

believed to imply a swift escalation to nuclear warfare, the attention paid to the submarine threat by Canadian and other NATO planners reached a low ebb. Since then, however, naval forces in general and anti-submarine capabilities in particular have been steadily receiving higher priority.

Indeed, since the development by the Soviet Union of its first nuclear-powered submarines capable of launching ballistic missiles (SSBNs), Canada and its NATO allies have been constantly improving the detection and attack capabilities of their anti-submarine forces. Because of the short range of their missiles, the early Soviet SSBNs had to get close to the North American coast in order to be able to strike targets in Canada and the United States. To improve the chances of NATO ships and aircraft of locating the SSBNs in the vast oceans, the United States cooperated with its allies to establish a complex network of underwater detection equipment in order to monitor the deployment of Soviet submarines from their home bases in the Kola peninsula to their combat stations off North America. The Sound Surveillance System (SOSUS), for example, is made up of very sensitive hydrophones moored to the ocean floor in chokepoints such as those between Greenland, Iceland and the United Kingdom, the GIUK gap, through which Soviet submarines must pass through to reach the Atlantic Ocean.

In recent years, however, the Soviet Union has developed submarine-launched ballistic missiles with enough range to reach North America from Soviet Arctic waters, thus allowing most of the Soviet SSBN force to stay submerged close to its home ports in bastions, areas of the Arctic Ocean defended by Soviet vessels and aircraft. While this has all but eliminated the presence of Soviet SSBNs off the North American coast, strategic and technological developments increased the threat posed to Western shipping and military installations by Soviet conventionally-powered and nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSKs and SSNs).

Indeed, the protection of allied shipping took on new importance in recent years in view of changing strategic thinking. There was a growing consensus, at least within military circles, that if war broke out in Europe, it would not necessarily become a nuclear war from the start, but would rather begin with a much longer period of conventional warfare than that which had been planned for during the 1960s and 1970s. The longer NATO's conventional forces in Europe would have to sustain their resistance to an invasion, the more dependent they would become on reinforcements and supplies coming from North America. Thus, the protection of the sea lines of communications through which most of the supplies would reach Europe became even more important in NATO planning than in the past. The likelihood of a conflict between NATO and the Soviet Bloc has greatly diminished in recent months, but so long as the presence of Canadian and United States