

Agreements can serve as a useful mechanism for beginning the process of regular staff consultations.

In practice, rather than building on a series of relatively complex information exchange signals, as found in the existing agreements, it might be appropriate to explore whether Middle East INCSEA agreements could incorporate a simple framework of concise messages. Such messages would be intended to allow individual or small groups of ships in proximity to each other to remove any ambiguity over their intended movements. For instance, if a patrol boat of one state were operating close to the maritime border of another state, it could display a simple signal (by day or night) to indicate the nature of its operations. This is done routinely by larger navies when conducting anti-submarine warfare (ASW) exercises, or operating divers and helicopters. Further, the vessel can change its signal quickly if the activity changes.

The idea of **closing certain bodies of water** to naval traffic has merit in theory, but adopting the principles contained in the 1982 Convention on the Law of the Sea would accomplish essentially the same objectives. However, such measures may be of limited value in a crisis. For instance, in the 1987-88 Tanker War in the Persian Gulf, war aims had little respect for the provisions of international maritime law, particularly in confined waters.

Imposing or agreeing to **Deployment constraints** serves the same purpose as activity constraints. In this the 1982 Convention also provides an adequate framework for limiting the movement of naval forces in the coastal zone and on the high seas. **In the Middle East case, the primary focus should be on coastal waters and international straits.** At the moment, only the submarine forces of the various Middle East states have a clear "high seas" role.