9 New Tasks for New Navies

The new environment has not only modified the execution of traditional maritime functions but has also produced new tasks for navies to perform. Sometimes these tasks are new in entire conception (such as those to do with the operation of the nuclear deterrent at sea) or new in their dimensions, demands and perceived importance (such as naval diplomacy and the protection of the offshore estate). To a greater or lesser extent these new tasks compete with the older ones for naval resources. To a greater or lesser extent also, naval policy makers will find little in the established literature of maritime strategy to help them make their choices.

(a) The protection of the offshore estate

Off the shores of many countries, over the past generation or so, there has appeared a new complex of technological, political and economic interests which the British like to call, somewhat whimsically, the ‘offshore tapestry’. It represents important new sources of food, energy and raw materials; it makes the sea more, not less, important than it used to be; it forces countries with coastlines to consider how best to manage their new estates. Even the maritime states have found their existing bureaucracies (whose responsibilities to date have been fundamentally territorial) unequal to the task; the United States has some forty overlapping agencies concerned with the offshore estate, the British over twenty. Very evidently, old patterns do not fit the new realities, which demand instead a co-ordinated maritime policy and new patterns of administration. Equally obviously, each new resource and interest needs recognition, understanding and effective management.

These days it is hard not to be aware of the importance of the sea and the sea bed as sources of energy (coal, oil, gas, even wave and tidal power) and of vital raw materials. Gorshkov produced an apparently endless list of chemical and mineral resources to be found at sea, everything in fact from thorium to gravel, and already explorations are underway of the ocean beds beyond the continental shelf where yet
more of these assets doubtless lie in rich profusion. Their efficient
extraction will certainly require an agreed and equitable ocean regime
and protection against nature, accident and hostile act.

As Gorshkov wrote, people have been taking fish from the oceans
since time immemorial, but there has been a radical transformation of
even this industry since 1945. The world catch, at something like
seventy million tons, is now four times what it was a generation ago. It
is a vital component of the economies of many countries, Japan and
Russia particularly. Inevitable problems have arisen. Some species, like
the Atlantic herring and the Arctic cod, have been over-fished to the
point of extinction. There have been endless disputes over what is the
maximum sustainable yield for these and other types of fish, over its
allocation, and over who has the jurisdiction to make the ultimate
decision. Tensions have run high between local fishing communities
and the high technology fleets which have appeared on their grounds
and, with a vacuum cleaner action, sucked up their livelihoods. There
promises to be much difficulty in the exploitation of new food sources,
such as the huge quantities of krill known to be in the waters between
Antarctica, South America and the Falklands, and estimated by Lord
Shackleton's 1976 report as likely to produce an annual catch far
exceeding the rest of the world fish catch put together.

The management of all this obviously requires international agree­
ment, equitable and effective regulation and the means to ensure that
fishing vessels comply with relevant fishery protection and conserva­
tion rules. Countries with seaboards will doubtless tend to increase the
areas of their maritime jurisdiction as time goes by. Within these areas
they will have to identify, plot and monitor the activities of all trawlers,
national and foreign, ensuring that individuals are not breaking the
rules by using the wrong size mesh on their nets or catching the wrong
kind of fish. The even more exacting task of ensuring that foreign
fishing fleets are not exceeding their agreed quota will also need to be
carried out.

The way in which various forms of sea use interweave is dem­
onstrated by the effects on fishing (and for that matter on recreation) of
pollution, often the unintended by-product of other marine activities.
In 1971 Jacques Cousteau told the Council of Europe that intensity of
life in the world's seas had declined by between 30 and 50 per cent
during the previous twenty years. The main causes of the trouble are
marine disposal, (either by coastal discharge or ocean dumping) ocean
spillage, navigational accident and sea bed operations of various kinds.
The vulnerability of the sea lies in the interdependence of its attributes.
It has been said, 'All marine life is joined in a complex web of food
chains and the relationship between living things, and between living
things and their surroundings is so delicately balanced in the sea that a
disturbance in one part can have a deleterious effect on the whole