

Chapter 10

The Cordon Sanitaire—Is It Useful? Is It Practical?*

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That Soviet naval units shadow U.S. aircraft carrier battle groups is common knowledge, but no less dangerous for that. Those tattletales provide the Soviet Navy with continuous, accurate information on the position of our carriers—the repositories of most of the conventional striking power of the U.S. Navy. The tremendous concentration of power in only twelve carriers makes them extremely lucrative targets in wartime.

Soviet leaders have clearly recognized the advantage to be gained by placing the carriers out of action in the first minutes of hostilities before carrier air power could be brought to bear on the ships of the Soviet Navy and targets ashore. Soviet surface combatants, submarines, and aircraft carry extremely capable antiship missiles, and the Soviet Navy frequently conducts anticarrier exercises during which the forces practice coordinated attacks.¹ A coordinated preemptive strike with antiship cruise missiles using precise targeting data provided by a tattletale could overwhelm a battle group's air defenses and destroy or cripple the carrier's striking power before it could be used.

The presence of a Soviet ship or perhaps several ships in company with a U.S. carrier battle group has become accepted as routine during normal peacetime operations, but such shadowing in a crisis situation on the "edge of war" would be an intolerable risk. Clearly, in crisis the United States needs some means of denying the Soviets this tattletale capability without precipitating hostilities. Although right now serious political and legal problems would inhibit its use, the concept of the cordon sanitaire offers great promise as a means to solve this dangerous problem.

As early as the 17th century, the French term, *cordon sanitaire* (sanitary zone), was used to describe the establishment of a perimeter around an area infected with contagious disease to effect a quarantine. Gradually its usage spread to connote military perimeters enclosing safe areas. Later, the system of alliances instituted by France in post-World War I Europe that stretched from Finland to the Balkans was also referred to as a cordon sanitaire. It completely ringed

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Germany and sealed off Russia from Western Europe, thereby isolating the two politically “diseased” nations of Europe.

The use of the term *cordon sanitaire* in a strictly maritime context originated in the late 1960s with Vice Adm. Isaac C. Kidd, Commander U.S. Sixth Fleet, as he attempted to devise a means of eliminating the Soviet tattletale problem in the Mediterranean. The term has gained acceptance but relatively little has been written on the subject. Maritime *cordon sanitaire* may be described in general terms, as follows: an area relative to U.S. Naval Forces, defined by either geographic boundaries or a circle centered on the formation in which the presence of units of a potential enemy would be considered a hostile act, making such units subject to military action.

One must first recognize that the decision to implement a *cordon sanitaire* would be made only by the President and National Security Council. There are many political and legal implications and risks associated with such action which would preclude any lower authority from declaring a *cordon sanitaire*. Secondly, it is clear that the use of *cordon sanitaire* would be limited to highly tense situations barely short of war, when the threat posed by tattletales would become intolerable. Once hostilities had opened, *cordon sanitaire* would have little, if any, usefulness. Thirdly, a *cordon sanitaire* must be applied to all the potential enemy’s surface, air, and submarine units in order to be effective. Since any ship or aircraft belonging to the foe can gather and transmit information, all Soviet ships and aircraft of whatever description, civil as well as military, would have to be subject to the *cordon sanitaire* restrictions. Fourthly, a U.S. *cordon sanitaire* would be selective. That is, neutral and allied units, both military and civil, could be permitted within the *cordon sanitaire*. Only Soviet and Warsaw Pact units, together with those of any other nation or nations deemed to pose a threat, would be excluded from the area.

Even though the use of *cordon sanitaire* can be contemplated for the protection of any group of ships, such as a convoy or an amphibious task group, the term “battle group” will serve our purpose here. Likewise, the term “Soviet” will be used to cover the units of any country associated with the Soviet Union.

There are no historical examples of the use of a maritime *cordon sanitaire*, but the concept has been used in war games. The results have been mixed. In Admiral Kidd’s experience, war games in which Blue used a *cordon sanitaire* generally ended more favorably for Blue than those in which it was not attempted.² Another veteran of many war games, Capt. S.D. Landersman of the Naval War College’s Strategic Studies Group, says that *cordon sanitaire* had no discernible effect on the outcome of the war games he has observed; if anything the imposition of a *cordon sanitaire* seemed to precipitate rather than delay hostilities.³

However, war game experience concerning *cordon sanitaire* is useful only up to a point since, in the minds of those playing the national command authorities,

the political and legal aspects of managing the "edge of war" crisis inevitably are subordinate to military factors. Since the primary purpose of war games is to test strategy and tactics in war, there is an artificial feeling of the inevitability of (or even impatience for) the commencement of hostilities that in real life would not be present. Further, the reactions to a cordon sanitaire declaration by those playing the parts of major Soviet officials undoubtedly would not precisely match those of their real life counterparts.

Determining the Cordon Sanitaire Size

Many factors affect the size of the area around a battle group that should be included in a cordon sanitaire. Probably the most obvious of these are the ranges

Ranges of Major Soviet Antiship Cruise Missiles

		Range	Platforms
AIR-TO-SURFACE MISSILES			
AS-2	KIPPER	About 100nm	BADGER C/G
AS-3	KANGAROO	200-300 nm	BEAR B/C
AS-4	KITCHEN	150-250 nm	BLINDER B, BACKFIRE
AS-5	KELT	About 100 nm	BADGER
AS-6	KINGFISH	150-250nm	BADGER C/G
SUBMARINE LAUNCHED ANTI-SHIP MISSILES			
SS-N-3c	SHADDOCK	About 250 nm	ECHO I/II, JULIETT, WHISKEY CONVERSION
SS-N-7		About 30 nm	CHARLIE I
SS-N-9	SIREN	About 60 nm	CHARLIE II, PAPA
SS-N-12		About 300 nm	ECHO II
SURFACE-TO-SURFACE MISSILES			
SS-N-1	SCRUBBER	About 100 nm	KILDIN KRUPNYY
SS-N-2	STYX	About 25 nm	OSA I, KOMAR, NANUCHKA II
SS-N-2	STYX (Improved)	About 40 nm	OSA II, MOD KASHIN, MOD KILDIN, MATKA, TARANTUL
SS-N-3b	SEPAL	About 250 nm	KRESTA I, KYNDA
SS-N-9	SIREN	About 60 nm	NANUCHKA, SARANCHA
SS-N-12		About 300 nm	KIEV

Source: Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, *Understanding Soviet Naval Developments* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1981), pp. 131-132.

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of Soviet antiship cruise missiles. Ideally, a cordon sanitaire would be large enough to keep all Soviet units outside their maximum effective missile ranges. From the missile ranges shown in the table, it is apparent that a cordon sanitaire with a radius of about 300 nautical miles against aircraft, surface ships, and submarines would be necessary to provide full protection from the longest range Soviet antiship missiles.

So large an area would be impractical for at least two reasons. First, a battle group's surveillance resources would almost certainly be inadequate to patrol such a huge area against intruders, particularly submarines and surface ships. If the battle group were operating near heavily traveled sea lanes and air routes, the need to investigate large numbers of innocent air and surface units would reduce even further the effective surveillance area. These and other factors, such as weather and hydrographic conditions, which affect the ability of the battle group to detect intruders, must weigh heavily in the planning of the size of a cordon sanitaire. Second, an extremely large cordon sanitaire would be harder for the Soviet Union to accept than a smaller area, and the reactions of Third World nations would likely be more favorable with a smaller cordon sanitaire. The need for political acceptability, then, requires that the cordon sanitaire be no larger than militarily necessary.

Since targeting information from external sources is generally required for cruise missiles more than 30 to 50 miles from the potential targets, a cordon sanitaire could still be effective with air, surface, and subsurface radii considerably less than 300 miles. By keeping targeting platforms (such as surface tattle-tales, Bear D aircraft, or submarines) outside of their effective targeting ranges, a cordon sanitaire could make the longer range Soviet antiship missiles largely ineffective. Thus the main objective of a cordon sanitaire would be to deny the Soviets accurate targeting data with which to launch a coordinated attack on the battle group.

Based on the factors discussed here, the radii of a cordon sanitaire (in the absence of other external constraints) should measure about 100 nm from the center of the U.S. formation against surface and submarine units and about 200 nm against aircraft. These distances provide a margin of safety in which to intercept and turn away intruders before they could obtain accurate targeting information. And, depending on the exact composition of the battle group, these distances form the approximate maximum area that could be patrolled effectively. While some Soviet missile platforms could be within striking range even though outside a cordon sanitaire of this size, without the external targeting information which the cordon sanitaire would deny, they would be ineffective.

Cordon Sanitaire and International Law

Arguments Against Cordon Sanitaire: Freedom of the high seas is the overriding principle of law arguing against the legality of cordon sanitaire. Article II of the 1958 Geneva Convention on the High Seas, to which the United States is a party, states in part:

The high seas being open to all nations, no State may validly purport to subject any part of them to its sovereignty. Freedom of the high seas . . . comprises, inter alia, both for coastal and non-coastal states:

(1) Freedom of navigation [surface and subsurface]. . . .

(4) Freedom to fly over the high seas.

These freedoms, and others which are recognized by the general principles of international law, shall be exercised by all States with reasonable regard to the interest of other States in their exercise of the freedom of the high seas.⁴

The establishment of a cordon sanitaire on the high seas would clearly interfere with the Soviet Union's freedoms of navigation and overflight. As such, a Soviet protest to such actions would be on solid legal grounds, and most of the international community would likely agree with the Soviet position.

A further legal complication regarding cordon sanitaire pertains to its enforcement once it is declared. If the Soviet Union refused to evacuate the declared zone, virtually any measure used by the United States to force compliance would violate the bilateral U.S.-Soviet Agreement for the Prevention of Incidents On and Over the High Seas, signed in 1972. This agreement specifically prohibits such aggressive actions as shouldering, illumination, buzzing by aircraft, training of weapons, etc.⁵ Thus, a U.S. effort to enforce a cordon sanitaire through any of the above methods, or even more drastic action would probably entail a violation of the bilateral agreement.

Arguments For: Customary international law recognizes a nation's rights of self-defense in the face of an imminent threat to its security. Within the constraints of the dual requirements of necessity and proportionality in relation to the severity of the threat, a State may take action to preserve its security. It could be argued that the threat to the security of the United States (that is, the possible loss of a carrier battle group) embodied by the presence of a Soviet tattle-tale or group of combatants would justify the imposition of a cordon sanitaire and the use of force, if necessary, to enforce it. Indeed, a cordon sanitaire would satisfy the test of proportionality much better than an attack without warning to forcibly remove a tattle-tale.

The United States has used the principle of self-defense on several occasions to exert limited jurisdiction over areas of the high seas. Before direct U.S. involvement in World War II, President Roosevelt established "Maritime Control Areas" outside U.S. territorial waters. Since that time several "defensive

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sea areas” have been established, usually during crises, in which the United States has exercised limited jurisdiction over foreign vessels.⁶ Probably the most famous defensive measure taken by the United States in peacetime on the high seas was the quarantine imposed under the auspices of the Organization of American States during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. While the quarantine would have been condemned by a strict interpretation of the Geneva Convention, the clear defensive need for such action justified the O.A.S. action in the eyes of most nations of the world.

Another useful precedent is the fairly routine establishment of warning areas by many navies to conduct naval exercises, missile or gun firings, or potentially dangerous experiments at sea. Notices to Mariners are promulgated which specify the area and duration of the dangerous activity. This peacetime abrogation of the normal freedom of the sea is accepted as the reasonable exercise of high seas freedoms, since such areas usually are severely limited in time and space.⁷ It should be noted, though, that while all ships are warned of the danger area, they are not *prohibited* from entering at their own risk.

Summary of Legal Consideration. There is little doubt that if a cordon sanitaire were declared today, without prior diplomatic and legal groundwork being laid, the vast majority of the world community would condemn the action as a clear violation of the freedom of the seas. However, the principle of self-defense and the precedents established by sea control zones, the Cuban quarantine, and the accepted practice of declaring warning areas, indicate that cordon sanitaire could be viewed as a reasonable and proportionate response to an imminent threat. Negotiations in international forums would be required, however, to ensure the acceptance of such a view in the world community.

Potential Benefits of Cordon Sanitaire

Removal of Tattletales. If the cordon were accepted and observed by the Soviets, they would remove their targeting and antiship missile platforms from the immediate vicinity of the carrier battle group. Although satellites, HF/DF nets, and other elements of the Soviet Ocean Surveillance System could presumably still track the battle group to some extent, the removal of the tattletale would decrease the accuracy of the targeting information available to the Soviets. Also, the removal of the combatants would provide a buffer area in which to intercept incoming missiles. Thus, with a cordon sanitaire in effect, a Soviet preemptive strike would be less accurate and would also allow more reaction time for battle group missile defenses to detect, track, and destroy the incoming missiles. Both factors would increase the survivability of the aircraft carriers.

Stabilization Through Separation of Forces. The high speed, accuracy, and lethality of modern naval surface-to-surface missiles greatly complicates the interaction between opposing surface combatants in close proximity during periods of crisis. As tensions escalate, it becomes increasingly likely that minor provocations or strictly defensive actions will be interpreted by the opposing tactical commander as an indication of an imminent attack, thereby triggering a defensive preemptive strike on his part. The initiation of hostilities, then, would not be controlled by the national command authorities of either side, but would result from the paranoia engendered by two opposing weapon systems operating within close range of each other in a volatile, edge-of-war situation. A cordon sanitaire, by separating opposing forces at sea, would help stabilize tensions by reducing the chance of hostilities commencing inadvertently through misinterpretation of actions by an opposing ship.

Drawbacks and Dangers of Cordon Sanitaire

It Invites Preemption. Argument Against Cordon Sanitaire: The declaration of a cordon sanitaire may be viewed as an ultimatum by the Soviet Union, analogous to the U.S. quarantine during the Cuban Missile Crisis. It is generally acknowledged that the Soviet capitulation to the demands of the United States at that time contributed to the downfall of Premier Khrushchev and accelerated the tremendous growth of the Soviet Navy. Undoubtedly the Soviet leadership would find anything resembling an ultimatum to vacate a cordon sanitaire around a carrier battle group most distasteful, and would agree to observe such a zone only if it was in their own best interest or if no reasonable alternative was available. The potential loss of face could be devastating for the Soviet oligarchy, both internationally and domestically. Backed into a corner by a cordon sanitaire ultimatum, Soviet leaders would unquestionably consider very seriously launching a preemptive attack on the battle group sometime before the cordon sanitaire became effective, while accurate targeting information remained available and missile platforms were within range.

Counter Argument: Even if the danger is very great that the declaration of a cordon sanitaire might provoke the preemptive attack it was designed to prevent, at some point, as tensions rise to the brink of war, cordon sanitaire could still be militarily attractive. If intelligence revealed a massing of Soviet naval units which could be the prelude to a coordinated strike, the declaration of a cordon sanitaire to take effect before the majority of the strike platforms were within missile range of the battle groups could force the Soviets to launch a less-than-optimum strike or else abide by the cordon sanitaire. Though a peak defensive posture could not reasonably be maintained for the days or weeks that a period of high tensions could last, the battle group could maintain peak defensive readiness during the 24 hours or so between declaration and the time the cordon sanitaire went into

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effect, thereby minimizing its vulnerability to a preemptive attack during the period of highest threat.

It seems obvious that the less prepared the Soviets are to launch a preemptive strike against the battle group, the less likely it is that they would do so in response to a U.S. declaration of a cordon sanitaire. As Admiral Kidd pointed out in a conversation with this author, if insufficient numbers of surface and submarine antiship missile platforms were in position to participate in the strike, or if too few Backfire or Badger aircraft could be brought to bear (due to availability or range limitations), the Soviet Union would be reluctant to preempt through a hastily coordinated strike with what their historically cautious civil leadership would consider insufficient forces. Also, although there is not necessarily a direct connection between a war ashore and one at sea, Soviet leaders would probably be reluctant to commence hostilities by preempting naval targets until they were fully ready to launch their land campaign. Thus, through proper timing based on accurate intelligence of Soviet land, sea, and air activity, a U.S. cordon sanitaire declaration could catch the Soviets not optimally prepared to attack, and thereby increase the likelihood of their acceptance of the cordon sanitaire.

Another means of reducing the likelihood of Soviet preemption after the declaration of a cordon sanitaire is to make the conditions of the cordon sanitaire appeal to the Soviets' own interests as much as possible. In the declaration message to the Soviets, stress should be laid on the advantages to both sides to be gained from the stabilizing effects of the separation of forces entailed in the cordon sanitaire. If the geography involved in the specific situation permits and the immediate mission of the battle group can still be accomplished, the cordon sanitaire could take the form of a "demilitarized zone" between the opposing forces, thereby making the declaration appear less one-sided and arbitrary. To have a reasonable hope of Soviet acceptance, the United States should indicate its willingness to abide by a similar restriction around Soviet battle groups. The implications of this will be discussed separately below. While the tone of the message declaring the cordon sanitaire must not be belligerent or threatening, the message must still convey the intent of the United States to protect the battle group against the unacceptable situation with force, if necessary. An overly conciliatory declaration would invite the Soviets to ignore the cordon sanitaire. An overly threatening tone could increase the likelihood of preemption by the Soviets.

In summary, the declaration of cordon sanitaire is a provocative action and should be done with great care. Proper timing of the declaration based on intelligence data to maximize the U.S. tactical advantage, and careful wording of the declaration could combine to significantly reduce the danger.

Enforcement Dilemma. Argument Against Cordon Sanitaire: It is almost certain that the Soviets would protest a U.S. declaration of cordon sanitaire as a violation

of the Geneva Convention and accepted international law. If they were not yet ready to attack the battle group, or for whatever reason did not desire to do so, the Soviets might rely on their strong legal position and remain within the cordon sanitaire in defiance of the U.S. declaration. Such a course of action would place the United States in a difficult situation. If the United States backed away from its declaration, the nation would obviously lose credibility and expose itself to greater Soviet pressure. Enforcing the cordon sanitaire by firing on offending units would damage world opinion of the United States and would likely produce Soviet retaliation—perhaps a massive strike. Clearly, both of these outcomes are undesirable.

Counter Arguments: The first option, backing away from the cordon sanitaire if the Soviets do not abide by it, should be discarded. The negative aspects of such a course of action, especially in a high tension crisis, would be devastating to U.S. interests. For this reason, the United States should never declare a cordon sanitaire without being fully resolved and capable of enforcing it. However, the consequences of sinking a Soviet ship within a designated cordon sanitaire, even after full warning, could also be very dangerous. An escalation ladder for enforcing the cordon sanitaire should be developed and used to ensure that excessive force is not used, thereby limiting the danger of Soviet retaliation. Below are examples of possible escalation ladders to compel Soviet surface, air and submarine units to vacate a cordon sanitaire.

— Against surface units:

1. Use radio messages and light signals to warn the Soviet unit to leave the area.
2. Attempt to overpower radio transmissions from the Soviet unit through jamming.
3. Use shouldering to prevent the Soviet unit from following the battle group.
4. Energize fire control radars.
5. Buzz the Soviet unit with aircraft.
6. Fire warning shots near the unit.
7. Attempt to disable the Soviet unit's rudder or propeller with lines or explosives.
8. Attempt to disable communications and/or radar antennas with helicopters and grappling hooks or other available means.
9. Seize the unit forcibly.
10. Hit the Soviet unit with a single round of the least damaging weapon available.
11. Continue to fire single weapons at the unit at short intervals until it is disabled or departs the area.

— Against air units:

1. Intercept the intruder with fighter aircraft.
2. Warn the Soviet aircraft via radio and/or hand signals to leave the area.
3. Fire warning burst of gunfire.
4. Shoot the Soviet aircraft down, if necessary, to prevent it from obtaining effective targeting data on the battle group.

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— Against submarines:

1. Track the unfriendly submarine with active sonar.
2. Use “Uncle Joe” procedures with underwater devices to signal the submarine to surface.
3. Attack with torpedoes.

These examples only suggest some possible actions which could be included in an enforcement ladder. The point is, specific enforcement instructions from the national command authorities should be promulgated to the battle group commander when the cordon sanitaire is declared. Escalation along the ladder, however, should be closely controlled by the NCA in view of the extreme sensitivity of the operation. The object, of course, is to use the minimum amount of force necessary to compel the Soviets to vacate the cordoned area, in order to minimize the risk of escalatory retaliation.

Promulgation of PIM. Argument Against Cordon Sanitaire: Establishing a cordon sanitaire around a moving battle group would require providing the group’s PIM to the Soviets. This would, of course, provide them with valuable targeting data by itself, depending on the size of the declared cordon sanitaire. While the exact position of the carrier within the cordon sanitaire could not be precisely pinpointed (as would be the case with a tattletale), the general movements of the battle group would be known days, at least hours, in advance. This intelligence would allow the Soviets many possibilities to plan a preemptive strike. Based on the PIM information Soviet Ocean Surveillance System (SOSS) satellite sensors could be positioned to maintain general locating data on the battle group. Also, submarines could be positioned ahead of the cordon sanitaire and quietly let the battle group steam past, by their slow speed greatly increasing their chances of remaining undetected. Targeting data on the carrier could be broadcast by the subs when obtained, and a coordinated strike could then be launched.

Counter Arguments: While the intelligence value of PIM information provided to the Soviets is significant, it certainly could not compare with the continuous stream of extremely accurate position information that would be provided by a tattletale unit in the absence of a cordon sanitaire. In the example discussed above, Soviet submarines would have to penetrate the battle group ASW screen to be able to provide accurate targeting data on the carrier. The submarines would also have to break radio silence to transmit the targeting information, making them very vulnerable to detection and prosecution as intruders.

The PIM information could also be used as a deception device by the United States. The battle group could operate in a relatively small portion of the cordon sanitaire area furthest from the major threat axis. Or, the battle group could

operate partially or completely outside the cordon area if needed or desired. With cooperative cloud cover, deceptive formations, and EMCON, the battle group could possibly elude SOSS sensors for several days. It seems obvious, then, that while providing the Soviets with battle group PIM information is a significant drawback of cordon sanitaire, it would still be much better than tolerating a tattletale within the battle group formations. False PIM information, coupled with other deceptive tactics, could be very helpful to the United States in certain situations.

Reciprocity. *Argument Against Cordon Sanitaire:* As discussed in a preceding section, to soften the impact of the cordon sanitaire declaration the United States would have to be willing to abide by similar restrictions around Soviet task groups, or restrict in some other manner the movements of its naval units. The less unilateral and arbitrary the cordon sanitaire declaration is, the greater are its chances of success. The loss of intelligence to the United States caused by abiding by a Soviet cordon sanitaire could be important. Also, the Soviets could conceivably declare a large cordon sanitaire around many small surface groups in an effort to limit U.S. access to key areas of the high seas. For example, multiple Soviet cordons sanitaire in the North Atlantic approaches to Europe could delay the arrival of critical military supplies and reinforcements there. Depending on the specific scenario, there are many relatively restricted bodies of water where both navies would legitimately want to operate—for instance, the Eastern Mediterranean or Northern Arabian Sea. The existence of cordon sanitaire on both sides in such restricted, yet important areas would probably require some type of partitioning or demilitarized zone. Such an arrangement would be difficult to negotiate during times of crisis, and even under the best of situations would restrict to some degree U.S. movements within a strategic area.

Another related danger is the possible proliferation of the use of cordon sanitaire beyond NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Its widespread use by small Third World nations, following a precedent set by the superpowers, could severely hamper free navigation, particularly along littorals.

Counter Arguments: The loss of intelligence to the United States caused by abiding by a Soviet cordon sanitaire, while significant, would probably not be critical. U.S. satellite and standoff aircraft sensors are generally acknowledged to be superior to those of the Soviet Union. Also, since the U.S. objective is not a preemptive strike, it could presumably absorb this degradation of intelligence capability much more readily than the Soviets.

Careful planning should be done in devising the initial cordon sanitaire area to ensure that Soviet naval or air units would not be totally blocked by the cordoned zone from access to their legitimate areas of concern. Such a precedent in the initial U.S. declaration, together with careful enunciation of the limits to which the United States would abide by Soviet cordons, would reduce the

likelihood of Soviet distortion of the concept that could severely disrupt critical allied shipping or naval operations.

The problems of negotiating the partition of strategic bodies of water with the Soviets during periods of extreme tension, and the risk of troublesome proliferation of the use of cordon sanitaire by Third World nations could both be ameliorated through negotiations during peacetime. Bilateral talks with the Soviet Union concerning the full range of issues surrounding the concept of cordon sanitaire and the unique danger posed by tattletale targeting units could lead to a formal agreement or understanding which would spell out limits and procedures governing the use of cordon sanitaire and the partitioning of restricted areas of dual interest. Ideally, such an agreement would prohibit the shadowing of combatant units even in peacetime, making specific cordon sanitaire declarations unnecessary.

It is perhaps too optimistic to expect the Soviet Union to agree formally to (or even seriously to discuss) the concept of cordon sanitaire, since the loss of their tattletales would greatly reduce their preemptive strike capability. However, even if no agreement were reached, the Soviets would be aware of the U.S. intention to use cordon sanitaire, and this awareness would be a stabilizing influence, reducing the chance of misunderstanding when a U.S. cordon sanitaire is, in fact, declared.

The United States should also push for legal recognition of cordon sanitaire as a necessary defensive measure in international forums, such as Law of the Sea Conferences and the United Nations. By stressing the intolerable threat posed by even an unarmed tattletale in this age of long-range, high-speed, extremely destructive missiles, together with the already acknowledged right of a nation to defend itself against an imminent threat, the United States could make a convincing case for the formal legalization or recognition of this concept. Such formalization would undoubtedly place specific conditions and restrictions on the legal use of cordon sanitaire, thereby reducing the potential for abuse by the Soviet Union and Third World nations.

Surveillance Requirements. Argument against Cordon Sanitaire: Very strict surveillance in all three media—surface, subsurface, and air—would be necessary to prevent Soviet intrusion into the cordoned area even after it was established. Surveillance requirements in areas of extremely dense air and surface traffic could quickly overwhelm the assets available. Sufficient numbers of E-2C (for air and surface surveillance), F-14 (for intercepting unidentified air contacts), and S-3 (for ASW search) aircraft to enforce the cordon sanitaire in such areas would probably be beyond the capability of a single carrier. The battle group would be particularly vulnerable to intrusion at night by surface units using deceptive lighting and other devices.

Counter Arguments: While surveillance requirements of a cordon sanitaire would be very high, it is not obvious that they would be reduced in the absence of the cordon sanitaire, given the common context of high tensions. With a tattletale in company, battle group surveillance efforts would be, if anything, intensified in order to locate all missile platforms within range of the battle group, which could be up to 300 miles. Surveillance requirements, since they would actually be greater without a cordon sanitaire, argue in favor of declaring a cordon sanitaire.

World Opinion. Argument Against Cordon Sanitaire: Established international law, as previously noted, argues predominantly against the legality of a cordon sanitaire. A U.S. declaration of a cordon sanitaire under the present system of international law would probably be viewed negatively by most Third World nations. It would also provide the Soviet Union valuable propaganda material with which to sway world opinion in its favor during the crisis. Any NATO nations with conflicting interests in the East-West crisis which might be persuaded to withhold their forces or support facilities in the event of hostilities would be particularly valuable targets of such a propaganda campaign. Exploiting any lack of political cohesiveness in the NATO Alliance would be a high priority for the Soviets, particularly during a rising crisis, and a U.S. cordon sanitaire widely viewed as illegal could provide the USSR with a very useful wedge with which to split or weaken NATO solidarity.

Counter Arguments: This is probably the most convincing argument against the feasibility of the concept of cordon sanitaire. At present, the political and diplomatic risks involved in declaring a cordon sanitaire would very likely dissuade the national command authorities from implementing the concept. Even if all military factors clearly favored establishing a cordon sanitaire in a given crisis situation, the overriding political concern for maintaining the strongest possible relations with allies and key Third World nations would probably preclude its use.

Several steps could and should be taken now to win international acceptance of the concept of cordon sanitaire as a legal defensive measure, in order to make its use more viable in a crisis situation. First, the United States should present to our NATO allies and other key friendly nations (at both the military and diplomatic level) the advantages and legal arguments in favor of the cordon sanitaire concept. The purpose would be to build support for the concept, or, at the very least, assuage as much as possible any negative responses of friendly nations. After achieving a semblance of allied unity, the United States, bolstered by other nations favoring the concept, should press for formal legalization of cordon sanitaire in truly international forums such as the United Nations and Law of the Sea Conferences. Such a process would doubtless be long and, perhaps, ultimately unsuccessful (at least in terms of formal recognition of cordon

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sanitaire as a legal defensive measure). Even so, U.S. arguments indicating our desire and intention to use a form of cordon sanitaire when necessary would serve to condition the international community to expect such a move. This would remove much of the shock and outrage from the reactions of the world community and make the implementation of a cordon sanitaire by the United States much less destabilizing politically, both within NATO and throughout the Third World.

What to Do

There are some actions which can both reduce the military and political risks associated with cordon sanitaire and enhance its attractiveness to the national command authorities as a means of protecting our naval striking power from preemptive attacks. These actions are not risky, not expensive, and should be begun without delay.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff should:

- Enhance U.S. intelligence capabilities to assess and to report rapidly on Soviet readiness and possible strike indications.
- Develop clear and logical rules of engagement for the enforcement of a cordon sanitaire to ensure compliance by Soviet units while using the absolute minimum force necessary in the process.
- Impress upon the national civilian leaders the seriousness of the threat posed by Soviet tattletales during crisis situations, and press for the diplomatic action listed below.

The national civilian leaders should:

- Fully recognize the unacceptable risk embodied in a Soviet tattletale and the potential benefits of a cordon sanitaire.
- Begin talks with allies and other friendly nations to gain support for the concept of cordon sanitaire as a legal defensive measure in times of extreme crisis.
- Bring the issue of formal recognition and legalization of cordon sanitaire before future Law of the Sea Conferences and the United Nations.
- Negotiate bilaterally with the USSR (or within a NATO/Warsaw Pact framework) for an agreement concerning tattletales and cordon sanitaire.

If these recommendations are implemented, cordon sanitaire could be transformed from an esoteric idea into a truly viable and extremely valuable measure to reduce significantly the vulnerability of U.S. aircraft carriers to preemptive attacks. Even if ultimately they proved unsuccessful, the diplomatic initiatives suggested above would still serve to make cordon sanitaire more politically attractive. If, during formal negotiations, the United States publicly states its intention to use cordon sanitaire and specifies clearly and logically why it is necessary, the Soviet Union and Third World nations would not be surprised by

its use during some future crisis, and their reactions, even if unfavorable, would be more reasoned and restrained.

Cordon sanitaire has tremendous potential as a means to reduce the vulnerability of U.S. aircraft carriers. The problems currently limiting its practical application are solvable, but many of the solutions require a peaceful diplomatic environment and considerable time to implement. It is therefore important to begin the diplomatic actions recommended above as soon as possible. The fate of many of our aircraft carriers may well depend on it.

Lieutenant Commander Gilchrist was assigned as a naval aviator with Patrol Squadron 30 at the time this article was first published.

Notes

1. Lehman, *Aircraft Carriers: The Real Choices*, 6, No. 52 *The Washington Papers* 39 (1978).
2. Telephone Interview with Admiral Isaac Kidd, USN (Ret.), Washington, D.C. (January 23, 1982).
3. Interview with Captain Stuart D. Landersman, USN, Naval War College Strategic Studies Group, Newport, R.I. (January 12, 1982).
4. U.S. Treaties, etc., "Law of the Sea: Convention on the High Seas," *United States Treaties and Other International Agreements*, TIAS 5200 (Washington: U.S. Dept. of State, 1962), v. 13, pt. 2, at 2314.
5. U.S. Treaties, etc., "Prevention of Incidents On and Over the High Seas," *United States Treaties and Other International Agreements*, TIAS 7379 (Washington: U.S. Dept. of State, 1972), v. 23, pt. 1, at 1168-1173.
6. Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, *Law of Naval Warfare* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1974), pp. 4-12a, 4-13.
7. Interview with Colonel Joseph D. Ruane, USMC, Naval War College Strategic Studies Group, Newport, R.I. (January 12, 1982).