

Il Mediterraneo e la sfida che arriva da Est

Questioni di sicurezza e cooperazione
nel mondo bipolare

a cura di

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The United Kingdom and the proposals of Nuclear Free Zones in the Mediterranean between the 1960s and 1970s

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1. Introduction

This article aims to analyze the position of the United Kingdom and the reaction of some of the countries of the Mediterranean with respect to several proposals that were made during the course of the 1960s and 1970s for the establishment of Nuclear Free Zones in the Mediterranean. The first proposal of this kind came from Poland whose probable goal was that of creating distress in the Atlantic Alliance and dividing the NATO members. Afterwards, similar proposals were submitted from time to time either directly to the Western countries but also into the international assemblies such as the United Nations, and some of them were successfully approved, such as the Treaty of Tlatelolco¹. The proposal for such a zone in the Mediterranean was rather different from the proposal for other zones of the world for the strategic implications that made them difficult, if not impossible to approve. There were a lot of objections that were raised within the British Government and the Foreign Service with respect to the proposals and there was the feeling that some of them were a mere exercise of propaganda and nothing more. Some of the objections related to the fear that their establishment would have altered the balance of power in the Mediterranean or it should have been agreed by all the interested states. There was also the fear that such a zones could be contrary to the strategic interests of the United Kingdom and allies. Despite those several doubts about the feasibility of the Nuclear Free Zones and their different variations, in the Mediterranean and elsewhere, the British officials had a lot of discussion and different point of view and there were, of course, several contacts with allied governments, notably the United States.

1. <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Treaties/latelolco.html>. The Treaty of Tlatelolco was followed in later years by those of Roratonga in 1985 and Peñindaba in 1996.

And it is also important to note that the United Kingdom had a strong nuclear power program for civilian use.²

The study has been carried out on the British diplomatic papers through a wide research at the National Archives of London³, and it was then completed using papers collected at the Nixon and Reagan Presidential Libraries and Archives in the United States⁴, as well as official published collections⁵. The Nixon and Reagan papers were used for a cross check and were sided by articles and books on the topic or related issues and by memoirs of statesmen and official that took part in the decisional process that lead the United Kingdom to take a position on the Nuclear Free Zone topic. A full range of books and articles⁶ were used to complete the research thanks to studies previously carried out on the topic, studies that helped in understanding the international situation and many military aspects related to the non-proliferation issue. Finally, in order to look at the spirit of the period it has been looked at memoirs of the politicians that were in charge during those years.⁷

2. T. Hall, *Nuclear Politics. The History of Nuclear Power in Britain*, Penguin Book, Harmondsworth, 1986.

3. *National Archives*, Kew Gardens, London (TNA), Collections: *Colonial Office (CO), Dominion Office (DO), Foreign and Commonwealth Office*.

4. *The Richard M. Nixon Library and Archives*, Yorba Linda, Los Angeles (NL), Collections: *National Security Central Files; The Ronald Reagan Library and Archives*, Simi Valley, Los Angeles (RRLA), Collections: *White House Subject Office Files (WHSO), Shoemaker Christopher Files*.

5. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*, United States Government Printing Office, Washington DC, 1961-1963, vol. V, *Soviet Union* (1998); vol. VII, *Arms Control and Disarmament* (1993); *Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Documents Diplomatiques Français (DDF)*, 1967, tome II, Peter Lang, Bruxelles, 2008; *Further Documents Relating to the Conference of the 18-Nation Committee on Disarmament (Session March 14, 1962 to June 15, 1962)*, HMSO, London, 1962.

6. A.J. Pierre, *Nuclear Politics. The British Experience with an Independent Strategic Force 1939-1970*, Oxford University Press, London, 1972; J.D. Boutwell-P. Doty-G. Trevor (Edited by), *The Nuclear Confrontation in Europe*, Croom Helm, London-Sydney, 1985; I. Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Politics of Nuclear Weapons in Europe, 1969-1987*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1990; H. Sokolski, *Fighting Proliferation. New Concerns for the West*, Air University Press, Maxwell Air Force Base, 1996; S. Twigg-L. Scott, *Planning Armageddon. Britain, the United States and the Command of Western Nuclear Forces, 1945-1964*, Harwood Academic Publishers, Amsterdam, 2000; M. Gala, *Il paradossso nucleare. Il Limited Test Ban Treaty come primo passo verso la disensione*, Edizioni Polistampa, Firenze, 2002; L. Koukouvellas, *Denuclearization on NATO Southern Front. Allied Reactions to Soviet Proposals, 1957-1963*, in *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol. 14 (Fall 2002), number 4; L. Nui, *La sfida nucleare. La politica estera italiana e le armi atomiche, 1945-1991*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2007; I.E.C. Hymans, *Achieving Nuclear Ambitions. Scientists, Politicians and Proliferation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012; T. Graham, *Disarmament Sketches. Three Decades of Arms Control and International Law*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2012.

7. J.B. Tito, *La politica di un'attiva coesistenza pacifista e la coscienza dell'umanità avanzata della pace*, Tipografia Rossi, Roma, 1955; A. Gromyko, *Memorie*, Rizzoli, Milano,

2. The early requests for a Nuclear Free Zone: the Soviet Note

On May 20th 1963 the Earl of Home, then British Foreign Secretary, received a call from the Soviet ambassador to the Court of St. James which left a note of his Government about NATO's nuclear submarines in the Mediterranean. The Soviet Government, having learned that there were US submarines equipped with nuclear rockets, considered this move as a threat to the peace in the Mediterranean region and consequently in the entire world, as it later emerged during the negotiations for the new draft of a Non-Proliferation Treaty⁸. The Soviet ambassador stated that his Government wanted to propose the Mediterranean to be declared a zone free from nuclear rocket weapons. The Soviets insisted they had consistently supported all the measures against dissemination of nuclear weapons and they had given support to the establishment of atom-free zones and the reduction of forces in areas where there was a danger of a military conflict, a statement seen by the British Government as a clear piece of propaganda and nothing more. In order to give a more substantial offer the ambassador said that his Government would have accepted the idea not to maintain nuclear weapons in the Mediterranean and proposed that they should have joined with the other countries in giving the guarantee that the Mediterranean would be outside the sphere of a nuclear attack in the event of a conflict, particularly the Southern flank⁹. At first the Foreign Secretary replied that his Government would have been keen to study the Soviet proposal with great care, but he said also that he would have not seen an immediate problem as the United States have maintained nuclear weapons in the Mediterranean in the last five years and there were no news on this issue. On the other hand it is important to say that the British Government was much more in favour of a comprehensive disarmament to be enhanced by the system of the observers, that the Soviet Government was not eager to accept, rather than an establishment of nuclear free zones¹⁰. This was not the first time that the USSR was proposing such a zone, and in the previous years Moscow proposed or supported the creation of at least a dozen of NFZs in various part of the world. The first proposal ever for a Nuclear-Free Zone was introduced by the Polish Foreign Minister Adam Rapacki, in 1957¹¹ and, since then, all the subsequent proposal had always been received with cautiousness by the British Government over the

1989; A. Gromyko, *Ambasciatore nel Mondo*, Napoleone, Roma, 1982; H. Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1999; H. Wilson, *La mia politica*, La Nuova Italia Editrice, Firenze, 1964.

8. L. Nui, *La sfida nucleare. La politica estera italiana e le armi atomiche, 1945-1991*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2007, pp. 302-311.

9. L. Koukouvellas, *op. cit.*, pp. 200-201.

10. Home to Trevelyan, letter of 20 May 1963, TNA, DO 182/61.

11. About the Rapacki Plan see: L. Koukouvellas, *op. cit.*, pp. 202-206.

years¹² and eventually rejected as the Rapacki Plan, even if with different positions within the British Politics.¹³ The main purpose of these proposals was to try to disrupt NATO's defence by limiting the freedom of the alliance to make the strategic dispositions which were considered necessary, and in particular by securing the withdrawal of American bases and weapons systems. In some case, as it is easy understandable, countries like Poland would have been strong advantages from the limitation of Soviet strength in Eastern Europe.

Since that time the concept of NFZs has taken different motivations. Some governments believed that the creation of such zones would have offered a degree of military protection; others would have wished only to respond to public pressure for action to eliminate nuclear weapons.¹⁴ Thus, the more substantial plans of denuclearization were those introduced by the Poles between 1957 and 1964, the Rapacki Plan, the Gomulka Plan, and the Lachs Plan whose main aim was that of preventing the access of nuclear weapons by West Germany ignoring the fact that such weapons and forces deployed in Central Europe were symptoms and a result of the political situation.¹⁵ There was also another plan proposed by the Romanian Prime Minister Chivu Stoica in 1957 that raised the issue of the denuclearization of the Balkans, a proposal that did not achieved the same attention as the other proposals.¹⁶ The question of a total disarmament and of the complete dismissal of the nuclear weapons was also requested during a session of the United Nation by the Wladyslaw Gomulka in 1960.¹⁷

The Soviet note followed the discussions opened with the European Countries earlier in the decade to set up a multilateral nuclear force and according to some opinion the proposal for a Nuclear Free Zone in the Mediterranean was intended as a countermeasure against the Multilateral Nuclear Force and the deployment of Thor and Jupiter missiles in Europe.¹⁸ and it was probably more acceptable if they have been kept under US exclusive control.¹⁹ All this in spite of the fact that the discussion about such

a force were to be long and unsuccessful²⁰, it seemed also, according to some scholars that the existence of the Multilateral Force Project could make any agreement on disarmament impossible to be reached²¹, but the Department of State wanted to convey the opposite idea. In fact the mission was that of let the allies perceive the Multilateral Force as perfectly suitable with the goal of non-dissemination. The fact of not maintaining the position would have been caused great anxiety among the allies, wrecking NATO.²² In fact, when the note was delivered, it was highlighted, in the Western embassies, that the MLF project would have led, according to Moscow, to the armament of West Germany with nuclear forces.²³ This move would have unleashed a nuclear missile armament race without political or even geographical bound. The Soviets, implicitly, were accusing the United States to widespread nuclear forces in many ports in Southern Europe along the Mediterranean shores, like Spain, Cyprus, Malta, Italy, Turkey and Greece.²⁴ In doing so, according to the Soviets, the United States and their allies were putting in danger a population of nearly 300 million people by transforming the Mediterranean Sea in a sort of storehouse containing dozens of rockets with megaton of nuclear loads. Apparently there was an immediate danger for all the countries of the basin because no one could give assurances that the nuclear rockets would not be launched from the international waters, not to mention from the vessels or submarines based in national ports, a probability that could not be excluded at all. The Soviet note tried to justify the legitimacy of Eastern Bloc countries, threatened by the presence of western nuclear weapons, to respond in case of attack. This presence would have caused a direct threat towards countries that were only hosting foreign nuclear weapons. The Soviets tried to threat the NATO countries as violators of the peace and of the tranquility of a sea normally devoted to tourism and leisure. The Soviets stated also that the weapons that the United States deployed in the Mediterranean were not only defensive means but also offensive, as they could have been used both ways. The real problem, that the Soviet note clearly underlined, was

12. Note from the press, 22 May 1963, TNA, CO 968/863.
13. H. Wilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 239-42.
14. Background Brief, 15 October 1964, TNA, CO 968/863.
15. Gore-Booth to Brown, letter of 25 August 1966, TNA, FO 371/187482.
16. L. Kourkouvelas, *op. cit.*, p. 205.
17. H. Ripka, *Eastern Europe in the Post War World*, Methuen & Co. London, 1961, pp. 138-152; W. Gomulka-A. Rapacki, *La Polonia all'ONU*, Editori Riuniti, Roma, 1961, pp. 11-20.
18. L. Kourkouvelas, *op. cit.*, p. 214; E. Di Nolfo, *La politica estera italiana tra interdipendenza e integrazione*, in *L'Italia repubblicana nella crisi degli anni settanta*, 4 voll., Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2003, vol. I, A. Giovaognoli-S. Pons (a cura di), *Tra guerra fredda e distensione*, p. 28.
19. H. Sokolski, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.

20. L. Nuti, *op. cit.*, pp. 248-281.
21. H. Sokolski, *op. cit.*, p. 14; on the Multilateral Nuclear Force see: P. Buteux, *The Politics of Nuclear Consultation in NATO 1965-1980*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983, pp. 18-29.
22. *Summary Record of the 515th Meeting of the National Security Council*, 9 July 1963, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. VII, pp. 780-81.
23. J. D. Boutwell-P. Dory-G. Trevorton (Edited by), *op. cit.*, pp. 34-35.
24. For the NATO presence in Southern Europe, particularly in Spain and Portugal, see: F. Rodrigo, *Southern European Countries and European Defense*, in *Macarism: The United States, Southern Europe, and the Challenges of the Mediterranean*, The World Peace Foundation, Cambridge, 1995, pp. 151-157; in order to understand the perception about the Mediterranean in the Italian politics see: E. Calandri, *Il Mediterraneo nella politica estera italiana*, in *L'Italia repubblicana nella crisi degli anni settanta*, 4 voll., Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2003, vol. I, A. Giovaognoli-S. Pons (a cura di), *Tra guerra fredda e distensione*, pp. 351-374.

that the main purpose of the United States Fleet was that of strategically controlling the Mediterranean, as many actions done in the previous years had demonstrated²⁵. For this reason it seems clear that the USSR was trying to make a move, like in a chess play, in order to understand the reaction of the USA, and in particular of their allies. It was clear for the Allies, since the foundation of the Atlantic Pact, that the Soviet Union first aim in case of war was that of trying to seize the Mediterranean and to gain control of the Middle East²⁶.

The Soviet note, after this long introduction, tried to make the point, as anticipated by the Ambassador Aleksander Soldatov to the Earl of Home. As the diplomat recalled, the United Nations General Assembly had adopted a resolution in order to consider Africa a denuclearized zone with the purpose of sparing the African countries the risks connected with a further spread of nuclear weapons²⁷, a resolution that was voted with another one that stated that the use of nuclear weapons was against the spirit of the United Nations²⁸. A resolution that, according to Soldatov, though passed with the votes of all NATO countries, was made void by the transformation of the Mediterranean in a nuclear sea by the United States. Following this precedent the Soviet Union decided to ask to the Western countries to declare the whole Mediterranean as a Nuclear Free Zone²⁹. The note, anticipated to the United Kingdom, was later sent to the United States and to other fourteen Mediterranean littoral states and registered by Her Majesty's ambassador to USSR as an exercise of propaganda and nothing more. The Foreign Office was even more accurate in replying to their missions abroad. According to their dispatch it was usual for the Soviet Union to use such a diversion in order to put pressure on the Western allies ahead of a NATO meeting. This time was the turn of a proposal for a NFZ in the Mediterranean. The note itself, noted at the Foreign Office, was written with an extravagant language and for the most part was an attack to the American decision to deploy three Polaris submarines in the Mediterranean³⁰. The "verbal" threats from Moscow started well before the issue of the 1963 Note, as from 1957 the Soviet Government tried to divide

the Western European countries, recalling old intra-European animosities, as well as European governments and the United States³¹. The note for the British diplomats was "a clumsy and blatant piece of propaganda". Thus, the Foreign Office decided not to reply too soon to the note, but if anyone among the Allies or within the Government was forced to do there were some guidelines to follow. The main points were that the US Polaris submarines in the Mediterranean were a replacements for the obsolete Jupiter in Turkey and Italy³². The submarines were part of the US contribution to the proposed NATO Inter-Allied nuclear force. Since the USSR had no known nuclear equipped vessels in the Mediterranean the note was no more than a thinly veiled demand for unilateral Western withdrawal. HMG were in favour of NFZ which have the support of the states directly concerned and which were not in areas of immediate confrontation; and last but not least the Mediterranean was an area of primary relevance³³. The United States made clear that they were in favour of the NFZs only in Latin America and Africa, where nuclear weapons do not form an integral part of the security arrangements upon which the countries in the areas rely³⁴.

The Soviet note, as it was obvious, placed some of the Governments of the Southern shore of the Mediterranean in an understandable embarrassment. The Moroccan Government, for instance, declared to the UK representative in Rabat that they did not know at first hand how to reply, in view of the knowledge of the situation on the one hand and due to the attachment to the idea of Nuclear Free Zone in Africa to the other³⁵, but they later decided not to reply at all, in the willingness not to get involved in propaganda between the blocs³⁶. Other Governments, which received the note, decided in the

25. Foreign Office to UK Delegation to Disarmament Conference, telegram of 22 May 1963, n. 84, TNA, DO 182/61.

26. G. C. Pedlow (Edited by), *NATO Strategic Documents 1949-1969, Introduction*, NATO Archives, 1997, pp. xiii-xiv, <http://www.nato.int/arc/hives/strategy.htm>.

27. UNGA, Resolution 1652 (XVII) 24 November 1961, *Consideration of Africa as a denuclearized zone*, <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR016705/IMG/NR016705.pdf?OpenElement>.

28. UNGA, Resolution 1653 (XVII) 24 November 1961, *Declaration on the prohibition of use of nuclear and thermonuclear weapons*, in <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR016706/IMG/NR016706.pdf?OpenElement>.

29. Foreign Office to UK Delegation to Disarmament Conference, telegram of 22 May 1963, n. 84, TNA, DO 182/61.

30. Trevelyan to Home, telegram of 22 May 1963, n. 1011, TNA, DO 182/61.

31. J.D. Boutwell-P. Doy-G. Trevelyan (Edited by), *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.

32. For the Jupiter deployment in Italy see: L. Nuti, *op. cit.*, pp. 171-199. M. De Leonardis, *Italy's Atlanticism: Between Foreign and Internal Politics*, in UNISCI Discussion Papers, January 2011, n° 25, pp. 30-31; L. Nuti, *Dall'operazione Deep Rock all'operazione Poi Piccola storia documentaria dei missili SM 78 Jupiter in Italia*, in «Storia delle Relazioni Internazionali», a. 11 (1996), n. 1, pp. 95-140; L. Nuti, *Le linee generali della politica di difesa italiana (1945-1989)*, in L. Goglia-R. Moro-L. Nuti (Edited by), *Guerra e pace nell'Italia del Movimento. Politica estera, cultura, politica e correnti dell'opinione pubblica*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2006, pp. 477-481; L. Nuti, *Italy's Nuclear Choices*, UNISCI Discussion Papers, January 2011, n° 25, pp. 172-175; For the decision of withdrawing the Jupiter missiles see: L. Nuti, *Gli Stati Uniti e l'apertura a sinistra, 1953-1963. Importanza e limiti della presenza americana in Italia*, Laterza Bari Roma, 1999, pp. 553-567; J. D. Boutwell-P. Doy-G. Trevelyan (Edited by), *op. cit.*, pp. 16-19.

33. Foreign Office to Certain of HM representatives, telegram of 22 May 1963, n. 279, TNA, DO 182/61.

34. *Instruction for the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs*, 10 July 1963, FRUS, 1961-1963, vol. VII, p. 787.

35. Rabat to Foreign Office, telegram of 23 May 1963, n. 121, TNA, DO 182/61.

36. Rabat to Foreign Office, telegram of 11 June 1963, n. 45, TNA, DO 182/61.

immediate aftermath to withheld comments in order to understand how to reply³⁷. France and Turkey, agreeing that it was just propaganda, saw the move as a mean to attract the Arab world³⁸. As expected the Arab world was quite attracted by the Soviet proposal. Lebanon was one of the first countries to give the UK some concern about the possibility that the Soviet note could be followed and appreciated. In Beirut there were some movements that, even if uncertain about the real possibility of establishing a NFZ, nonetheless were in favour of such a proposal³⁹. In general, it has to be pointed out, that all the early replies were only first hand reactions to the Soviet proposal and the positions were exposed to change in the following years.

Probably in order to avoid a massive reply in favour of the note, the UK representatives in the Arab countries started to advice the countries concerned suggesting them to reply avoiding any emotional reaction. Such an approach was tried by HM Ambassador in Damascus Thomas Bartley Bromley where the Government replied that they wanted to consult with the other Arab countries before to give an answer⁴⁰. It was clear that several countries would have backed or, at least, not disclaimed the Soviet position. The Libyan minister at the first instance declared that they could not judge if Moscow was doing a mere exercise of propaganda or, was otherwise looking for peace and security in the Mediterranean⁴¹. A more detailed reaction was registered from the Yugoslav Government. Belgrade received the note with great appreciation because they saw the move as an important step towards disarmament and consolidation of peace in the world⁴². The Yugoslav position was not surely seen as a surprise as in many other occasions President Tito had already express the point of view of his Government towards the Nuclear Weapons and Energy years before⁴³, and because of the rapprochement with the Soviet Union of Khrushchev's period⁴⁴. In general, nevertheless, the first reactions were reported to be aloof throughout Europe and in certain Northern Africa countries⁴⁵. Another reaction that has to be registered, was that of Spain. The Spanish Government, normally kept aside, had in fact the chance

37. Tel Aviv to Foreign Office, telegram of 23 May 1963, n. 169, TNA, DO 182/61; Rome to Foreign Office telegram of 23 May 1963, n. 373, DO 182/61; Athens to Foreign Office telegram of 24 May 1963, n. 263, TNA, DO 182/61.

38. Ankara to Foreign Office, telegram of 24 May 1963, n. 617, TNA, DO 182/61; Paris to Foreign Office, telegram of 24 May 1963, n. 381, TNA, DO 182/61.

39. Beirut to Foreign Office, telegram of 24 May 1963, n. 394, TNA, DO 182/61.

40. Damascus to Foreign Office, telegram of 27 May 1963, n. 177, TNA, DO 182/61.

41. Tripoli to Foreign Office, telegram of 3 June 1963, n. 8, TNA, DO 182/61.

42. Belgrade to Foreign Office, telegram of 25 May 1963, n. 263, TNA, DO 182/61.

43. J. B. Tito, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-7. For an interesting perspective on Tito's nuclear ambitions see: J. E. C. Hyman, *cit.*, pp. 172-202.

44. S. Clissold, *Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, 1939-1973. A Documentary Survey*, Oxford University Press London, 1975, pp. 290-91; Z. Rapp, *Hungary's Part in the Soviet Yugoslav Conflict, 1956-1958*, in «Contemporary European History», n. 7, pp. 198-200.

45. Rome to Foreign Office, telegram of 28 May 1963, n. 389, TNA, DO 182/61.

to be consulted by the Western countries and to be associated with them for the first time since as early as before WWII⁴⁶. It is also important to note that Syria was one of the Arab countries that decided to reply promoting the co-existence and non-alignment and to help achieving general disarmament and the banning of nuclear weapons under international supervision. The Syrian Ministry for Foreign Affairs declared that they were interested in seeing the Mediterranean excluded from nuclear armed areas and that they continued to support the denuclearization⁴⁷.

3. The discussions at Whitehall and among the Allies

Once the ministerial offices started to discuss the topic it was clear that the Soviet move, though being an act of propaganda ahead of the Ottawa Conference, should have not to be pursued or enhanced. Inside the original proposal there were several positions and the idea of the Mediterranean Nuclear Free Zone implied a nuclear free zone in the Middle East whose consequences were obviously different. The Middle East Nuclear Free Zone would have been acceptable only in the wake of an agreement between Arabs and Israelis, provided that Iran and Turkey would have been waived about being part of it. Turkey and Greece had been explored in early 1960 when it was launched a proposal about a Balkan conference for a nuclear missile-free zone in the region to which the Greek and the Turks reacted very negatively⁴⁸, particularly in the wake of the threat from the Bulgarian *de facto* Head of State Todor Zhivkov in 1959⁴⁹. These were not the only problems because the Mediterranean Free Zone, at the time, was seen as unacceptable because the nuclear submarines stationed in there were vital for the protection of Europe⁵⁰. As for the possibility that Israel and the Arabs could have the same opinion on the issue, it seems hard to think. As a matter of fact, the Israeli Government agreed to reply to the Soviet note declaring that the presence of nuclear submarines in the Eastern Mediterranean was not seen as a cause of tension, nor do they believe that existing tension would cease if they were removed. Moreover they considered that the tension in the area were enhanced by the steady supplies of conventional weapons rather than nuclear ones⁵¹.

46. Madrid to Foreign Office, telegram of 30 May 1963, n. 170, TNA, DO 182/61.

47. Damascus to Foreign Office, telegram of 3 July 1963, n. 16, TNA, DO 182/61.

48. UK Embassy in Athens to the Foreign Office, letter of 31 December 1959, TNA, FO 371/152799, R. 1071/1.

49. Speech by Todor Zhivkov at the National Assembly on December 25, 1959, enclosed in British Legation in Sofia to UK Embassy in Athens, letter of January 27, 1960, TNA, FO 371/152799, 1071/3.

50. Draft Reply to Parliamentary Questions, 28 May 1963, TNA, DO 182/61.

51. Tel Aviv to Foreign Office, telegram of 31 May 1963, n. 29, TNA, DO 182/61.

The topic was clearly difficult and there was not urgency in replying to the Soviet note and, one of the Allies, Italy, suggested that there should have been a common answer to be agreed by the NATO countries⁵², a position that was in the wake of the Italian spirit of the constant search for a compromise⁵³. It is important to note that there was not co-ordination among the European Economic Community members as the discussions on a political co-operation were still at a dead point⁵⁴ and there was also a huge divergence of views between the USA and the Europeans on the administrations and control of the weapons within the Atlantic Alliance⁵⁵. Nevertheless, there was a general agreement, at least between UK and USA, on the unacceptability of the Soviet proposal with reference to the criteria adopted for the establishment of the Nuclear Free Zones by the Western countries. It was the case also with the French Government that made an impressive plea to the White House, when Brazil introduced a resolution for a denuclearized zone in Latin America and Africa, as any support to this resolution would have been misunderstood by France and other Western Europe allies⁵⁶. The reply had to be drawn in order to show that the Soviet proposal was designed to secure a unilateral military advantage and that the replacement, recently decided, of the Jupiter by Polaris should have been seen as a contribution to stability rather than an act of increasing tension⁵⁷. It was also suggested that it would have been important to make a difference between zones where high seas were included and other lands, because it was important that no one would have retained the right to close the high seas falling into a nuclear free zone to naval movements. The Soviet proposal, in fact, by referring to the Mediterranean as a whole was introducing an unacceptable principle, endurable only in the context of a broad disarmament agreement. Washington and London agreed on the principle that any counterproposal, like that one supported by the Italians, had to be blocked unless it was widely discussed before. But this seemed not to be the case at the moment⁵⁸.

The United States agreed only in principle on the necessity of a reply to the Soviet note, and found important to make a distinction between sectors of

52. Foreign Office to Washington, telegram of 5 June 1963, n. 5335, TNA, DO 182/61.

53. A. Villani, *L'Italia e l'ONU negli anni della coesistenza competitiva (1955-1968)*, CEDAM, Padova, 2007, p. 312.

54. L. Nui, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-43.

55. S. Twigg-L. Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

56. *Memorandum of Conversation between Foster and Alphand*, 30 October 1962, Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*, United States Government Printing Office, Washington DC, 1961-1963, vol. VII, *Arms Control and Disarmament* (1995), p. 593.

57. L. Nui, *La sfida nucleare*, *cit.*, pp. 220-228.

58. Foreign Office to UK Delegation to NATO, telegram of 6 June 1963, n. 796, TNA, DO 182/61: On the perception that the United States had of Italy as an ally in the Western Bloc, see: M. Del Pero, *Gli Stati Uniti e l'anomalia italiana*, in P. Craven-A. Varsori, *L'Italia nella costruzione europea. Un bilancio storico (1957-2007)*, FrancoAngeli, Milano, 2009, pp. 419-430.

and areas where nuclear defence was critically important to them and areas where it was not⁵⁹. The points of the reply would have been that there were no objections in principle to nuclear-free zones but they were to be established with the agreement of all the concerned countries without upsetting the existing military balance. These principles, thus, would have made the Soviet proposal unacceptable⁶⁰. There was also the fact that Washington did not want to undermine the defense possibilities of the Federal Republic of Germany by accepting this proposal⁶¹. It was also understood that some countries, such as Greece and Turkey, were inclined to reply proposing in turn that the Soviet Union itself, or a large part of it, was to be declared a nuclear-free zone. Such a proposal, in fact, apparently came out during the bilateral discussions in Ottawa, introduced by the Italians, who were suggesting that the Western countries would have been prepared to agree to a nuclear-free zone in the entire, or part, of the Mediterranean under the condition that the Soviet Union agreed in establishing a zone of similar size behind the Iron Curtain. Though funny and provocative as a proposal, UK and US thought it was probably better to remain on a general position and on a more aseptic reply⁶².

The Italians, in general, thought that a reply to the Soviet Union was not negative itself as there was concern about the neutral countries reaction to this proposal whether the note would have remained unanswered or dismissed⁶³. The Greeks eventually decided not to follow the Italians over this path and intervened accordingly to this line of action during the meeting of the NATO Political Committee but they insisted, supported by Turkey that it was important to reply. Turkey agreed on this point and added that the country was duly named in the note that seemed to have been primarily draft for the Arab world. There was in fact some likelihood that the Soviet Union would have introduced the matter in the United Nations if they would have noticed any chance of attracting the non-committed countries. Italy, on its part, was in favour of a reply which, even if negative in substance, should have been flexible in the form, in view of the possible impact on the neutrals. On the contrary, France had a steady position. There was no need to reply to the note and if there should be any need to reply it would have been sufficient without a detailed denial of Soviet points or justification of any Allied policy. It would have been important, anyway, to avoid creating the impression that the note was a starting point for meaningful negotiations⁶⁴.

59. Stevenson to Kennedy, letter of May 10, 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. VII, p. 451.

60. Washington to Foreign Office, telegram of 5 June 1963, n. 1712, TNA, DO 182/61.

61. *National Intelligence Estimate*, May 2, 1962, NEE-11-9-62, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. V, p. 426.

62. Washington to Foreign Office, telegram of 5 June 1963, n. 1712, TNA, DO 182/61.

63. UK Delegation to NATO to Foreign Office, telegram of 5 June 1963, n. 201, TNA, DO 182/61.

64. UK Delegation to NATO to Foreign Office, telegram of 8 June 1963, n. 29, TNA, DO 182/61.

It is also important to note that the position of the French Government was certainly affected by De Gaulle's vision of a leading France among the European countries⁶⁵, whilst Italy was carrying on a policy of dialogue with developing countries through a strong action of the Prime Minister Amintore Fanfani⁶⁶. At any rate, it is crystal clear that there was not agreement among the NATO allies.

4. The reply note of the United Kingdom

The talks among NATO countries and among the other countries that received the Soviet note highlighted that the majority of them were in favour of a reply. The only problem was that, in view of the different positions, it would have been quite difficult to agree on an identical reply. The United Kingdom decided that the reply should have been short, shared and it would have to point to the exaggerated propagandistic tone of the Soviet proposal, referring also the official position of the United Kingdom on the multilateral force, that was seen by the Soviet Union as a direct threat from NATO countries⁶⁷. The reply had to state also the views on the necessary conditions for an agreement on any nuclear free zone showing that there were not these conditions in the Mediterranean⁶⁸. A position agreed by the United States⁶⁹. At any account, contrary to the first intentions, the reply of the British Government was quite long, detailed and was delivered, at the end of the day, on June 26 1963 after a wide circulation among various departments and UK embassies abroad⁷⁰, and as soon as Her Majesty's Government were informed that the United States were about to reply⁷¹. The note that the United Kingdom prepared for release was designed to reassure the Mediterranean countries. The Foreign Office noted that there was also another major point in the Soviet proposal that was unacceptable. The freedom of passage in the high seas could not

65. A. Varsori, *Italy's European Policy*, UNISCI Discussion Papers, January 2011, n. 25, pp. 51-53.

66. E. Costa Bona-L. Tosi, *L'Italia e la sicurezza collettiva. Dalla Società delle Nazioni alle Nazioni Unite*, Montecchi Editore, Perugia, 2007, pp. 202-209; L. Tosi, *La strada stretta. Aspetti della diplomazia multilaterale italiana (1971-1979)*, in *L'Italia repubblicana nella crisi degli anni settanta*, 4 voll., Rubettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2003, vol. I, A. Giovagnoli-S. Pons (a cura di), *Tra guerra fredda e distensione*, pp. 257-267.

67. L. Koukouvoulas, cit., p. 210.

68. Foreign Office to Washington, telegram of 11 June 1963, n. 5519, TNA, DO 182/61.

69. Washington to Foreign Office, telegram of 13 June 1963, n. 1780, TNA, DO 182/61.

70. Foreign Office to UK Delegation to NATO, telegram of 14 June 1963, n. 1389, TNA, DO 182/61; UK Delegation to NATO to Foreign Office, telegram of 18 June 1963, n. 241, TNA, DO 182/61.

71. Moscow to Foreign Office, telegram of 24 June 1963, n. 1293, TNA, DO 182/61.

be surrendered because even whether the criteria for the establishing of the NFZs were met it was not wise to abandon the right to station nuclear weapons in the high seas⁷².

The note highlighted the fact that Whitehall was used to diversionary tactics of the Soviet Union, usually made at the eve of important meetings. Notwithstanding they were surprised that this time Moscow was promoting a document clearly propagandistic (both in tone and in content). According to the British reply the note seemed less concerned with serious proposals to reduce tension in the Mediterranean area than with thinly disguised attempts to create dissension among NATO allies and apprehension among the concerned non-aligned countries. Whitehall stated also that all the relevant information about the establishment of a NATO nuclear force had already been given through a previous note and that the measures proposed should not have constituted as a move towards the proliferation of nuclear weapons but, by improving the collecting security of the parties concerned, would have powerfully reinforced peace and stability. The British reply was quite strong in the terms. London appeared surprised that a country like the Soviet Union with over 700 medium and intermediate range nuclear missiles, by their admission, and looking at acknowledged figures⁷³, pointed against Western Europe, expected that the same Western allies should afford to accept restriction in the deployment of their legitimate means of defence. The UK reply would also underline that the note was threatening and aggressive and had caused dismay among the Mediterranean countries. The Soviet note seemed to be a veiled demand for unilateral withdrawal by the West from an area in which the Western defences were legitimately deployed and to be another Soviet attempt to interfere with the strategic balance on which world peace and security depended. There was also a quote, on the reply, on the general disarmament principle agreed in 1961 by USSR and the US. London pointed also out that there were no objections to the establishment of NFZs if they were unanimously supported by all the countries concerned and when there was no danger of the existing military balance in the area being disturbed, a criteria not met in the case of the Mediterranean. In that moment, though, there could only have been temporary awaiting agreement on effective and controlled disarmament by all nations. Disarmament was the only answer to the demand of peace. In general there was the belief that it was unrealistic to avoid a nuclear war by simply declaring a zone free from nuclear weapons⁷⁴. The best way to avoid the nuclear war was that the Great

72. Foreign Office to UK Delegation to NATO, telegram of 14 June 1963, n. 1388, TNA, DO 182/61.

73. J. Haslam, cit., pp. 9-11.

74. Foreign Office to Moscow, telegram of 25 June 1963, n. 1749, TNA, DO 182/61; Moscow to Foreign Office, telegram of 26 June 1963, n. 1306, TNA, DO 182/61; As for the

Powers would concentrate their efforts in tackling the issue of nuclear tests and disarmament and in restoring mutual confidence⁷⁵.

Beyond the Soviet note on a NFZ in the Mediterranean the UK and NATO Allies had to deal with the proposal, introduced at the 16th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, declaring Africa as a nuclear-free country, that would have affected the existence of foreign bases, particularly in the Mediterranean. Again, the position of the United Kingdom was quite pragmatic on the issue and the basic two criteria were the voluntary adherence and the preservation of military balance, a cardinal principle of disarmament, already given for the Mediterranean NFZ⁷⁶. There would have been no opposition in the case of African countries providing that previous treaties were respected, as in the case of the UK military presence in Libya⁷⁷. The Government of the United Kingdom had a steady view on the issue and the creation of a nuclear-free zone should not conflict with the principles above mentioned and they were aware that each region of the world had its own particular problems and such a proposal should have been considered on individual merit. In general there was not a preclusion from the UK part for proposal of NFZs to be introduced at the UN General Assembly⁷⁸. The fundamental problem for the Mediterranean was that there were no assurances that others were not to introduce nuclear weapons in the basin after the NFZ was established. The Foreign Office stressed that the United Kingdom was not in the position to insist on the inclusion of verification provisions. In fact, the Government concerned in a particular area may decide not to include them. The only choice for Whitehall would have seemed that of offering to give or withhold the support for any particular set of proposals on the basis of the insertion of verification provisions. In practice the Ministry of Defence was pointing out that if several states of a particular region would decide to set up a Nuclear-Free Zone with an overwhelming majority, and with or without verification procedures, it would have been difficult for the United Kingdom alone to oppose this decision, particularly if the zone was far away from the UK borders. HMG could certainly try to use the lack of verification provisions to block a specific proposal which was disliked, but

idea of not altering the existing military balance it was still in force in the mid 1970s and was paramount for UK acceptance of a NFZ, Draft on Nuclear Free Zones and Non Proliferations, Appendix to Richards to various offices, letter of 30 September 1974, TNA, FCO 66/625.

75. Acting British High Commissioner to Cyprus to Foreign Office, telegram of 12 July 1963, n. 73, TNA, DO 182/61.

76. Foreign Office to Certain of Her Majesty's Representatives, telegram of 6 June 1963, n. 305, TNA, CO 968/863.

77. With respect to the British presence in Libya see above all: M. Critico, *Il petrolio dei Senusi. Stati Uniti e Gran Bretagna in Libia dall'indipendenza a Gheddafi (1949-1973)*, Edizioni Polistampa, Firenze, 2002.

78. Note for the Records without date, TNA, CO 968/863.

it would have been politically difficult to sustain this position against a solid "regional" viewpoint. As for the verifications it was important to note that the proposals for nuclear free zones combined a number of undertakings of which some were easy to verify, such as testing nuclear weapons, while others were difficult if not impossible to ascertain, such as not to receive nuclear arms from external sources.

The issue of the verification provisions was an uncertain point for the United Kingdom and there were a lot of discussions over them. In order to determine the attitude towards verification it would have been important to understand whether verification was desirable for the UK's own security; whether it would have been practicable; and whether the absence or the inclusion of verification provisions would have constituted a precedent. There was not a steady and clear answer to these questions and verification was surely useful for UK security but in some case it was also clear that there would have been an interest in discouraging it where it could have been harmful for the United Kingdom's interests. As for the other two questions it was obvious that it would have been difficult to prove that the provisions were effective and also the lack of provisions in one zone would have not set a precedent for other zones. At the end of the day the United Kingdom was in the position to decide whether insisting on the verification principle because it would have helped the Western Block in its efforts to persuade the Soviet Union to accept, in other contexts, international verification. For this last reason the experts of the Foreign Office seemed eager to accept the principle of lacking of verification particularly in areas where the governments concerned were opposing them. It would have always been possible to reserve the right to ask for verification in the future and on certain contexts.

As with respect to the reply to the Soviet note the question of verification was kept aside as the United Kingdom did not wish that the debate on the verification issue could detract from the main purpose of the reply, the main point being the upsetting of the military balance in the Mediterranean. In general the question of the verification was to be treated with care because there were cases in which it would have been contrary to HMG interests⁷⁹. Also the Ministry of Defence, consulted by the Foreign Office, stated that NFZ should have been resisted mainly because there would have been an upset in the military balance between East and West. The point of the verifications was not an easy one because the prospect of such a system which would detect movement or stock piles of fissile material would have been infinitesimal⁸⁰. It was better, thus, not to go ahead at all with this point because there were NFZs totally unacceptable for the United Kingdom and it would have been dangerous, in this case, to pay too much attention to the question of verification, since this would have diverted the consideration

79. Shepherd to Stephens, letter of 27 August 1963, IAD 1053/96, TNA, CO 968/863.

80. Stephens to Shepherd, letter of 30 August 1963, TNA, CO 968/863.

from more fundamental objections⁸¹. The question was raised again during a conversation between the Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko and the Lord Home, and the former said that observation posts should have been coordinated with further measures such as reduction of forces or the creation of denuclearized zones at which the British Foreign Minister disagreed⁸².

The issue of the NFZs in the Mediterranean, as the Foreign Office predicted, gave the opportunity to African countries to raise the question of the presence of Polaris missiles in the Mediterranean and, more in general, of the US Sixth Fleet. The question, indeed, was arisen by the Algerian President Ahmed Ben Bella in 1964 following a similar request made by Khrushchev, in Egypt the same year⁸³, and also the suggestion of President Ahmed Sukarno of Indonesia, who apparently maneuvered to prevent another Conference of Nonaligned States⁸⁴. In order to discuss the topic, President Ben Bella called an international conference, presented as the first step towards nuclear disarmament, that seemed to have as a main objective that of providing a forum for criticism of Western military bases⁸⁵. The conference itself was avoided due to the aborted coup in Indonesia in 1965 and to the air of uncertainty surrounding the Government of Algeria. Nevertheless, President Tito succeeded in reinforcing the ties with Algeria the year before the scheduled conference⁸⁶.

The Foreign Office, in co-operation with the Ministry of Defence, prepared a note with the instruction that had to be followed during the 18th General Assembly of the United Nations in case the topic of the Nuclear Free Zones was raised again. According to these instructions the primary aim of the Western powers was a general and complete disarmament through a carefully scaled reduction of nuclear and conventional armaments on a global basis. Reduction and possible elimination of nuclear weapons should have been a result of this process, where, nevertheless, NFZs could be useful as a confidence building measure in certain areas of the world at certain conditions: voluntary decision to accede; the creation of such a zone should not conflict with the principles of disarmament – that the existing military balance should not be disturbed; all militarily significant states, and preferably all the states

in the zones, were to be included. Moreover, each region of the world was a different case and proposal for NFZs had to be considered on individual merit. There was also the problem of verification, on which the Americans insisted whilst Whitehall's view on that point, as we have seen, were much more relaxed. At any rate, if there was to be any discussion at the General Assembly, the UK Representative to the United Nations should have been to stress the point of view determined by the Foreign Office in co-operation with the Ministry of Defence in order to refuse proposal that were clearly unacceptable. Whilst, on the one hand, there would have been sympathy for NFZs in Latin America or Africa, on the other hand, there would have been strong resistance for such a zone in the Mediterranean where apparently it did not find support among the states of the shores⁸⁷.

In October 1963 after the conclusion of the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty there was a new impetus to proposals for NFZs and it is now clear that the Treaty was seen as just a starting point towards something more⁸⁸. Proposal, as we have seen, originally put forward by Communist Governments with the intention of putting pressure on the American bases abroad and on the deployment abroad of the American nuclear weapons systems even if in some cases there would have been genuine hope that the creation of such zones could give some real military protection to the countries concerned. After the conclusion of the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty the Foreign Office delivered to several embassies the official position of HMG on Nuclear-Free Zones where it was reminded how to deal with that issue⁸⁹. The wind was nevertheless changing and also in the United States, in 1965 the Committee on Nuclear Proliferation, after a Lyndon Baines Johnson's request, was trying to find a solution in order to stop the widespread of nuclear weapons. The first aim, according to this Committee, was to find an agreement on Non-Proliferation, but other options such as the establishment of NFZ in Latin America, Africa and the Middle East should have been taken into consideration as a viable option⁹⁰. If we look at the position of the USSR towards the Nuclear Free Zones in Latin America, as expressed by Gromyko later in 1967, it is easy to conclude that Moscow's position on the topic, as understood by Her Majesty's Government was clearly deceptive⁹¹.

81. Steering Committee on International Organizations, 9 October 1963, TNA, CO 968/863.

82. *Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs (Tyler) to the White House*, 4 October 1963, FRUS, 1961-1963, vol. VII, *Arms Control and Disarmament* (1995), pp. 888-89.

83. With respect to Khrushchev's visit to Egypt see: N. S. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, translated by Strobe Talbot, Sphere Books Ltd, London, 1971, pp. 404-414.

84. A. Z. Rubinstein, *Yugoslavia and the Nonaligned World*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1970, pp. 303-304.

85. Observer, 24 May 1964, TNA, CO 968/863.

86. A. Z. Rubinstein, *op. cit.*, pp. 304-305.

87. Note by the Foreign Office on the Denuclearization of Latin America and Nuclear-Free Zones in general, 24 September 1963, IOC (63)133, TNA, CO 968/863.

88. M. Gata, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30.

89. Foreign Office to Certain of Her Majesty's Representatives, telegram of 7 October 1963, n. 102, TNA, CO 968/863.

90. M. Guderzo, *Inferesse nazionale e responsabilità globale. Gli Stati Uniti, l'Alleanza atlantica e l'immigrazione europea negli anni di Johnson 1963 - 1969*, Il Mulino, Firenze, 2000, pp. 145-146.

91. Seydoux de Clausonne to Couve de Murville, telegram of September 27, 1967, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Documents Diplomatiques Français*, 1967, tome II, Peter Lang, Bruxelles, 2008, pp. 382-83, D. 145.

During the following years the position of HMG towards NFZs became clearer and was definitely defined in a paper approved by all the Departments concerned, made the object of a pamphlet "Disarmament: the path to peace", and in this form it became also the basis for all the subsequent discussions with foreign governments⁹². The new aspect in the official position of the United Kingdom Government with respect to previous documents was that the principle of verification was now included in the four basic principle on how to start a discussion on NFZs⁹³.

5. The question on the Nuclear Free Zones is raised again in the 1970s

At some point of the 1970s amidst the new challenging period of the D tente, and in consideration of the increasing state of tension between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, it was thought useful and appropriate to remove the Mediterranean from the contention between the Western Bloc and the Soviet Union. This was done also in the wake of Richard Nixon's policy of authorizing the opening of negotiations on arms control and limitation⁹⁴. From a certain point of view this solution could have been seen by the general public as the result of years of meetings and discussions on how to solve the increasing tension that was putting in danger the countries of Southern Europe and Northern Africa, but it meant also practically to deprive the Western Countries of a strategic advantage. The British Foreign and Commonwealth Office was aware of this eventuality. In fact some diplomats advised the Cabinet Office that this solution was not practicable nor in the British interests. There were many reasons that urged the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to give this advice: several NATO countries had borders on the Mediterranean; elements of the Soviet Fleet were entitled to cruise in the Mediterranean from the Black Sea; the Arab-Israeli conflict was near the centre of the East-West tensions; the opening of the Suez Canal and, in general, the passage of oil tankers through the Mediterranean involved major strategic and economic considerations and the two Blocs would not have refrained from trying to influence the issue through military measures. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office pointed also out that there were other reasons that would have prevented the USA from moving the Sixth Fleet in the near future from the Mediterranean, not least all those reasons connected with Israel⁹⁵. The ideas about the US Fleet were steady and President Nixon, during a conversation with President Tito made

clear that there was no intention to move the Fleet out of the Mediterranean and its presence and purpose there went well beyond the Middle East interests and crisis, serving the broader objective of assuring stability in the area while not constituting a threat to any country in the region⁹⁶. The British Government was aware that they could not take any such decision as the NATO allies, first of all the United States and those in the Mediterranean shores, would have never accepted any provision of a "zone of peace". If the proposal was not practicable at that moment, it was true, for some official at the FCO, that it should have needed to be deeply studied for a future use⁹⁷. There was no agreement among the offices and it was later decided not to proceed with a substantive paper on the matter. It was decided instead to express to the Cabinet Office the position of the FCO in order to let them know that the problem was under consideration and, even if there was no reason in producing a paper, they were able instead to produce a study on it⁹⁸. The Ministry of Defence was also made aware of the position expressed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and declared to be content with it⁹⁹ and so did the Cabinet Office¹⁰⁰.

As we have already seen, the issue of Arms Limitations in the Mediterranean was not new and it was the object of a full debate among the Soviet Union and several Mediterranean littoral states over the previous twenty years. It is true that some of the proposals would only have limited the United States and Soviet fleets or part of them with nuclear capability, but others included ships of medium power countries such as the UK and France. The persistent state of tension in the Middle East prevented any real progress on such naval limitations but the issue was a matter of discussion during the Conference on European Security and Co-operation during which some non-European Mediterranean countries have suggested to place the Basin in a Nuclear Free Zone in order to lessen the tensions in the region¹⁰¹.

A recalling of the Nuclear Free Zones issue came from President Tito of Yugoslavia in 1969 during a visit to Algeria¹⁰² and it was later renewed by the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev in 1972¹⁰³. Brezhnev's idea was reported also by Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, who praised in his speech the fact that the renounce to nuclear weapons did not imply renouncing to self

92. Montgomery to Sloane, letter of 21 January 1974, FCO 66/625.

93. Annex to Summerhayes to Wheeler, letter of 29 January 1974, FCO 66/625.

94. H. Krissinger, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

95. Thompson to Smith, letter of 13 January 1975, The National Archives, FCO 66/786 DS 11/516/1.

96. *Memorandum of Conversation between Nixon and Tito, 1 October 1970*, NL, NSC Files, President's Trip Files, President's European Trip, 1970, Box 467.

97. Thompson to Smith, letter of 13 January 1975, *cit.*

98. Thompson to Edmons, letter of 18 December 1974, TNA, FCO 66/786 DS 11/516/1

99. Hockaday to Smith, letter of 17 January 1975, TNA, FCO 66/786.

100. Smith to Thompson, letter of 17 January 1975, TNA, FCO 66/786 B04285.

101. Chronology of Proposal for Naval Limitations in the Mediterranean, attached to Thomas to Edmonds, letter of 28 January 1975, TNA, FCO 66/786.

102. Harris to Richards, memorandum of 1 May 1974, TNA, FCO 66/629.

103. Chronology of Proposal for Naval Limitations in the Mediterranean, attached to Thomas to Edmonds, letter of 28 January 1975, *cit.*

defence, according to the Charter of the United Nations¹⁰⁴. The reference to the United Nation Charter was a way of reassuring the world and also it was certainly a courtesy to the UN as his speech was delivered there. With respect to the defence issue, arisen by Gromyko, the Pentagon pointed out that Moscow had no intention to renounce to the right of self defence, including also the use of nuclear weapons, that were going to be treated equally to the conventional ones¹⁰⁵.

The Yugoslavs, in particular, seemed interested in the reduction of tactical nuclear missiles set around their borders¹⁰⁶, and they were obviously trying to find a way to remove them. When Brezhnev raised the question again during a speech in Warsaw in 1974 he offered the withdrawal from the Mediterranean of both US and USSR ships and submarines carrying nuclear weapons. This speech caused great anxiety among the British because the USSR leader recalled to have proposed such an agreement to President Nixon when he was in Moscow that year. It was true that the United States rejected the proposal but it was noticed by the British diplomats that they did not mention at all to Her Majesty's Government that there has been such an offer¹⁰⁷, and for that reason it would have been important to understand the real position of the United States on that matter¹⁰⁸.

The assumption that the Soviet Union was ready to withdraw nuclear weapons from the Mediterranean was reasserted also by Erich Honecker, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, during the celebrations held in Berlin for the 25th Anniversary of the German Democratic Republic. Honecker's message, however, clarified the moves and the aim of the Soviets when he stated that there were leaders that were opposing the idea of peace and détente. He was referring directly to the Chinese leaders but in the speech he used the phrase "among others" where he apparently was thinking to the United States and allies. A piece of propaganda in order to put the Soviet Bloc in a different and brighter light¹⁰⁹. Honecker spoke about a more general idea of disarmament during an interview later in the years when he remembered the efforts made by various actors with respect to a disarmament conference¹¹⁰.

104. *National Security Study Memorandum 162*, in Davis to Kissinger, *Memorandum of 28 October 1972*, NL, NSSM, NSSM 162, Box H-194.

105. *Id.*

106. Taylor to Richards, letter of 30 May 1975, TNA, FCO, 666799.

107. Bullard to Graham, letter of 24 July 1974, TNA, FCO 666629.

108. Bullard to Graham, letter of 26 July 1974, TNA, FCO 666629.

109. Keeble to Foreign and Commonwealth Office, telegram of 7 October 1974, n. 339.

TNA, FCO 666629.

110. The idea of a possible disarmament conference was recalled by Erich Honecker during an interview in 1981, the interview is published in *Erich Honecker debate questions politiche annuali*, Documenti sulla politica della Repubblica Democratica Tedesca, Panorama DDR, 1981, pp. 17-18.

The issue of the NFZ, apparently favoured by the Soviet Union from the political and propaganda point of view, perhaps was used by Brezhnev in order to remember to the world, and particularly to the NATO countries, that whilst in general the Soviet Fleet was seen as a menace, it was not the same rule for the US Sixth and Seventh Fleets in the Mediterranean or in the Far East. In both cases the fleets were next door to the Soviet Union. After this statement he said that it was not an ideal situation for the fleets of the great powers to stay too much time far from their shores. There would have been a solution for this and, on equal footing, the Soviet Union was ready to discuss any proposal towards a general offer of naval arms control. Within the Foreign Office it was noted that the proposal was not quite clear and perhaps, as the Soviet Union considered the Mediterranean as a closed sea, it was intended that the United States should reduce their naval fleet there¹¹¹. A fact on what the USSR had insisted over the years since before Kennedy Administration¹¹² and it was apparently a way to demonstrate that Moscow had always favoured the search for a compromise¹¹³. The proposal about this reduction that came in between of Tito's proposal and Brezhnev renewal of the Nuclear Free Zone issue, was so unclear that Andrej Gromyko, the USSR Foreign Minister, was asked, without success, to clarify it. The Soviet officials tried to reply attacking Western countries as the fact occurred when the British Leader of the Opposition Harold Wilson visited Moscow in September 1971. Wilson was made aware of the disappointment of the Soviet Government by the failure of the West in replying to their initiative¹¹⁴, and it is known that the same Wilson was of the opinion that it would have been important to negotiate over it without a final rejection¹¹⁵. The reply to this point was that the question had not been put forward formally but, nevertheless, the Soviets hoped that Her Majesty's Government could take some initiative in this field¹¹⁶. The same Wilson was not sure that the Soviets Union had understood the full implications of the proposal and he thought that "they had not really faced up to the possibility of balanced but unequal force reduction"¹¹⁷. Harold Wilson may have had the impression that the Soviets, at the end of the day, were uncertain on what to do on this issue. In fact when talking privately with Aleksiej Kosygin, Chairman of the Council of

111. Chronology of Proposal for Naval Limitations in the Mediterranean, attached to Thomas to Edmunds, letter of 28 January 1975, cit.

112. A. Gromyko, *Memorie*, cit., p. 131.

113. A. Gromyko, *Ambasciatore nel Mondo*, cit., pp. 144-145.

114. Chronology of Proposal for Naval Limitations in the Mediterranean, attached to Thomas to Edmunds, letter of 28 January 1975, cit.

115. H. Wilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 248-250.

116. Killick to Foreign Office, telegram of 15 September 1971, n. 1343, TNA, FCO 281571.

117. Killick to Foreign Office, telegram of 16 September 1971, n. 1347, TNA, FCO 281571.

Ministers of USSR on September 13, he discovered that Brezhnev's Proposal was not related specifically to the Mediterranean but the Russians were concerned with all fleets cruising in areas unrelated to their neighbouring shores. Thus this would have involved the navies of the United States, Soviet Union, United Kingdom and France. Kosygin said that his country was ready to discuss the issue and find a solution that could bring equal rights for all the countries concerned and it would have been a move towards peace. He added also that the proposal was made to have reactions from other countries.¹¹⁸ It seems clear that such a discourse was of advantage only for the Soviet Union if we look at the complexity of the military presence of the Soviet armed forces near Europe.¹¹⁹ In any case the British Embassy in Moscow expressed some doubts about the issue because they had not clear if it was raised at Wilson's initiative or it came up while talking of other things. In particular, the embassy pointed out that it would have been useful to make clear the exact point of view of the United Kingdom as well as that of the United States.¹²⁰ The Soviets explained to the UK representatives that their country's nuclear power had little military significance to them.¹²¹ There were other issues beyond those examined by the two leaders.

According to the Foreign Office analysis, Brezhnev's position on a Mediterranean Zone of Peace implied a Middle East peace settlement and was thus more realistic than that of Nikita Khrushchev in 1963. On this issue Moscow urged for an eradication of the military bases in the Mediterranean in order to solve the tensions of its Eastern part. As it was underlined in London, they would have received practical and direct benefits from such a move in which they were supported by several shore states like Yugoslavia, Algeria, Morocco and Spain. Two states in particular, Algeria and Yugoslavia, had already made a similar statement in 1969 when the Mediterranean was envisaged as a lake of peace. A policy that was kept steady in the years ahead when Yugoslavia protested against Western naval manoeuvres in 1972 and 1974 in the Adriatic Sea, seen as well as a sea of peace. The British officials saw it as a peculiar thing statement because the Yugoslav ports were always been hosting Soviet warships. In 1970, after a visit of the Algerian Foreign Minister to Belgrade, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the slogan was that of "the Mediterranean to the Mediterranean States", supported also by the Tunisian leader Habib Bourguiba, a clear move against the presence of the United States Navy, as clarified by Bouteflika during the Non-Aligned Conference in Algiers in September 1973. The Moroccan Prime Minister was even more clear when he said "Mediterranean must first and foremost be, in our view,

118. Wilson to Killick, letter of 13 September 1971, TNA, FCO 28/1571.

119. In order to have a clear framework of the forces of the USSR see: P. Podvig (Edited by), *Russian Strategic Nuclear Forces*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 1-66.

120. Scott to Bullard, letter of 17 September 1971, TNA, FCO 28/1571, ESN3/548/20.

121. A. J. Pierre, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

a region of peace, security and co-operation. The enormous responsibility placed upon us in this respect makes it incumbent upon us to arm ourselves with the weapon of vigilance so that decisions should not be taken in our absence in the name of European security for example, without our view be taken into consideration on such a matter"¹²². A fact, noted piercingly by the Foreign Office, in which they made considerable efforts to try to ensure that this should not happen.

At the end of the day the request put forward by the Soviet Union and by the Non-Aligned countries to call a Mediterranean Conference interfered with the programmed European Security and Co-operation Conference that was to be held in Helsinki from November 1972.¹²³ The non-European Mediterranean countries felt themselves distant from the conference where it was to be decided something that would have affected them as well, and they wanted that their interests were not ignored. Many European countries were quite sympathetic towards the non-European Mediterranean countries. The Italians, for instance, supported by the French, tried to promote a European Community initiative to meet some of their demands and expressing a common interest. The Italian draft was, at least initially, fiercely opposed by the United States but later accepted by Henry Kissinger in the path drawn by President Nixon to disengage confrontation with the Soviet Bloc.¹²⁴ The urging requests made by the Soviet Union and by the Non-Aligned countries revived the interest, as we have seen, into the Nuclear Free Zones. The idea of creating a Mediterranean Nuclear Free Zone came up from the original idea of the UN First Committee for the establishment of such a zone in the Middle East when several countries suggested to incorporate the Mediterranean. This proposal would have match with those, that we have seen before, of the withdrawal from the Mediterranean of all Soviet and United States vessels and submarines equipped with nuclear

122. Chronology of Proposal for Naval Limitations in the Mediterranean, attached to Thomas to Edmunds, letter of 28 January 1975, *cit.*

123. There are several studies on the CSCE, among those: A. Romano, *From Détente in Europe to European Détente. How the West Shaped the Helsinki CSCE*, Peter Lang Bruxelles, 2009; C. Meneguzzi Rosatign (Edited by), *The Helsinki Process: A Historical Reappraisal. Atti del Workshop tenuto a Padova, 7 giugno 2004*, Padova, Dipartimento di Studi Internazionali, 2005; V. Masiny, *The Helsinki Process and the Reintegration of Europe (1986-1991). Analysis and Documentation*, New York University Press, New York, 1992; A. Heracles, *Security and Cooperation in Europe. The Human Dimension 1972-1992*, Frank Cass, London, 1992; N. Ropers-P. Schlotter, *The CSCE: Multilateral Conflict Management in a Transforming World Order. Future Perspectives and New Impulses for Regional Peace Strategies*, Foundation for Development and Peace, Bonn, 1992; for a contemporary account and perspective of the Soviet Détente see: P. J. Potchyny, J. P. Shapiro, *From the Cold War to Détente*, Praeger Publishers, New York, 1974, pp. 89-118.

124. H. Kissinger, *World Order Reflection on the Character of Nations and the Course of History*, Allen Lane London, 2014, p. 307.

weapons. The final aim of such a proposal was to end the military escalation in the Mediterranean and facilitate the co-operation and peace among the countries of the region. The perception of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was, again, that many of the proposals that aimed to reduce the naval fleet had only an anti-NATO purpose behind. In fact no one, among the proposers, made concrete suggestions on what reductions would actually involve¹²⁵

The general aim, as stated before, was that of removing the Mediterranean from contention between the Soviet Union and the West but the British Government decided that the request from the Soviet Union and the Non-Aligned countries was suspicious and not practicable. The more important reasons for this decision lied on the fact that several NATO countries had shores on the Mediterranean, elements of the Soviet Fleet were entitled to pass through the Straits from the Black Sea; the passage through the Suez Canal of oil tankers involved major strategic and economic considerations; there was no possibility at all, particularly for reasons connected to Israel, that the Sixth Fleet could leave the Mediterranean; several NATO allies, the United States and those with shores in the sea, would have strongly opposed the idea and would have resented such an endorsement by Her Majesty's Government.¹²⁶ In order to avoid any misunderstanding with the Ministry of Defence the Foreign and Commonwealth Office decided to co-ordinate a common policy on that issue¹²⁷, even if for some of the Cabinet Office officials to produce a serious paper and position on this subject was "a complete waste of time"¹²⁸. Moreover, although there were not advancements in the proposal on denuclearization of the Mediterranean the Foreign Office decided to go ahead with the study of the situation and of the possible repercussions of this situation for the United Kingdom particularly in the envisaged own withdrawal from Cyprus¹²⁹; a move that the British Government was not keen to take. At least not in that moment¹³⁰, even if they were aware since the Sixties of the unwillingness of some part of the cyprriot press and politics towards the presence of the British Sovereign Bases.¹³¹ A position that probably aimed to avoid any appearance of detachment from the Atlanticism

125. Chronology of Proposal for Naval Limitations in the Mediterranean, attached to Thomas to Edmonds, letter of 28 January 1975, cit.

126. Thomson to Smith, letter of 13 January 1975, TNA, FCO 66/786, DS 11/516/1.

127. Thomson to Edmonds, letter of 18 December 1974, TNA, FCO 66/786; Richards to Thomson, letter of 9 January 1975, TNA, FCO 66/786.

128. Edmonds to Thomson, letter of 12 December 1974, TNA, FCO 66/629.

129. Thomson to Edmonds, letter of 27 November 1974, TNA, FCO 66/629.

130. Goodison to Edmonds, letter of 29 November 1974, TNA, FCO 66/629; Edmonds to Short, letter of 9 December 1974, TNA, FCO 66/629; Short to Edmonds, minute of 11 December 1974, TNA, FCO 66/629.

131. The British High Commissioner in Nicosia to the Foreign Office, telegram of 14 June 1963, n. 62, TNA, DO 182/61.

always followed by the major European Community members¹³² and it was also useful to freeze the question within the quarrel between the two parts of Cyprus¹³³.

6. The attempt to "remove" the Mediterranean from the contention between East and West

The issue of a peace zone in the Mediterranean was pursued, following the path opened by the Soviet leader, by the Tunisian Government in 1971 and 1972 when, again, after the failed attempt of the previous years, they tried to organize a conference for peace in the Mediterranean and by the Algerian Government later in 1973 when President Houari Boumediene demanded the removal of foreign fleets and bases with a speech on the Italian Radio and Television Service.¹³⁴ It is important to point out, with respect to the Southern shore of the Mediterranean, that the relationship among the countries of the shore and the Western allies have always been particularly problematic¹³⁵. The Conference began in September 1973 and did not come to any conclusion. At many stages, even during conferences organized by private foundations, such as The Ditchley Foundations, the main point was whether it would have been useful to allow the United States withdrawal from the Mediterranean perhaps paying the way to the instability of countries such as Italy, Spain, Greece and Turkey to the clear advantage of the USSR.¹³⁶ All the hypothesis were not taken into real consideration by the proposers but sometimes announced as a contribution towards peace.¹³⁷

132. N. P. Ludlow, *In Search of a Balance: Italy, Britain and the Dream of Another European Axis?*, in P. Craveri-A. Vasson (Edited by), *L'Italia nella costruzione europea. Un bilancio storico (1957-2007)*, FrancoAngeli, Milano, 2009, pp. 68-69; H. Kissinger, cit. pp. 196-197.

133. V. Fouskas, *Zones of Conflict: US Foreign Policy in the Balkans and the Greater Middle East*, Pluto Press, London-Sterling, 2003, pp. 73-80.

134. Note of SLI, 29 April 1974, TNA, FCO 66/629.

135. A. Ortega, *Relations with the Maghreb*, in J. W. Holmes (Edited by), *Meistrum. The United States, Southern Europe, and the Challenges of the Mediterranean*, The World Peace Foundation, Cambridge, 1995, pp. 42-52; M. Del Pero, *Distensione, bipolarismo e violenza. La politica estera americana nel Mediterraneo durante gli anni Settanta. Il caso portoghese e le sue implicazioni per l'Italia*, in *L'Italia repubblicana nella crisi degli anni settanta*, 4 voll., Rubettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2003, vol. I, A. Giovagnoli-S. Pons (a cura di), *Tra guerra fredda e distensione*, pp. 128-140.

136. *The Ditchley Foundations Conference on Mediterranean Neutralization*, June 21-24, 1974, in *Maitland to Sumnerthayes and others*, 7 June 1974, TNA, FCO 66/629.

137. C. Rossi, *L'Unione Europea e la sicurezza nel Mediterraneo dalla Carta per la Pace e la Stabilità alla Primavera Araba (1970-2011). Genesi storica e prospettive future*, in A. Sassu-S. Lodei (Edited by), *Tra il nuovo e il vecchio. I cambiamenti politici del Nord Africa*, Aracne, Roma, 2012, pp. 260-261.

The question of the removal of the Mediterranean from the contention between Eastern and Western Blocs and the eventual set up of nuclear weapon-free zones was studied also by the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament of the United Nations from 1969¹³⁸ in the line of what happened before in the Committee's predecessors¹³⁹. A issue raised also within NATO Council that ordered further studies on it¹⁴⁰. The NATO concern grew as the proposals for Nuclear Free Zones went ahead. In particular many of them were in contrast with the elementary concepts of defence within the Alliance both for the Deterrent Strategy of Flexible Response and for the pressure that it would lead for removal of nuclear weapons from the then emplacements¹⁴¹. The discussions about the NFZ at the Foreign Office went ahead, together with the consultations in the NATO. The basic criteria that HMG would have applied for the establishment of a Nuclear Free Zone, as it was already decided in the previous decade when the idea emerged for the first time, would have been the following: a) The decision should have been freely taken by the States of the region; b) The existing military balance of the area should have not been disturbed; c) All militarily significant States, and preferably all States in the area, should have been included; d) There should have been adequate international verification. The British diplomats noted that, so far, only one NFZ in an inhabited area was established and that occurred in Latin America with the 1967 treaty of Tlatelolco and a number of resolutions calling for such a zones in Africa, South Asia and the Middle East were adopted since 1974 by the General Assembly of the United Nations without any of them likely to lead to a result¹⁴². In particular the Treaty of Tlatelolco was not yet into force as the US nor the UK had complied with all the provisions of its articles¹⁴³. As a matter of fact, the resolution taken by the UNGA on the NFZs in certain regions served as the main purpose of accelerating the process towards nuclear disarmament and as the ultimate goal of general and complete disarmament under effective international control¹⁴⁴. The strength of the official position of the Foreign Office was probably diminished by the fact that no one from the United Kingdom Delegation to NATO was attending NATO Disarmament meetings, so the position reported by the UK representative was, in his word, "wasted".

138. T. Graham, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-75.

139. A. Villani, *op. cit.*, pp. 326-342; *Editorial Note*, Department of State, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. VII, p. 379.

140. Simon to Otr, letter of 11 April 1975, TNA, FCO 66/779; Simon to Otr, letter of 16 April 1975, TNA, FCO 66/779.

141. Minute of 21 April 1975, TNA, FCO 66/779.

142. Callaghan to UK Delegation to NATO, telegram of 21 April 1975, TNA, FCO 66/779.

143. *Keating's Contemporary Archives. Weekly Diary of World Event*, vol. XIX, 1973, Keating's Publications, Bristol, p. 25682, see also United Nation Office for Disarmament Affairs, *http://disarmament.un.org/treaties/tlatelolco*.

144. Allen to FCO, telegram of 20 November 1974, TNA, FCO 66/779.

as far as they were concerned. NATO had a legitimate interest in the matter but started to act too late to do much better than done in Geneva¹⁴⁵.

In the NATO circles, as well as within the Western governments, there was not so much favour on the NFZs and in some case they were considered as unacceptable in areas of major confrontation, like the Mediterranean, or next to "buffer states" alongside the Warsaw Pact borders. It was in that case "a military non starter" because, from a security point of view, none of the four proposal made by the UK was military viable. Italian and Dutch representatives were of the same opinion and the Italians added that the proposals were dangerous for publicity as well as for military reasons since they could have increased pressure on non-nuclear members to leave the Alliance¹⁴⁶. The instruction from the FCO to the UK delegation to NATO was not to keep a leading role while supporting the Italian and Dutch views¹⁴⁷. In general there was a certain agreement within the Alliance members in thinking that NFZs for the Mediterranean would have been quite dangerous from the strategic point of view and NATO itself should have been waiting until the issue was completely discussed during the Conference Committee on Disarmament¹⁴⁸, where, as we have seen the topic was posed also by the Soviet Union¹⁴⁹. At the end of the day there was a lot of confusion among NATO members because, as we have seen, it was not clear which was the position of the United States. Washington decided to urge the Allies hoping that they could back the US position on the NFZ. The United States explained that their position could be the same taken in the Treaty of Tlatelolco because the situation in Latin America was peculiar to them. For other parts of the world the US position would have been that of supporting extra efforts in strengthening the security of non-nuclear weapon states, and also to question whether specific non-use undertakings by nuclear powers would be a feasible and reliable means of promoting that objective¹⁵⁰.

During the summer of 1975 the discussions over the establishment of other Nuclear Free Zones beyond those already established – The Antarctic, the Outer Space, the Sea Bed and Latin America – all deserted except the latter, continued in the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament¹⁵¹. The speculations developed and there was a great debate within the British

145. Internal Minute of 22 April 1975, TNA, FCO 66/779.

146. Bailes to Otr, letter of 22 April 1975, TNA, FCO 66/779.

147. Callaghan to UK Delegation to NATO, telegram of 28 April 1975, TNA, FCO 66/779.

148. Extract from Record of NATO Meeting, 8-9 April 1975, TNA, FCO 66/779.

149. *Memorandum of the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on Disarmament Negotiations in the Eighteen Nation Committee*, March 15 1963, in *Further Documents Relating to the Conference of the 18-Nation Committee on Disarmament* (Session March 14, 1962 to June 15, 1962), HMSO, London, 1962, pp. 40-50.

150. US Mission to NATO, Talking Points, 29 April 1975, TNA, FCO 66/779.

151. Higgins to Chief of Defence Staff and others, letter of 18 August 1975, TNA, FCO 66/779.

ministerial offices. Other talks also took place at the Non Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in May 1975 whose Final Declaration praised the steps taken towards establishing NFZs, recognized the need for co-operation by Nuclear Weapon States and urged them to give security assurances to the states which might form a Nuclear Free Zone. The official position of the United Kingdom remained the same as it was before and among the ministerial circles it was agreed that any treaty proposing a NFZ would have not been acceptable to the UK if its effect were to limit the free use of the High Seas; the freedom of transit for nuclear powered vessels within territorial waters; the free transit in NFZs for warships or military aircraft carrying, or equipped to carry, nuclear weapons; the practice, which is common to both the US and the UK, of neither confirming nor denying the presence of absence or nuclear weapons in ships or aircrafts. It was clear that, if that was to be the point, the British Government could decide to consider each proposal for a NFZ as a different case due to the different characteristics of each zone¹⁵². At a deeper investigation the FCO realized that the question of the right of free passage was to arise not only with a Nuclear Free Zone but in general whenever the country was going to ask permission for a free passage in a determinate country, by aircraft or by boat, and in case of a NFZ the point was just that of declaring that no nuclear weapons were on board each time a transit was requested¹⁵³.

Ahead of the UNGA the FCO decided to draft a memorandum on the general position of HMG on the matter. The concept of NFZs should have been modified in the more circumstantiated declension of Nuclear Weapons Free Zone, unless a clear definition of NFZ was agreed. This would have avoided the problem of nuclear powered vessels and their free passage in the zones¹⁵⁴. The documents, however, seem to exclude any favour of a maritime-free zone with a reflection in the Mediterranean theatre. The UK wanted to verify whether the idea was compatible with article 7 of the NPT, whose provision envisaged the possibility for any group of States to conclude regional treaties in order to assure the total absence of nuclear weapons in their respective territories¹⁵⁵, in order to promote regional security. This could have been a useful way of containing nuclear proliferation but the NWFFZ should not come to be seen as a substitute for the NPT. This zones should be seen instead as the best and easiest means, as the Secretary General of the UN Kurt Waldheim stated, to ensure the total absence of nuclear weapons from

the territories interested by them and enhance their mutual security. Said that, the UK thought that the best option was anyway the Non-Proliferation Treaty that provided perfect security assurances for all Parties. The real problem, as envisaged by the British ministerial offices, was that there should have been a shield against Soviet propaganda and in this context the Nuclear Weapon Free Zone seemed viable only if there would have been a clear contribution to international non proliferation efforts aimed at increasing world security¹⁵⁶. This statement was important because it was quite clear that the UK could not adhere to a system of NFZs that was just a mean of propaganda or, even worse, a way to exclude the Western countries from a particular area. The question of the NWFFZ was discussed in 1975 by the UN General Assembly that adopted a study about it¹⁵⁷.

In general there was uncertainty on the matter and it was difficult to understand which country was really supporting the idea and the policy of Nuclear Free Zones and if there was a political sponsor for them. For all these reasons the UK delegation to the United Nations General Assembly was instructed to wait for other opinions and, in particular, for the principal sponsor of the proposals to play their game. The original NFZ for the Mediterranean, for instance, came up from a Soviet plan in 1963 and it was explicitly directed against the stationing of Polaris submarines in that sea¹⁵⁸. This was one of the reasons why it was seen as a mean of destabilizing the balance of power in the Mediterranean.

7. The persistent position of the United Kingdom on the NFZs and other proposals

As we have seen, for the United Kingdom, in general, the problem of establishing a Nuclear Free Zone in the Mediterranean, beyond the fulfilling of the four principles set up in the previous years, was particularly that of avoiding the possibility of the preclusion of the free passage in the centre of the Mediterranean with vessels armed with nuclear weapons or nuclear engines having in mind the policy of not confirming nor denying such a news about its vessels. This problem came up whilst discussing of a possible Nuclear Free Zone in the Pacific Ocean but the principle was the same for the other theatres¹⁵⁹. The British diplomats, nevertheless, realized that the

152. *Id.*

153. Draft on Nuclear Free Zones and Non Proliferations, Appendix to Richards to various offices, letter of 30 September 1974, TNA, FCO 66/625.

154. Wilkinson to the Secretary of COOS Committee, letter of 26 August 1975, TNA, FCO 66/779.

155. Article VII, Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), in https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/npt_text/1976/npt_text_140.pdf.

156. Brief for the 1975 UNGA, in MacDonald to Thomas and Richards, letter of 26 August 1975, TNA, FCO 66/779.

157. Comprehensive Study of the Question of Nuclear-Weapons-Free Zones in all its aspects, 11 December 1975, Res. 3472 (A-B), in [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/3472\(XXXI\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/3472(XXXI)).

158. Brief for the 1975 UNGA, in MacDonald to Thomas and Richards, letter of 26 August 1975, cit.

159. Summerhayes to Wheeler, letter of 29 January 1974, FCO 66/625.

creation of a NFZ in the Mediterranean would have clashed with the same objection that emerged with respect to a similar proposal for the Middle East delivered by Iran, backed and supported by Egypt from then onwards.¹⁶⁰ It was, in fact, pointed out that it would have been difficult for countries such as Egypt, Israel or the same Iran, that were receiving a nuclear know-how from the United States and France, to call for a ban on a full nuclear weapons in the Mediterranean. Such a move would have been regarded as to be a bit odd if not contradictory.¹⁶¹ The proposal of a Nuclear-Free Zone in the Middle East had implications and connections with the NFZ in the Mediterranean because it was not so clear if the Middle East zone would include international waters such as the Mediterranean one.¹⁶² Years later, in a revival of the subject due to the Iranian and afterwards Israeli raids against the Iraqi reactor of Tammuz in 1981, even the Reagan Administration was doubtful about a Nuclear Free Zone in the Middle East for the implication that it could have had in the Arab-Israeli question and because they did not want the Soviet Union to be put again in the centre of the theatre in discussing again a topic like this one. During the Carter Administration, after all, it happened again what it had occurred in the early Sixties and Seventies with the Soviets pulling ahead the nuclear topic in order to put the Western countries on the ropes.¹⁶³ On the other hand, as we have seen, the question was so delicate with respect to Israel and to the Peace Process that it should not be linked to it at any rate.¹⁶⁴ The possible area covered by such a zone in the Middle East was difficult to be defined. Egypt was included in a proposal of 1964 for an African zone. In general it was noted that a wider extension of the zone would have brought greater collateral problems. For instance, the inclusion of Turkey would have excluded nuclear weapons from a member of NATO, and to the East, the inclusion of the Indian sub-continent would have involved one country that had already exploded a nuclear bomb.¹⁶⁵ Thus, a viable NFZ would have excluded both these areas

160. N. Brehony-A El-Desouky, *British-Egyptian Relations from Suez to the Present Day*, Saqi London, 2007, p. 69.

161. Gore-Booth to Blatherwick, letter of 19 July 1974, TNA, FCO 66/625.

162. Blatherwick to Logan, letter of 31 July 1974, FCO 66/625.

163. Shoemaker to Gulim, Memorandum 3 September 1981, RRLA, WHSOF, Shoemaker Christopher Files, Rac, Box 1.

164. Reagan to Haig and Rostow, letter of 22 December 1981, RRLA, WHSOF, Shoemaker Christopher Files, Rac, Box 1.

165. On the Indian nuclear problem there is a variety of books: G. Perkovich, *India's nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation*, University of California Press, Oakland, 2001; I. Abraham, *Making of the Indian Atomic Bomb: Secrecy and the Postcolonial State*, Orient Longman Ltd., London-New York, 1999; A.J. Tallis, *India's Emerging Nuclear Posture*, Rand Corporation Santa Monica, 2001; J.B. Calvin, *The China - India Border War (1962)*, Marine Corps Command and Staff, College, 1984; S. Alford, *Zones of Peace: the Case of the Indian Ocean*, In *India's Security Considerations in Nuclear Age*, G. Sen (edited by), Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, 1986.

and of course international waters such as the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Gulf. A NFZ perspective could enter in the game of denials made by the Shah of Iran that his country was to develop nuclear weapons.¹⁶⁶ On that point it was true that Iran ratified the NPT and had a growing conventional military capability so it had everything to gain from the establishment of a nuclear free zone, at least in terms of regional balance. With respect to Iran there was an important point to be underlined as there could not have been realized the full implications of a nuclear free zone which would have largely nullified any nuclear guarantee given to the country as member of CENTO by the UK and the USA if the two great powers were going to adhere to a NFZ¹⁶⁷ and all this in spite of the convergence of interests among the three countries.¹⁶⁸

The revival of an international interest for the NFZs emerged again in the mid-Seventies in consequence of the first India's nuclear explosion in 1974.¹⁶⁹ After this fact Pakistan, Iran and Egypt asked for the establishment of such a zone in their boundary territories. The position of Pakistan was quite particular because the government had started the nuclear program earlier in 1972.¹⁷⁰ The British diplomats noted that this revival came with a bad timing because the first Review Conference of the Parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which was due to be held in Geneva in 1975, was under preparation. One of the issues that the United Kingdom was expected to face would have been the accusation by the Non-Nuclear States about the inadequacy of the Security Assurances which were given to them by the Three Nuclear-Weapon States (USA, UK, USSR) at the time of the signing of the Treaty. In this context a NFZ would have been useful but it is true that the attitude of the United Kingdom towards such zones, as we have seen, was very cautious, conditioned mainly by concern that zones free of nuclear weapons might compromise their national defence interests.

166. On the Iranian Nuclear Program see: S. Chubin, *Iran's Nuclear Ambitions*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, New York, 2006; F.A. Georges, *The Superpowers and the Middle East Regional and International Politics, 1955-1967*, Westview Press Boulder, 1994; G. Rose, J. Tepperman, *Iran and the Bomb-Solving the Persian Puzzle*, in *Foreign Affairs*, Washington DC, 2012; A.J. Venier, *Iran's nuclear options, Teheran's quest for the Atom Bomb*, Casemate, Havertown, 2005; C. Zak, *Iran's Nuclear Policy and the IAEA*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington DC, 2002.

167. *Draft on Nuclear Free Zones and Non Proliferations*, Appendix to Richards to various offices, letter of 30 September 1974, TNA, FCO 66/625.

168. V. Felci, *La Twin Pillar Policy e la convergenza di interessi tra Stati Uniti, Gran Bretagna e Iran, 1969-1976*, in «Studi Urbani di Scienze Giuridiche, Politiche ed Economiche», 2010, vol. 77, fascicolo 3, pp. 405-26.

169. G. Perkovich, *India's nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation*, University of California Press, Oakland 2001, pp. 170-187.

170. *Id.*, p. 165.

8. A decision to be revised

After almost ten years since the first official proposal of these zones it was decided that the time was right to revise the entire position on this matter. The paper prepared by the Research Unit of the Foreign Office outlined that the NFZ were initially proposed to encompass both major land and maritime zones, and their air space. The fundamental purpose of such areas was to prevent, by means of international agreements, the actual or potential deployment of nuclear weapons therein. The NFZ could provide a mechanism for either preserving the non-nuclear status of an area or removing nuclear weapons already present. The British experts, pointed out, that the removal of nuclear weapons in some case could lead to destabilizing changes in the existing military situation. For this reason alone, past proposals of NFZs in areas of major nuclear confrontation between East and West have met with no success. In some cases moreover it was recalled that the initiative for such an area was made, like for the zone in the Mediterranean, with the purpose of eliminating the *Polaris* submarines¹⁷¹. It was time, according to the Foreign Office researchers, to use the NFZs as an instrument of non-proliferation and this fact will exclude the acceptance of maritime NFZs, particularly the Mediterranean, as directed against existing Nuclear Weapon States. A Nuclear Free Zone in the Mediterranean would have posed major problems because it could have limited the "freedom of the seas" and also because most of the warships of the Nuclear-Weapon States were dual capable (equipped for nuclear or conventional operations). For this major reason the position of Her Britannic Majesty's Government, similarly to the NATO's position, was again firmly that of examining only proposals for regions or continents outside the major confrontation areas between East and West.

Until 1975 the only empirical example of the NFZs was the Treaty of Tlatelolco for Latin America, a treaty that did not prohibit the transit of nuclear weapons through the zone. In general the basic nature of a Nuclear Free Zone was determined by the discipline it meant to impose both on countries located within the zone (the potential direct participants) and on the activities of external powers. The new possibility was that of having the form of either a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (NWFZ) which would have involved the mutual renunciation of nuclear weapons capability by the direct participants or, alternatively, of a nuclear-explosive-free zone (NEFZ). The latter would not only have denied the right of participants to nuclear weapons, but also to the indigenous development of peaceful nuclear explosives (PNE) capability. This last aspect seemed very important because, particularly from the non-proliferation point of view, since the technology of PNE devices was virtually indistinguishable from that of nuclear weapons. There were also other aspects to consider: as the obligations which might be undertaken by

its participants. A NFZ, indeed, could have the result to impose constraints on the nuclear activities within that zone of external powers, following the precedents set with Tlatelolco Treaty. These restrictions could impact on the freedom of Nuclear Weapon States to use the NFZ for the deployment or stockpiling of nuclear weapons (such as at military bases) and they may be extended to the transit of nuclear weapons by land, sea or air, and perhaps even to the passage of nuclear capable aircraft or warships. On the one hand, it was pointed out by the expert of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that a country does not need the creation of a NFZ to exercise the ultimate right to grant or refuse legal access to its territory, including its air space. On the other hand there would have always been a danger whether in the interest of promoting a Nuclear Free Zone a country was prepared to agree with all the implicit options, to inspect every passing ship in order to support an unconditional ban. Indeed, the attitude of a Nuclear Weapon State would have been different and would have depended on several factors like its nuclear status and intentions, its security situation and general arms control posture that would have given them a reason for either supporting or rejecting the idea of a Nuclear Free Zone for the region or continent. The basis for supporting such a zone could include: the genuine promotion of non-proliferation; the prevention of damage to security by putting more pressure on any near-NWS within the proposed zone not to exercise their option to go nuclear; to restrict the freedom of NWS to deploy nuclear weapons within the zones (fears caused by the stationing of Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba for instance); enhance security by attempting to elicit formal commitment from existing NWS not to use nuclear weapons against the countries within the zone. This last reason could have been seen as the most important for many Non-Nuclear-Weapon States who were already *de facto* NFZs on account of their adherence to the NPT and absence of any NWS military base. It was also important to add that since many Non-Nuclear-Weapon States were technically incapable of acquiring a nuclear weapon option for a foreseeable future, they would have seemed to have little option but to resort to diplomatic means to ensure their security, particularly if this was not subject to a guarantee from a nuclear ally. Although there could have been several reasons for a Non-Nuclear-Weapon State to reject the Nuclear Free Zone concept, the most obvious would have seemed that they did not wish to renounce the nuclear weapons option, or the possibility to acquire nuclear technology in the future. The Committee, again, stressed the attitude of prudence of the British Government towards Nuclear Free Zones. An attitude borne not only for a crucial reliance on nuclear weapons for defence and deterrence purposes, but out of skepticism as to whether NFZs could achieve anything of real value in terms of enhancing international security¹⁷².

171. L. Nunn, *La sfida nucleare*, cit. pp. 220-228.

172. *Draft on Nuclear Free Zones and Non Proliferations, Appendix to Richards to various offices, letter of 30 September 1974*, TNA, FCO 66/6525.

In general and to sum up, for the British diplomats, the question of the support of a European Nuclear Free Zone would have been out of question, because the nuclear stockpile in Germany played an essential part in NATO strategy, which explicitly depended on the use of nuclear weapons to oppose Soviet conventional preponderance and geographical advantage. As for NFZs outside Europe and the borders of the NATO the position was rather different, moreover in areas of minor strategic and military importance, where the setting up of NFZs might have to accomplish certain British interests. Of these the most important would have seemed to be that of preventing the proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. For such reasons there was openness from HMG over some proposals¹⁷³. There was also another proposal on the table about the creation of nuclear-explosive-free zones, a proposal collateral to the other on the Nuclear Free Zones and was introduced as a minor proposal that could be viable before the other.

According to the Foreign Office the proposal seemed to bring several advantages because it would have affected areas where there were near-NWS, as a further (legal and moral) constraint on these countries developing nuclear weapons; provide rival near-NWS with a framework which might make it easier for them to renounce simultaneously the nuclear weapons option; lower regional tension by enhancing mutual confidence; enable the United Kingdom to extend – as they had by signing Protocol II of the Tlatelolco Treaty, when they extended its validity to Falkland Islands, South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands¹⁷⁴ – a guarantee not to use nuclear weapons against a specific region of NNWS of the kind which they cannot extend on a universal basis due to the exigencies of the military situation in Europe – this could have helped to get the United Kingdom off the hook by having to do something concrete about security guarantees; achieve what Her Majesty's Government wanted without themselves appearing to make the running and thus be liable to the kind of criticism they usually faced by sponsoring "discriminatory" measures such as the Non Proliferation Treaty since the NNWS themselves would have taken the initiative and having them done so would have also confirmed one of HMG fundamental proposition concerning proliferation that it is that are the NNWS that have the most to fear from it; provide presentational advantages for the UK in giving their general support to a NNWS initiative; prove a useful precedent for other, non-nuclear, arms control measures on a regional basis; possibly enhance UK security by inflicting greater restrictions on the military deployment of potential adversaries than UK and allies suffered¹⁷⁵.

173. *Id.*

174. *United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland: Ratification of Additional Protocol II to the Treaty of Tlatelolco*, in http://disarmament.un.org/treaties/tlatelolco_p2/ *unitedkingdomofgreatbritainandnorthernirelandratimexico+city*.

175. *Draft on Nuclear Free Zones and Non Proliferations*, cit.

The problem whether these hypothetical advantages could matter or not. None the less the Government thought that if the NNWS were convinced that the NFZ would have enhanced their security it would have been better not to disabuse them, even being skeptical of the value of any declaration made by a NWS not to use nuclear weapons against a NNWS either included or not included in a Nuclear Free Zone. In general, the Government was aware that the setting up of a NFZ would not have been as easy as it was thought by some of the promoters, and the negotiations of the Treaty of Tlatelolco in the past demonstrated all the difficulties. One fundamental issue, for instance, concerned the treatment of the Peaceful Nuclear Explosives because, if the establishment of a NFZ, on the one hand, could ban the production of all nuclear explosives, on the other hand could legitimize the production of nuclear explosives for peaceful purposes, thus damaging rather than promoting the idea of the non-proliferation status. In the case of the Tlatelolco Treaty there was not any clear provision about that issue, but the United Kingdom adhered on the understanding that the ban on the development of peaceful nuclear explosives was implicit. A different interpretation and a relaxation on this subject would otherwise be in contrast with the Article V of the NPT, that reserves to the NWS the role of suppliers of PNE to the others, and it would have been a major shift in the policy of the United Kingdom. In order to take advantage in having a word to say in the future it was probably better to avoid any staunch opposition and support in theory the idea of NFZs. In general, the United Kingdom decided to adhere to the principle stated in the mid-1960s about the support of any Nuclear Free Zone, principles that we have already seen. The most important among them was that any military significant State, and preferably all States in the zone should be included. The omission of any significant state of a particular zone could reasonably undermine and cast severe doubts in the value of the zone. On the contrary, greater zone could have intractable problems to be overcome in order to form them. As noted before, there could have been a problem for a NWS like UK whether the setting up of a Nuclear Free Zone was to include a restriction on the movements of aircrafts and ships, in order to ensure they were not carrying nuclear weapons. The verification of such restrictions could cause embarrassment to the Nuclear States. The logic would have been that the verification should have been aimed at controlling that the states within a NFZ were not producing themselves nuclear explosives not to verify the transit of nuclear weapons. The general conclusions of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on the issue was that the United Kingdom policy should be formulated in the light of pragmatism and according to this policy any proposal which would have strengthened the non-proliferation regime should have received full support provided it could be achieved at an "acceptable" cost to the country's defence interests.

9. Conclusions

The question of the Nuclear Free Zones in the Mediterranean took the international debate for a decade between the 1960s and the 1970s. The proposal, as it has been highlighted, was brought forward after a request from the USSR and other different Soviet Bloc's countries. It seems clear that the countries concerned influenced themselves mutually and there was probably a common scope that was that of putting the Western Bloc in a sort of difficulty. A deep analysis of the motivations, that urged the proponents in submitting the Nuclear Free Zone in the Mediterranean idea, suggests that there were very different scopes behind them. Different motivations meant different ideas on what to do with the NFZs and different impact of them on the general context. The documents of the Foreign Office, more than those of the White House, highlight that there was a very deep series of discussions on the reply to the Soviet proposal and, moreover, there were different opinions among the European allies within the NATO. The discussions were openly frank also within the Foreign Office itself, but despite the variety of opinions in the European and North Atlantic Chanceries the outcome was the same: steady refusal of the Soviet note in the two rounds it was introduced, in the Sixties and in the mid-Seventies. Another important annotation is that it is possible to understand is that, whatever the result it is, there is a strong interruption between the first proposition of the note and the second introduction of the theme of the Nuclear Free Zones in the Mediterranean in the mid-Seventies. The main difference is due to the different international scenario between the two periods.


A deep examination of the question of the Nuclear Free Zone in the Mediterranean, even if nothing came of it, is definitely important as a test among the allies in receiving proposal that brought into the scene different options and different ideas and that lead the different NATO countries to an exercise of patient and of analysis of the national interest to be connected to the broad interest of the Alliance and of the allies. The Mediterranean, differently to other zones of the world, was a scenario of high strategic importance for the countries that have a shore in it and also for others that use this basin for strategic purpose, not least the Soviet Union, that wanted in this case try to test the ability of the Western Countries in giving a unitary reply and demonstrated that it was rather complicated to put the Alliance's interest behind more general or supposed "peace" or "détente" interests.

Teatro nel corso dei secoli della competizione tra le potenze marittime e oggi luogo di un dialogo dalle alterne fortune tra l'Unione Europea ed i paesi rivieraschi, nella seconda metà del Novecento il mare Mediterraneo è stato uno degli scenari del confronto bipolare, entro il quale si sono intersecate prioritarie necessità di sicurezza, sotto differenti aspetti e con diverse declinazioni. In quest'ambito, il presente volume ricostruisce alcune pagine meno note di storia della politica internazionale tra gli anni Cinquanta e Duemila. Dalle esigenze strategiche della Gran Bretagna riguardo il continente africano alle scelte degli Stati Uniti in un Medio Oriente dalle molte peculiarità politiche; dalla convergenza di interessi tra una Jugoslavia in equilibrio tra gli schieramenti opposti e la Comunità Europea fino ai progetti di Nuclear Free Zones ed agli specifici capitoli mediterranei del Processo di Helsinki, volti a dare avvio ad un dialogo nuovo e inclusivo tra le due sponde del bacino.

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