

# **Strategic Views of the US Navy and NATO on the Northern Flank, 1917-1991**

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American recognition of the strategic significance of Europe's Northern Flank, stretching from the Danish Straits to Norway's North Cape, is not entirely a phenomenon of the Cold War. More than eighty years ago, in November 1917, Admiral William S. Benson, the US Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), visited Europe to confer with British leaders on future naval strategy for World War I. At this time, President Woodrow Wilson was on record as opposing what he viewed as the overly defensive stance of the Royal Navy's Grand Fleet. Based far from the European war zone at Scapa Flow, that force obviously deterred the German High Seas Fleet from seizing control of the North Sea. But Wilson and Benson preferred an aggressive, close-in assault on the enemy, a strategic objective shared by many British leaders who invoked memories of the Royal Navy's Nelsonian tradition. The targets proposed by both British and US critics were two-fold: the ships and facilities located at the enemy's bases, which represented the source of German naval strength; and the maritime transit routes connecting these bases to the high seas.'

These criticisms influenced British naval strategy in the latter part of the war. In 1917 the Royal Navy stepped up its mining campaign in the Heligoland Bight of the North Sea, as well as in the Danish Straits that provided an alternate German access route to the high seas. In addition, during Benson's visit Royal Naval (RN) officers revealed plans to intensify the mine and ship barrage of the Dover Straits. The British agreed to cooperate with the US Navy (USN) in planting a new minefield across the North Sea. But perhaps the most dramatic and certainly the most secret decision reached by Admiral Benson and the the First Sea Lord, Sir John Jellicoe, was approval of a plan to base an American battle fleet in southern Norway, probably in Stavanger. Here, the US admiral noted, the USN could "get close to the submarine bases and points of exit from German waters."

For several reasons this proposal never became reality. Late in December 1917, Admiral Jellicoe was abruptly dismissed as First Sea Lord for his alleged sense of defeatism and lack of aggressiveness.' His successors were not committed to Benson's plan and in any case, the proposal was complicated by Norway's neutrality. British leaders recognized the value of bases on Germany's northern flank. But they also knew that if Norway granted the use of these ports, the result might be a German invasion, which would require the British to come to the aid of their new ally. Any diversion of forces from the Western Front, where

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the Entente powers anticipated a major German offensive in 1918, was highly undesirable. It also was clear that Norwegian policymakers were firmly opposed to abandoning their neutrality and therefore refused to cede a base at Stavanger or anywhere else to foreigners. For all of these reasons, an American strike force would not be deployed to the Northern Flank during the First World War.<sup>4</sup>

Despite this outcome, RN strategists developed a daring alternative plan for offensive operations in northern Europe. The lead was taken by Admiral Sir David Beatty, who as early as September 1917 had a plan in hand for a dawn attack on the German Fleet at its North Sea bases, to be launched by British torpedo aircraft operating from no less than eight aircraft carriers. Beatty's plan was approved by the Admiralty and welcomed by Admiral Benson, who pledged during his November 1917 visit to give all possible support. But before the raid could be carried out, the RN faced the formidable task of developing from scratch a carrier force, including appropriate aircraft and weapon systems. Not surprisingly, this feat could not be accomplished before the end of the Great War in November 1918.<sup>5</sup>

More than two decades later, in another world war, Germany's seizure of Norway reminded observers of the significance of the Northern Flank. The naval bases developed by the enemy after 1940 gave the Germans a new approach of attack against British maritime trade routes.<sup>6</sup> Later in World War II, the Murmansk convoys demonstrated the importance of the lines of communication in the Norwegian and Barents Seas that connected the Soviet Union's northern ports with the North Atlantic.<sup>7</sup>

Norway's role in World War II also suggests the inevitable interconnections between power at sea and on land, and between a flank and a central front. In October 1943, a dawn raid on enemy shipping in the Bodo area by a combined British-American task group revealed German vulnerability to Allied assaults. Aircraft from the carrier *USS Ranger* scored the heaviest damage, sinking six enemy merchant ships, damaging four more, and killing 200 personnel.<sup>8</sup> One also should remember that British control of the Nordic sea approaches helped encourage Hitler to believe that the Allies might invade Norway – not Normandy – in the summer of 1944. That appreciation led the Germans to divert a force of 400,000 men from France in order to defend their Scandinavian position.<sup>9</sup>

Between the end of World War II and the establishment of NATO in 1949, the USN undertook a number of cold weather operations.<sup>10</sup> One of the first of these, Exercise Frostbite in 1946, tested the feasibility of carrier flight operations in Canadian Arctic and sub-Arctic waters. Although severe meteorological conditions greatly reduced the number of flights that could be launched, Frostbite seemed to show that at least a limited carrier air campaign could be mounted in this region.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the operational difficulties revealed by the exercise discouraged American naval strategists. This limitation was one reason American naval leaders of the late 1940s concentrated so much attention on developing the Sixth Fleet, which was oriented to striking at the USSR's Southern Flank from the Mediterranean:<sup>12</sup>

Despite its climatological challenges, the Northern Flank could not be ignored. As Professor Lawrence Kaplan points out, Norway's fear of becoming a Soviet satellite was one of the main reasons for the establishment of NATO in 1949.<sup>13</sup> In this period, the USN and RN identified the Barents Sea, the White Sea approaches, and the Danish Straits as key Soviet submarine operating areas that must be defended by allied attack submarines:<sup>14</sup> During 1949 the US Joint Chiefs of Staff prepared a plan called Dropshot that, although never formally adopted, revealed the outlook of American strategists. That plan included the

Northern Flank as one of the active theatre of a possible war with the Soviet Union. In that event, Dropshot foresaw strikes launched by as many as six large carriers (four US and two British), operating in the Barents and Norwegian Seas against enemy submarine and air bases in the Kola Peninsula. The plan called for the deployment of amphibious and other naval forces to repulse expected Soviet invasions of northern Norway, Iceland, and Svalbard. Dropshot additionally featured measures to blockade the northern ports of the USSR, including the planting of 40,000 Allied mines in their approaches."

The decision of Iceland, Norway, and Denmark to become members of NATO imposed an obvious obligation on the new alliance to develop plans for the defence of their home territories. The inclusion of those nations in NATO also was an important step in protecting the maritime lines of communication that were of critical importance in a possible NATO-Warsaw Pact war. This was especially the case since the three Nordic nations controlled a chain of strategically located islands in the North Atlantic. In addition to Iceland the vital insular positions included Greenland and the Faeroes, both associated with Denmark, and Norway's Svalbard Archipelago."

Another basic step affecting the development of all future plans for a northern campaign was NATO's establishment in 1952 of the Supreme Allied Command, Atlantic (SACLANT). Based in Norfolk, Virginia, SACLANT was NATO's commander for the entire Atlantic, minus European coastal waters and the Mediterranean. Admiral Lynde D. McCormick, USN, the initial commander, and the US Naval officers who succeeded him at SACLANT, also commanded the multi-service US Atlantic command. Until 1985 that officer had a third naval hat as the US Atlantic Fleet commander.<sup>17</sup>

In the year of its founding, SACLANT mounted NATO's first major naval exercise, Operation Mainbrace, in the waters off Norway and Denmark. The inclusion of no less than six large and three light US, British, and Canadian carriers in the exercise demonstrated the importance given to maritime air power in a Northern Flank campaign. Mainbrace's scenario foresaw a major Soviet offensive across the frontier the USSR shared with Norway, as well as an enemy advance into Denmark. In response, Mainbrace air units supported Allied ground forces in both areas. NATO naval units also undertook anti-submarine, amphibious, and shore bombardment operations along the Scandinavian coast. Yet another aspect of Mainbrace was an escorted convoy from Scotland to Bergen, reflecting the need for rapid Allied reinforcement and resupply of Norway in the event of a war.<sup>18</sup>

In Mainbrace, the USN and other NATO navies once again faced the cold weather challenge. Operating in heavy weather as far north as sixty-eight degrees, NATO carriers were forced to reduce flight operations by an estimated eighty percent. Meteorological conditions also forced changes in amphibious objectives.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, by underlining the importance of the Northern Flank, this exercise contributed to the 1952 decision to establish the Atlantic Striking Force. In the event of hostilities, NATO plans called for that force of US and British carriers to operate in the eastern Atlantic under direct SACLANT command. Here the Striking Force would attack northern bases, whose forces and facilities represented the sources of Soviet naval and air strength, and provide other support for Allied forces ashore. The availability of sea-based air was all the more important considering the policy of Norway – which consistently sought to avoid provoking its Soviet neighbour – barring foreign forces from its soil in peacetime. Obviously, the creation of a carrier strike force also was fully within the tradition of the close-in, offensive strategies of the USN and RN.<sup>20</sup>



Several additional factors influenced the increased attention given to the Northern Flank during the early 1950s. One was a marked increase in overall USN force levels during the national mobilization of the Korean War era. Because of its expanding fleet the USN now could look beyond its major overseas operating areas in the Mediterranean and East Asia. As the Cold War deepened, NATO naval leaders also recognized that Soviet submarines and aircraft based in the Kola Peninsula posed a special threat to the United Kingdom, a vital ally and a key base in any future European war!' In addition, potential Soviet dominance in the north threatened assaults against Iceland and the other islands located along the all-important lines of communication between North America and Europe!'

From 1953 through 1961, during the Eisenhower era, the nation adopted a New Look defence policy based on the assumption that NATO could not prevail in a conventional war with the Warsaw Pact.<sup>23</sup> Instead, NATO sought to take advantage of the West's superiority in nuclear weapons. This new strategy had consequences for a possible Northern Flank campaign. Most notably, naval carrier aircraft, previously oriented to attacking maritime bases, now prepared to launch nuclear strikes against strategic sites in the interior of the Soviet Union.<sup>24</sup> After 1956, when the new Skywarrior A3D aircraft entered the fleet, these attacks could be conducted at ranges of up to 1500 miles.<sup>25</sup> Western anti-submarine warfare (ASW) forces reflected the New Look doctrine by carrying nuclear depth charges with significantly increased lethal ranges. After 1956, the USN additionally began to develop ballistic missile submarines, which became the most invulnerable component of the nation's nuclear deterrent.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the New Look policy, the development by the USN of measures to counter the Soviet submarine threat included much more than nuclear options!' One non-nuclear response was the SOSUS low-frequency listening array that became operational in the late 1950s. SOSUS represented a revolutionary new means of long-range submarine detection. Its arrays were installed at various locations in the North Atlantic, including the relatively narrow choke points off Northern Norway and Iceland that Soviet submarines needed to use as they deployed from their northern bases to the high seas. Another important conventional development was the conversion of fifteen *Essex-class* fleet carriers into anti-submarine platforms. Those ships formed the backbone of American hunter-killer task groups until being decommissioned in the 1970s.<sup>28</sup>

Submarines of this period, especially nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs), held an inherent advantage over their ASW opponents.<sup>29</sup> But Admiral Arleigh A. Burke, the visionary CNO, made attempts to correct this imbalance before he left office in 1961. In 1958 Burke created Task Force Alfa, a carrier hunter-killer group tasked with writing "the book on ASW tactics."<sup>30</sup> OSUS coverage was expanded and improved. At the same time, the Fleet benefitted from more effective sonars. In addition, the new P-3 Orion maritime patrol aircraft became operational in the early 1960s. Finally, reference needs to be made to the commissioning of six *Skipjack-class* attack submarines between 1959 and 1961. These SSNs symbolized a new age of effectiveness in ASW.<sup>31</sup>

Another important development was the transfer of the Iceland Defense Force in 1961 from US Air Force to USN command. Aside from providing SOSUS sites for the long-range detection of submarines, Iceland was a base for radar facilities and pursuit aircraft contributing to the continental air defence of North America. Early in 1962 the USN established a major command for land-based ASW aircraft at Keflavik. Units based in

Iceland were well located to detect and attack enemy submarines and aircraft transiting the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom Gap (GIUK).<sup>32</sup> Because of its prime location, Iceland was viewed by Allied strategists as the "cork in the bottle" that controlled Soviet access through the GIUK barrier into the North Atlantic?'

If the event of hostilities with the USSR, American naval planners of the late 1950s and early 1960s crafted a defence-in-depth plan to counter Soviet submarines. The first defensive line, in the waters off northern Norway, consisted of SSNs, NATO's carrier striking forces, ASW hunter-killer groups, and minelaying units. The alliance's priority target was the Soviet submarine. To the south, the GIUK Gap marked the second line of defence. Here were deployed land-based patrol aircraft operating from Iceland and other locations, reinforced by sea-based aviation. As was true for the forces operating off Norway, these forces depended heavily upon SOSUS intelligence, sonobuoys for the localization of underwater contacts, and homing torpedoes to detect and destroy submarines seeking to enter the North Atlantic.<sup>34</sup>

Later in the 1960s several new factors influenced the USN's attitude toward the Northern Flank. In the Kennedy-Johnson years national strategy called for a flexible – not necessarily nuclear – response to Warsaw Pact aggression?' This outlook was entirely consistent with the Navy's traditional objective of developing a broad spectrum of capabilities. Of greater moment to the service was a conflict half way around the world in Southeast Asia. For ten years after the mid-1960s, the Vietnam War absorbed funds and attention that otherwise might have been applied to modernizing an aging American fleet still built to large extent around numerous World War II-era ships.

A momentous event in this era was the rapid build-up of the Soviet Navy, under the leadership of Admiral Sergei Gorshkov, following Moscow's embarrassing setback in the 1962 Cuban missile crisis.<sup>36</sup> Suggestive of the extent of this rearmament program was the USSR's completion during one five-year period (1966-1970) of no less than 209 surface combatants, submarines, and amphibious vessels?' Many Soviet ships carried cruise missiles, a type of weapon not then in the US arsenal. To some extent, those missiles offset the lack of a Soviet sea-based air capability in this period. The USSR also beefed up its system of naval air bases in the Kola Peninsula that supported its land-based aviation resources. By the mid-1970s, Admiral Gorshkov's Badger bombers, some based in the Kola, had 2000-mile ranges and carried air-to-surface missiles that allowed stand-off ranges of 100 miles while attacking enemy ships. In addition, by 1975 the Soviets had 193 submarines. About two-thirds of the Soviet Navy's boats either were nuclear powered or armed with ballistic or cruise missiles. By this time, Soviet nuclear-missile submarines were operating off both the east and west coasts of the continental United States?'

Some analysts argued that the Soviet extension of its operating areas represented a means to defend its homeland, since distant deployments allowed the Soviet Navy to attack NATO's ballistic missile submarines in their launching areas in the event of nuclear war." But whether the enemy's intentions were defensive or offensive, a "bonus effect" of the Russian Navy's growing strength was the threat that its powerful Northern Fleet, based in the Kola Peninsula, might be able to isolate Norway and Denmark from the rest of the NATO alliance.<sup>40</sup>

Two *Okean* exercises undertaken in 1970 and 1975 demonstrated Moscow's growing naval capabilities. In the 1970 manoeuvres, the Soviets simulated attacks on a presumed NATO carrier striking force moving through the GIUK gap into the Norwegian

Sea. In all, the Soviet Navy deployed thirty submarines and ten surface combatants, the latter armed with cruise missiles, and flew 400 aircraft sorties. Five years later a much larger operation, *Okean 75*, mounted simultaneous exercises in the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans. The Soviets deployed more than 200 ships and launched 700 air sorties. In the North Atlantic the Soviets again appeared to assume that they could halt a NATO carrier advance into the Norwegian Sea. After establishing nominal sea control north of the GIUK Gap during the exercise, some Soviet air, surface, and submarine forces then moved south, apparently to simulate attacks on the North Atlantic convoy routes."

The USSR's rising strength at sea was paralleled by increases in other branches of the Warsaw Pact's armed forces. These relative shifts in national military power had political ramifications. During the Nixon era, 1969-1974, the policy of detente with the Soviets reflected, at least in part, a recognition of a decline in US comparative strength, as well as the nation's absorption with the war in Southeast Asia. The Nixon Doctrine revealed the same considerations when it called on US allies to increase their share of the common defence burden.<sup>42</sup>

During the 1960s and 1970s there were a few optimistic signs for the West's naval readiness. By 1962 five ballistic missile submarines operated in NATO waters, and future plans called for the commitment of many more of these powerful weapons systems as they came off the building ways. It should be noted that the deployment of the SSBNs also was important in allowing the USN to de-emphasize the role of its carriers as a strategic striking force.<sup>43</sup> Further, in this period a number of NATO nations, including Norway, Denmark, and Germany in the Northern Flank area, undertook extensive naval construction programs. As a result, by the 1970s sixty-five percent of all ocean-going NATO forces (including twenty-six percent of the major combatants) were from non-US navies." Finally, the 1960s and 1970s saw the initial development or introduction of significant new US weapons systems, including the carrier-based A-6 attack bombers and S-3 Viking ASW aircraft, Harpoon and Tomahawk cruise missiles, and the ship-borne Aegis fire control system that greatly increased the Fleet's air defence capabilities."

Early in 1968, partly as a result of the West's recognized weakness on the Northern Flank, NATO established the Standing Naval Force, Atlantic. Operating in the northeastern Atlantic, this multi-national command consisted of from four to eleven destroyer-type ships, originally supplied by the Norwegian, British, and Dutch navies. Although ships of most NATO nations rotated through this flotilla, the Standing Force itself was permanent in nature. Strategically it was designed as a low-level deterrent to Soviet aggression. But as Professor Joel Sokolsky points out, the Standing Naval Force may have had even greater significance as a symbol of NATO's commitment to a collective security system."

In 1969, Manlio Brosio, NATO's Secretary General, submitted a study of the naval aspects of a limited war on the Northern Flank in which Soviet forces were expected to invade Norway. Despite the Secretary General's concern with the strength of the USSR at sea, he concluded that Western naval forces could counter Soviet air and submarine attacks and win control of the Norwegian Sea. NATO, in Brosio's estimate, then would make Russian positions in Norway untenable.<sup>47</sup>

Secretary General Brosio's conclusions seemed to be confirmed in 1972 by NATO's Exercise Strong Express. The 300 ships and 700 aircraft committed to that manoeuvre undertook apparently successful ASW operations in the Norwegian Sea, conducted effective

air strikes on the Northern Flank, and landed Dutch, British, and US troops to stiffen Norway's defences."

But, despite the outcomes suggested by the Brosio Study and Strong Express, there were many reasons for concern about the security of the Northern Flank. When Admiral Elmo Zumwalt became the US CNO in 1970, he faced the need to prosecute a war in Southeast Asia while absorbing a sharp drawdown in naval force levels. The Fleet's erosion was hastened by the block obsolescence of World War II-era ships and the heavy construction and operational costs of the US nuclear submarine program.<sup>49</sup> The following statistic reveals the extent of the USN's decline. In 1974 the total displacement of US combatant and amphibious forces was 3.6 million tons. That compared to a six-million-ton total only ten years earlier." Under these circumstances, Zumwalt concluded that the USN had only a thirty percent chance of winning a conventional naval war with the USSR, a percentage he later raised to fifty percent, assuming the USN successfully developed its own cruise missiles and other new weapons systems.<sup>51</sup>

In the meantime, the USN largely abandoned the forward strategy in the Northern Flank that had been exemplified by Admiral Benson's 1917 plan, *Ranger's* raid on Bodo in 1943, the Dropshot Plan, and naval and NATO thinking during the 1950s and 1960s. Instead, naval strategy stressed a defensive posture along the GIUK Gap. Even that line seemed threatened when Iceland, in 1973-1974, seriously considered non-renewal of the agreement allowing the US to station forces at Keflavik. By a narrow parliamentary margin the Icelanders decided to extend the lease on this vital base.<sup>52</sup> But Admiral Zumwalt still was not entirely convinced NATO could hold the GIUK line. If the GIUK were breached, the CNO warned that the Soviets might be able to interdict North American-European convoys." Bearing that contingency in mind, it is not surprising that in the early 1970s NATO gave considerable attention to pre-positioning supplies in Europe."

Admiral Zumwalt fully recognized the strategic importance of Norway, especially due to its location near the oceanic narrows between the Svalbard Islands and the North Cape that was the Soviet Northern Fleet's transit zone. But, to be realistic, the Zumwalt observed that Northern Norway, especially in the light of the common border it shared with the Soviet Union, was "virtually indefensible" and hence "potentially NATO's most vulnerable area." During a visit to Norway in 1971 Norwegian officials told Zumwalt that they feared abandonment as the USN retreated to the GIUK line. The CNO made the gloomy prediction that, unless NATO attained the capability to defend the Northern Flank, Norway might drift away from its NATO membership."

Admiral James L. Holloway III, who succeeded Admiral Zumwalt as CNO in 1974, was only relatively more hopeful about the outcome of a NATO-Warsaw Pact war. When he stepped down from office in 1978, Holloway stated that the USN had no more than a "slim margin of superiority" in the most likely wartime scenarios." Nevertheless, it was during the admiral's tour that the USN developed Sea Plan 2000. That 1977 document reasserted the concept of an aggressive offensive against the USSR in the Northern Flank and elsewhere in the world.<sup>57</sup>

In part, Admiral Holloway's Sea Plan 2000 reflected American recognition that, prior to the initiation of hostilities, NATO forces must be deployed north of the GIUK Gap in order to prevent the Soviets from gaining preemptive control of the Norwegian Sea." Furthermore, American attention to the Northern Flank also was a reaction to increased Soviet air and naval activity in the region. During 1978 for example, US aircraft



encountered approximately 150 Soviet aircraft in the Iceland Air Defense Zone.<sup>59</sup> In the same year, there was increased Soviet ship and air activity near Svalbard, the key Norwegian archipelago located only 400 miles north of the North Cape. In 1978 the crash of one of its TU-126 AWAC aircraft and the establishment of new Soviet radar facilities, both in these northern islands, suggested the importance of this position for the USSR's air defence.<sup>60</sup>

In 1979 two prominent defence analysis organizations with close ties to the USN and other American armed services published alarming studies concerning the Northern Flank. The National Strategy Information Center sponsored a report by Marian K. Leighton, who described the enormous geographic significance of Norway and Denmark but lamented America's "alarming indifference" to the defence of those nations. Ms. Leighton's study described a Soviet propaganda effort to persuade Norway to adopt neutralism and to abandon NATO. In her opinion, the central Russian contention was that NATO's two Scandinavian members now lay behind the "Arctic Curtain" created by the growing power of the Soviet Northern Fleet. The NSIC's basic conclusion, which echoed the position taken by Admiral Zumwalt eight years earlier, was that the war in the north would be lost "before a shot is fired" if Norway and Denmark became convinced they could not expect prompt trans-Atlantic aid from the United States.<sup>61</sup>

Washington's Center for Strategic and International Studies sponsored the second study. Its author, Kenneth Myers, expressed equal concern about potential Soviet domination of Norway and Denmark. If a general war broke out, Myers predicted that Warsaw Pact naval forces would seek to isolate those countries by controlling their coastal waters. Since it was essential for the West to contest the "forward edge" of the North Sea and Norwegian Sea battle areas, he urged a "selective augmentation" of the USN's presence in those regions.<sup>62</sup>

Two years after these studies appeared, SACLANT Admiral Harry D. Train seemed to confirm their pessimistic appraisals when he stated in a newspaper interview that "today the Northern Flank is not secure." Train added that if Norway was lost, NATO stood to lose its ability to provide reinforcements by sea to Europe. As a result, Germany, the key to the Central Front, also faced defeat.<sup>63</sup>

These fears formed the background to the naval thinking in the 1980s by the Reagan Administration. A doctrine known as the Maritime Strategy exemplified the outlook of the USN in that decade. That plan reflected the views of Admiral Holloway, Admiral Thomas Hayward who became the CNO in 1978, and many other naval officers. It also became closely associated with the efforts of Reagan's Secretary of the Navy, John F. Lehman, to create a 600-ship fleet. Although widely viewed as a new policy, the strategy's stress on a close-in offensive, featuring attacks against key bases and oceanic choke points, were part of the long tradition in Anglo-American naval thinking that is outlined in this article. One major difference was the fact that, in an effort to secure political and popular support for the Maritime Strategy, that doctrine was widely publicized, whereas previous strategies typically were highly secret."

The Maritime Strategy aroused considerable controversy in the United States and abroad. But the doctrine served as an essential intellectual underpinning for the naval build-up of the Reagan era. More generally, as Eric Grove once noted, it marked "a renaissance in naval self-confidence" during the 1980s following two decades of fiscal austerity and strategic doubt.<sup>65</sup> The new policy also was a reaction to President Carter's almost exclusive attention in the late 1970s on Europe's Central Front and his fears that NATO attacks on

Soviet Naval forces risked a dangerous escalation in the level of violence. Naval officials concluded that, in effect, the Carter Administration's policy gave the USSR a free hand to seize the Northern Flank. In the meantime, the USN bristled at being largely restricted to maintaining a Maginot-type defensive line along the GIUK Gap and to protecting trans-Atlantic convoys.<sup>66</sup>

What the maritime strategy did, as Professor Robert S. Wood of the Naval War College explained, was to "reconfigure the terms of the conflict" by demonstrating that if the Soviets became the aggressors on NATO's Central Front, the USSR faced a "global, protracted conflict."<sup>67</sup> Specifically, the strategy threatened to bring the war home against the enemy in all its maritime peripheries, including the Northern and Southern Flanks of Europe and the Soviet Pacific region. But the proponents of this doctrine also viewed it as a key element of a deception campaign that aimed to keep the potential enemy "guessing" about the exact targets to be attacked. As a result, they hoped it would serve as a major deterrent to Soviet adventurism. This psychological dimension is another reason for the major publicity given to the Maritime Strategy.<sup>68</sup>

There were variations in the Maritime Strategy's scenario for a Northern Flank campaign. But all schemes featured a close-in NATO assault launched from Norwegian waters, typically accompanied by a campaign to prevent the Danish Straits from falling under Warsaw Pact control.<sup>69</sup> The likely campaign scenario began with a pre-hostilities mobilization phase in which NATO SSNs and land-based patrol aircraft armed with cruise missiles, operating from Iceland, Scotland, England, and Norway, deployed along the Svalbard-North Cape line or in the Barents Sea. In reaction to these moves, the Soviets were expected to withdraw most of their naval forces to northern waters to prepare for a NATO assault on the defensive bastions the Soviets planned to establish for their SSBNs.

In the event of actual hostilities, typical scenarios called for NATO's patrol aircraft and attack submarines to initiate offensive operations especially against Soviet naval forces. Land-based maritime aircraft played an especially important role in the early stages of this campaign, since NATO's Striking Force and its embarked aviation resources probably could not deploy initially to northern waters!<sup>o</sup> As another means of filling the gap before the carriers arrived, a 1982 Navy-Air Force agreement foresaw the possibility that Air Force AWACs, F-15s, B-52s, and aerial tankers would participate in this campaign!<sup>i</sup> As these units hopefully held the line against the Soviets, NATO planned once again to move its Atlantic Striking Force into the Norwegian Sea. This command could consist of as many as four carrier battle groups. Employing Aegis ships and other air defence measures, including the natural concealment provided by Norwegian fiords, the USN felt confident that it could repulse Soviet submarine attacks and win the battle of the skies against Soviet aviation units. Plans called for the Striking Force to attack enemy air and naval bases in the Kola Peninsula. In addition to carrier strikes, the new long-range Tomahawk cruise missiles would hit targets ashore.

NATO also planned to land amphibious forces to repulse an expected Soviet ground offensive in Norway. As was true for so many other aspects of the Maritime Strategy, this was a familiar feature of previous Northern Flank plans. But a significant new development, made possible by a 1981 agreement with Norway, allowed pre-positioning in the Trondheim area of supplies for a US Marine Corps Amphibious Brigade!<sup>i</sup>

Once again, fleet exercises appeared to validate US optimism regarding the potential success of this strategy. In 1981 while *Los Angeles-class* attack submarines took position

off Soviet Northern Fleet submarine bases, two US attack carriers, maintaining radio silence, sailed off the North Cape apparently without being detected.<sup>73</sup> There also were large NATO exercises in 1985 and 1986. The 1985 Ocean Safari featured a three-carrier Striking Force and a total of 160 ships from nine NATO countries. Norway's rugged fiord coastline provided some concealment for the carriers. NATO forces additionally conducted ASW and strike warfare, as well as resupplying and amphibious operations in Norway. Finally, the exercise included efforts to maintain control of the Danish Straits, a priority objective of NATO from the time of the alliance's founding in 1949.<sup>74</sup>

Despite optimistic appraisals of the success of NATO manoeuvres in the Norwegian area, there were critics who claimed that those operations were overtly provocative, featured unlikely scenarios, and posed great inherent risks to western maritime forces. Some observers also questioned the Navy's expectations of avoiding nuclear escalation.<sup>75</sup> It also was evident that the actual extent of American operational experience in the challenging northern environment was very limited. In fact, during the 1980s US carrier battle groups logged less than 100 operating days in those waters.<sup>76</sup>

A more fundamental problem was the caution with which Norwegian political leaders greeted the Maritime Strategy. John Holst, a former Norwegian Defence Minister, acknowledged in a 1986 paper that his nation's position might seem "overly ambivalent," since in the 1960s and 1970s Norway expressed grave concern that it was being left "behind the lines" of the powerful Soviet Northern Fleet. Nevertheless, Holst now regretted the attention rivetted on the Northern Flank by US maritime strategists. The former minister acknowledged that there should be a "reasonable frequency" of NATO presence in Nordic waters. But he noted that emphasis on a Maritime Strategy offensive might cause unnecessary "tension" with the Soviet Union and undercut Norway's traditional policy of avoiding provocation of its neighbour.<sup>77</sup>

The Maritime Strategy never was formally adopted as a US national strategy.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, it is difficult to separate this doctrine from Reagan's defence build-up that represented such a fundamental challenge to the economic and military ability and will of the USSR to continue to wage the Cold War. Admiral Leon A. Edney, who served as SACLANT from 1990 to 1992, notes that in the 1980s that Soviet Navy responded to the Maritime Strategy by reverting from a "blue water forward-deployed navy to a defence in depth of the deep bastions of Soviet nuclear capability."<sup>79</sup> But historians probably will debate for many years to come the overall influence of Reagan's politico-military strategy on the amazing collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact in 1991.

Whatever conclusions may be reached on that thorny issue, the Maritime Strategy is a logical conclusion to this broad overview of USN thinking regarding the Northern Flank through the end of the Cold War. It is clear that the Maritime Strategy posed a grave western threat to the Soviet Union. In an even broader sense, the doctrine demonstrated once again that the United States is an Atlantic nation committed to the security of Europe. Finally, the Maritime Strategy stands as a reminder of the USN's traditional way of war that stresses a close-in offensive against the sources of an enemy's maritime strength.

#### NOTES

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board of *The Northern Mariner/Le Marin du nord*, he has been a frequent contributor to this journal.

1. Works dealing with Anglo-American naval relations include David F. Trask, *Captain and Cabinets: Anglo-American Naval Relations, 1917-1918* (Columbia, MO, 1972); and Dean C. Allard, "Anglo-American Naval Differences During World War," *Military Affairs*, LXXXIV (1980), 75-81. For British internal criticisms of naval strategy see, for example, Maurice P.A. Hankey, *The Supreme Command, 1914-1918* (London, 1961), 654-655 and 672-673.
2. The Benson quote and other information in this paragraph are from Library of Congress (LC), William S. Benson Papers (WSBP), Naval Conference of 1917 file, box 42, "Record of Activities of Admiral Benson," n.d., paragraph 18. On the grounds of secrecy, Benson did not specifically identify Norway or Stavanger. But those locations are clearly indicated in planning documents written by the Admiralty staff in preparation for or during Benson's visit, including Great Britain, Public Record Office (PRO), Admiralty Papers (ADM) 116/3148, Operations Committee Documents, Staff Memorandum to Director of Plans, 23 October 1917; and United States, National Archives (NA), Record Group (RG) 45, Admiralty Plans Division, box 655, TP folder 4, "Co-Operation of British and US Battle Fleets and US Battle Fleets," 13 November 1917.
3. See First Lord Geddes's account in A. Temple Patterson (ed.), *The Jellicoe Papers: Selections from the Private and Official Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Earl Jellicoe of Scapa* (2 vols., London, 1966-1968), I, 245-246.
4. See Olav Riste, *The Neutral Ally: Norway's Relations with Belligerent Powers in the First World War* (Oslo, 1965), 187-191, 215-217 and *passim*.
5. See Stephen W. Roskill, *Documents Relating to the Naval Air Service* (London, 1969), 536-543, 561-562 and 613-614; Roskill, *Admiral of the Fleet Earl Beatty, The Last Naval Hero: An Intimate Biography* (New York, 1981), 233-234; and R.D. Layman, *Naval Aviation in the First World War: Its Impact and Influence* (London, 1996), 190-195. For Benson's reactions to the plan see LC, WSB, "Record of Activities," paragraphs 25-26.
6. Stephen W. Roskill, *The War At Sea, 1939-1945* (3 vols., London, 1954-1961), I, 201.
7. Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II* (15 vols Boston, 1947-1962), I, 158-192 and X, 229-244.
8. *Ibid.*, X, 231-233.
9. Thor Nikolaisen, "The Maritime Strategy: A Norwegian View," in Geoffrey Till (ed.), *Britain and NATO's Northern Flank* (Basingstoke, 1987), 112. See also Morison, *History*, X, 322-323.
10. See John C. Reed, "United States Arctic Exploration Since 1939," in Herman R. Friis and Shelby G. Bale, Jr. (eds.), *United States Polar Exploration* (Athens, OH, 1970).
11. Roy A. Grossnick, *United States Naval Aviation, 1910-1995* (Washington, DC, 1996), 160; and Robert W. Love, *History of the U.S. Navy* (2 vols., Harrisburg, PA, 1992), I, 289.
12. Michael A. Palmer, *Origins of the Maritime Strategy: American Naval Strategy in the First Postwar Decade* (Washington, DC, 1988), 22-24 and 30.
13. Lawrence S. Kaplan, *NATO and the United States: The Enduring Alliance* (Boston, 1988), 20.
14. Eric Grove and Geoffrey Till, "Anglo-American Maritime Strategy in the Era of Massive Retaliation, 1945-1960," in John B. Hattendorf and Robert S. Jordan (eds.), *Maritime Strategy and the Balance of Power: Britain and America in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1989), 278.
15. Palmer, *Origins*, 63-66; and Joel J. Sokolsky, *Seapower in the Nuclear Age: The United States Navy and NATO, 1949-1980* (Annapolis, 1991), 12-13.
16. Lawrence S. Kaplan, *The United States and NATO: The Formative Years* (Lexington, KY, 1984), 83.
17. Leo P. Hirrel with William R. McClintock, *United States Atlantic Command Fiftieth Anniversary, 1947-1997* (Norfolk, 1998), 7; Sokolsky, *Seapower*, 73-74 and 85; and Sean M. Maloney, *Securing Command of the Sea: NATO Naval Planning, 1948-1954* (Annapolis, 1995), 135-137.
18. Maloney, *Securing Command*, 155-157; and Grove and Till, "Maritime Strategy," 287.
19. George W. Baer, *One Hundred Years of Sea Power: The U.S. Navy, 1890-1990* (Stanford, 1994), 336.

20. Maloney, *Securing Command*, 156-157; Baer, *One Hundred Years of Sea Power*, 336; and Norman Friedman, *The Postwar Naval Revolution* (Annapolis, 1986), 25-26.
21. Eric Grove, *Maritime Strategy and European Security* (London, 1990), 44; Nikolaisen, "Maritime Strategy," 112; and Friedman, *Postwar Naval Revolution*, 22.
22. Grove and Till, "Anglo-American Maritime Strategy," 287, refers to a 1953 NATO exercise scenario in which the Soviets seize Iceland.
23. *Ibid.*, 290-292.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Love, *History*, 382.
26. Grove and Till, "Anglo-American Maritime Strategy," 292.
27. David Alan Rosenberg, "Arleigh Albert Burke," in Robert W. Love, Jr. (ed.), *The Chiefs of Naval Operations* (Annapolis, 1980), 280-282; and Love, *History*, 384-388.
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29. Michael T. Isenberg, *Shield of the Republic: The United States Navy in an Era of Cold War and Violent Peace* (New York, 1993), 747-748. See also Malcolm Muir, Jr., *Black Shoes and Blue Water: Surface Warfare in the United States Navy, 1945-1975* (Washington, DC, 1995), 136-137.
30. Isenberg, *Shield of the Republic*, 744.
31. Baer, *One Hundred Years of Sea Power*, 348; Friedman, *Postwar Naval Revolution*, 25, 77 and 217; and Rosenberg, "Arleigh Burke," 285-286.
32. Grossnick, *United States Naval Aviation*, 245.
33. Kenneth A. Myers, *North Atlantic Security: The Forgotten Flank?* (Beverly Hills, 1979), 24.
34. Love, *History*, 387; Baer, *One Hundred Years of Sea Power*, 338; and Palmer, *Origins*, 82.
35. Kaplan, *NATO and the United States*, 99-101.
36. Johan Jorgen Holst, "The Security Pattern in Northern Europe: A Norwegian View," in Till (ed.) *Britain and NATO's Northern Flank* 40
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40. Hoist, "Security Pattern," 40.
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42. Kaplan, *NATO and the United States*, 127-130 and 148-149.
43. Sokolsky, *Seapower*, 61-62.
44. *Ibid.*, 48-50 and 118.
45. *Ibid.*, 122-123; Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., *On Watch: A Memoir* (New York, 1976), 78 and 82-84; and Friedman, *Postwar Naval Revolution*, 217.
46. Sokolsky, *Seapower*, 104-106.
47. Grove, *Maritime Strategy*, 17-19; and Joel J. Sokolsky, "Anglo-American Maritime Strategy in the Era of Flexible Response," in Hattendorf and Jordan (eds.), *Maritime Strategy*, 310.
48. Grove, *Maritime Strategy*, 19; and Sokolsky, *Seapower*, 98.
49. Marolda and Schneller, *Shield and Sword*, 22.
50. Lawrence J. Korb, "The Erosion of American Naval Preeminence, 1962-1978," in Kenneth J. Hagan (ed.), *In Peace and War: Interpretations of American Naval History, 1775-1978* (Westport, CT, 1978), 334.
51. Zumwalt, *On Watch*, 464.
52. *Ibid.*, 468-474. For a discussion of earlier Icelandic ambivalence regarding NATO, see Donald E. Nuechterlein, *Iceland: Reluctant Ally* (Ithaca, NY, 1961).
53. Zumwalt, *On Watch*, 342-343.

54. Thomas H. Etzold, "The Military Role of NATO," in Lawrence S. Kaplan and Robert W. Clawson (eds.), *NATO After Thirty Years* (Wilmington, DE, 1981), 244-245.
55. Zumwalt, *On Watch*, 466-468.
56. Marolda and Schneller, *Shield and Sword*, 25.
57. Baer, *One Hundred Years of Seapower*, 426.
58. Sokolsky, *Seapower*, 89 and 97-98.
59. Marian K. Leighton, *The Soviet Threat to NATO's Northern Flank* (New York, 1979), 66.
60. Myers, *North Atlantic Security*, 56-58.
61. Leighton, *Soviet Threat*, ix, 81-82 and 94-95.
62. Myers, *North Atlantic Security*, 34-36, 63 and 68.
63. Quoted in Nikolaisen, "Maritime Strategy," 111.
64. Baer, *One Hundred Years of Sea Power*, 424-426 and 428-432; and Frederick H. Hartmann, *Naval Renaissance: The U.S. Navy in the 1980s* (Annapolis, 1990), 199-217. Palmer, *Origins*, 83, refers to the secrecy of earlier strategic thinking.
65. Grove, *Maritime Strategy*, 15.
66. John F. Lehman, Jr., *Command of the Seas* (New York, 1988), 118-120, 126 and 147.
67. Robert S. Wood, "Maritime-Air Operations in the North: American Perspectives," in Till (ed.), *Britain and NATO's Northern Flank*, 96.
68. Baer, *One Hundred Years of Sea Power*, 439; and Robert S. Wood, "Fleet Renewal and Maritime Strategy in the 1980s," in Hattendorf and Jordan (eds.), *Maritime Strategy*, 339-341. A basic argument in Baer's *One Hundred Years of Sea Power* is that public understanding of strategy is essential in order to obtain political support for that policy.
69. See, for example, the scenarios in Wood, "Maritime-Air Operations," 89-102; Geoffrey Till, "A British View," in Till (ed.), *Britain and NATO's Northern Flank*, 114-123; Lehman, *Command of the Seas*, 137-144; Friedman, *Postwar Naval Revolution*, 183-187; and Baer, *One Hundred Years of Sea Power*, 432-438.
70. Till, "British View," 118-119. Friedman comments on the relative merits of land-based maritime air and carrier-based air in *Postwar Naval Revolution*, 28.
71. Lehman, *Command of the Seas*, 137. For earlier naval efforts to obtain Air Force participation in maritime campaigns, see Zumwalt, *On Watch*, 70.
72. Holst, "Security Pattern," 41. See also David B. Crist, "A New Cold War: U.S. Marines in Norway and the Search For A New Mission in Norway" (Unpublished paper presented to the US Naval Academy History Symposium, 25 September 1999).
73. Love, *History*, 720.
74. John C. Ausland, *Nordic Security and the Great Powers* (Boulder, CO, 1986), 76-77 and 115; Lehman, *Command of the Seas*, 144; and Wood, "Fleet Renewal," 341.
75. Grove, *Maritime Strategy*, 15; Love, *History*, 725-727; and Baer, *One Hundred Years of Sea Power*, 348.
76. Love, *History*, 727.
77. Holst, "Security Pattern," 45-46.
78. Baer, *One Hundred Years of Sea Power*, 438-439.
79. Leon A. Edney, "50 Years of the Cold War: A Maritime SACLAN Perspective," 167, in Karl L. Kleve (ed.), *50 Years With the Cold War* (Bode, Norway, 1999).