

Consultative Group Discusses Naval Arms Control at Halifax Meeting

Members of the Consultative Group on Disarmament and Arms Control Affairs from the three maritime provinces and Newfoundland met with Ambassador for Disarmament Peggy Mason in Halifax on June 25 to discuss a range of arms control and disarmament issues. In addition to Consultative Group members, the consultation included several others from the region who are knowledgeable about and interested in arms control and disarmament issues, as well as officials from EAIRC and the Department of National Defence.

The consultation focused in particular on naval arms control, with presentations by Commander Peter Haydon, Royal Canadian Navy (retired), of Dalhousie University's Centre for Foreign Policy Studies, and Mr. Tariq Rauf, Senior Research Associate at the Canadian Centre for Arms Control and Disarmament in Ottawa.

Commander Haydon, speaking about naval arms control's history and prospects, pointed to the Rush-Bagot agreement of 1817 between the United States and Great Britain as the ideal to imitate. He attributed the success of this agreement, which limited naval forces

most scope for naval confidence-building measures, particularly applied to non-nuclear navies, as well as for some superpower movement on the limitation of strategic and possibly tactical nuclear weapons.

Commander Haydon gave a mixed assessment of the Convention on the Law of the Sea. He argued that while it will be an important part of any future concept of maritime security, it is also likely to lead to boundary disputes and increase the risk of naval confrontation.

Mr. Rauf, addressing Canada's role in naval arms control, argued that the issue should be tackled sooner, rather than later. He proposed several initiatives that Canada could suggest to the superpowers, including: regular data exchanges and staff contacts; the introduction of permissive action links on sea-based nuclear weapons; the elimination of non-strategic naval nuclear weapons; a ban on all nuclear sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs); and negotiated deep cuts in general-purpose submarines.

On unilateral moves, Mr. Rauf recommended that Canada: add naval arms control to its present list of arms control objectives; begin naval verification studies; propose an extension of the CSBM Negotiations' Madrid Mandate to include independent naval activities; expand its existing incidents-at-sea agreement with the Soviet Union to include sub-surface activities; and take an active role in proposing naval arms control and confidence-building measures at the UN.

During the Group's discussion, there was some criticism of Canada's policy of supporting the practice of allies possessing a sea-based nuclear deterrent of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons aboard their warships during visits to foreign ports. It was also suggested that those concerned about the environmental

dangers posed by nuclear-armed or powered ships should devote greater attention to commercial vessels, which are involved in proportionately far more accidents than military ones.

The suggestion of a UN naval force was raised, but some participants voiced concerns about the inter-operability of navies and observed that any such force would be at substantial risk intervening in a war in, for example, the Persian Gulf.

While some argued that the Convention on the Law of the Sea provides an adequate legal basis for a future peaceful regime of the seas, others expressed opinions closer to Commander Haydon's view and emphasized the definitional ambiguities enshrined in the Convention.

In general, participants noted the complexity and difficulty of naval arms control, particularly as an increasing number of states come to regard navies as useful and flexible instruments of national power. The fact that navies are moving in several cases into quasi-military roles, which further complicates constraints, was also raised.

Other topics discussed during the consultation included the changing face of Europe and Canada's involvement therein, global security arrangements, the changing nature of security, possibilities for Arctic cooperation and Canada's policy on a comprehensive nuclear test ban.

Consultative Group meetings provide occasion for informed debate among people who approach current arms control and disarmament questions from very different perspectives. They also offer government representatives a chance to hear the most persuasive arguments in favour of and against various policy alternatives. Both governmental and non-governmental participants expressed satisfaction that the Halifax meeting continued this valuable tradition. ■

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on the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain, to precision in geographic limits, realism in objectives, verifiability and establishment of a management process.

Commander Haydon was less sanguine about naval arms control's prospects, noting that with over 100 states now possessing combatant naval capability, the chances of universal agreement on radical change to the status quo are non-existent. He saw the