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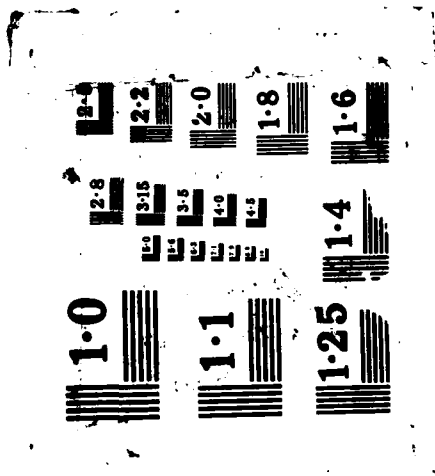
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The Maritime Strategy and Coalition Defense:
A Synthesis for NATO Success

by

David W. Glazier
Lieutenant, USN

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in competition for the President's Prize.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Submitted by:

David W. Glazier

Faculty Advisor:

Dr. William S. Williamson



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 Maritime Strategy is an essential element underpinning the credibility of the NATO alliance. Far from hampering continental defense, the Strategy enhances our deterrent posture and, should deterrence fail, increases our prospects for both preserving NATO allies and for ending hostilities on favorable terms. Execution of the global war portion of the Maritime Strategy would almost certainly occur as part of a NATO defensive effort against Warsaw Pact aggression. Also, discussions about the feasibility of executing the Maritime Strategy have attempted to compare our national force structure and capabilities to that of the Soviets.

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Public discussion of the Maritime Strategy, although extensive, has tended to be narrow in focus. The critics, in particular, have sought to center the debate on the Strategy's relevance to what they perceive to be the chief issue confronting NATO, defense of the Central Front. The prospect for successful execution of the Strategy against a robust Soviet naval threat has been another favorite issue. Although often mentioned in passing, the "coalition warfare" aspects of the Maritime Strategy have not enjoyed widespread understanding. At least one major critic has made a name for himself arguing that America must choose between conflicting objectives of coalition defense and our maritime strategy.*

I contend that the Maritime Strategy is an essential element underpinning the credibility of the NATO alliance. Far from hampering continental defense, the Strategy enhances our deterrent posture and, should deterrence fail, increases our prospects for both preserving NATO allies and for ending hostilities on favorable terms.

Execution of the global war portion of the Maritime Strategy would almost certainly occur as part of a NATO defensive effort against Warsaw Pact aggression. This factor has significant ramifications with respect to both the relevance and executabil-

* See Robert W. Komer, "Maritime Strategy vs. Coalition Defense," Foreign Affairs, Vol. 60, No. 5, Summer 1982, pp. 1,124 - 1,144 and his subsequent book, Maritime Strategy or Coalition Defense?, Cambridge: Abt Books, 1984



ity of the Strategy. The very reason for NATO's existence is to provide collective self-defense for all members of the alliance. To be credible, therefore, a NATO strategy must be a full forward strategy. An "association of free states joined together to preserve their security through mutual guarantees...in which member states retain their full sovereignty and independence"¹ cannot rationally endorse any strategy which would effectively concede its flank nations to a potential adversary.

Also, discussions about the feasibility of executing the Maritime Strategy have attempted to compare our national force structure and capabilities to that of the Soviets. Often overlooked are the potent forces which our NATO allies can bring to this coalition effort. While we may be critical of the percentage of their GNP our allies devote to defense, it is irresponsible to underestimate their potential contributions to the naval battle against the Warsaw Pact.

The Role of Naval Forces

Maritime forces have a number of important roles to play in a global conflict. Some of these have significant political ramifications which must be considered by both US and allied national leadership as the conflict develops. In this category I would place expanding the geographic scope of the conflict to theaters of the Alliance's choosing--the Pacific and Indian Ocean if war starts in Europe, and major efforts to alter the nuclear balance with conventional forces--dedicated offensive anti-SSBN



operations. Other such options might include tactical strikes against targets in the USSR, and possible transition to theater nuclear warfare, either in response to Soviet first use or because of unfavorable trends in the conventional battle.

Other naval roles are inherent to any efforts at alliance defense. Foremost in this category are defending the seaward flanks of our European allies and maintaining North Atlantic sea lines of communication (SLOCs).

The Requirement for a Forward Strategy

Failure to pursue a forward strategy would unilaterally concede to the Soviets effective control of waters flanking our forwardmost allies: Norway, Denmark, even the eastern coast of the United Kingdom! The same threat would confront Turkey and Greece if the Sixth Fleet were to be withdrawn from the eastern Mediterranean. With the ever increasing abilities of modern navies to project power ashore, unilateral concession of forward ocean areas is clearly an obsolete approach. This is even more true when one considers the traditional landward focus of the Soviet Navy, an organization whose basic mission is "the battle against the shore."² Possessing adequate amphibious lift to simultaneously move the entire 16,000 man Soviet Naval Infantry, "the last conventional, all-gun cruisers in commission with any navy,"³ at least four capable VSTOL carriers, and a number of smaller cruise missile and gun armed vessels, the



Soviet Navy might quickly wreak havoc on unprotected flanks of coastal NATO nations.

Protection of the Sea Lanes

The second essential mission for NATO maritime forces is to maintain the North Atlantic SLOCs, permitting seaborne movement of heavy combat forces and equipment to the European theater as well as resupply of munitions, strategic materials, and even foodstuffs from the US. Traditional approaches to this mission have called for a defensive barrier in the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom (GIUK) gap, convoy escort, or some combination of both. There are significant problems, however, with each of these approaches.

Establishment of a GIUK barrier, particularly against Soviet submarines, would be extremely difficult in most scenarios. If Warsaw Pact aggression were to occur with relatively little warning, the Soviets could surge deploy large forces before an effective ASW containment could be established. They would capitalize on the fact that their Kola Peninsula bases are much closer to the gap than those of the US Atlantic Fleet, which would almost certainly have prime responsibility for the barrier effort. A wartime Soviet breakout could be facilitated by early cruise missile or bomber strikes against forward SOSUS shore nodes and maritime patrol aircraft bases.

A prolonged pre-conflict period poses its own challenges. Allied sonobuoy inventories could be rapidly depleted by the



requirement to maintain simultaneous tracks on a number of deploying submarines. Contact might thus be lost on many Soviet units before hostilities actually commenced and they could be engaged. The barrier tactic would then fail to protect the sea lanes despite its potential effectiveness in generating initial detections on the outbound submarines.

Convoy escort also has significant drawbacks in the modern era. Convoy warfare is "a tactic of desperation."⁴ It is attrition warfare, offering merchant vessels as bait to attract the enemy in hopes of an acceptable trade-off between ships lost and submarines killed. The rapidly dwindling size of US and allied merchant marines underscores the problems with this tactic. The British merchant fleet, for example, has dropped from approximately 1400 ships in 1978 to about 600 in 1986.⁵ Further, as the number of merchant ships has declined, the size of individual ships has grown significantly. Each ship thus now represents a much more valuable investment than ever before. The high cost and long lead times inherent in most modern military hardware to be transported across the SLOCs means that "most military cargoes are irreplaceable in the course of all but the longest war. If they are not delivered, the war would be very short, indeed."⁶

Another problem with the convoy approach is that our current escorts were designed primarily to provide ASW protection; the Soviet submarine threat today includes cruise missiles as well as torpedoes, and is complemented with long range, land



based, naval aviation. With an unrefueled range of about 2,650 nm, Backfire-Bs based in the Kola region can strike "targets as far south as the Azores."⁷ Unless actually accompanied by CVs, whatever AAW protection surface escorts could provide would be limited to engaging ASCMs, leaving the bomber force intact to rearm and conduct follow-up strikes.

There can be little doubt that the Soviets perceive the value of cutting the NATO Alliance's SLOCs in time of conflict, although the relative priority afforded this mission has varied over time.⁸ One of the major lessons Soviet writers extract from the experiences of the "Great Patriotic War" is the value of massed aircraft strikes and submarine attacks against enemy SLOCs.⁹ Nevertheless, the principal missions of the Soviet Navy are indisputably strategic strike, protection of the SSBN forces dedicated to this role, and defense of the Soviet homeland. A declaratory NATO strategy based on forward operations near the Soviet homeland, with the prospect of preemptive attack on Backfire bases and possibly anti-SSBN operations, might effectively force the Soviets to assume a defensive naval posture and restrain from large-scale interdiction of allied SLOCs. A publicly declared objective of full forward pressure is thus a key element in keeping the Soviet Navy on the defensive, regardless of the conflict scenario. By following Sun Tzu's dictum that "what is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy,"¹⁰ the allies can effectively maintain "control" of the SLOCs in the Soviet usage, by creating:



such a situation that the enemy will be paralyzed or constrained in his operations, or weakened and thereby hampered from interfering with our execution of a given operation.¹¹

We may thus have the opportunity to protect the SLOCs not with a defensive curtain of ships, but by the threat of forward offensive operations, placing at risk values more dear to the Soviets than the opportunity to conduct open ocean sea lane interdiction.

The Naval Balance: NATO vs. Warsaw Pact

There are clearly significant risks to be encountered in forward operations against an adversary as capable, determined, and professional as the Soviet Navy. It is essential, therefore, to critically assess the forces available to both sides to determine whether a strategy based on forward pressure can be credible enough to have the desired impact on wartime Soviet naval deployments. And since we are talking about a coalition effort on both sides, this assessment must consider the contribution of Warsaw Pact forces as well as those of the NATO alliance.

Failure to include allied forces results in a serious exaggeration of our adversaries' strength in contrast to our own. Largely a continental alliance, the combined navies of the other Warsaw Pact nations are virtually insignificant in major warship categories. They add only five diesel submarines, one destroyer, and eight frigates to the Soviet totals.*

* All naval strengths are taken from: John N. Moore, ed., Jane's Fighting Ships: 1985 - 86, London: Jane's Publishing Co., 1985. Numbers shown reflect only active units in commission



NATO forces, excluding France and Spain, add 104 diesel and 13 nuclear submarines, two conventional (light) and three VSTOL carriers, two cruisers, 56 destroyers, and 136 frigates to US totals. France and Spain, although not militarily integrated with the rest of NATO, are likely to contribute to the allied effort another 24 diesel and three nuclear attack submarines, two cruisers, three light carriers, 30 destroyers, and 36 frigates.

The non-Soviet Warsaw Pact nations do possess sizeable numbers of small combatants (from patrol boats on up to corvettes) and mine warfare vessels. Their 316 small combatants and 168 mine warfare craft are countered by a western order of battle of 452 small combatants and 295 mine warfare craft.

Adding the US Atlantic Fleet and the Soviet Baltic, Black Sea, and Northern Fleets produces the following approximate ship totals available for service in the European theater:

<u>Ship Type</u>	<u>NATO</u>	<u>Warsaw Pact</u>
Carriers (CV and CVL)	12	0
VSTOL Carrier	3	2
Battleship (Iowa)	1	0
Battlecruisers (Kirov)	0	1
Cruisers	16	22
Destroyers	125	55
Frigates	222	144
Misc. Combatants	452	686
Mine Warfare	295	398
Submarines (SS/SSG)	129	114
Submarines (SSN/SSGN)	72	75

(NATO totals include the French and Spanish navies)

in May, 1985. Coast Guard units which would chop to navy control in time of war are not included.



The Warsaw Pact navies are supplemented by approximately 350 strike bombers and fighter/bombers assigned to Soviet Naval Aviation. To counter these, NATO navies embark something on the order of 300 interceptors on their carriers, ranging from the VSTOL Sea Harrier to the F-14 Tomcat.

If conflict should spread to the Pacific, the Soviet Navy would probably have to go it alone in that ocean against a coalition which might reasonably include the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force, Royal Australian Navy, and South Korean Navy operating in conjunction with US forces.

Qualitative assessments obviously pose a greater challenge than numerical comparisons. The offensive potential embodied in the NATO carriers, for example, defies ready quantification but clearly outstrips anything the Soviets can put to sea.

Coalition Synergism

Not to be overlooked in qualitative assessments should be the synergism that results from combining the NATO coalition forces. While the submarines and major NATO combatants provide a welcome addition to our own blue water capabilities, the contribution of the Europeans' many small vessels might be even more important. Our resupply efforts and open ocean naval activity would be impossible if our allies cannot maintain mine-free entrances to the European ports and clear passages through restricted straits and channels. While our naval units are protecting the European flanks with their forward presence, close

in operations by NATO patrol craft, such as the Norwegian Navy's Penguin missile-equipped boats, can provide the larger ships freedom to maneuver away from the coast to enhance their own survivability.¹²

We should also consider the contributions made by landbased coalition assets. Maritime patrol aircraft permit extended ASW operations beyond the range of battle group assets. Tactical air based in Norway, Iceland, and the United Kingdom can supplement naval air defense efforts, as can land based tanker support by extending both the range and mission duration of carrier aircraft. The UK's recent decision to purchase the E-3 AWACS, with its potential for providing long range surveillance, early warning, and battle management over the North Sea, may prove to be one of the most significant allied contributions to execution of the Maritime Strategy.

Current publicity about the new AKULA and unexpectedly rapid progress in Soviet submarine development may cause doubt about the long perceived NATO superiority in both submarine and anti-submarine warfare. It should be noted that the concern among US Navy officials is not for present capabilities, but for the future if we fail to keep up with Soviet developments.¹³

Current production versions of the US SSN-688 class are considered sufficiently capable to maintain superiority over the Akula.¹⁴

The present US 688 inventory exceeds the total Soviet inventory of first line nuclear attack submarines including the VICTOR III, ALFA, MIKE, SIERRA, and AKULA. And while the Soviets continue

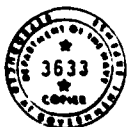


series production of their modern classes, it should be noted that between 1984 and 1986, inclusive, the NATO allies outproduced the Soviet Union in submarines, 27 to 25, and in major combatants, 11 to 9.¹⁵

There are obvious asymmetries in missions, force structure, and individual unit capabilities between NATO and Warsaw Pact forces. To this we must add uncertainties inherent in assessing the tactical readiness of relatively secretive adversaries, in both material and training. Short of actual combat, highly complex and classified war games provide the best means to assess the executability of the Maritime Strategy. Nevertheless, unsophisticated force level comparisons such as those shown suffice to show that the NATO alliance is strong enough at sea to cause grave worry to Soviet policymakers. The threat of operations against the Soviet homeland or strategic reserves should be credible enough to compel the Soviet Navy to maintain a defensive posture from the outset of hostilities.

The Maritime Strategy, Deterrence, and NATO Defense

While the Maritime Strategy clearly supports NATO objectives of defending all member nations and maintaining the SLOCs between the North American and European partners, some contend nevertheless that it is not a part of alliance strategy. Bing West, for example, contends that it "was developed unilaterally by the Navy--and does not have allied consensus, or blessing."¹⁶ Robert Komer writes that "even if all Soviet ships were swept from



the high seas and all Soviet home and overseas naval bases put out of action" the Maritime Strategy could not guarantee defeat of the Soviet Union.¹⁷ He therefore concludes that it does not serve the interests of the NATO alliance. Some Scandinavians allegedly oppose the strategy on the grounds that it will provoke the Soviets into preemptive action or expand wars which begin elsewhere into their region.¹⁸

I contend that the Maritime Strategy both enhances NATO security and provides stability in the East-West military relationship. The Soviet Union is a land power by virtue of its geography, history, and force structure. Despite development of the much-heralded DELTA IV and TYPHOON SSBNs, the bulk of Soviet forces, even at the strategic level, are deployed safely ashore, out of range of our naval forces. Alliance maritime power can hurt the USSR, but, as Komer contends, cannot defeat it. While the Maritime Strategy may inspire some improvement in Soviet naval and coastal defenses, it does not threaten their survival and thus is not provocative in the way a massive build-up (however infeasible) of NATO ground forces might be. The strategy provides a viable deterrent to Soviet aggression by its promise to inflict considerable pain, without being so threatening as to demand preemption.

The Maritime Strategy meets the imperatives of NATO coalition defense and is executable with an acceptable level of risk by existing alliance forces. Bing West may be technically correct in noting that our allies have not formally adopted the



strategy in the manner of MC 14/3. But as the CNO has made quite clear, they are onboard.¹⁹ Until more attractive options are articulated by its critics, the Maritime Strategy will underpin both our national and alliance military strategies. It is a centerpiece of our hopes for a conventional military deterrent, and should deterrence fail, for achieving war termination on favorable terms.



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