Naval Arms Control in the Asia-Pacific Region after the Cold War

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INTRODUCTION

With the end of the Cold War, some analysts have concluded that arms control has lost all relevance. This view is held by traditional critics of arms control such as Colin S. Gray, as well as by some former proponents of arms control such as Kosta Tsipis. With regard to naval arms control, throughout the Cold War the U.S. Navy maintained a highly visible "just say no" attitude toward naval arms agreements with the USSR, and the demise of the USSR is largely seen as evidence of the wisdom of that policy—and the end of further talk on the subject. Naval arms control is, in this view, simply another item in a long list of dubious political processes that have been "overtaken by events."

If by naval arms control one means only formal, bilateral, negotiated agreements between the United States and the Soviet Union resulting in major ship reductions or operational restraints—the U.S. Navy's preferred Cold War definition—then of course it is dead, along with the Cold War itself.

However, the issue of preventing or containing maritime conflict in the post–Cold War era is not dead, and naval arms control in the broad sense can play an important role in that effort. In this paper naval arms control is defined as any action, agreement, or statement, whether unilateral, bilateral, or multilateral in form, that reveals, restricts, restrains, or reduces the operations, capability, composition, structure, or size of any nation's naval forces for the purposes of preventing conflict, reducing damage should conflict occur, and reducing the cost of procuring and maintaining naval forces. Naval forces refers to sea-based forces and those land-based forces that have sufficient reach to significantly affect naval activities (for example, strike aircraft and antiship missiles).


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From this perspective it is clear first of all that the U.S. government and its navy have long been engaged in naval arms control, from the 1817 Rush-Bagot Treaty to demilitarize the Great Lakes to President's Bush's September 1991 decision to withdraw all U.S. naval tactical nuclear weapons, a move reciprocated by Gorbachev. Moreover, naval arms control by this definition is alive and well in the post–Cold War era, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, for very substantial reasons. It is in the interest of the United States and its navy to become an active partner in this aspect of the effort to achieve global security in a new strategic era.

To set the context, a brief review of Cold War–era, Asia-Pacific naval arms control efforts is in order.

ASIA-PACIFIC NAVAL ARMS CONTROL DURING THE COLD WAR

During the Cold War, most naval arms control efforts were focused on the North Atlantic confrontation between NATO and Soviet naval forces. However, the Soviet Union's highly publicized efforts at naval arms control in the Gorbachev era placed considerable emphasis on the Pacific, beginning with Gorbachev's July 1986 Vladivostok speech to "lessen tension in the Asian and Pacific Regions." These proposals ranged from rather innocuous confidence-building measures (CBMs) to rather lopsided cuts in naval forces and were met with universal rejection by the United States.

Much less noticed were the Western-led nongovernmental efforts to defuse the dangerous U.S.-Soviet confrontation in the North Pacific in the 1980s. For example, in August 1987 the Peace Research Centre at the Australian National University (ANU), in cooperation with the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre there, organized a conference on Security and Arms Control in the North Pacific—the first ever with a Pacific focus. In May 1988 the Institute of International Relations at the University of British Columbia hosted a conference on superpower maritime strategy in the Pacific. In No-


