps one logical course of action would be to husband as much of Sixth Fleet and Allied resources as possible; high value units might move westward, perhaps even into the Atlantic for a period. If the Soviets were knowledgeable of such a move, it would be perceived by them for what it is, not a strategic withdrawal but a serious tactical measure to prepare for a campaign to sweep the Mediterranean clear of Soviet forces (and mines), moving deliberately from west to east. An alternative (or complementary) course would be to exploit Western land-based aviation in combination with maritime forces to establish or strengthen points d'appui on Crete, Cyprus, Rhodes, and other islands, as well as on mainland Greece and Turkey. Throughout, land-based U.S. and U.K. maritime patrol aircraft have the potential to make a major contribution to Western effectiveness, though they will need protection against possible Soviet air strikes and even airborne attacks and commando raids.

Depending on the balance of forces, a higher risk course would seem to be pressing carrier battlegroups early into the eastern Mediterranean before the Fifth Eskadra had been significantly reduced. Presumably, the strategic purpose of such a move would be to meet an emergency ashore in which Western forces required immediate support from the carriers' attack or air defense aviation. Such contingencies must be allowed for. But given the very large land-based tactical air forces available (or potentially available) to both sides, the later sea-based aviation is committed to support ground operations, the greater its impact is likely to be. (In this sense, carrier aviation can be regarded as a mobile reserve. For example, the Soviets have no doubt considered the potential of carriers operating in the Ligurian Sea to meet the advance of, say, one of their Operational Maneuver Groups in southern Germany.)

A similar military consideration¹ would also seem to apply to a decision to strike SNA bases on Soviet territory with carrier aviation or sea-launched cruise missiles. Early U.S. Navy attacks would be met by Soviet air defense forces. Presumably, these would presumably be at full readiness, and, unless other Western forces were simultaneously committed against targets in southern Russia, able to focus their entire

1. Beyond the political considerations that might militate against such an action.

might be chosen.¹ Third, the Soviets are well aware of the superiority in strike range their bombers would nonetheless enjoy over U.S. sea-based attack aviation and might be loathe to commit SNA until Western carriers approached within lethal ranges of targets they viewed as significant and vulnerable.

Whatever the case, we can be reasonably sure the Soviets would use Black Sea Fleet Naval Aviation for reconnaissance, to mine critical waters and, as a force in being, to maintain a threat to Western forces in the Mediterranean. On balance however, we should not automatically expect SNA's ready commitment in force to strikes at extreme ranges from Soviet territory. Indeed, given its strategic mobility, Naval Aviation in the Black Sea should be regarded as nearly great a threat to Western forces in the Baltic and Norwegian Sea theaters as in the Med per se. At least this last seems likely to be the case if a secondary strategic priority for the Mediterranean can be properly ascribed to Soviet planners.

Western Options

Western superiority at sea in the Mediterranean is the sine qua non of the cohesion of the Alliance and of its viability in NATO's Southern Region [36]. If it can be achieved, the theater holds considerable geopolitical potential for the West--a potential that is typically not investigated because of the current balance of forces in the Balkans and intra-NATO enmities. Whether and, if so, when superiority might be achieved will depend on the size and relative effectiveness of the maritime forces committed on each side. The significance of superiority in turn would depend on trends in other maritime theaters and of course ashore. For the purposes of this paper, it will be assumed that the war is not resolved quickly in any of its dimensions--that is, it does not escalate, the West remains viable on the Central Front, and Greece, Turkey, and Italy remain belligerents.

Western operations to gain superiority would presumably begin with measures to foil or defeat the D-day shootout or other Soviet options that could arise from the posture of the "close embrace" that they may enjoy in the prewar crisis. Similarly, pressing would be the need to

1. It must be noted that during conventional operations the Soviets might try to avoid launching SNA from their own territory to attack Western targets at sea unless Soviet territory had been struck or at least seemed in imminent jeopardy. Rather than involve their own territory directly, the Soviets might well prefer to base some SNA units in Eastern Europe, putting on the West the onus of crossing the threshold of superpower territorial limitation. Moreover, they might fly from Eastern Europe to increase their radius of possible action in any event.

In sum, the Soviets see themselves on the defensive at sea. Indeed, they are likely to be mindful of the possibility that the West might mount operations in the Black Sea using Turkey's 16 modern diesel submarines many of German construction as well as other forces.¹ The West might expect to achieve exactly the same goals against Soviet forces that the Fifth Eskadra seeks against NATO. If the West did so successfully, the Soviets would necessarily postpone, perhaps even forgo, possible amphibious and sea-borne logistic operations to support efforts to seize the Turkish Straits and the littoral of Thrace, and perhaps points on the Turkish Black Sea coast.

These priorities, the Soviet navy's style of war, and the logic of the situation combine to produce the following picture of the Soviet's Mediterranean operations in war. From the purely naval point of view, the Soviets main striking forces in the Mediterranean are--as everywhere else--submarines and naval aviation. Nuclear-powered and diesel submarines can be expected to target such high-value Western units as they can acquire and track during the prewar crisis. There has been debate in the West much about the so-called "D-day shootout" that might then occur. However, it is improbable that Soviet plans focus exclusively or even mainly on such a narrow aspect of operations. More likely, the Soviets see themselves fighting a campaign to raise the cost of the West's use of the Med as high as possible and to delay the achievement of decisive superiority as long as possible. The Soviets would use such forces as they had ashore in Libya, Syria, and elsewhere (probably minor) for the brief period they expect them to survive. Forces at sea can be presumed to seek to mine and position themselves at choke points, off Western bases and ports, and along the principal transit routes in order to destroy Western naval forces and to inhibit Western attempts to resupply and reinforce Greece, Turkey, and Italy. Gibraltar and the Straits of Sicily are obvious pressure points. Naval actions against Suez are less certain; perhaps sabotage would be tried first.

Soviet Naval Aviation (SNA) (supported in the Soviet fashion by elements of the Soviet Air Force) presents a formidable but still lesser threat to Western forces in the Mediterranean than worst-case analysis usually envisions. First, during the conventional phase the Soviets are likely to hold a significant fraction of SNA in reserve, ready for rapid transition to nuclear operations that their planners believe could be decisive at sea--as it may well be ashore. Second, the Soviets would logically be concerned with Western land-based air defenses which could pose a threat to SNA both en route to targets at sea, and during their return to base. Thus, low altitude and range-limiting flight profiles

1. The Military Balance, 1983-84, p.42.

shift forces from the Southwest TVD to the Central Front than to continue to pursue further strategic objectives in the Mediterranean. If prospects for success on the Central Front seem satisfactory, forces in the Southwest TVD would probably turn to consolidating and expanding the Soviet position in the Mediterranean region. Their objectives would be to deal with the possibility that the U.S., and its remaining allies in Europe and elsewhere might attempt in due course a strategic counter-attack through the Mediterranean. In this case, Italy would probably be the major focus of intensified Southwest TVD operations, though some actions along the Mediterranean's African littoral can scarcely be ruled out.

This assessment assumes that the Soviets would not mount a major ground operation aimed at the Persian Gulf until events on the Central Front take favorable shape--although a calculated feint or lucky move in that direction might force the U.S. to deploy the RDF. Such an assumption reflects Soviet judgments that: (1) The Soviets' geographic priorities are controlling as stated; (2) the Soviets do not expect "to walk to the Channel"; and (3) operations in Southwest Asia do not contribute to or strengthen significantly the prospects for Soviet success in the Western or Southwestern TVDs.

These priorities set the framework within which the Soviets view the Mediterranean. In addition, the Mediterranean fits the Soviet definition of an "enclosed sea." This means they expect the Mediterranean's wartime fate, in total or in part, will be determined by the power that can control the surrounding land areas. Within this conception, complete control of the sea or even control of an area of that sea is not required, and there is little reason to expect the Soviets to venture major naval forces in an attempt to achieve it. That is not to say that they would not in a period of crisis reinforce the Fifth Eskadra, especially its submarine contingent. And surely they would expect such forces to give a good account of themselves in the war's initial period. Amongst other tasks they would be expected to gain intelligence on Western intentions, force Western naval forces into defensive measures, and get cheap kills where they can. However, it seems quite unlikely that the Soviets would expect to prevail at sea in any significant sense. Thus, in the war's initial period they would not attempt to reinforce further in the Mediterranean, regarding the forces already deployed as expendable. Thus, it is quite unlikely that the best of the Soviet navy will be in the Fifth Eskadra when the big war starts.¹

1. A brand new Kara-class cruiser present in the Mediterranean at the start of the crisis that led to the October War beat a hasty retreat back to the Black Sea even as the Soviets were augmenting the Fifth Eskadra to historically unprecedented levels [35].

The experience of nearly 4 years means that those who have consistently forecast that a decline in the Sixth Fleet carrier contingent would have harmful effects on U.S. policy now have the burden on proof upon them.¹ Before attempting larger conclusions about what this political experience might mean regarding the deployment options open to the U.S. in the Mediterranean in the future, let us turn to the second consideration determining the strategic view from the Mediterranean; the wartime options open to the U.S. and Soviet Union there.

WARTIME STRATEGY AND OPERATIONS

Although the issue is widely debated in the West, the authors' judgment is that the two superpowers seem to have essentially complementary views about the importance of the Mediterranean in war. In principle, both view the geopolitical nature of the theater as having greater potential for Western than for Soviet strategic gain, though current Soviet superiority ashore probably means that potential might be difficult for the West to realize. This section will summarize the attitudes of the superpowers toward the Mediterranean if a major war were to occur and will focus on the options apparently open to each. As in the review of their peacetime views and plans, the Soviets will be taken up first. For the Soviets, these interpretations reflect the authors' assessment of Soviet priorities and style in planning; for the U.S., their application of military logic.

Soviet Options

For the Soviet military planner, there seems little doubt that the Central Front--what the Soviets invariably term the "main Western axis"--is regarded as the decisive ground theater in a war between the coalitions [33]. Among maritime theaters, they give higher priority to the Arctic and Baltic than to the Mediterranean most probably because of their more immediate relation to the Central Front and because Soviet ballistic missile submarines operate in the former. The Mediterranean Sea is seen as secondary in importance, basically the maritime extension of what the Soviets term the Southwest Theater of Military Operations (TVD) which encompasses Turkey and the Balkans [34].

Soviet aims in the Mediterranean arise mainly in the context of what they believe they must achieve ashore in the Balkans. The principal defensive objective will be to prevent the West from penetrating into the Black Sea area or attacking the USSR from the Mediterranean. The principal offensive objective is to drive Greece, Turkey, and perhaps Italy out of the war. If the second can be accomplished, subsequent actions would depend upon the trend in the battle on the Central Front. If need should arise there, the Soviets would be more likely to

1. The authors are indebted to their colleagues Desmond P. Wilson, Jr. and Fred Berghoefer for this pungent observation.

TABLE 2

U.S. NAVY RESPONSES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN 1977-1984

<u>Month and year of commitment</u>	<u>Events</u>
May 1981	Syrian missiles move into Lebanon
August 1981	Gulf of Sidra freedom of navigation operations
October 1981	Assassination of Anwar Sadat
June 1982	Israeli invasion of Lebanon
August 1982	Beirut peacekeeping operations
September 1982	Palestinian refugee camp massacres
February 1983	Libyan threat to Sudan
August 1983	Libyan threat to Chad
December 1983	Retaliatory air attacks in Lebanon
February 1984	Retaliatory naval gunfire in Lebanon

Source: Extracted from contemporary press and other sources according to the criteria employed in the sources used for table 3 below. The authors are indebted to their colleague John Perse for preparation of this material.

TABLE 3

THIRD WORLD CRISIS INCIDENTS INVOLVING U.S. NAVAL
AND OTHER MILITARY RESPONSES 1969-1984^a

	<u>Mediterranean N. Africa</u>	<u>Indian Ocean Subsaharan Africa</u>	<u>N.E., S.E. Asia</u>	<u>Latin America</u>	<u>Total</u>
1969-1976	9	4	3	4	20
1977-1984	10	18 (14-10)	6	14	48

Source: Barry M. Blechman and Stephen S. Kaplan (eds.), Force Without War: U.S. Armed Forces as a Political Instrument, Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1978, Philip Zelikow, "Force Without War, 1975-1982," unpublished paper, Pentagon Library, Washington, D.C., 1982; New York Times, Washington Post, 1983-1982. The authors are indebted to their colleague John Perse for preparation of this material.

a. The Navy and Marine Corps were the services most often called upon for these responses.

carrier deployments significantly below the historical level of two have been nil. To the degree the change has been noticed by observers whose views are important to the U.S., it was apparently not judged to reflect a significant change in U.S. interests nor, we further hypothesize, in the ability or willingness of the U.S. to back up its interests in the Mediterranean with military power if need be.

Observers most probably reached this conclusion because the Sixth Fleet continued to operate and the U.S. proved able to muster it and other military forces to support its Mediterranean diplomacy when required. The heavy carrier response to the Lebanese crisis of 1982 has already been mentioned. In addition the Navy was ordered to respond nine other times to political events there between 1977 and early 1984, as shown in table 2. As far as can be determined, none of these responses was regarded as other than timely and military appropriate.

Moreover, these responses in the Mediterranean took place while the total number of U.S. naval and other responses in the Third World was increasing sharply. Table 3 shows that, while the frequency of U.S. responses in the Mediterranean in the eight years from 1977 onward was at essentially the same level as the eight years before that, responses in the Indian Ocean and Latin America rose dramatically. What might a reasonable observer of the Sixth Fleet have concluded? On the basis of this evidence alone, he could not rule out the possibility that the U.S. had wished to respond to some events in the Mediterranean but had failed to do so because its forces were stretched too thin in global terms.¹ But to the knowledge of the authors, no observer in the Mediterranean or elsewhere has in fact reached such a conclusion. On the contrary U.S. responses to Mediterranean crises since 1981² were seldom if ever criticized for being slow or weak; if anything, they were characterized (especially by America's critics), as rapid and intense.

Given this experience, it is not surprising that the general reduction in overall Sixth Fleet carrier deployment levels has resulted in a muted if not completely neutral reaction. For a number of reasons, this important U.S. military change simply has not had an important effect on the U.S. political position in that theater.

1. Which is not to say that the U.S. Navy has not found this mode of operation very burdensome indeed. But that important topic should be the subject of discussion in its own right.

2. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to consider domestic determinants of U.S. foreign policy, it cannot have escaped the reader's attention that the U.S. did not respond to a Mediterranean crisis in the Carter years, 1977-1980.

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