

SSBN SANCTUARIES

Finally, although SSBN sanctuaries could be categorized in a variety of ways — for example, as mutual force reductions or even partial demilitarization agreements — it may not be doing too much violence to the concept to include them under the rubric of CBMs as well. Proposals for such sanctuaries to aid in preserving the relative invulnerability of the sea-based deterrent have been extant for some time. Not surprisingly, given the basing of Soviet SSBNs, the areas most often mentioned as likely candidates on the Soviet side are found in the vicinity of its Arctic territories, namely the Barents and Okhotsk Seas. On the American side, the Gulf of Alaska has been proposed as a possible SSBN sanctuary but, given the US preference for open-ocean dispersal of its SSBNs, such sanctuaries have generally been considered much less attractive to the United States. In fact, one of the principal objections to the idea has always been that they would disproportionately benefit the Soviet side. Other variants of the SSBN sanctuary concept have been suggested — for example by Ken Booth, that they cover the entire EEZs of each of the superpowers,¹⁶⁵ and by Willy Østreng, that the entire Arctic Ocean be constituted as one.¹⁶⁶

There are several objections to the idea. One, already mentioned, is that it would disproportionately benefit the Soviet Union, in view of its current practice of concentrating its SSBNs in so-called “bastions” adjacent to its northern coasts. More importantly, the Western ability to threaten submarines of all types in these “bastions” is considered to be an essential part of its overall ASW strategy, forcing the Soviet Union to assign considerable forces (in fact, the bulk of its overall naval power, according to some analysts)

165. Ken Booth, “Law and Strategy in Northern Waters,” paper prepared for the Conference on “Northern Waters: Security and Resources Issues,” Ellon (Aberdeen), Scotland, 17-19 September 1980.

166. Willy Østreng, “Strategic Developments in the Norwegian and Polar Seas: Problems of Denuclearization,” *Bulletin of Peace Proposals* 13:2, 1982, pp. 101-112; and Østreng, “The Strategic Balance in the Arctic Ocean—Soviet Options,” in: William Gutteridge (ed.), *European Security, Nuclear Weapons and Public Confidence*. London: Macmillan, 1982, pp. 125-154.