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## Set and Drift—U.N. Maritime Operations: "Realities, Problems, and Possibilities"

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# SET AND DRIFT



## U.N. Maritime Operations "Realities, Problems, and Possibilities"

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Admiral of the Fleet Sir Julian Oswald, G.C.B.

**T**HIS IS AN IMPORTANT MOMENT to be discussing the topic of United States naval options for participation in United Nations military operations. It is an era when the original ideas of the U.N., and the Security Council, are beginning to be realized in a new way. The collapse of the former Soviet Union as a superpower has done three things: firstly, it has catapulted the United States of America into a position of unchallenged superiority. It has led to the "lonely president" syndrome. Secondly, of course, the United Nations operations have perhaps been freed up from the former blocking veto of the other superpower. Russia appears to be being fairly evenhanded at present in the former Yugoslavia, but the worry must remain of her siding with the Serbs. If the Spratley dispute in the South China Sea blows up, China could prove difficult. And thirdly, the demise of the former Soviet Union has directly or indirectly opened up a pandora's box of regional tensions. There is an awful lot of peacekeeping, but not a lot of peace around at the moment. The United Nations had been living, up until 1990, in a period of predominantly frozen interstate confrontation. We're now facing a different era of intrastate conflict

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Admiral Sir Julian Oswald served for forty-six years in the Royal Navy. He was First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff (Chief of Naval Operations—equivalent) from 1989 to 1993.

Adapted from an address delivered on 31 March 1993 to participants of a conference at the Naval War College on "Options for U.S. Participation in United Nations—Sanctioned Military Operations."

leading, for example in the Balkans, to possible interstate conflict and the danger of hostilities.

There is an expanding role for the United Nations, and it's there for us all to see. Multinational operations are not, of course, easy, and perhaps Beirut was an example which signalled this. But U.N. operations are moving inexorably into new multinational and major operational levels. Many of us in the West have wide experience in multinational operations that can, I believe, be put to good use in support of the international community. It is interesting that my own navy has used force some forty or fifty times since the Second World War, including four major campaigns, while the former Soviet Navy had never, as far as I'm aware, fired a shot in anger since 1945 except on one occasion against one of their own ships. Now I hope that you will not gain the impression that I'm proud that my navy is a sort of international rottweiler,\* but I am indicating that we do have a certain amount of experience.

Where then do we go from here? Let us look briefly at realities, problems, and possibilities. And let's take the realities first. As a military man, I have to accept certain things. One, not all the aims of every operation will be achievable. Nor can all the Secretary-General's wishes be met. For example, force composition. I don't think that we're going to go as far as he would wish. Secondly, we must accept that few, if any, countries will commit themselves in advance to open-ended multinational commitments. Third, we have to face the reality of the existence of the North-South divide and the political tensions and demands to which it gives rise. The Indian representative at the United Nations illustrated this in his reservations expressed about the control of the Somalia operation, in effect requiring us to stress the need for continued U.N. command and its recognition. The difficulty is that many countries, and here I'm not referring to India, are trying to make their own points politically, whilst we are trying to get about the business of peacekeeping. And they are doing it even to an extent and a degree that causes interference in the conduct of operations. I believe it's the military's duty carefully to explain this to their politicians. But of course the more militarily developed nations must take account of the sensitivities and constraints under which the U.N. operates. They have to acknowledge that fundamental legality for U.N. operations depends on the consensus within the General Assembly and the Security Council. And also I think we must remember the self-interest of that ever-smaller proportion of the world represented by the Northern Hemisphere's developed populations for peace and security in the world as a whole.

The experience of the Persian Gulf is something which no military man will wish to forget. It is, however, an experience which to me gives rise to mixed

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\* A breed of dog having in the United Kingdom the same reputation for combativeness as the pit bull in the U.S.

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feelings. Desert Storm was, of course, militarily a success, but regrettably it also showed that some nations are, to say the least, reluctant to front up in a timely way; some support forces were kept back by their countries and didn't provide the necessary support which they were sent there to give.

The next reality which military people have to recognize is that although the constraints of national sovereignty may, to a certain extent, be eroded, the basic sovereignty problem is likely to remain for the service lives of most of us. The degree of intervention possible in the internal affairs of countries may change, but I suspect that it'll always be a question raised, and the difficulty of obtaining clearance to intervene in sovereign states' internal affairs will not go away.

I would also like to say a word about embargo operations, because such operations particularly affect maritime forces. We see them at the moment in the Adriatic and also in the Gulf and the Red Sea. I think that we must accept that the majority of U.N. issues are land-oriented and have been the source for the U.N. of some of its particular perils and difficulties. We must accept that ships and aircraft cannot stop rape ashore in Bosnia or Croatia, but embargo operations and the power from the sea could nevertheless be critical. The other point that occurs to me is that the strategic principles are easier to think through in our less politically constrained maritime context.

The next reality that I would like to put to you is that in some essential areas it is only the United States that has sufficient capability, for example, strategic lift, C<sup>3</sup>I,\* and surveillance. And I hope that this will be recognized in the current force structure debate in this country, because it is not only in support of your own interests, but in that of the world as a whole, that these particular capabilities are so important. Often, if the U.N. will is to be enforced, in practice it will have to be the United States which leads.

We all know that the U.N. lacks military expertise; particularly, of course, this has been because of the Cold War confrontation and the veto. We are also agreed on the need for rigorous analysis of conditions and objectives before forces are deployed. There is the problem of the incapacity of the United Nations at the moment to grip the military staffing problem, and its obvious and understandable preoccupation with political factors. It is, nevertheless, absolutely vital that the mandate for the military is completely clear, and I don't think that I can overstress that point. There's also the interesting question of the United Nations commander's authority over subordinates of a different nation. I suggest that the feasibility of the U.N. commander in the field having the same authority as he would in national operations is something we should explore. And I suspect that the Nato model might be quite useful in this context.

In theory I support the idea of preventive diplomacy to preempt the crisis, because it's cheaper by far to act first than to pick up the pieces afterwards when

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\* Command, Control, Communications, and Intelligence.

thing have gone wrong. But most of our armed forces in most of our countries, in general, and our navies in particular, seem to be already fully engaged undertaking their respective commitments without any more being added.

I would like to mention the areas to which I think we will have to attend. The first is rules of engagement. It certainly isn't true that U.N. ROE are only appropriate for a man with a rifle. But the system for implementing ROE is archaic, while it needs to be fast, robust, and flexible. Also, it's true that U.N. ROE are not designed for use at sea, where there's often been a disparity in ROE among different nations' ships undertaking the same operation. And of course we also have the situation where some ships tend to arrive with unduly inhibiting ROE. In my view, the most difficult area of ROE as a whole is the tricky question of hostile intent. I had the honor of serving in the Striking Fleet with Admiral Mustin,\* and his approach to hostile intent—and I hope that I don't do him a disservice by mentioning this—was that no commanding officer was required to wait for incoming mail! I've always thought that that was pretty good guidance. I think we need, in our training and exercising, to practice and improve our performance. The importance of ROE is that lives are on the line, and they will be put at risk if we don't get it right. We have said that one of the problem areas is that C<sup>3</sup>I is weak at present in U.N. operations. Commanders of missions must be brought into the loop early, in the planning stages, and any commander in the field or at sea must have good military information. Without this he would be impotent. The trouble here is that intelligence has become a dirty word in some nations' languages. Yet it is these same people who must realize that without such military information the success of the operation may be put in doubt and the safety of troops put at risk. This problem is complex, but I'm sure we're intelligent enough to find a way around it.

A U.N. General Staff is possibly an attractive idea, and I'm delighted that the U.N. is now establishing a twenty-four-hour operations center. It just doesn't do, when a commander has a real problem in the field, to find that he's talking to an answering machine which invites him to call back at nine o'clock on Monday morning. Establishing this twenty-four-hour center will be a significant step in ensuring that military advice is available when wanted. It's important that this center works and is established fully and early for any operation.

Now, areas for growth. We should start work on likely areas for growth and contingency plans for possible U.N. operations of the future. But I'm sure it's important that the U.N. itself doesn't get bogged down writing new manuals and doctrine. There's a great deal already available, and in any case we need to remain flexible. I'm delighted that so many countries, including my own, are supporting the work that is to be done. Next, I think we need to develop our

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\* Vice Admiral Henry C. Mustin, USN, Retired, who was present as a conference participant and had been Commander Second Fleet and Commander Striking Fleet Atlantic from September 1984 until September 1986.

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Chapter VII thinking,\* if I may use that shorthand. We've already indicated our interest in this by supporting the work of Dr. Prins' group at Cambridge.† Next a word or two on Nato and the WEU.‡ Of course the primacy of the United Nations has to be acknowledged, but the Charter allows for, and indeed it encourages, the use of regional organizations. They can fit in with U.N. command arrangements and take onboard non-Nato participants as well. Desert Storm illustrated this very clearly. But we need to draw on Nato's strengths rather than abandon them; make better use of existing structures and use these additionally for training. Nato's expertise is on offer. I frankly believe it's the best show in town, and it shouldn't be rejected. There's also room to develop cooperation further between Nato and, for example, the CSCE countries,§ and I would call attention to the recently formed North Atlantic Cooperation Council. Nato procedures, which are very widespread and very well understood, are adaptable to a wider range of users. They're already well known to the Australians, and you can't get much further from the North Atlantic than that. We have adopted the procedure of "de-baptizing" Nato Headquarters and using it as joint headquarters rather than having ad hoc arrangements. We need to play down the problem of universality and play up the importance of effectiveness. We also need to develop exercising and interoperability whenever an opportunity offers.

There are very important possibilities for maritime forces in U.N. peacekeeping operations. They are, in many ways, ideal instruments—easier to deploy, no sovereignty involved, able to poise in international waters. We're already experienced in embargo operations, and I welcome the chance to identify areas where we have expertise and where we can better contribute in the future. But I would add just one word of caution. It might seem sensible to have forces dedicated for potential U.N. operations; you could, at least in theory, pre-equip them and suitably train them and so on. But I don't think that there's any place for standing U.N. army or naval or air squadrons. Surely none of our nations can afford to have such expensive units sitting around waiting to deploy. It's alright to have them cataloged as available, on an if-required basis, as was started in 1990 in response to a U.N. questionnaire. But these valuable men and units

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\* Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter draws together articles addressing action in response to threats to, and breaches of, the peace, and acts of aggression. The term "Chapter VII" has come to refer collectively to peace-enforcement actions employing military force.

† Dr. Gwin Prins is the Director of the Global Security Programme at the University of Cambridge, England. The program is future-oriented and is concerned with identifying threats to the survival of the human race and the existing biosphere. It enjoys international links with a wide range of both military and academic bodies.

‡ The Western European Union, established in 1954, comprising Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

§ The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, founded in 1972, having fifty-two member nations including states of Western, Central, and Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and also the United States and Canada.

must be free to undertake other operational tasks in the meantime. This will have the double benefit of keeping them trained and experienced. The best peacemakers are the troops trained for high-intensity conflict. We must remember that any conflict, even if it starts at the lowest end of the scale, as humanitarian aid, can go high-intensity if things go wrong. We should also remember that the really well-trained troops suitable for high-intensity conflict will provide a much better deterrent than those that are not. Second, I think it is a truism to say that every crisis is different and it requires different types of forces. I agree that some sort of logistics stockpiling could be helpful, but even if you preallocate, say, a regiment of tanks as a standing force just because they were required in the Kuwait crisis, then, probably, they won't be the things that you need the next time.

It's very important that the military side of U.N. operations be successful. The precedents are mixed: Korea, Congo, Iraq, Yugoslavia, the latter still of course not yet decided. But clearly the scope of the operations is expanding, and if the U.N. fails, nations will no longer defer to it and respect it in the way they do at the moment. An important factor in insuring this will be the strengthening of the U.N. military staff, especially in size and capability. I think we must recognize, as I've suggested, that the U.N. can't do it all; it must delegate, and regional organizations are there to be used—currently, especially but not exclusively, Nato.

I believe we need to further refine how we best provide political control of escalatory peacekeeping operations. But military effectiveness must not be blunted. We must address the complex and difficult problem of ROE procedures in U.N. operations, especially at the peacekeeping level. Then, I'd suggest that joint and combined operations can, indeed must, be successful. But experience has shown that these need very good planning, good C<sup>3</sup>I, and appropriate training if success is to be achieved. And there's much work to do in these areas. Finally, I suggest we must be careful not to forget the need for good public relations. The public image of the U.N. and of U.N. operations is an effective tool in peacekeeping.

This brings me to conclude on the place of maritime forces in U.N. operations, be they preventive, embargo, peacekeeping, peacemaking, or whatever. The potential is clearly there already. We must now talk through the problems and plan and train for the wide range of likely operations. Crises are often unexpected and develop in unforeseen ways. C<sup>3</sup>I is a key function. Our strategy, planning, and training must emphasize flexibility.

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