

superiority and the number of hostile vessels they are likely to face in any particular Third World conflict, are still much higher than required for such contingencies. Furthermore, considerable sums of money could be saved by foregoing future production of submarines and attendant ASW forces.

It is true that the numbers of US and Soviet submarines are already declining substantially as a result of fiscal constraints and, in the Soviet case, the block obsolescence of older models. Thus, the Soviet nuclear-powered fleet is expected to peak at about 183 units in 1991 and fall to about 100 early in the 21st century. The US, which had 134 nuclear-powered submarines in 1988, now has only 122, and is expected to have just 83-88 (including 65-70 SSNs) by the turn of the century. Some disarmament advocates point to this as an example of "spontaneous disarmament" and use it as an argument against the need for formally negotiated limits on such vessels. However, relying completely on unilateral cutbacks may leave total force-levels much higher than they need otherwise be, and does not preclude a reversal of direction should political fortunes change. Neither side will ordinarily eliminate its most modern and capable forces without guaranteed assurances of reciprocity by the other. Thus, an expensive and wasteful arms race in submarines and ASW, substituting quality for quantity, could still continue.

There remains some question about the "negotiability" of deep cuts in attack submarines as a separable measure for the USSR. Senior Soviet naval officers have, in the past, rejected the idea of reducing the single strongest component of their fleet, without making corresponding cuts in areas of US naval strength, such as aircraft carriers. On the other hand, the USSR has, in recent years, accepted severely asymmetric cuts in other categories of military forces, such as ground-based conventional weaponry and strategic nuclear forces. And it remains the case that the only way of adequately testing the Soviet response to such a proposal is to actually make it, and see how they react. If other categories of naval vessels have to be brought into the picture too, this may not necessarily be a bad thing, given that so much of the US-Soviet naval buildup in recent years has been geared to a competition that seems so far removed from the political realities of today.

## CONCLUSION

What has just been said about proposed cuts in attack submarines can be applied to the subject of naval arms control generally. The numbers of ships in the world's

major navies are likely to continue to decline of their own accord, due to cost reasons, but their actual combat capabilities (spurred by a continuing technological arms race) will continue to grow. Unilateral and informal constraints may have an important role to play, but can never fully replace the precision, certainty of reciprocity, verifiability, and longevity or irreversibility (comparatively speaking) of formally negotiated agreements.

The focus of global naval arms control efforts will eventually shift from the remnants of the East-West competition at sea, to the proliferation of modern naval weaponry — and the stoking of incipient new rivalries — in the Third World. However, as long as the world's major maritime powers continue to maintain large standing naval forces — which they will do for the foreseeable future — various kinds of naval arms control may have an important role to play in averting dangerous incidents, improving political relations between states, and further reducing the costs of naval arms, not only on a regional but on a global level as well. President Bush's announcement of 27 September 1991 concerning tactical nuclear weapons at sea was a breathtaking reversal of traditional American attitudes to this subject, although it remained informal, unilateral, and incomplete. Whether this move will spur additional naval arms control efforts, or only dampen current interest by taking off some of the immediate pressure, remains to be seen. However, it is a dramatic opening which testifies to the extraordinary changes in the international security environment in recent years and even months, reminding us that what may have seemed far-fetched or unrealistic only a short time ago may now be within the realm of the possible.

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