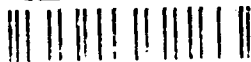


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- NAVAL ARMS CONTROL -
AN IMPORTANT NATIONAL SECURITY ISSUE
IN THE 1990s AND BEYOND

BY

MR. JOSEPH J. FALEY, USGAO

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NAVAL ARMS CONTROL: AN IMPORTANT NATIONAL SECURITY
ISSUE IN THE 1990's AND BEYOND

An Individual Study Project

by

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SECTION I

INTRODUCTION

Naval Arms Control

On 27 September 1991, President Bush wrote a truly fresh page of history in arms control reductions: He announced removal of nuclear-tipped missiles and strike and depth bombs from U.S. warships.¹ Naval arms thus moved to the center stage of the arms reduction drama. Officials in both the Reagan and Bush administrations had fought vigorously over the past nine years in negotiations with the Soviet Union (hereafter referred to as the Commonwealth of Independent States or Soviets) to exempt these and other naval weapons from the very constraints that President Bush suddenly unilaterally embraced. Specifically, the President's decision will take tactical (short-range) nuclear weapons, particularly sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs), out of the U.S. arsenal. Further, his decision halts development of a new short-range nuclear-tipped missile (SCAM-11). The President's unilateral initiative challenges the Soviets to reciprocate. Most of all, it marks a dramatic break from earlier protracted, suspicious, and unyielding U.S.-Soviet arms reductions negotiations, especially regarding naval nuclear weapons and activities.

Post Cold War Realities

No longer are U.S. negotiators haggling over whether these cuts are symmetrical, sufficient, or fair, as U.S. and Soviet

officials have done in years past. The administration has a new perspective on nuclear deterrence at sea and on the Commonwealth of Independent States. The United States is entering a new naval nuclear arms reductions environment.

The decline of the Soviet military threat is already being reflected in U.S. defense policies and defense budgets. Recent events inside the Commonwealth of Independent States are far from resolved, but they appear to be leading to closer political and economic ties with the United States and the international community in general. It appears that the Commonwealth of Independent States (or whatever government or governments emerge from the present turmoil) must direct its full energies to establishing new political and military infrastructures. Accordingly, the United States has adjusted its military strategy to fit emerging post-Cold war realities.

Scope of Essay and Objectives

This essay will analyze the new U.S. approach to naval arms control. First, it will offer background on the naval arms control issue and indicate its relation to U.S. national security. Then it will describe the current U.S. and Soviet naval arms reduction positions. Finally, it will present conclusions regarding future U.S. security strategies. The analysis will support the President's decision to allow this transition to new political and military realities to impact on future U.S.-Soviet naval arms reduction negotiations and strategies. It is time to seriously consider substantial

measures to de-escalate military tension. Even so, any such negotiations must recognize the U.S. naval forces' unique role in sustaining forward presence as called for by our national security strategy. More than ever, the United States needs flexibility in adjusting to changing strategic and tactical circumstances, including responding to tensions arising between former Soviet state republics as they wrestle for control of key elements of the former Soviet armed forces, especially the Black Sea fleet, as well as being concerned about potential tactical nuclear weapon threats that now might emerge through unchecked proliferation.

SECTION II

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

U.S.'s Historical "Hands-Off" Approach

The United States has long supported international agreements designed to promote openness and freedom of navigation on the high seas. However, on strategic grounds, the United States has resisted Soviet efforts to restrict U.S. naval forces in ways contrary (in the U.S.'s opinion) to internationally recognized rights of access.² Since at least 1980, the United States has refused "any" and "all" restraints proposed by the Soviets on controlling U.S. naval operations or armaments.³ The general U.S. position is that, as a maritime-oriented power located between and separated from allies by two oceans, the United States (unlike the Soviets) relies on maritime activities and freedom of navigation under international law to protect its security and trade interests. Accordingly, the United States has seen little merit in traditional Soviet proposals for naval arms limitations or additional constraints on its naval activities.

In particular, U.S. defense officials have emphasized three important factors for discouraging consideration of any traditional Soviet naval arms reduction proposals. These include (1) the "geostrategic" asymmetries between the United States and the Soviet Union, (2) the resulting differences in the roles and missions of their naval forces, and (3) the need to evaluate naval arms control proposals outside the U.S.-Soviet context. In

the U.S. view, these factors serve together to limit naval arms control options the U.S. might pursue.⁴ The United States is a maritime nation whose security and prosperity are closely linked through a complex arrangement of transoceanic economic and political relationships. The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) asserts that the most effective way the United States can utilize its navy to defend its global interests is to deploy close to those interests, thereby posing a credible deterrent to any potential adversary. On the other hand, according to DOD, the Soviet Union is a Eurasian power, largely self-sufficient and not dependent upon free and unencumbered use of the seas. The Soviet Navy has therefore been deployed primarily for defense of Soviet territory, control of coastal waters, and wartime interdiction of the use of the seas by the United States and its allies.⁵ U.S. naval forces also have global maritime responsibilities apart from the European region and unrelated to U.S.-Soviet rivalry. For these reasons, the United States has long maintained that an equitable naval arms control regime is very difficult to construct and would likely significantly impact on its ability to meet its global commitments.⁶

In terms of past U.S. naval doctrinal fears regarding naval arms reductions and specifically regarding tactical nuclear weapons bans, the U.S. Navy found any such limitation or elimination totally unacceptable.⁷ Even under a total ban for both sides, the U.S. Navy believed the Soviet Union would retain a significant nuclear anti-ship and anti-submarine capability

based ashore; thereby the Soviets would retain the capacity to wage a sea-denial effort with nuclear weapons. In contrast, the U.S. Navy believed the United States would lose its most credible deterrent to such a campaign--its naval tactical nuclear forces. Hence, the U.S. Navy would be operating forward without any such resources in a maritime nuclear-free environment and be vulnerable to shore-based nuclear weapons. Under a total tactical nuclear arms limitation agreement, the U.S. Navy concluded that any such deep arms reductions would simplify Soviet targeting and lessen the survivability of the remaining U.S. delivery platforms. Further, any moderate reductions would do little to advance U.S. or allied security, because the Soviet Union would still maintain adequate capability to wage a nuclear war at sea.⁸

Also, the United States has been reluctant to include naval armaments in arms reduction talks for historic reasons. In a commonly held view, the United States and Britain fared badly in the naval agreements of the 1920s and 1930s.⁹ For example, the U.S. Chief of Naval Operations in 1988 noted that:

We should remember ... that maritime nations have seldom benefitted from naval disarmament treaties and never from unilateral disarmament The Washington Naval Conference of the 1920s proved to be one of those misguided policies, so seductive in the present, so harmful to the future, that we have adopted all too often in our history; and that have led us step by descending step into the abyss of war.¹⁰

As a result, the United States and its NATO allies have successfully excluded naval forces from conventional arms negotiations; the United States has negotiated only ground and land-based air forces in the European arms talks. The United States has also resisted proposals to expand the application of confidence-and security-building measures (CSBMs) that would make the activities of each navy more transparent to the other.¹¹ Only recently has the United States relinquished its refusal to limit SLCMs and other nonstrategic naval nuclear weapons.

Soviet Initiatives

Soviet officials have issued a wide array of public proposals for limiting naval forces and operations. These Soviet initiatives fall into four types. The first is geographic. The Soviets propose (1) freezing naval force levels in or mutually withdrawing naval forces from selected sea areas, (2) establishing sea areas that are free of antisubmarine warfare (ASW) forces or operations (ASW-free zones), and (3) limiting or banning naval operations in international straits and major shipping lanes. The second type entails numerical limits on the vessels of each navy. The third addresses tactical nuclear weapons, by seeking bans or limits on nonstrategic naval nuclear weapons and SLCMs. The fourth includes CSBMs. Soviet proposals would limit the number, scale, and geographic area of naval exercises; would provide official observers for naval exercises; would exchange information on naval forces and doctrines; and, would add new provisions to the 1972 U.S.-Soviet Incidents at Sea

Agreement, which regulates the activities and resolves the disputes of U.S. and Soviet ships and maritime aircraft when they are in proximity with one another.¹²

Possible Rationale for Soviet Proposals

Many knowledgeable Western analysts and politicians have debated the merits of and Soviet rationale for introducing naval arms proposals. Generally they offer mixed views.¹³ Militarily, the Soviets may view these negotiations as an option for reducing what they see as the naval advantage of the United States and its allies, just as the United States and its European allies at one time viewed the European conventional ground force talks as a means of reducing what they saw as a Soviet-Warsaw Pact ground forces' advantage. Also, the Soviets may want to neutralize specific sea-based Western military threats, such as the land-attack threat posed by U.S. carrier-based aircraft that they are unable to, or cannot easily afford to, counter with a military response of their own. Politically, the Soviets may hope to isolate the United States from its overseas allies and restrict U.S. ability to influence political developments in the Third World. Economically, the Soviets may be hoping to trade parts of their Navy (the obsolete ships) for something before these parts became archaic due to age and lack of maintenance. Lastly, in humane terms, the Soviets may be genuinely interested in limiting naval forces and activities to relieve U.S.-Soviet military tensions.

Opposition to U.S. Naval Arms Control Participation

Many U.S. opponents to U.S. participation in naval arms talks agree with the first three above mentioned views.¹⁴ They perceive a U.S. strategic requirement for a maritime-oriented power assuming a non-negotiation position. They also believe militarily that any deviation from the U.S. strategy of forward deployment/presence of our naval forces reduces our options in responding to Soviet and Third World crises. Further, they believe that the Soviets are desperate for arms controls so they can redirect their military spending into their failing economic sector. Thus opponents to naval arms reductions conclude that it would be unwise for the United States to rush into any negotiations that could undermine something fundamental to U.S. national security--such as a withdrawal of warships from the Baltic Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Indian Ocean, or allowing restrictions on the U.S. ASW capability.¹⁵

Even Soviet naval CSBM proposals are thought to be undesirable. Opponents argue that naval CSBMs could force the U.S. Navy into more predictable or disadvantageous deployment patterns, reducing uncertainty for Soviet military planners and thereby weaken deterrence. Likewise, exchanging detailed information on forces and doctrines would also reduce the uncertainty that U.S. and Western naval forces create for Soviet military planners and thereby weaken deterrence. In addition, putting geographic limitations on exercises could reduce the readiness of U.S. naval forces to fight in certain areas and permitting observers at exercises would allow the Soviets to

learn more about U.S. tactics and capabilities than they can deduce from their observation ships.¹⁶

Opponents go on to argue that the verification problems associated with tactical nuclear weapon reduction measures are in themselves insurmountable. According to U.S. Defense officials, effective verification of a total or reduced tactical nuclear weapons ban would not be possible primarily because of the low probability of detecting covert production and stockpiling of nuclear weapons for naval use.¹⁷ The lack of distinguishing features (for example, of SLCM facilities) and the relatively small size of naval tactical nuclear weapons would severely reduce U.S. confidence in assuring compliance with a ban. Furthermore, the new Commonwealth of Independent States would be able to deploy these weapons relatively quickly and with low risk of detection, thereby gaining a significant advantage during a crisis. U.S. Defense officials add that negotiated measures, such as on-site inspections, would somewhat increase verification capability, but would still not meet requirements for effective verification. Further, it would place unacceptable constraints on naval operations. Finally, verification data with respect to compliance bans may be subject to differing interpretations and result in unacceptable judgements and decisions at the political and military levels.¹⁸ A total or reduced tactical nuclear weapons ban, in their opinion, would therefore simply divest the United States of capabilities without providing confidence that the Commonwealth of Independent States would be similarly

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SECTION III

ISSUE DEFINITION

Naval Arms Control Proposals and Positions

Soviet leaders in recent years have intensified their public diplomacy campaign to engage the United States and the Western allies in negotiations aimed at limiting naval forces and activities.²⁰ They persistently express a strong interest in incorporating naval forces into the East-West talks on conventional forces in Europe. They have also made proposals for limiting naval forces and operations in the Pacific and other regions. The United States, which has made a great investment in naval forces and has the world's most capable navy, has until very recently strongly resisted proposals to place general purpose naval forces and operations into the arms control process. U.S. Defense officials have refused to entertain naval arms control negotiations, arguing that doing so would interfere with the longstanding U.S. need, as a maritime power, to send warships into any ocean unfettered by inspections and restrictions on short-range battlefield weapons, such as the nuclear-tipped tactical missiles, depth bombs, and torpedoes.²¹ (The one exception has been submarine-launched ballistic missiles and related submarine weapons which are institutionally perceived as strategic, long-range weapons designed to attack distant land targets. Such armaments have indeed been considered in strategic arms negotiations, as in the signed Strategic Arms Reduction

Treaty (START II) at the Moscow Summit in late July 1991.²²

Major Questions Lie Ahead

Recent dramatic changes in Soviet policy and thinking have ended the Cold War and allowed for major progress in many areas of bilateral relations, including mutual support and cooperation in the Persian Gulf crisis. The progress achieved in such positive bilateral relations has cleared the way for major new U.S.-Soviet agreements in the 1990s, such as President Bush's September 1991 televised unilateral arms reduction initiative. However, beyond this effort, additional initiatives or agreements limiting U.S. naval forces or operations will have major implications for U.S. alliance relationships, military strategy, force structure, and defense spending. In this new favorable, yet uncertain, environment, how flexible or willing should the United States be to accept further limits on its naval forces, weapons and operations at sea? How can the United States maintain national security and create a safer world? What are acceptable or allowable risks in naval arms control negotiations?

SECTION IV

OPTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

As recently as last year, General Colin L. Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, restated the administration's opposition to naval arms reductions by telling the Soviet military leadership during a meeting in Vienna, "I am willing at any time to discuss our Navy, but I am not prepared to negotiate restraints, controls or reductions in our Navy."²³ Just six months ago, a major Department of Defense study released for congressional consideration asserted that the various Soviet proposals mentioned above simply do not serve U.S. interests.²⁴

However, President Bush's September 1991 initiative changed the total playing field for U.S. arms control policy. The administration no longer has the option to generally oppose further naval arms control proposals. In fact, the administration reversed its current policy of opposing restrictions on sea-based tactical nuclear weapons restrictions. Now the United States apparently hopes that the Soviets as well as our allies will likewise make immediate, unilateral nuclear weapons cuts and accept long-term reductions of other nuclear arms.

Despite the well-documented positions based on strategic (militarily as well as politically) and historical considerations presented above for continuing the U.S. policy of ignoring naval arms control proposals, President Bush selected the correct

course of action (policy option). He courageously and appropriately moved quickly for a unilateral arms-cut initiative--including for the first time general naval forces limitations. He did not link this strategic decision to anything else. Thus he sidestepped the long, volatile process of negotiations. While opening a potential new era of nuclear deterrence and U.S.-Soviet relations, President Bush can continue to be flexible and willing to orchestrate new initiatives for naval force and operations limitation. He can now, with an obvious show of good faith, propose reductions in selected CSBMs that are mutually acceptable, at the same time allowing for flexible naval operations and respect of rights at sea (for example, invitation of observers to major exercises, prior notification of major naval activities). In fact, some of these CSBM initiatives might teach us more about Soviet naval tactics and abilities than it teaches the Soviets about ours.

To build towards further naval force and operations reductions--new U.S. policy options--with the Soviets, the administration could initiate such talks on geographic constraints and numerical limits. Other matters could follow sufficiently large unilateral reductions in the size of the Soviet Navy, their rate of new ship construction, their level of forward-deployed forces, or some combination of these. For example, the Soviets could limit their short-range nuclear anti-ship missiles at sea or their land-based Backfire bombers with nuclear weapons dedicated to attacking U.S. carrier groups.

Also, the administration could offer a policy change on naval arms concessions based upon the Soviet's expediting certain milestones in the recently signed Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), which currently calls for implementation in seven years, or in exchange for strategic concessions by the Soviets. Or the administration, as an investment in national security could monetarily assist the Soviet Union in controlling and destroying its tactical and other nuclear weapons inventory--spending U.S. funds to eliminate Soviet weapons, rather than matching or countering them--an idea that Senator Joseph R. Biden Jr. (D-Del.) refers to as potentially "the most cost-effective national security expenditure in American history."²⁵ (The U.S. Congress has currently appropriated \$400 million to destroy Soviet weapons due for reduction by treaty or unilateral commitment).²⁶

The Soviets as well as our allies will react positively to these new U.S. policy initiatives in a period of reduced anxiety about the threat of international strategic and political confrontation. The United States may witness concrete reciprocal change. Such changes can provide a rationale for economic relief to countries attempting to shift domestic priorities. However, the United States must not underestimate the many obstacles and challenges facing the U.S.-Soviet naval arms control process. Without question, the obstacles raised by the asymmetrical development of the respective force structure of the two nations (Soviet ground versus U.S. naval forces) and the dissimilar role of maritime doctrine within their respective national strategies

cause major problems for negotiations.²⁷ Also, special features and characteristics of naval forces and activities that are not shared by land or air forces, such as difficulties in applying controls to submarine activities and verification difficulties, will challenge future negotiations.²⁸ But, as an astute observer so accurately stated, such factors "do not prevent naval arms control--they only complicate it."²⁹

For example, acknowledging the many difficulties in verifying naval nuclear tactical weapons agreements, there can be verification procedures established to generate more openness and cooperation between the United States and the former Soviet states. That is not to say that under such agreements that either country (or countries) will have complete information about the tactical nuclear naval forces and activities of the other (or others) and that the involved countries will exhibit total compliance with the agreements. Nonetheless, such agreements will be deemed verifiable if each country can remain confident that the other(s) has (have) not pursued significant violations and that any such violations will be detected in time to respond to them or offset them. Elaborate verification procedures can be designed to build that confidence. However, such procedures must contain detailed restrictions on what tactical nuclear naval weapons and activities are permitted and multiple sources of information about those weapons and activities--along with the costs and continued risk of detection associated with possible violations.³⁰

Further, another factor complicating naval arms control and which is an immediate problem to the Bush administration is how to address the independent-minded former Soviet state republics' attempts to seek autonomy and control over 30,000 strategic and tactical warheads, particularly the Ukraine and Russia republics' separate claims over the Soviet naval Black Sea fleet's strategic and tactical nuclear weapons.³¹ Current American policy supports development of the new Commonwealth of Independent States into something that would have a single military command led by Russia, with all nuclear weapons deployed in Russia.³² If, instead, two or three or four Commonwealth of Independent States republics--Byelorussia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Russia--want to maintain nuclear authority over its currently held strategic and tactical nuclear weapons or retain some portion of them, such an arrangement would add an extra dimension of instability to a region plenty uncertain without it. In particular, the U.S.'s most immediate and prime concern would be with the potential proliferation of nuclear tactical weapons which could be easily diverted and sold to Third World countries. President Bush needs to push for an unified CIS military command as well as for a unified CIS foreign policy command to lessen tensions among the former Soviet republics and to eliminate the potential threat of tactical nuclear weapons being put in the hands of terrorists and unstable Third World countries.

In general, naval arms control can limit uncertainty and help reduce tactical and strategic nuclear and conventional

weapons arsenals. The United States must engage in naval arms control, not as an end in itself, but as a means to enhance U.S. national security.³³ The United States must seek to reduce military threats to its national interests, must inject greater predictability into U.S.-Soviet relationships, and must channel force postures in more stabilizing directions, while maintaining vital naval military capabilities. Correspondingly, the United States must have the capability to detect noncompliance and must preserve the latitude to respond effectively to treaty violations. As a result, the United States will be best served by an credible naval arms control plan incorporating a variety of response options to reflect ongoing political and military transition activities of the former Soviet state.

Now that the "train is rolling," any reluctance by the U.S., its allies, or the Commonwealth of Independent States to not take the naval arms reductions issue seriously will be a major impediment to progress. As discussed, there are several steps that can be taken to eliminate the maritime tactical nuclear weapons, operations, and strategies that could contribute to the unintentional outbreak of a conflict or the escalation of a crisis.

Bringing naval forces and activities into the arms control equation will certainly strengthen U.S. national security. As President Bush said on 27 September 1991: "Destiny is not a matter of chance; it is a matter of choice. It is not a thing to be waited for, it is a thing to be achieved."³⁴ He has taken a

dramatic and necessary initiative. He has broadened the working concept of arms control so that it takes on a new, heightened reality--and offers a realm of new possibilities.

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