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Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rspe20>

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Published online: 09 May 2008.

To cite this article: Ali L. Karaosmanoglu (1993) Naval security in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean: A Turkish view, The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs, 28:4, 139-144, DOI: [10.1080/03932729308458032](https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729308458032)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03932729308458032>

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# Naval Security in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean: A Turkish View

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Given the lack of strategic depth, Turkey has had to maintain a level of force in Thrace which would have been able to defend the region against attacks coming from land, amphibious and airborne units far superior in strength and structure.<sup>1</sup>

While the defense of the Bosphorus and Dardanelle Straits has been a major concern of Turkey's strategic planners, Ankara has also always been extremely sensitive to the security concerns of the other Black Sea riparian states, especially Russia. Since Turkish decision makers are acutely aware that the Straits and the Black Sea are very important strategic approaches to the Russian homeland, they believe that any non-Black Sea naval power concentration in the Black Sea during peacetime would create apprehensions and dangerously disturb regional stability.

The 1936 Montreux Convention continues to serve these interests, and many of its provisions constitute early examples of naval arms control measures.<sup>2</sup> It imposes limitations on both the passage of warships through the Turkish straits and the presence of the non-Black Sea states' warships in that sea. One of its principal purposes is to allow Turkey to militarize the Straits, something which was prohibited under the 1923 Lausanne Convention. Furthermore, it states that if Turkey considers itself threatened with "imminent danger of war", the passage of warships through the Straits "shall be left entirely to the discretion of the Turkish Government".

The Montreux Convention clearly favors the Black Sea countries, imposing

1 Statement by the Turkish Chief of General Staff, General Necip Torumtay, at the CSBM Military Doctrine Seminar in Vienna on 19 January 1990.

2 See the article by N. Ronzitti in this issue.

heavy restrictions upon the non-Black Sea powers and granting much greater freedom of movement to the Black Sea navies. This freedom of movement has been increased even further as regards the transit of Soviet aircraft carriers such as the *Kiev* and *Admiral Kuznetsov*. Given that neither Turkey nor the other signatories have challenged the Soviet classification of these ships and their transit rights, it may well be argued that the practice has been based on an extensive interpretation of the Montreux Convention.<sup>3</sup>

The Montreux Convention's adaptability to changing circumstances has recently been a matter of public debate in Turkey. A considerable number of experts continue to support the official position which opposes any modification of the Convention. They believe that its major provisions continue to be quite satisfactory with respect to Ankara's interests, and that even a discussion of its minor provisions might open a Pandora's box and bring about undesirable results. Thus, while acknowledging the need for a certain degree of adaptation, they argue that it could be done through an evolutionary process of interpretation.<sup>4</sup>

Other experts, however, emphasize the need for a revision of the Convention. They argue that the Convention as it applies today considerably limits the powers of the Turkish government. Turkish authorities should be given the necessary powers to regulate the passage of ships, to take measures for environmental protection, and to stop and search vessels for security reasons. Moreover, they insist that pilotage should be obligatory for merchant vessels.<sup>5</sup>

There is no doubt that the Montreux Convention has so far successfully served the interests of the Black Sea powers including Turkey; however, the time has come to consider the matter from a different perspective. Under post-Cold War conditions, the concept of security has acquired a different and broader connotation. The limitations imposed upon the non-Black Sea navies have lost much of their strategic significance, as has the obligation to inform signatories about the passage of warships. Instead, new security risks are now posed by problems such as environmental pollution, terrorism and the increasing probability of proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. These risks are compounded by the fact that the Bosphorus flows through Istanbul, a city of nearly ten million people, and that the semi-enclosed Black Sea is increasingly polluted and borders on highly unstable regions. These considerations give added support to the argument advocating revision of the Montreux Convention.

Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the strategic landscape in the Black Sea has changed radically. Control of the Soviet Black Sea Fleet is being disputed by Russia and Ukraine. If, in demanding to take control of a portion of

3 See Charles Maechling Jr., "Crisis at the Turkish Straits", US Naval Institute Proceedings (August 1988), p. 63-71, cited by Douglas L. Clarke, "The Soviet Navy's First Aircraft Carrier", *RFE/RL Report on the USSR* (August 16, 1991), p. 15.

4 See the interview with Prof. Yüksel İnan, *Cumhuriyet*, 22 January 1992, p. 13.

5 İ. Soysal, *Cumhuriyet*, 23-24 January 1992, p. 13

the former Soviet Black Sea Fleet, Ukraine's purpose is to balance Russian naval power in the region, then Ukraine may be prone to negotiate certain regional arms control measures; on the other hand, if Ukraine's objective is to become a major naval power in the region, it may be very difficult to reach a regional agreement on naval arms control.

## Prospects for Naval Arms Control

### *Structural arms control*

During the Cold War, the aim of structural arms control was to discourage each major bloc from initiating war against the other. For instance, the objective of the CFE negotiations was to decrease the surprise attack and sustained operational capabilities of Soviet/Warsaw Pact conventional forces so that Moscow's incentive to launch an armed attack against NATO territory would be substantially reduced. It was difficult, however, to put forward a similar argument as regards naval arms control: on the one hand, sea power was not a suitable instrument for the initiation of war; on the other, naval arms reductions could have had the opposite effect, as any substantial reduction in NATO navies would have reduced the Alliance's logistical and reinforcement capability, leaving its conventional forces in Central Europe and on the Southern Region at the mercy of far superior Soviet/WP forces.

The Soviet threat has ceased to exist, though there are still uncertainties. But does this mean that structural naval arms control negotiations are more promising now than they were in the past? To a certain extent, this argument can be upheld, but it should be kept in mind that navies can hardly create an incentive to initiate war alone in the Mediterranean for the following reasons: they mainly function as a supportive element of the other services; they defend sea lines of communication (SLOCs), the continued importance of which was demonstrated during the Gulf War when NATO ships patrolled the Mediterranean SLOCs; they may be used as a crisis-management and peacekeeping tool, which is becoming increasingly significant in the new international environment. NATO's center of gravity has shifted from Central Europe to the South, and the Alliance has a palpable tendency to assume new tasks in out-of-area and in peacekeeping, requiring mobility and force projection capability; thus the areas in which structural naval arms control may be plausible are limited.

Turkey would be in favor of the creation of a nuclear weapon-free zone in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Elimination of all nuclear warheads and strategic submarine ballistic missiles (SSBNs) from the region would not hamper performance of the above-mentioned missions required by the new strategic conditions. Removal of dual-use (nuclear and conventional) delivery vehicles such as cruise missiles, however, may be problematic, given that their continued military usefulness became apparent during the recent Gulf War.

Precision-guided munitions (PGMs) also constitute a difficult case. The present trend is to acquire more PGMs. For instance, the improvement of fire-

power and precision of naval weapon systems is an important aspect of Turkey's modernization program. But the acquisition of anti-ship PGMs by radical regimes and terrorist groups would constitute a serious danger for SLOCs, making effective measures to prevent their proliferation necessary.

Similarly, submarines (conventionally armed) may be both offensive and defensive, constituting both a major threat to and useful protection for the SLOCs. Moreover they can perform valuable crisis-management and peacekeeping functions, such as observation, blockade, escort and coastal defense. Like PGMs, however, their proliferation might increase risks to the security of SLOCs.

### ***Operational arms control***

Selectivity is also required in operational arms control measures, as some may be incompatible with the naval missions required by the new security challenges. For example, operational arms control measures should not curb the mobility and power projection capability of NATO navies.

Greece and Turkey have already made some progress on confidence and security building measures (CSBMs) within the framework of the Davos process. The two documents they signed in 1988 called for the bilateral application of the following measures:

- During national military activities in the high seas and the international airspace, efforts will be made to avoid interfering with shipping and air traffic;
- When planning and conducting national military exercises in the high seas and the international airspace, efforts will be made to prevent the isolation of certain areas and the blocking of exercise areas for long periods of time, particularly during the peak tourist season (1 July-1 September), and main national and religious holidays.
- Naval and airforce units conducting military activities will act in conformity with international law, as well as with military custom and courtesy.
- Naval units will refrain from reciprocal acts of harassment. When engaged in the surveillance of the other party's ships during military activities, they shall maintain a position which will not hamper the smooth conduct of those activities.
- Pilots shall display utmost caution in proximity of the other party's aircraft and shall not maneuver or react in a manner that might be hazardous to the safety of the flight and/or affect the conduct of the mission of the aircraft.
- In order to promote a climate of confidence, the parties will refrain from releasing official statements whenever there are claims of acts contrary to the above measures; they will first inform each other through diplomatic channels.
- For crisis-management, a direct telephone line will be set up between the prime ministers of the two countries.

Although the above measures are not comprehensive and are violated from

time to time, they may be regarded as a useful step forward in the regional CSBM experience.

Turkey has also had experience in operational naval arms control with Bulgaria. The Chiefs of the General Staffs of each country met in Sofia on 16-20 December 1991 and signed a document to initiate a bilateral process aimed at enhancing confidence and security in the region. The "transparency" measures provided by this agreement covered certain naval activities such as "naval visits, visits at flag and staff officer levels", and training cooperation (exchange of cadets, exchange of officers for on-the-job training, and reciprocal attendance at conferences and symposia by officers from high level headquarters and staff colleges).

It is noteworthy that the Turco-Bulgarian agreement includes more extensive measures for land forces than for naval forces. These measures involve the geographic limitation of military exercises, their observation and the inspection of military installations. Unlike the naval CSBMs in the Aegean, all the measures agreed upon between Turkey and Bulgaria are being satisfactorily applied and have greatly contributed to the easing of tension between the two states.

Turkey favors naval CSBMs in the Mediterranean provided that arms control measures do not hamper the freedom of navigation of its own ships and those of other NATO countries. Although the CSBMs agreed upon between Turkey and Greece, and between Turkey and Bulgaria are not comprehensive, their improvement and their extension to the whole Mediterranean area including the Black Sea would contribute to regional security. Urgent measures must also be taken to protect the marine environment in areas which are increasingly polluted, such as the Black Sea. Similarly, the navigation of the nuclear propulsion vessels and oil tankers through densely populated areas such as the Turkish Straits should be limited and strictly controlled, if not totally prohibited, to ensure safety.

## Conclusion

There is currently a broad consensus that arms control measures are generally quite useful in creating global and regional stability. There is also a growing tendency to include naval forces in future arms control negotiations. At the regional level, the Italian-Spanish proposal for establishing a Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean refers to the importance of confidence-building "through increased transparency and information exchange".<sup>6</sup> The Turkish-Bulgarian agreement is a successful example of this kind of effort.

It is equally true that "the ultimate objective of arms control should not be merely military stability, but political stability".<sup>7</sup> This last point is particularly relevant for such an unstable region as the Mediterranean, where crisis-manage-

6 R. Aliboni, "European Security Across the Mediterranean", *Chaillot Papers* no. 2 (Paris: WEU Institute for Security Studies, 1991), p. 41.

7 I. Daalder, "The Future of Arms Control", *Survival*, vol. 34, no. 1, Spring 1992, p. 92.

ment, peacekeeping and the protection of the SLOCs have become more important than ever. Consequently, any naval arms control negotiation in the Mediterranean will have to consider the conditions of the new strategic environment and its military requirements. Post-Cold War security challenges seem to favor a considerable variety of operational arms control measures, but impede substantial efforts toward structural naval arms control.

Finally, the delimitation of the geographical area of naval arms control is problematic. The former Soviet maritime power has global dimensions and, as such, is not amenable to regional structural arms control if attempts are confined to the Mediterranean. Any reduction in the Mediterranean would create additional security problems in the Baltic and further north unless the ships and weapon systems subject to reduction are destroyed.