

1972

The Future Roles and Problems of Small Countries' Navies

C. Margaritis
Hellenic Navy

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Margaritis, C. (1972) "The Future Roles and Problems of Small Countries' Navies," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 25 : No. 1 , Article 5.
Available at: <http://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol25/iss1/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact daniel.desilets@usnwc.edu.

The utility of small navies in today's world has been frequently discounted by some critics as no longer being relevant in an age of nuclear weapons, ICBM's, and advanced technology. Such "cold war mentality" has overemphasized the ability of the superpowers to marshal the necessary resources to control events around the entire world. Recent history suggests that no one or two Great Powers can police the entire world, and it is in this light that the future role of the security forces of smaller countries, particularly their naval forces, assumes greater importance.

THE FUTURE ROLES AND PROBLEMS OF SMALL COUNTRIES' NAVIES

A presentation delivered

by

Vice Admiral C. Margaritis, Chief, Hellenic Navy

to the

Second International Seapower Symposium

held at the Naval War College

Introduction. The atomic blasts over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the closing stages of World War II marked the beginning of a new period known as the atomic era. New dreams and fears were created out of the traditional ideas of security and world order so recently thrown into confusion by radical modern weapons. There was a long period during which even the existence of the large navies was in doubt not only in the public opinion, but also in professional naval circles. The construction and maintenance costs of naval units were rapidly increasing, and the role of naval forces in a future confrontation was unpredictable. Estimates of conflict duration were as low as a few hours and ending with the total destruction of our planet.

Perhaps the space age intensified this confusion, but in the meantime a balance of terror between the nuclear superpowers was reached. At the same time, however, a series of local wars and crises brought back the classical principles and theories regarding seapower as a means to implement national strategy. The ability of direct intervention in distant places—only one of the many advantages offered by seapower—has again proven to be a valid concept. We thus observe the Soviet Union, which only a decade ago postulated the end of the surface fleet, emerging today as a major world seapower.

Up to 1963 nuclear deterrent forces played the major role in the defense establishments of both superpowers, with naval forces (except carrier forces

capable of projecting nuclear weapons into enemy territory) receiving less emphasis. The significant naval technological event of this period was the building of the first nuclear-powered submarine in January 1954. From 1963 on, however, two new trends began to influence the role of the navies around the world:

- the rise of the Soviet Union as one of the world's leading seapowers,
- the prevalence of the "flexible response" strategy which, in part, revived the classical principles of seapower.

Nevertheless, for the small navies the entire postwar period has been a crisis period during which their composition and even their very existence have fallen under continuous challenge.

The Role of the Small Navies. The increasing level of technological sophistication—making the building and maintenance of the naval forces more and more expensive—poses the following questions for countries whose naval ambitions are severely limited by both resources and technological capabilities:

- How can a modern navy be created and maintained?
- What is the appropriate role for such a navy in today's world?

However, before one can effectively deal with the above questions, one should first objectively examine the necessity of navies for small countries and then postulate the mission of such a navy in relation to the navies of the superpowers. An assumption in this inquiry will be that the present alliances of nations with common ideals and interests will continue in the future. That is, the future role of the small navies will be examined mainly within the framework of these alliances.

The role of the small naval forces varies from country to country, depending on factors such as geographical position, nature of the threat, maritime potential of the nation, et cetera.

In this investigation an effort will be

made to examine factors common to all navies, especially those in the Western World. As it is well known, the navy comprises but the military element of a nation's seapower, while the merchant marine also makes invaluable civilian contributions to national maritime capabilities. The geography of our planet, in conjunction with technological developments and modern weapons systems capabilities, defines the mission and the role of naval forces in relation to the offensive or defensive organization of the Great Powers.

Thus the existence of a strong navy—apart from its contribution to the defense of the homeland and the support of the operations of the other branches of the armed forces—offers the following advantages to its country:

- enhances its strategic deterrent capabilities;
- provides options for exercising political influence;
- provides the capability of striking at enemy strongholds from a closer distance, consequently with greater accuracy and less expense;
- enhances means for controlling escalation, ranging from economic pressure to the application of massive retaliation;
- allows for maintenance of close relations with the allied nations;
- provides for ability to transport land and air forces and to support their operations in enemy territory;
- ensures ability to secure the supply and logistic support requirements of the population and the armed forces.

These capabilities describe the mission of navies in general. Naturally these missions strongly influence the roles and *raison d'être* of small navies as well as large, particularly in the framework of the present alliance system. What, therefore, is the particular role of small navies, given present-day capabilities and international arrangements?

First of all, each nation must depend primarily on itself in matters of own

defense, independently of the collective security provided by the alliances. As has been demonstrated many times in history, a small and well-trained combat force can stand up successfully against superior forces, at least providing them grave doubts before attacking. Today, as well as in the future, the probable occurrence of local wars in which the small navies will have to operate alone cannot be excluded. Thus, for this reason alone, the existence of small navies can be justified.

In today's world, as well as for the foreseeable future, seaborne transportation will be the primary means of meeting international trade requirements on which depend the survival of the Western World's economic system. The need for naval forces to protect sea transportation and sea lines of communications is self-evident. Large navies, however, are not sufficient for the protection of all the world's sea routes and may have to direct most of their energies to strategic interocean conflict. Thus, the protection of coastal traffic is, and will be in the future, a task for the small navies. In addition to the primary role of protecting sea transports in the coastal zone of responsibility, small navies must be able to counter naval forces capable of threatening their homeland. They must also be capable of supporting land operations undertaken by their respective armies.

* * * * *

When one considers the requirements placed on large navies to develop weapon systems to meet challenges of the entire spectrum of contemporary conflict, it becomes obvious that large navies cannot comprehensively cover all the necessary missions. In any general conflict situation, large navies will simply need the support of their smaller brethren. In their supporting role, it is incumbent upon small navies to analyze prospective operational tasks to ensure

they have units capable of effectively performing in the areas of:

- ASW operations and air defense,
- strike operations,
- mine warfare operations,
- amphibious operations,
- shore bombardment.

Of course, the priority which must be assigned to each of these operations depends upon the geographical factor, the volume of seaborne transportation, et cetera. In addition to the above considerations, the control of vital areas for the protection of the international sea lines of communications (e.g., the Baltic and Black Sea exits) attaches an additional weight to the role of certain small navies, the personnel of which—being familiar with the local conditions—are in a better position than anybody else to accomplish this particular mission.

Today the spirit of national independence is very prominent among the peoples of various countries, many of which dislike the existence of foreign bases and the presence of the stronger allied nations' military forces on their territory because of the fear of destruction in case of war. The existence of these nationalistic sensitivities, taken together with the need to clearly demonstrate continued allied guarantees for the territorial integrity of all members, dictates that new emphasis be placed on forces not dependent on bases, such being mainly the naval forces and these forces be multinational in character. Only through the presence of multinational naval forces deployed in sensitive areas can there be met the particular requirements of providing credible deterrent force levels which would not be overly dependent on large bases located in foreign population centers.

Multinational forces need to be integrated to ensure the greatest operational effectiveness. Naval units are more easily integrated in such multinational units than any other forces as

navy people are trained similarly and have similar experiences and ties based upon facing the same hazards at sea. The unwritten laws of the sea are obeyed by all navy people, and finally, there is a unique mutual understanding between seamen not present between the members of any other organization.

Moreover, the continuity of the ocean areas and their international status make feasible the establishment and operation of multinational forces necessary with minimal political repercussions.

This element is doubly useful. In peacetime the activation of naval forces consisting of units from nations with common interests in certain regions has a well-known deterrent effect. The importance of such forces should increase in the future, considering the isolationist attitudes recently shown in the public opinion of various nations and the mobility, speedy activation, and quick reaction provided by multinational naval forces.

In addition, the existence of multinational forces, apart from reinforcing the large navies which, as repeatedly proved, in time of crisis do not have the necessary number of units, provides also a means to continue the fight by the countries overrun by the enemy, as it happened during World War II.

A related consideration in developing naval capabilities is the quality of naval personnel. The development of such personnel, particularly the officers, the mainstay of every navy, is an exceptionally arduous task. Integrity, experience, ability, and a fighting spirit are qualities required from every officer of the armed forces, but especially from the naval officer.

Naval command is the greatest strain that can be brought to bear on a person. The commanding officer alone faces many delicate situations and is required to make vital decisions in a minimum of time. Consequently, the naval officer should be thoroughly trained and highly

qualified before being appointed to command.

The existence of the small navies, particularly those with long traditions and experience, can serve even this need by creating skillful and well-trained personnel which in a time of crisis can be used to man ships transferred by the large navies to their smaller allies.

Problems. Thus, we have noted the necessity of naval forces for small countries while the present and future roles of these navies, as well as the mutual interdependence of small and large navies, has been adequately stated. However, for small navies to carry out effectively their roles, they must be supplied with modern equipment and weapon systems. This perhaps is the most critical problem they face today and will continue to face in the future.

Investigating these problems, we can devise the best solution for building or modernizing small navies by keeping in mind that such solutions differ from country to country, depending directly on the economic capability and long-range planning of each individual government.

Examining the roles of the small navies, we recognized the need to provide them with the capability to carry out different types of operations such as ASW, strike, mine warfare, amphibious operations, et cetera. These operations require special types of ships, aircraft, helicopters, as well as maintenance facilities to support them.

Modern units are required if these operations are to be carried out successfully. The effectiveness of modern weapons systems today renders even large naval units vulnerable to properly equipped smaller vessels.

Modern equipment, however (armament, electronic devices, et cetera), is expensive, while ongoing technological advances make today's equipment obsolete tomorrow. Moreover, such equipment requires adequate logistic support

(means and personnel) if it is to remain effective.

No doubt even the large navies are facing the same situation, but it is more critical for the small ones, especially those belonging to countries which lack advanced appropriate industries. Those nations are obliged to allocate their scarce resources for procuring naval units from foreign countries to the detriment of their balance of payments.

The era when small navies possessed battleships has passed forever. Only few navies today possess the modern substitute for the battleship, the aircraft carrier. Thus the composition of small navies must necessarily be limited to vessels the size of destroyers and smaller. In order that the small navies fulfill their role, especially that of training a balanced corps of officers and crews, they should include in their forces all types of ships required. For example, to develop an antisubmarine capability, submarines are needed. Those submarines will be used both for conducting antisubmarine operations and for training other antisubmarine forces.

However, the cost of even the smaller classes of modern ships is extremely high, making their acquisition in sufficient numbers difficult, if not impossible, for the small countries. Thus an FPBG equipped with missiles, modern radars, digital computers, et cetera, costs in the neighborhood of \$6 million, U.S., probably more than a battleship of the early pre-World War I period which, beyond its standard armament of guns, was equipped only with a basic fire control computer, a compass, and a log.

In my opinion the solution to this problem should be sought in the following directions:

- Cooperation with the economically stronger countries through loans, lease, or sales, under favorable conditions, of ships not absolutely necessary to these countries. The cost-sharing program through which many small navies

are modernized is an outstanding example of such a type of cooperation. Another example in a parallel field is the bilateral or multilateral cooperation in the development of ships, aircraft, weapon systems, and new equipment in general. Another field for cooperation is that of personnel training. By making available training facilities and generally by exchanging experience and information, allied navies could avoid duplication of effort and thereby decrease the maintenance cost of the small navies.

- Construction of multipurpose naval units, of the smallest possible size, to limit their cost.

- The extensive use of guided missiles on small, fast units as well as on other ships as a means to provide the small navies with striking capabilities.

- Drawing up and implementing within an alliance framework, common funding programs for financing the development requirements of small countries' navies lacking the capability to finance them alone.

Epilog. This discussion has led us to the conclusion that the small navies of today have and will continue to have in the future very important roles to ful-

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Vice Adm. Constantine J. Margaritis, Hellenic Navy, is a graduate of the Hellenic Naval Academy, attended the NATO Defense College in Paris, and is a graduate of the National Hellenic Defense College. He has served in a variety of seagoing commands, attended submarine school in England, and served as liaison and staff officer of STRIKEFOR SOUTH in Naples. He has held the position of Commandant of the Naval Academy and, being promoted to rear admiral in 1968, assumed command of the Aegean Sea Command. Vice Admiral Margaritis is presently serving as the Chief of the Hellenic Navy and COMEDEAST.

fill. Today, in light of the existing international situation, these roles are more easily understood than a few years ago.

In addition to their purely national roles and responsibilities, the small navies essentially assist the large navies in maintaining the freedom of the seas. The development of the small countries' navies necessarily will be limited to small displacement, multipurpose, where possible, units equipped with the proper types of guided missiles and with a high-speed capability. The main prob-

lem, development and modernization, can only be overcome through mutual cooperation and assistance.

Concluding, I would like to stress the point that a navy's value can be best understood in its absence, when the need for its services arises and there are none available. Furthermore, the creation of an efficient navy is a very hard task because while the building of a ship may only take a year, the naval expertise and tradition, an essential element for the existence of a navy, is the product of entire generations.

Ψ

Whoever is strongest at sea, make him your friend.

*Address of the Corcyraeans to
the Athenians, 433 B.C.*