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A not infrequently heard thesis is that control of the North Atlantic would have little influence on the outcome of a short conventional war along NATO's central front. This paper disputes that thesis, presents its own, and offers some suggestions for the United States' strategic planning consideration.

SOVIET NAVAL AVIATION AND THE NORTHERN FLANK: ITS MILITARY AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

by
Joel J. Sokolsky

It has been long understood that the balance of power, and particularly changes in the balance, can have profound political consequences.* Adverse shifts in the balance narrow the options available to those who find themselves at a disadvantage. It compels them to take greater cognizance of the wishes and interests of that state perceived to have the strategic advantage. It changes their evaluation of what is "tolerable, acceptable and even desirable." It is precisely by this "mental conditioning" that military capabilities, which alter the strategic balance, generate political power and in so doing, earn their "keep without war."¹

Such process is now taking place along the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) northern flank** where the buildup of Soviet land, sea and air capabilities is significantly altering the balance of power. In a purely military sense, the northern flank is NATO's potentially most vulnerable area.³ It is an area that is likely to witness increasing Soviet activity. Given that the margin of change in nuclear capability and along

the central European front is restricted, "we must expect the high seas and the

*The term "balance of power" is used in the perceptual sense. It entails calculations of the likelihood of various events, including the outcome of armed confrontation. The actual physical strategic assets need not be in perfect equilibrium. There can be a balance as in accounts, in which one side has a surplus, as well as a balance as in scales, in which each side has roughly equivalent assets. Using the first meaning, deterrence, "narrowing an opponent's freedom of choice among possible policies by raising the cost of some of them to levels thought to be unacceptable," is one-sided. Using the second meaning, it is mutual. In both, the balance of power rests on calculations of expected outcomes, and the political power of a state functions through the medium of others' perceptions. It is thus that actual strategic assets become measures of the balance of power.²

**For the purposes of this paper, the northern flank will be defined as encompassing both the Norwegian Soviet border and the waters of the North Atlantic off Norway, Iceland and Greenland. Thus, the flank begins on the east where Norway's northernmost province of Finnmark, wrapped around Sweden and Finland north of the Arctic Circle on the shores of the Barents Sea, borders Russia near Murmansk; it goes west from there to the North Cape, across the Norwegian Sea to Iceland, then across the Straits of Denmark to Greenland.

flanks to be the areas of future Soviet activities." It is these areas that "offer the Soviet Union chances for expanding its sphere of influence without risking a direct military confrontation with the West."⁴ In the northern flank region, which is 90 percent water, the long-term cumulative effect of a shift in the balance in favor of the Soviets would be the political detachment of the flank from the alliance by means short of war. This appears to be the Russian objective.

The purpose of this paper is to examine how one particular component of the Soviet military buildup may further the fulfillment of this political objective. This is the growing threat of Soviet naval aviation to NATO's sealanes of communication (SLOC) and air corridors in the North Atlantic. While not the major threat to allied SLOC, it is argued here that: (i) Soviet naval aviation is a growing one, especially with the deployment of the *Backfire* bomber to naval service; (ii) this development raises questions about NATO's ability to protect the northern flank; and (iii) an examination of the Soviet naval air threat can be useful in clarifying our thinking about the relationship between the alliance's naval strategy and its overall military and political doctrine.

The North Atlantic SLOC. In terms of a possible ground war in central Europe, two general views have been taken regarding the importance of the transatlantic communication lanes. Simply stated, they are that in case of a short conventional war along the central front, mastery of the SLOCs and air corridors will have little influence on the outcome. On the other hand, if a conventional confrontation lasts more than a few weeks, and the transportation of men and supplies (including oil) from North America becomes necessary, then control of the North Atlantic will be crucial.

Yet, the situation is much more complicated than this either/or approach would suggest. NATO is a defensive "latent war community" whose purpose is to deter any military attacks, from small conventional probes to general nuclear assaults. It is committed to a policy of graduated, or escalating response should deterrence fail. This means that in the event of an armed confrontation with Warsaw Pact forces, the alliance will attempt to keep the conflict on the conventional level for as long as possible. Because, as a defensive alliance, NATO will presumably not be the initiator of a war, the onus will be on it to avoid resorting to nuclear weapons.⁵

It is argued, particularly in Europe, that NATO's ability to fight conventionally for an extended period may well depend on maintaining control of the North Atlantic lines of communication. To be sure, prepositioning of equipment can lessen the immediate need for resupply from North America—but it is impossible to know in advance how much equipment is necessary. Thus, as one Dutch analyst has noted:

In preventing a crisis from developing into war or even in limiting a war to the conventional level, the NATO navies might well prove decisive. They might even help induce the national leaders on both sides to meet at the conference table rather than take the alternative route of escalation.⁶

In other words, no matter what the alliance's projections about the length of a European land war, the North Atlantic will have to be secure. Failure to do so would close off an important element in continued conventional resistance and would in fact undermine the policy of escalated response. Moreover, unless NATO's deterrent abilities include protection of the SLOCs it may be leaving itself open to Soviet conventional threats short of war whose

purpose is to extract some political concession, e.g., on Berlin.

If deterrence along the central front requires the ability to resupply after a few weeks, then on the northern flank it means the ability to bring in men and equipment almost immediately, possibly during the period of crisis that would precede armed confrontation. The Soviet Union has been building up its ground forces opposite Norway with elements of the Soviet 6th Army. At present there are two mounted rifle divisions, a *SCUD* surface-to-surface missile brigade, artillery and air defense units.

While a member of the NATO alliance, Norway does not allow the permanent stationing of allied forces on its soil. This policy, which has widespread domestic support, reflects the country's longstanding approach to the Soviet Union and the East-West conflict. Through its membership in NATO Norway obtains a measure of national security by placing itself under the American deterrent umbrella. At the same time, by refusing to have allied troops stationed along its borders with the U.S.S.R., Norway has also sought to maintain a regional *détente* by not exacerbating Soviet fears.

Currently a multinational NATO force is committed to bolstering Norwegian defenses. This includes the brigade-size Canadian Air-Sea Transport Group (CAST), supported by two Canadian fighter squadrons, the Allied Command Europe Mobile Force, British or Netherland Marines, as well as British fighters, and elements of the U.S. Marines with American fighter support.⁷ Negotiations are underway to upgrade the U.S. commitment by prepositioning equipment for some 8,000 American troops.⁸

As late as 15 years ago the ability of NATO to resupply this region was assured by the alliance's predominance in the waters of the North Atlantic. Thus, the Norwegian policy of alliance

membership without permanent stationing of NATO forces seemed adequate to assure Nordic security through deterrence and regional *détente*. Since then, the steady buildup of Soviet naval forces has meant that both sides may now operate in the region with equal strength, and the balance is constantly shifting in favor of the U.S.S.R. The effect of this has been to "erode the belief that Norway can receive sufficient and timely help from her allies if exposed to the threat of war."⁹

In a 1971 report entitled "Political/Military Situation on NATO Northern Flank," former U.S. Chief of Naval Operations, Elmo Zumwalt, noted:

Norway feels increasingly behind the line as a result of her knowledge that NATO defense initially must be across Greenland/Iceland/UK Gap and because of the very high order of recent Soviet fleet exercises off Northern Norway. Norway is particularly concerned because USSR has begun practice of announcing these exercises, leaving the USSR the option of a sudden "Czechoslovakia-type" occupation of Northern Norway. Norway believes these amphibious landings would be accomplished by helo-borne vertical assault directly from Russia and that the USSR would stop short of the Tromsø area in the expectation that NATO would settle peacefully, for this small territorial snatch.¹⁰

The need to reinforce the Norwegian front would arise, therefore, in advance of the outbreak of hostilities. An early and safe arrival of outside forces would serve to present the Soviets with the prospect of a wider conflict. The net result could be to inhibit the Russians from exploiting Norway's relative isolation by attempting to seize the northernmost part in a crisis or at the outset of a longer war in order to extract

concessions from the West, or to place NATO in the position of either accepting the Soviet move or escalating the confrontation.¹¹ A credible deterrence in Norway requires the capability to control the sea and air approaches to it.

Expanding our view to take in the whole of the northern and central theaters of operations, it is evident that NATO cannot allow the present neglect of the Norwegian front to continue. A Soviet move into Norway in the early stages of crisis or war might not be just to make a quick grab for territory; it could be the first step in an effort to neutralize NATO early-warning and response facilities in Norway and Iceland. This would open the way for movement by the Soviet northern fleet, and its naval aviation arm, into the North Atlantic where it would cut across allied SLOCs. Russia would in effect preempt control of the sea approaches to Europe. As Admiral Steinhaus, formerly of the German Navy, has argued: "... the Northern flank is the left wing of the defensive front in Europe; a breakdown on this front would shatter the capability of forward defense in the central region.... As long as the northern flank is controlled by NATO, it would be possible to preserve the continuity of overall operations in northern and central Europe and across the Atlantic Ocean."¹²

Thus, no matter what scenarios regarding conventional war in Europe are considered, NATO strategy in the northern flank cannot be separated from its overall war plans, hence, its deterrence posture. The Soviet land, sea and air buildup in this region poses a significant challenge to NATO's military doctrine. There are "grim uncertainties" to all of this; the least that can be said, and it is a lot, is that while neither side could win a European war by winning in the North, "both the Warsaw Pact and NATO might come

close to losing a European war by losing the North."¹³

Should uncertainties increase regarding NATO's ability not to lose in the North Atlantic, it would have profound political consequences. The alliance, by sustaining a credible deterrent posture, seeks to assure the political independence of its members, mainly its European members. Its aggregated strategic assets generate political power by negating the political influence that the Soviet Union attempts to exercise over Western Europe. This is important not only to the Europeans, but also to the United States, the principal guarantor of European independence. Both it and the Soviet Union regard Western Europe as central to the wider global rivalry. The U.S.S.R. is aware that so long as these nations remain relatively free of Soviet influence, no extension of Russian influence beyond the borders of the Soviet Union can be fully secure. Equally, the United States implicitly acknowledges that "so long as the power of the Soviet Union continues to threaten the independence of Western Europe, the very survival of western civilization will remain in question."¹⁴

As with its deployments along the central and southern fronts, NATO's posture along the northern front must in the first instance be directed towards assuring political independence. This can only be done through force structure decisions that "maximize the perceptible manifestations of NATO military power in the region."¹⁵

It is to undermine such perceptions that the Soviet buildup along the northern flank is directed. The Soviet Union expects to be treated as *the* superpower in the region. The other superpower, its allies and the indigenous Nordic countries are expected to recognize the Russian regional preponderance and, in time, to readjust their foreign policy calculations in consonance with the perceived vital

interest of the Soviets. The cumulate of this would be to detach Norway, along with the whole of Scandinavia, from the West. To some extent this process is already underway.

As noted above, Norway, although still desirous of remaining with NATO, exercises caution in its military relations with the West. In January 1978 the Government, in response to Soviet protests, announced that there would be no further increase in the participation of West German forces in NATO exercises on Norwegian territory. Such forces—a company of 180 medics—had taken part in 1976 exercises.¹⁶ Sweden has maintained a military establishment in order to protect its neutrality and recently announced its decision to purchase the American-built F-16. Yet, the Swedes have been reducing their naval presence in the Baltic, in effect acknowledging the Soviet claim that it is a *mare clausum*.¹⁷ They have also recently consented to supply the U.S.S.R. with a floating drydock capable of servicing a giant aircraft carrier currently under construction.¹⁸

Strategically, Finland is almost an appendage of the U.S.S.R. Soviet and Finnish railway lines are fully integrated and "the construction in Finland of highways pointing in the direction of Norway suggests that in the event of hostilities the Russians would strike fast to seize Norwegian ports and airfields as Hitler had done in 1940."¹⁹

The changes in the strategic balance in the northern flank seem to be changing the evaluations of political leaders there of what is "tolerable, acceptable and even desirable." The obvious answer to the Soviet military buildup along the Norwegian border would be to set up more western defenses in the area. But some in the Nordic countries now regard such a response as dangerous, for it will only lead to further escalation, while some even defend Soviet moves. "The Soviet Union," a foreign affairs commentator

affiliated with the Finnish Social Democratic Party stated recently, "has a legitimate right to action if it feels there is a buildup on its frontiers that could lead to aggression."²⁰ Lately there have been calls in Scandinavia for a "Nordic nuclear-free zone." In essence such a zone would prevent NATO from deploying medium-range nuclear missiles in Norway, while leaving the U.S.S.R., not a Nordic country, free to sustain or increase its military capabilities in the region. "It is," observes Walter Laqueur, "the old vicious circle."

The Soviet Union is permitted to gain a considerable military advantage, the balance of power changes, and once this happened it becomes exceedingly difficult to restore the balance, for any such attempt is attacked by the Russians (and by domestic appeasers) as a provocation endangering world peace.²¹

Among the most important military instruments now used by the Soviets to bring about the detachment of Norway and its neighbors from the West is its naval aviation force. Improvements in this force will compel the West to acknowledge that Russia's legitimate defense perimeter now extends to the vital Greenland/Iceland/U.K. (GIUK) gap. Such an extension would put the Soviets athwart the North Atlantic communication lanes and leave Norway and almost the whole of the northern flank well within a new, and more persuasive, Soviet sphere of influence.

Threat and Counter. Testifying before the House Appropriations Committee in 1976, Admiral Holloway ranked Soviet naval aviation behind the submarine fleet, but ahead of the surface fleet, as a priority threat to allied control of the sealanes. He noted that Soviet naval bombers, in particular, could have a "significant disruptive effect in the early stages of war."²² During a period

of crisis operations, interdiction and interposition would likely be carried out by surface ships in a limited area where they are protected by air cover. The Soviets are unlikely to commit their surface force to a direct confrontation with the United States. Should war break out, Soviet submarines and aircraft would be immediately involved. It is the combined submarine and land-based bombers and the torpedoes, mines, bombs and missiles they carry that constitute the major threat to alliance naval and merchant ships. Both forces would "most likely be preoccupied with operations against alliance carrier task forces—at least early in a major engagement."²³

Since the Russian Revolution the Soviet Navy has had an integrated naval aviation arm. At the beginning of the Second World War the Soviets had 2,581 aircraft distributed among its four fleets, of which 45 percent were fighters and 14 percent bombers. During the war the Russians added a considerable number of fighters and bombers to their naval aviation forces. In the postwar period growth was concentrated on land-based fighters, with the "virtual absence" of long-range aircraft. Then, in 1955, the first squadrons of TU-16 *Badger* medium-range bombers were transferred to the navy from long-range aviation.²⁴

Today the Soviet Naval Air Force comprises some 1,200 aircraft of which about 365 are "configured for intermediate-range maritime strike, being supported by another 200 aircraft configured as tankers, reconnaissance, and electronic warfare aircraft." In past exercises the Soviets have demonstrated the ability to carry out simultaneous strikes in the Pacific and North Atlantic.

There are about 275 *Badger* bombers carrying the 175 nautical mile AS-5 (*Kelt*) antishipping missile (ASM), some 40 *Blinders* with free-falling bombs and about 50 of the new *Backfire*

bombers. The number of *Badgers* and *Blinders* has been declining, the latter at a much higher rate, indicating that the Soviets intend to make the *Backfire* the "backbone" of its naval air wing.²⁵ With its 2,500 mile unrefueled radius the *Backfire* almost doubles the range at which NATO surface forces can be attacked. It carries either the AS-4 (*Kitchen*) or AS-6 (*Kerry*) ASM with ranges of over 150 miles. The AS-6 has been described as having an active radar homing system for terminal guidance,²⁶ thus affording greater "stand-off" accuracy.

Most of the Soviet antishipping bombers, including 225 *Badgers* and nearly all of the *Backfires*, are deployed in the Soviet Northern and Baltic Fleets. This indicates that their task will be to destroy NATO attack carrier task forces protecting the North Atlantic SLOC. Given their growing numbers, Soviet bombers, supported by fighter aircraft, could also do serious damage to other surface forces, ports, and naval installations.

The initial threat to NATO's maritime interests is not, however, to its convoys and port facilities. As noted above, the proximity of Norwegian (and Icelandic) airbases to Soviet territory makes them vulnerable to surprise attack and even seizure.²⁷ If these bases were neutralized by being bombed or seized, it would allow the Soviets to move their submarine fleet into the North Atlantic. They would also be in a better position to use their naval air forces for antishipping and antiport missions inasmuch as the lack of NATO forward interceptor forces would permit the Soviets to take full advantage of the long-range capability of their ASMs. The result of this would be to create "an imposing barrier" across the Atlantic such as might compel NATO to sue for peace, given the unfavorable prospects of sustaining a protracted conventional resistance.²⁸

For NATO to meet adequately the air

threat along the northern flank, therefore, it will not be enough to provide additional convoy protection in the event of war. Such a strategy implicitly yields the initiative to the Soviets and may in fact be insufficient in view of the vulnerability of the northern airfields and the long-range capability of Soviet antishipping bombers and their missiles.

Moreover, planning improved convoy protection in the event of war will do little to negate the political influence the Soviets can derive from their increasing naval forces along the northern flank. NATO must be prepared to challenge in peacetime the assumption (and assumption of some in Scandinavia) that the U.S.S.R.'s legitimate defense perimeter now rests on the GIUK gap. It must, in the words of one commentator, demonstrate the ability to "cut 'em off at the pass."²⁹ Unless it can do this, the alliance's naval forces will not be perceived as being able to meet the Soviet naval air threat at the beginning of a war. And the more widespread this perception of a shift in the balance of power against NATO becomes, the greater the political influence the Soviets are likely to derive. In other words, failure to develop an effective counterstrategy to the U.S.S.R.'s air threat along the northern flank will only serve to further the Soviet goal of politically detaching the flank from the West.

"Fortunately," notes naval analyst Dov Zakheim, "the G-I-UK gap provides a natural geographic barrier for the early detection and interdiction of hostile Soviet aircraft as well as submarines." Enhanced capabilities there, whether through land-based or carrier-based aviation, would represent a major contribution to the defense of the Atlantic sealanes and therefore to allied defenses "regardless of the length of a war, or the warning time that precedes it."³⁰

The major part of the burden for an

enhanced early warning and response capability along the gap will fall upon the United States. Two general operations have been put forward. One is to build a new carrier task force bringing to four the number of carriers attached to the U.S. Navy's Second Fleet in the Atlantic. This last force would be more or less on permanent station near the gap. The Congressional Budget Office has estimated that this will cost \$9.3 billion over a 15-year period, with procurement cost set at \$5.2 billion. Alternatively, the United States could drastically improve its land-based forces through a combination of Airborne Warning and Control (AWAC) aircraft and deployment of more advanced interceptors (i.e., the F-14), all of which would operate out of the American base at Keflavik, Iceland. This would cost some \$3 billion over 15 years with procurement cost set at \$1.6 billion.³¹

Given the difference in cost, it is likely that the latter approach will be taken in any American effort to improve NATO defenses in the North Atlantic. In terms of AWACs, the United States could supplement Britain's Hawker Siddley *Nimrods* by replacing its EC-121 with either the Boeing E-3A or the Grumman E-2C. The forward radar stations in Iceland and Norway should also be moved to higher elevation.³²

The alliance's interceptor forces along the northern flank include the Royal Air Force *Toronado* and, shortly, the Norwegian Air Force's F-16s. This should adequately defend against the movement of Soviet antishipping bombers over the Baltic. On the other hand, while the United States possesses the most capable total force, its dedicated interceptor forces for maritime defense in the North Atlantic are amongst the least capable. This is the Air Force's F-4C squadron at Keflavik. Also located there is the Navy's P-3 *Orion* long-range patrol, antisubmarine (ASW) force.

Candidates for replacement of the F-4Cs are the Navy's F-14, and the Air Force's F-15, F-16, and F-4E. The F-14 appears to be the best interceptor for the task; none of the other planes can match its *Phoenix* missile system either in range or in number of shots that can be fired simultaneously. It is thus an effective weapon in countering the Soviet antishipping bomber threat, and provides for greater protection of the Keflavik base itself. Two squadrons of F-14s would increase the present Iceland interceptor force by "at least a factor of four."³³ Although somewhat less effective, the Air Force's F-15 with its *Sparrow* missile system would also be useful for the interception of missile-carrying bombers.

Under the 1974 Icelandic-U.S. agreement, the United States is limited to only one squadron at Keflavik, and this is unlikely to be changed for Icelandic domestic political reasons. Thus a second squadron dedicated to GIUK gap defense would have to be based in England.

To replace the current force with either the F-14 or F-15 would require an increase in the production programs of both airplanes. Assuming increased production, the United States would then have to make a decision about the relative importance of the northern flank, and the Soviet naval air threat in the GIUK gap in particular, as opposed to other locales and tasks to which the new airplanes might be assigned.³⁴

This factor has the most far-reaching implications in terms of the alliance's military and political doctrine. It touches on the problem of allocating scarce defense resources on a global scale, on judgments about the nature and immediacy of various threats to American and allied security, on the difficulties of alliance burden-sharing and above all upon the relationship between the United States and its European allies. All of these considerations must be taken into account in

designing a comprehensive allied response to the Soviet naval air threat along the northern flank.

"The Western alliance," warned former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger recently, "must restore a mutual confidence because it can no longer postpone adapting its defenses to strategic conditions." Cooperation is needed, "because the time has come about to redistribute existing burdens in light of new threats to the Free World from outside of Europe."³⁵ The United States cannot fully restore mutual confidence unless it is prepared to deal with the Soviet threat along the northern flank. Yet, if too many resources are allocated to this task, it will not be able to meet the need, in particular for interceptor forces, outside the European area, i.e., in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf. The response in the northern flank must be one that, while including an enhanced American contribution, also draws upon the maritime resources of other NATO countries.

As noted above, what is needed to counter the Soviet antishipping bomber threat is enhanced early warning and interceptor capacity along the GIUK gap. The combination of doubling the U.S. fighter capability and introducing a new AWAC offers a reasonably adequate response, in addition to being less costly than the construction of a new carrier task force. But, in the competition for scarce defense resources, it may well be that the needed replacements for the North Atlantic will not be readily available, even if the alliance were to place greater emphasis on security in the northern flank.

As an interim step, the United States ought to move one of its existing carriers, and associated ships, to permanent station along the gap. Symbolically, this might well prove a more timely move than an announcement that the land-based forces are to be upgraded. Since the Second World War,

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the carrier has served primarily as a political instrument. It demonstrates immediate interest in a political region or conflict while providing a number of options beyond backing down or all-out nuclear war should crises arise.³⁶ In their study of the use of American military instruments for political purposes, *Force Without War*, Blechman and Kaplan note that carriers were used in 106 of the 215 instances in which the United States employed latent military force. Carriers were most used where they were already on permanent station.³⁷ The permanent deployment of a carrier along the GIUK gap would serve, therefore, as a uniquely visible sign of commitment and would enhance the "perceptible manifestations of NATO military power in the region." It can assist in assuring the Norwegians that the alliance is prepared to meet any Soviet threat or provocation in the region immediately and in so doing challenge the long-term Soviet political goal of detaching Norway (and the other Scandinavian countries) from the West.

While the United States would supply the carrier, it need not supply all the support ships of a task force. The Bonn Government has lifted curbs on the operation of its Navy. Until now, the Germans have limited both the size of their navy and its range of operations, restricting ships to a 24-hour sailing distance from the approaches to the Baltic. Bonn will proceed with construction of six new frigates, actually guided-missile cruisers of about 6,000 tons displacement. These ships will be available to police the seas between Iceland and Norway, including the North Sea oil and gas fields, and, in the event of war, to join other NATO forces in the protection of the sealanes.³⁸

The Canadian Armed Forces' Maritime Command is also planning to build six new frigates. It would seem that a system could be arranged whereby Canada and Germany, either at the same

time, or for alternating periods, supplied ships to a carrier task force on permanent station along the gap. Canada might also be in a position to assist in the interceptor role. It has recently agreed to acquire 128 F-18A *Hornets*. Under existing deployments, 54 of these airplanes will be assigned to the European central front, while the rest will be used for North American air defense. The F-18, though, is well suited for a maritime role along the gap. Its combat radius on high altitude air-to-air missions, using no external fuel pods, is more than 500 miles, the distance from Iceland to Norway.³⁹ To assist in protecting the gap, Canada could abandon its air role in Europe and either place a squadron on permanent station in Iceland or, if this is politically unacceptable, arrange regular visits with a view towards rapid deployment from Eastern Canada in the event of war or crisis.⁴⁰ Such a move might ease the burden on the United States enabling it to assign its F-14s elsewhere or to carrier service.

Making use of Canada's fighters in this way would further enhance the existing Canadian commitment to the defense of the northern flank, and its cooperative arrangements with Norway.⁴¹ A further step would be the creation of a new "Arctic Command," as suggested by Nils Orvik.⁴² In such a combined operations command Canada, Norway and possibly Iceland, would play a dominant role with the United States assuming a lower profile, but still supplying necessary forces. It would help solidify transatlantic ties, provide a clear indication of NATO's determination not to be eased out of the northern flank, and offer a greater measure of control for these smaller countries in exchange for greater responsibility in assuming the burden of North Atlantic security. For Canada, it would also offer the prospect of a more distinctive role within the alliance.⁴³

Greater allied burden sharing in

defense of the North Atlantic from the Soviet antishipping bomber threat will allow the United States to maintain more of its resources in vital areas outside the NATO area such as the Persian Gulf and the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Given the importance of these areas, it is likely that the current "swing" strategy, in which naval forces are brought in to defend the North Atlantic from other areas in the event of war, will have to be reconsidered.

However, concern with areas outside NATO, such as the Persian Gulf, must not be allowed to undermine efforts to improve NATO's posture along the entire northern flank. It is argued, for example, that the alliance's ability to sustain conventional resistance in Europe will depend on the safe delivery of oil. Thus its deterrent posture must include the ability to protect oil from the Gulf. This may well be true but, as shown above, it is equally true that the need to protect the SLOC between North America and Europe in order to reinforce the northern flank in Norway and to prevent Soviet preemption of the seas, will arise at the very beginning of hostilities if not in the crisis period that precedes the outbreak of war. Moreover, in terms of oil, supplies will have to be brought in within the first few weeks of hostilities. This oil will, or should be, coming from North America as the most reliable source of extra-European supply. Tankers will not be able to make the trip unless measures are taken to counter, among other threats, Soviet antishipping bombers. Nor can the alliance afford to leave the indigenous North Sea oilfields without adequate protection in peace as well as in war.

It should be evident that while the United States must look to its obligations elsewhere, it can only do so if it looks in the first instance to European security. Such an approach will foster the kind of "mutual confidence" that both the Americans and Europeans will require in order to

effect a redistribution of burdens. This, in turn, will free more U.S. resources to meet the threats to the West that originate from outside the European theater.

Conclusion. For some time, the Soviet Union has cherished the thought of detaching Norway from the Western alliance and thus, without firing a shot, turning NATO's crucial northern flank. The continued expansion of Soviet naval air forces in the region can make an important contribution towards achieving this objective. If successful, the United States and its allies would suffer an irreparable *political* defeat that would in due course have profound *military* consequences. It would place the sealanes of the North Atlantic in danger, making the defense of the central front much more difficult.

Such a perceptible shift in the balance of power would have further *political* consequences. If the Europeans came to believe that the Atlantic sealanes could be cut, it would raise more doubts about the credibility of conventional deterrence and seriously undermine the cohesion of an already strained alliance. Under these circumstances, accommodation with the Soviet Union might seem more "tolerable, acceptable and even desirable."

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Joel Sokolsky, an instructor in Canadian Studies and Ph.D. candidate in government at Harvard University, holds degrees from the University of Toronto and The Johns Hopkins University. His advanced studies have been under a Canadian Department of National Defence Scholarship. His book reviews and articles have appeared in several journals including *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, *Judaism*, *Fletcher Forum*, and *Canadian Defence Quarterly*.

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For the United States, the end result would be a deterioration in both its military and political posture world wide. It is in this broader, global

perspective that the implications of the buildup of Soviet naval air strength along the northern flank must ultimately be viewed.

NOTES

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2. This approach to the balance of power is taken from the works of Edward N. Luttwak. See, for example: *Dictionary of Modern War* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 82; *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 197; "European Insecurity and American Policy," in James Schlesinger et al., *Defending America* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), p. 170; *Strategic Power: Military Capabilities and Political Utility*, The Washington Papers, v. IV, no. 38 (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1976), pp. 1-16.
3. Elmo Zumwalt, *On Watch: A Memoir* (New York: Quadrangle, 1977), p. 466.
4. Rolf Steinhaus, "The Northern Flank," in James L. George, ed., *Problems of Sea Power As We Approach the Twenty-First Century* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute, 1978), p. 148.
5. John L. Hudson, "On Keeping the Atlantic Sea Lanes Open," *Canadian Defence Quarterly*, Autumn 1978, p. 46.
6. Hans Garde, "The Influence of Navies on the European Central Front," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings*, May 1976, p. 165.
7. Steinhaus, p. 145.
8. *The New York Times*, 11 February 1980, p. A7.
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