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# Fighting Under a Different Flag: Multinational Naval Cooperation and Submarine Warfare in the Mediterranean, 1940–1944



Richard Hammond

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## Abstract

The exiled navies of many Allied nations came under British operational control in World War II. Six of these contributed significant proportions of their submarine fleets to the Mediterranean, where there was great need for them, yet troubled relations meant multinational naval cooperation (MNC) was often extremely difficult. British attempts to establish structures to improve this were frequently hampered, while perceived differing strategic “worth” led the British to treat them in an unequal manner. Ultimately, while MNC was broadly successful in the British home theatre, it was much less effective in the Mediterranean and valuable resources subsequently went underused.

Operating in coalitions has become the norm for western militaries. It has been formally recognized by the British government in both the 2010 and 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Reviews, the first of which acknowledged: “We rarely deploy alone. We and our NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] allies consciously depend on each other for particular capabilities.”<sup>1</sup> Such a conviction plays an integral role in shaping procurement, long-term planning, and

1. “Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review” (2010), 20. Similar comments on the importance of partnering were again recognised in “National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom” (2015); see page 47 for example.

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operating concepts. An example of this relating to the Royal Navy (RN) was the decision to optimize the Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carriers for interoperable capabilities with allied aircraft, as “we would normally expect to deploy with allies such as the US and France; through NATO; or as part of a broader coalition.”<sup>2</sup> Working successfully within coalitions in the maritime environment is clearly dependent on effective multinational naval cooperation (MNC). Effective MNC must deal not only with technical differences between allies, but also with those of languages, cultures, attitudes, operating procedures, and priorities.

In October 2008, this journal published an excellent article by Mark C. Jones on the role of the RN’s Ninth Submarine Flotilla (S9) in fostering effective MNC between British and European allies in World War II.<sup>3</sup> Free French, Polish, Dutch, and Norwegian submarines were placed in this flotilla under British operational control and worked alongside RN vessels. Jones convincingly demonstrates that despite difficulties such as different languages, cultures, equipment, and tactics, the unit became “an important example of a multinational naval force.”<sup>4</sup> It is his contention that S9 laid the foundations for effective MNC in NATO, when it was formed shortly after the war.

As Jones’s article is based around the genesis, operations, and workings of S9 at Dundee, the article focuses on the British home theatre and the Atlantic. This article will examine the much larger number of Allied submarines that were placed under British operational control in the Mediterranean, and the situation surrounding MNC there. A total of 67 came under British control between 1940 and 1944, accounting for 39 percent of the 173 submarines used by the RN in the Mediterranean. It was a truly multinational contingent, consisting of 15 French, 5 Greek, 4 Dutch, 2 Polish, 1 Yugoslavian, and no fewer than 40 Italian submarines.<sup>5</sup>

The Mediterranean saw the greatest concentration of Allied submarines under British control in the war. Jones’s claim that “it seems likely that the RN decided to concentrate most of the foreign boats that were fit for combat operations in one flotilla, S9,” is true in that S9 held the largest proportion of Allied submarines of any individual flotilla, but the overall number and proportion in the home theatre was far less than in the Mediterranean.<sup>6</sup> The diversity of these forces has also been underestimated; these submarines were from six different nations, equal to that

2. “A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom,” 29, 51–52.

3. Mark C. Jones, “Experiment at Dundee: The Royal Navy’s 9th Submarine Flotilla and Multinational Naval Co-operation during World War II,” *Journal of Military History* 72, no. 4 (2008): 1179–1212.

4. *Ibid.*, 1211.

5. The figures given were compiled by the author, based on the Admiralty “pink lists” from June 1940 to December 1944. These are comprehensive lists of Royal and Allied Navy locations and movements on a monthly basis, in ADM 187/8-44, The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom (hereafter TNA).

6. Jones, “Experiment at Dundee,” 1193.

housed within S9. Michael Wilson has stated that that the Indian Ocean was unique in submarine warfare, as it saw submarine forces of seven different nations from both sides operating there.<sup>7</sup> Yet this number was actually less than those in the Mediterranean, with the six nations mentioned above counted alongside British and German forces. That such a high proportion of the total number should be Allied vessels makes it particularly surprising that they have received so little scholarly attention.

Official and general histories of the war at sea in the theatre tend to make only passing mention of the Allied vessels.<sup>8</sup> Histories of the RN submarine service or of submarine operations in the war add some additional, largely operational, information.<sup>9</sup> Papers and memoirs of British officers in the theatre, from theatre commanders down to submarine commanders, have provided some details on policy and attitudes towards them.<sup>10</sup> The remaining secondary literature largely deals with each of the individual navies or submarine services, most of which focus directly on operations and contain little on the question of MNC.<sup>11</sup>

7. Michael Wilson, *A Submariner's War: The Indian Ocean, 1939–1945* (Stroud: Tempus, 2000), 13.

8. See, for instance, S. W. Roskill, *The War at Sea, 1939–1945*, 3 vols. (London: Naval and Military Press, 2004); Correlli Barnett, *Engage the Enemy More Closely: The Royal Navy in the Second World War* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991); Donald McIntyre, *The Battle for the Mediterranean* (London: Batsford, 1975); Jack Greene and Alessandro Massignani, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean* (London: Chatham, 1998). The most information to be gained on the minor nations from these general histories is in Vincent P. O'Hara, *Struggle for the Middle Sea: The Great Navies at War in the Mediterranean, 1940–1945* (London: Conway, 2009).

9. There is much to be gained on operational aspects from the relevant unpublished Naval Staff History (hereafter NSH) that can be found in NSH, Submarines: Volume 2—Operations in the Mediterranean, 1956, ADM 234/381, TNA; see also S. May, "The British Submarine Campaign in the Mediterranean, 1940–43" (Mphil thesis, University of Swansea, 2000); Arthur Hezlet, *British and Allied Submarine Operations in World War 2*, 2 vols. (Gosport: Royal Navy Submarine Museum, 2001); Derek Walters, *The History of the British U-Class Submarine* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2004), 155–83, provides a specific narrative overview of Allied submarine operations, limited to those in "U" Class submarines.

10. See Michael Simpson, ed., *The Cunningham Papers*, 2 vols. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999, 2006); G. W. G. Simpson, *Periscope View: A Professional Autobiography* (London: Macmillan, 1972); John Wingate, *The Fighting Tenth: The Tenth Submarine Flotilla and the Siege of Malta* (London: Periscope Publishing, 2003); Edward P. Young, *One of Our Submarines* (London: Hart-Davis, 1953); William D. E. King, *The Stick and the Stars* (London: Hutchinson, 1958); Ben Bryant, *One Man Band: Memoirs of a Submarine C.O.* (London: William Kimber, 1958); Alistair G. C. Mars, *British Submarines at War, 1939–45* (London: William Kimber, 1971); John O. Coote, *Submariner* (New York: Norton, 1991).

11. On the French, see Paul Auphan and Jacques Mordal, *The French Navy in World War Two* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1959); Phillippe Masson, *Histoire de la marine. Tome II: De la vapeur à l'atome* (Paris: Charles Lavazelle, 1992); Michel Bertrand, *Les Forces Navales Françaises Libres* (Paris: Argout, 1980); Claude Huan, "The French Navy in World War 2," in *Re-evaluating Major Naval Combatants of World War 2*, ed. James J. Sadkovich (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1990). For the French and Free French navies specifically in the Mediterranean, see

The effort of coordinating such a large multinational effort is worthy of study, but it has been largely ignored to date. This is possibly to do with the rather unsuccessful nature of MNC there, which stands in stark contrast to the fruitful efforts of S9. By focusing on the situation and circumstances in the Mediterranean different to that of the home theatre, this article will demonstrate that while there were some successes, the difficulties of MNC were much greater in the Mediterranean and were not overcome to anything like the extent they were in S9. This was due to the fractious nature of relations between some of the different nations, particularly relating to those that were formerly hostile neutrals or enemies—the ex-Vichy French and the Italians. This, coupled with technical problems and differing British attitudes of the strategic “worth” of the various nations, meant manpower and resources were under-utilized.

This study is presented in four broad sections. First, it will explore the importance of submarine warfare in the Mediterranean, and thus where the Allied vessels could contribute. Second, it will chart when, how, and why these

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C. F. Caroff, *La Theatre Mediterranee*, 2 vols. (Paris: SHM, 1958–60); for French submarines, see Huan, *Les Sous-Marins Francais 1919–45* (Rennes: Marines Editions, 1996).

For the Greek navy in general, see Procopis Papastratis, “A Fighting Navy in Exile: The Greek Fleet in the Mediterranean and Beyond,” in *New Interpretations in Naval History: Selected Papers from the Tenth Naval History Symposium*, ed. J. Sweetman. (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1991), 363–73; there is also useful information on the Greek navy in the Mediterranean in O’Hara, *Struggle for the Middle Sea*; and some detail relating to cooperation in Reginald Leeper, *When Greek meets Greek* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1950).

Sources on Dutch submarine history, including their operations in the Mediterranean, are C. J. W. van Waning and J. J. Leeftang, eds., *Wegduiken! De Nederlandse Onderzee dienst, 1906–1966* (The Hague: Zuid-Hollandsche, 1967); and Piet C. Jalhay and Gerard Horneman, *Periscope Op!: Nederlandse Onderzeebooten* (Amsterdam: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 2006). On the Dutch navy in exile more generally, see the official histories: Ph. M. Bosscher, *De Koninklijke Marine in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, 3 vols. (Franeker: T. Wever, 1984–90).

A general source which contains much on the Polish navy in exile is Michael A. Peszke, *Poland’s Navy, 1918–1945* (New York: Hippocrene, 1999); while Wanda Troman, “Anglo-Polish Naval Relations, 1918–1947” (Ph.D. thesis, University of Exeter, 2000), contains a chapter on the Second World War. See also Jerzy Bedzmirowski, “Co-operation Between the Royal Navy and the Polish Navy during World War II Regarding the Education of Naval Cadres,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 21 (2008): 657–68; and the memoirs of one Polish submarine commander who served in the Mediterranean: Borys Karnicki, *Marynarski Worek Wspomnien* (Warsaw: Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, 1987).

Març’ Antonio Bragadin, *The Italian Navy in World War II* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1957), includes a narrative chapter on the “co-belligerency” period. For works in Italian, see the multi-authored Italian official history *La Marina Italiana nella Seconda Guerra Mondiale (LMI)*, 21 vols. (Rome: Ufficio Storico della Marina Militare [USMM], 1950–1978), especially vol. 21, G. Fioravanzo, *L’organizzazione della Marina Durante il Conflitto Tomo III: I problemi organici durante il periodo armistiziale* (1978); Giovanni Bernardi, *La Marina, gli armistizi e il trattato di pace, settembre 1943–dicembre 1951* (Rome: USMM, 1979).

submarines came to be under British operational control and demonstrate their changing proportion of the overall total of submarines throughout the campaign. Their operations and overall levels of activity compared to those of the RN will be examined before assessing their contribution to the campaign. Third, the nature of MNC in the UK will be established before the final section examines the nature of it in the Mediterranean. This will place the contribution of the Allied vessels in the context of the serious political difficulties that existed for MNC in the Mediterranean, and so resulted in a worse outcome than that in the home theatre.

### **Submarine Warfare in the Mediterranean, 1940–1944**

The RN's submarines were often not used to their full potential during the war. Despite being an offensive weapon, they were frequently utilized on other, less suited tasks. In Home and Atlantic waters, they were regularly tied to roles such as close blockade of German naval units, convoy escort, anti-raider, and anti-U-boat patrols. Only during the Norwegian campaign of 1940 did they take a sustained offensive against the German navy and invasion shipping. It was, as one historian has aptly put it, "a regrettable misuse of specialist ships."<sup>12</sup> In the Far East, the RN was initially restricted to patrols in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea in 1943–1944. With little presence of the Japanese navy or their supply shipping, it was a less fruitful hunting ground than the Pacific. The sighting of any shipping larger than a 500-ton coaster was a rarity.<sup>13</sup> An extension of their operations further east from late 1944 brought some further opportunities, but the combination of a lack of genuinely high endurance, long-range ocean-going submarines and the attrition to the Japanese meant little could be achieved.<sup>14</sup>

It was only in the Mediterranean that RN submarines were consistently used in their offensive capacity. Here a rich vein of targets existed, and the enclosed nature of the theatre complemented the smaller, shorter-range submarines employed by the British. The Axis sea lines of communication between Italy and North Africa offered a prime target and an opportunity to definitively influence the war in the desert. The importance of this route had been acknowledged by the Admiralty when planning for the possibility of war with Italy, and highlighted as a major objective.<sup>15</sup> As the war progressed, the importance of submarines to interdicting this shipping was quickly recognized by the RN's Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C) Mediterranean, Admiral Andrew Cunningham. He regularly requested more be

12. Nigel John Gilbert, "British Submarine Operations in World War 2," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings* 89, no 3 (1963): 73.

13. Wilson, *A Submariner's War*, 145–46.

14. For lists of Japanese warships and shipping of over 500 tons sunk by RN and Dutch submarines, see NSH, *Submarines: Volume 3—Operations in the Far East, 1956*, 114–18, ADM 234/382, TNA.

15. O'Hara, *Struggle for the Middle Sea*, 8.

transferred to his command, and went so far as to say in the autumn of 1941 that "Every submarine that can be spared is worth its weight in gold."<sup>16</sup>

On the Italian declaration of war, 10 June 1940, there had been a single submarine flotilla (S1) based at Alexandria, Egypt, with a sub-command at Malta. This was soon expanded with the creation of another (S8) at Gibraltar in December, as part of an increased effort by the RN to interdict shipping from Italy to the Axis forces in North Africa, to act as an overseas training/working up unit for submarines in the theatre, and to serve as escorts to Atlantic convoys.<sup>17</sup> The much-increased sub-command at Malta was then made into an independent flotilla (S10) in September 1941. Even when Axis aerial superiority had forced the withdrawal of submarines based at Malta in 1942, a proposal to withdraw one of the three flotillas from the Mediterranean was unanimously rejected by the British Chiefs of Staff as they remained the best possible option to attack Axis shipping.<sup>18</sup>

Yet these submarines were not important just for interrupting Axis communications with North Africa, nor did the need for them end with the climax of the Tunisian campaign in May 1943. In fact, while 993 convoys were run between Italy and North Africa, totalling 9,245,171 tons of shipping, there were 3,116 convoys totalling 19,379,786 tons to Albania, Greece, and the Aegean up to the Italian armistice, 8 September 1943.<sup>19</sup> These convoys were vital to supplying the Axis positions in the Balkans and across the Aegean islands. The interruption of Italian communications through the Aegean had been identified alongside those with North Africa as a prewar objective. Cunningham outlined his intention to attack them in the summer of 1940, and a cabinet memorandum on "future strategy" shortly followed that argued for the importance of attacking shipping in the Aegean.<sup>20</sup> Declarations of "sink at sight" zones followed over 1940 and 1941, opening up areas to attack Axis shipping without warning beyond the North African routes and into the Adriatic and Aegean. The area between Southern France and Corsica was opened as an "operational zone" for submarines in November 1942 in order

16. For Cunningham's quote, see C-in-C Mediterranean to Admiralty, 19 September 1941, AIR 8/961, WX. 2604, TNA.

For appeals for more submarines, see COS(41) 10th "O" meeting, 4 April 1941, CAB 79/555, TNA; 27th "O" meeting, 25 August 1941.

17. Organisation of Allied Naval, Army and Air Contingents, 16 April 1941, 4, CAB 66/16/9, TNA; S. May, "Strangling Rommel: British Submarine Commanders in the Mediterranean," *Mariner's Mirror* 88, no. 4 (2002): 466.

18. COS(42) 121st meeting, 16 April 1942, CAB 79/20, TNA; 133rd meeting, 28 April 1942.

19. Giorgio Giorgerini, *La battaglia dei convogli in Mediterraneo* (Milan: Mursia, 1977), 235.

20. O'Hara, *Struggle for the Middle Sea*, 8; Cunningham to the Admiralty, 16 July 1940, in Simpson, ed., *The Cunningham Papers*, 114–15; COS(40) Memorandum 647, "Future Strategy," 21 August 1940, 38, CAB 80/16, TNA.

to allow further interdiction of Axis shipping to Corsica and Sardinia and to deter Spanish trade with the Axis.<sup>21</sup>

Although the scope for submarine operations certainly decreased after the Axis surrender in Tunisia, the need for submarines persisted in order to attack communications with Sardinia and Corsica in the Adriatic and the Aegean and along the coasts of Italy and southern France. In June 1943 there were still 350,000 tons of remaining Italian large vessels, about 800 small vessels of 50 to 500 tons, and large numbers of very small coasters. Even after the Italian armistice, the Germans still retained 185 vessels of 575,000 tons, although some of it was no longer seaworthy or consisted of large passenger liners unsuited to the narrower waters they were now operating in. This shipping was seen as vital by the Germans to maintain their position in the Mediterranean.<sup>22</sup>

The continued need for submarines was clearly recognised by those both at Whitehall and in theatre. A proposal (later cancelled) by Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill to withdraw five from the eastern Mediterranean and send them the Black Sea to assist the Russians came with the caveat that he did not wish the total Mediterranean strength to be reduced.<sup>23</sup> The C-in-C Levant, Admiral Algeron Willis, called for more submarines in October 1943, and urged greater use of all arms to build on inroads made into Axis shipping during the failed campaign to take and hold the Dodecanese islands.<sup>24</sup> Along with attacks on shipping and remaining German naval units, the submarines conducted storing operations, special operations to land agents and Special Forces, and location work to aid the various amphibious landings.<sup>25</sup> Submarine operations of all types continued until November 1944, when the C-in-C Mediterranean ordered that no more offensive patrols take place.<sup>26</sup> After that, only non-combat operations continued.

### **The Numbers and Contribution of Allied Submarines in the Mediterranean**

The graph shown in Figure One (next page) displays the changing average weekly totals of British and Allied submarines present in the Mediterranean each month, from June 1940 to December 1944. It shows two lines: one for the total

21. See Richard Hammond, "British Policy on Total Maritime Warfare and the Anti-Shipping Campaign in the Mediterranean, 1940–1944," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36, no. 6 (2013): 797; DO(42) 17th meeting, 16 November 1942, annex on "Extension of sink at sight zone to Franco-Spanish border," CAB 69/4, TNA.

22. Sixth Report by the Reichkommissar for Shipping, 6 June 1943, 41, FD 4195/45, Imperial War Museum, Duxford; Eighth Report by the Reichkommissar for Shipping, 13 December 1943, 62.

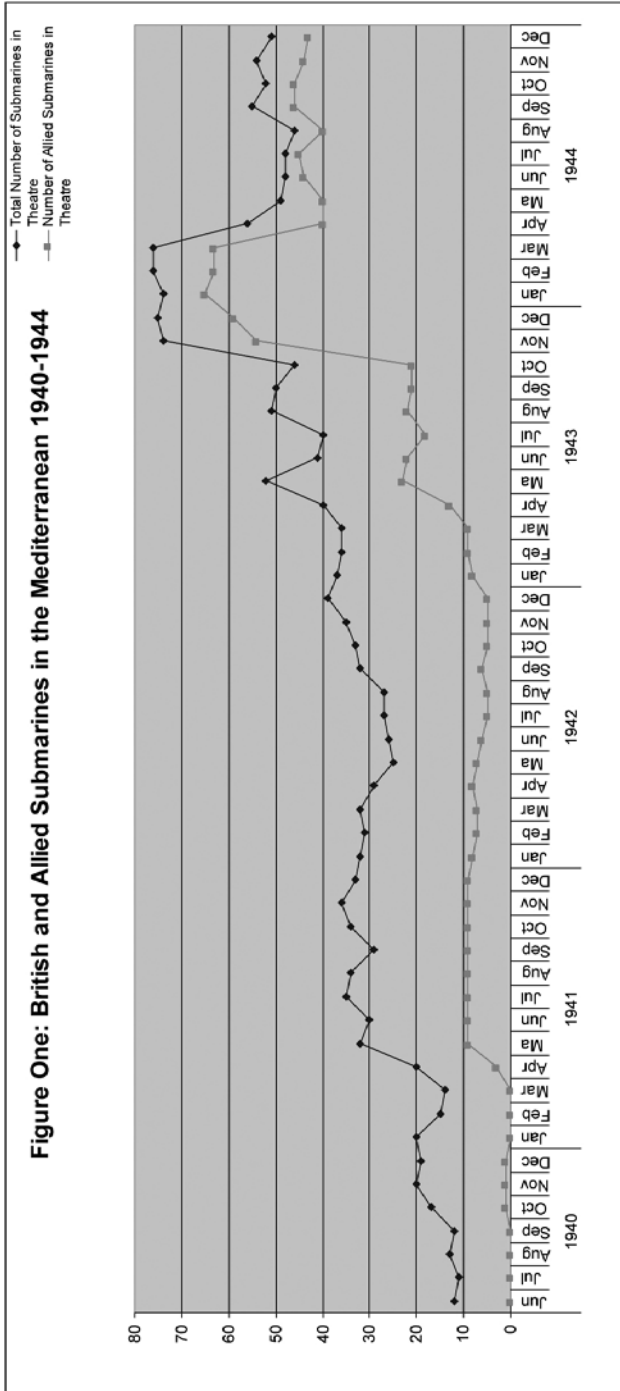
23. Extract from COS(43) 264th meeting, 29 October 1943, ADM 199/1340, TNA.

24. C-in-C Levant to Admiralty, 3 October 1943, ADM 223/584, TNA; "Naval Operations in the Aegean, 7 September–28 November 1943," 27 December 1943, p. 20, WLLS 6-2, Private Papers of Admiral Algeron Willis, Churchill College Archive Centre, Cambridge.

25. See, for instance, Andrew Cunningham, *A Sailor's Odyssey* (London: Hutchinson, 1951), 557, for details on their role in the landings on Sicily.

26. NSH, Submarines, vol. 2, 259, ADM 234/381, TNA.





number of British and Allied submarines in the Mediterranean, and one specifically for the number of Allied submarines under British operational control.<sup>27</sup> The chart clearly indicates not only that there was an increasing presence of Allied submarines over the course of the submarine campaign in the Mediterranean, but also that they represented an increasing proportion of the total number of vessels in the theatre.

The first Allied submarine to come under RN operational control in the Mediterranean was the Free French *Narval*. In the immediate aftermath of the French armistice, 22 June 1940, this was the only submarine out of the forty-six they had in the theatre to join the British, sailing to Malta from Tunisia at the first opportunity.<sup>28</sup> There were no new additions until the arrival of three Dutch submarines in late March and early April 1941, detached from S9 and sent to bolster the newly formed S8 at Gibraltar. One Yugoslav and five Greek submarines became new additions the next month.<sup>29</sup> During the closing stages of the German-led offensive, the Greek vessels were placed under the command of C-in-C Mediterranean and managed to escape to Alexandria.<sup>30</sup> Despite these additions, the Allied submarines did not represent a greater proportion of the overall number. Instead, greater RN numbers were sent to the theatre, in order to interdict Axis shipping to North Africa in support of the coming British and Commonwealth land offensive in Libya—Operation Battleaxe.<sup>31</sup>

Little changed for the remainder of 1941, as vessels were variously transferred in and out. There was a new arrival in the form of the Polish ORP *Sokol* in September, detached from S9, but two of the Dutch submarines then left the theatre in early 1942.<sup>32</sup> The total number of submarines rose significantly from August to December, to take a role in Operation Torch—the Allied landings in North Africa. Here they were utilized in roles including guarding against a sortie by the Italian navy, escorting the invasion convoys, and acting as location markers for the landings themselves in November.<sup>33</sup> This increase was primarily RN vessels though, and the Allied proportion of the overall total decreased. January to March 1943 saw some increase in the proportion of Allied vessels, rising from 13 percent in December 1942 to 25 percent in March 1943, although the actual number of

27. This graph shows averages compiled from the listings given for each month from June 1940 to December 1944 in the Admiralty “pink lists,” ADM 187/8-44, TNA. It should be noted that this includes only Allied submarines that were under British operational control, and so not, for example, Greek submarines prior to Greek capitulation.

28. NSH, Submarines, vol. 2, 2, ADM 234/381, TNA; Auphan and Mordal, *French Navy*, 159.

29. Admiralty pink list entry for 2 April 1941, ADM 187/12, TNA; Admiralty pink list entry for 2 May 1941, ADM 187/13, TNA.

30. Roskill, *War at Sea*, 1:434; Papastratis, “Fighting Navy in Exile,” 365.

31. NSH, Submarines, vol. 2, 27–32, ADM 234/381, TNA. Operation Battleaxe took place in June 1941.

32. Admiralty pink list entry for 2 January 1942, ADM 187/17, TNA.

33. NSH, Submarines, vol. 2, 100–110, ADM 234/381, TNA.

Allied submarines remained in single figures. This had included the first additions of French submarines in January, and numbers swelled with further additions up to April.<sup>34</sup> These, along with the arrival of the Polish *Dzik*, were the reason that the proportion of Allied vessels passed 50 percent for the first time in May.

The dramatic Allied increase in November 1943 represents the Italian submarines. Italy had signed the armistice in September and declared war on Germany in October, being given status as a “co-belligerent” to the Allies. As such, the Italian vessels do not appear in the Admiralty “pink lists” until November. A total of forty Italian submarines that had escaped destruction or German seizure came under British control by December, not including the “midget submarines.”<sup>35</sup> At the start of 1944, vessels from Allied nations constituted around 80 percent of the total British and Allied submarine force. In April, numbers dropped heavily as twenty-three French and Italian vessels left the theatre for a variety of reasons: some went to other theatres of war and some were sent for extensive repairs and refits at better equipped stations outside of the Mediterranean, whilst some of the Italian vessels in particularly bad states of repair were scrapped.<sup>36</sup> However, as RN submarines were also exiting the theatre, the proportion remained little changed. From May to the end of the year, Allied vessels represented between 81 and 96 percent of the submarines in the theatre. The RN submarines had mostly either returned to Home waters, or moved on to the Far East.<sup>37</sup>

The contribution of the Allied submarines to the war in the Mediterranean can be assessed by examining two criteria: their level of activity and their achievements on operations. The activity of the vessels is measured through calculating the proportion of the total number of Allied vessels that were at sea throughout the submarine campaign. This can then be compared to the activity levels of the RN submarines. Figures Two (opposite) and Three (next page) demonstrate these average weekly quantities each month, and paint completely different pictures.

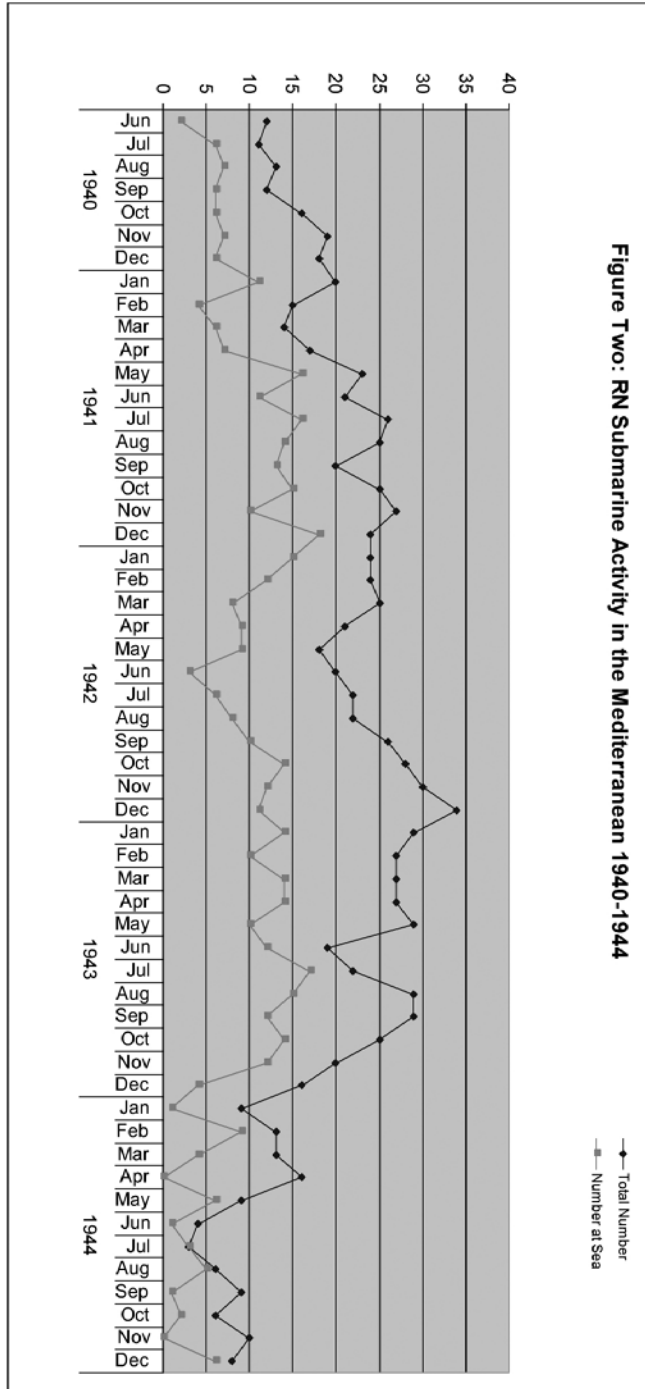
Throughout the campaign, there were regularly 50 percent or more of the RN submarines in the theatre actually at sea. This demonstrates a very active role there, as following any period at sea, a submarine must spend time in port for refueling and refitting, and possibly also rearming and repairs, not to mention rest and paperwork for the crews, before being able to set sail again. At particularly important times during the campaign they were exceptionally active with over 75 percent, an example being July 1943, which saw increased activity prior to and during the invasion of Sicily. Periods of low activity were very rare and generally with a clear reason. For instance, the lack of vessels at sea during June and July 1942 was the result of the final stages of the heaviest bombing of Malta by the Axis, forcing the submarines

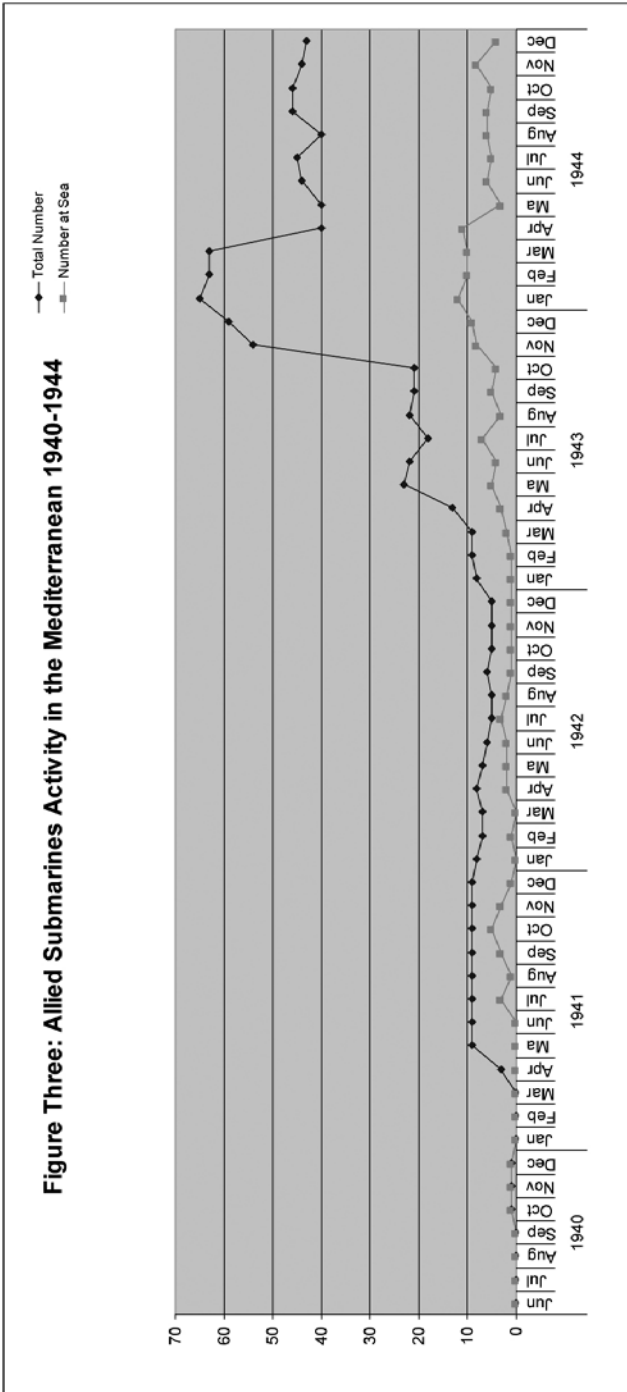
34. Admiralty pink list entries for April 1943, ADM 187/24, TNA.

35. Admiralty pink list entries for December 1943, ADM 187/31, TNA.

36. “Disposal and Employment of Surrendered Italian Submarines,” minute of 31 October 1943, ADM 1/13300, TNA; “Proposed Employment of French Naval Vessels,” 6–7, 12.

37. Admiral Submarines: Statistics, “Summary of British and Allied Submarine Operations 1944,” 4, ADM 199/1926, TNA.





of S10 stationed there to stay underwater in port during the daytime, and making entering or leaving the port very hazardous.<sup>38</sup> They were later forced to withdraw from the island, while a rapid Axis advance in North Africa also prompted the withdrawal of S1 from their base at Alexandria to Haifa and Beirut.

Figure Three demonstrates a clear difference in the level of activity of Allied submarines compared to those of the Royal Navy. Excluding the brief but very active existence of the *Narval* in 1940, it was very rare for the Allied vessels to reach, let alone exceed, 50 percent activity. In 1941–1942 there was a steady, if often low, level of activity. It is in the examination of 1943–1944 that the low level of activity of the Allied submarines becomes truly apparent. Overall activity of Allied submarines did increase in this period; from March 1943 onwards there were always two or more submarines at sea. December was the first month to see more Allied submarines at sea than those of the RN, and this was a frequent occurrence in 1944 when few RN vessels remained. Activity levels reached double figures for the first time from January to April 1944.

This increased activity must be seen in context though. By May the addition of French vessels, coupled with the return of some Dutch and Polish submarines to the theatre, meant that there were twenty-three Allied submarines available, yet only five were at sea.<sup>39</sup> The figures become even more widely separated at the end of 1943. Whilst the nine Allied submarines at sea in December represented the greatest number to that date, the addition of the Italian submarine force meant that the total number of Allied submarines in the theatre that month was actually fifty-nine.<sup>40</sup> Despite the increased activity throughout 1944, the ratio of Allied submarines at sea to the total available was extremely low and never recovered.

A total of 773 (1,194,240 gross registered tons [GRT]) merchant ships of all types were sunk by submarine and 184 (438,772 GRT) damaged, with 123 warships of all types destroyed.<sup>41</sup> They had indeed proven to be “worth their weight in gold” as Cunningham had claimed, but it was not just the British who appreciated this. Their success had caused grave concern among senior Axis personnel during the war in North Africa, who regularly acknowledged the danger they posed and the losses to vital supplies they caused, and frequently demanded greater efforts be made to counter them. This even led to the creation of a whole new Italian school for anti-submarine warfare in late 1941.<sup>42</sup> Concerns continued over 1943–1944,

38. NSH Submarines, vol 2, 88, ADM 234/381, TNA.

39. Admiralty pink list entries for May 1943, ADM 187/25, TNA.

40. Admiralty pink list entries for December 1943, ADM 187/31, TNA.

41. All the figures shown in this and the subsequent paragraph are the author's own calculations based on the comprehensive list of submarine attacks given in Jürgen Rohwer, *Allied Submarine Attacks of World War Two: European Theatre of Operations 1939–1945* (London: Greenhill, 1997), 125–223.

42. On concerns, see, for example, “Report of the CinC Navy to the Fuehrer at Wolfsschanze, 13 November 1941” and “Report to the Fuehrer made by the CinC Navy,” 13 February 1942, in *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs, 1939–1945* (London: Greenwood, 1990), 241, 263. For the A/S school, see *LMI*, vol. 4, Fioravanzo, *Le Azioni Navali dal 10 Giugno al 31 Marzo 1941*, 69.

with submarine sinkings often causing the suspension of shipping traffic, while the combined threat of submarines and surface forces caused the German operation to retake Leros to be temporarily suspended.<sup>43</sup>

Yet of the totals, submarines from Allied nations sank only 79 merchant and supply vessels (80,231 GRT) of all types when under British control, and damaged a further 19 (63,826 GRT). They also sank two U-boats, one destroyer, and ten auxiliary warships of all types. This can be compared to the following total figures for submarines of the RN: 694 merchant vessels (1,114,009 GRT) sunk and 165 (374,946 GRT) damaged. They also sank nineteen U-boats, three cruisers, seven destroyers, eight torpedo boats, and one corvette, as well as a total of seventy-two naval auxiliaries. Allied submarines accounted for 10 percent of the total number and 7 percent of the total tonnage of merchant vessels sunk, as well as 10 percent of the total number and 15 percent of the total tonnage damaged in the theatre. Considering the numbers of Allied submarines available throughout the period, these statistics reflect poor totals, but are hardly surprising given such low activity. The source material also shows the Allied successes were almost entirely from the Greek, Dutch, and Polish submarines. The primary reason for this disparity in activity and achievement is the environment surrounding MNC in the Mediterranean, which was more complex than that faced in the home theatre and resulted in the low activity of those crewed by the Allied nations.

### **The Nature of Multinational Naval Cooperation in the UK**

The arrival in Britain of naval units from the various defeated nations took place over a relatively short period of time. Polish vessels, including several submarines, escaped to Britain over September and October 1939. French vessels and personnel, along with those from Norway, the Netherlands, and Belgium, were transferred to or escaped to Britain between April and June 1940.<sup>44</sup> All the Allied submarines in the home theatre had arrived over the course of eight months, and the majority over the course of just four.

The Polish naval forces in exile found fairly rapid acceptance from and integration within the RN. Anglo-Polish naval relations were rather distant in the 1920s, while improvements in the 1930s were gradual, primarily for fear of antagonizing German leader Adolf Hitler. However, as Wanda Troman has noted, Anglo-Polish staff talks and planning did set the foundations for Polish warships to operate from Britain throughout the coming war.<sup>45</sup> After the defeat of Poland in September 1939, the remainder of the Polish navy quickly concentrated in British ports. The Polish naval Headquarters (HQ) was soon transferred to London and a new Anglo-Polish Naval Agreement was signed in November. It outlined procedures for the continued

43. Signals JP 6600, 6763, 6929, 6971 8–12 October 1943, DEFE 3/884, TNA.

44. A narrative account of how naval forces from each of the defeated nations escaped to British waters, and their subsequent operations, can be found in A. D. Divine, *Navies in Exile* (London: J. Murray, 1944).

45. Troman, "Anglo-Polish Naval Relations," 218.

operation of Polish naval forces under British control, and for future lending of RN warships to the Polish forces in exile.<sup>46</sup>

When the other exiled navies began to arrive in April and May 1940, the transition to a foundation for continued MNC was a little more labored. Questions were raised of the trustworthiness of Belgian, Dutch, and Norwegian personnel, and it was the subject of a meeting at the Admiralty in May 1940. Multiple senior officer raised concerns on this issue, with C-in-C Portsmouth and the Vice Admiral (Submarines) expressing particular concern over the trustworthiness of Dutch and Norwegian personnel. Others, including the Assistant Director for Naval Intelligence, pointed to what was seen as a “defeatist spirit.”<sup>47</sup> It was suggested that Dutch cruisers and destroyers should be sent to U.S. stations under RN command, while their submarines should be used only for anti-submarine (A/S) training purposes based in Portland. Their proximity in Home waters would allow a close eye to be kept on them, and so “the risk of traitorous action would be reduced to a minimum.”<sup>48</sup>

After the fall of France, attitudes were quick to soften within the Admiralty. Starved of major allies, Britain would clearly need all the available men and materiel to continue the war. Agreements for MNC were put in place with the Allied nations along the lines of that with Poland. An office was also created at the Admiralty to deal with administrative and liaison matters toward the exiled navies on 2 July. Admiral Gerald Dickens was placed in charge, in a position that was later to become known as the Principal Naval Liaison Officer (PNLO).<sup>49</sup> As a great advocate of using these exiled navies, he pointed to the potential they offered in light of urgent need for manpower and warships, stating in an early report: “The object, as I see it, is to make the best use of these Allied seamen for the common cause.”<sup>50</sup> He went on to criticise the tendency to view these men as possible fifth columnists, arguing they wished to see Axis defeat just as much. In light of the new situation, he received widespread agreement, albeit with many reservations regarding the French.<sup>51</sup>

Questions over the loyalty of the 12,000 or so French sailors in the UK after the armistice were rife. When offered the opportunity to join the emerging Free French Naval Forces (FFNF), few accepted. Offers to join the RN also received very

46. Peszke, *Poland's Navy*, 57, 179–81.

47. Minutes of a meeting held at the Admiralty, 24 May 1940, 1, ADM 199/615, TNA.

48. *Ibid.*, 2.

49. Mark C. Jones, “Friend and Advisor to the Allied Navies: The Royal Navy’s Principal Naval Liaison Officer and Multinational Naval Operations in World War II,” *Journal of Military History* 77, no. 3 (2013): 998. Before PNLO, the position was known first as “Coordinator of Employment for Allied Seamen” and then “Naval Assistant (Foreign) to the Second Sea Lord.”

50. “Coordination of measures to employ allied naval and mercantile seamen in this country,” minute by PNLO, 4 July 1940, ADM 199/715, TNA. Underlined emphasis is in the original source.

51. “Coordination of measures to employ allied naval and mercantile seamen in this country,” minutes by DASW, DMS, DOD(H), DoLD, 8–10 July 1940, ADM 199/715.



few responses. The sailors' concerns were primarily over families in occupied France and a duty to the Vichy Regime and existing navy, so the vast majority opted to be repatriated.<sup>52</sup> After the British seizure of French vessels in their ports in July, and the British attack on the French fleet at Mers-el-kebir, remaining hopes for volunteers were virtually extinguished, and many more Frenchmen were interned.

By mid-July, the framework was set for MNC in the UK. Polish, Norwegian, Dutch, and Free French vessels would operate, manned by their own personnel, under British operational control. Belgian and Danish personnel and fishing vessels also joined the war effort. Vichy French warships had been seized and personnel either repatriated or interned, although the door was left open for further volunteers. The use of these Allied men and craft did not just aid the troubles of British resource and manpower shortages, but also helped present the continuing struggle against the Axis as a legitimate international cause. As Churchill put it:

It is the settled policy of His Majesty's government to make good strong French contingents for land, sea and air service, to encourage these men to volunteer to fight on with us or with [Free French leader Charles] De Gaulle . . . The same principle applies to the Polish, Dutch, Czech, Norwegian and Belgian contingents within this country . . . It is most necessary to give the war which Great Britain is waging single-handed the broad, international character which will add greatly to our strength and prestige.<sup>53</sup>

Each of the Allied navies had its own HQ based in London, and a British Naval Liaison Officer (BNLO) was to work there with them. The one exception was the Dutch, who sent their own representative to the Admiralty instead.<sup>54</sup> While policy regarding the Allied navies at different levels was formulated in the standard manner from the government and/or Admiralty, the PNLO advised on such issues. He and his office also worked to smooth relations between the different navies themselves, and between them and the RN. This varied from issues over equipment, to welfare, through to organising and attending social functions.<sup>55</sup> More junior BNLOs served on each individual vessel to ensure communications security and the correct interpretation of orders.

It was in this atmosphere for MNC that the RN was able to quickly concentrate the Allied submarines into S9. By concentrating these forces into a single flotilla, the RN was able to minimize the security, linguistic, and technical difficulties of inter-operability. While each crew could operate at sea in their own language,

52. Auphan and Mordal, *The French Navy in World War 2*, 158; Martin Thomas, *The French Empire at War, 1940–1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 50–51.

53. COS(40) 546, Copy of minute to War Cabinet by Churchill and Ismay, 12 July 1940, CAB 80/14, TNA.

54. Jones, "Friend and Advisor," 1001.

55. *Ibid.*, 998–99; Dickens's diary contains references to attending social functions with the Allied navies; see War Diary, 9, 12, GB0099 KCLMA Dickens, Liddell-Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College London.

English was quickly instituted as the main language for orders and shore duties, and housing the various crews in close proximity aided learning of English and adaption to British ways of life and service. This level of close integration helped aid relations between all involved and made it easier for the British to administer to the needs of each of them. It also helped to further soften British attitudes of distrust and superiority towards the Allied nations.

After the initial suspicions of the Dutch and the suggestion that their navy be heavily restricted in its operations, attitudes and policy changed with remarkable swiftness. In late July 1940, the PNLO recorded that “Nothing but good reports are received about the Dutch [navy],” and singled out their submarines in particular for efficiency and handling. He suggested that Dutch officers and men be treated in the same regard as those in the RN and restrictions on their operations be lifted.<sup>56</sup> This was quickly implemented, allowing the later transfer of Dutch submarines to operate in the Mediterranean and elsewhere. Perhaps the greatest indicator of changed attitudes and policy was the willingness to transfer British warships to the Allied navies to allow continued or increased contribution to the war effort. Multiple warships were lent, in line with the terms of the 1940 Anglo-Dutch naval agreement, including four submarines. The *Dolfijn*, which saw success in the Mediterranean, was one of these.

Like the Dutch, the Polish were repeatedly praised for high morale and courage, and believed to be a well-trained fighting force. After the French capitulation, the Polish were allowed to take control of several of the French surface warships interned in Britain, and were later given British warships to man as well, including the light cruiser HMS *Dragon*. The transfer of such a large and important warship to a small navy in exile was the first of its kind, and a clear demonstration of the value the British placed in the Polish.<sup>57</sup> Right from the start the Polish submarines were singled out for being particularly efficient, with the BNLO assigned to the submarine *Wilk* reporting that it was “A first class unit of the flotilla. Officers and men have settled into the life of the flotilla and wish to man another submarine when available.”<sup>58</sup>

Among the British vessels given to the Polish were “U” class submarines to replace their own losses and to allow the utilization of highly skilled spare crews. The Polish submariners had already impressed the RN with their initial escape in 1939 and subsequent operations in the home theatre. As such, a “U” class was transferred in January 1941 and renamed *Sokol*. British policy towards the

56. Organisation of Allied Naval, Army and Air Contingents, 22 July 1940, 4, CAB 66/10/12, TNA.

57. Organisation of Allied Naval, Army and Air Contingents, 31 October 1942, 4, CAB 66/30/29, TNA. A second light cruiser was later lent.

58. Organisation of Allied Naval, Army and Air Contingents, 22 July 1940, 3, CAB 66/10/12, TNA. Examples of other sources making direct reference to these opinions are Organisation of Allied Naval, Army and Air Contingents, 16 April 1941, 3, CAB 66/16/9; Organisation of Allied Naval, Army and Air Contingents, 18 January 1943, 3, CAB 66/33/34.

Polish navy was sufficiently malleable that *Sokol* was sent to the Mediterranean despite Poland not actually being at war with Italy!<sup>59</sup> After the loss of one of their original vessels and the laying up of another, it was suggested by the Vice Admiral (Submarines) that an additional “U” class should be leant to them. He pointed to the consistently positive reports of *Sokol* from operations with S10, and suggested Polish morale would be dented from only having a single operational submarine. The suggestion brought immediate agreement across the Admiralty and was subsequently approved, resulting in the *Dzik*.<sup>60</sup> *Sokol* and the *Dzik* operated on the “front line” of the Mediterranean, in the most important and dangerous areas, mainly out of Malta with S10 against the vital Axis supply lines to North Africa. Their successes there gained them the nickname of “the terrible twins,” and they received much praise from their flotilla commanders and the C-in-C Levant for their efficiency, fighting spirit, and inspirational leaders.<sup>61</sup>

Thanks to the progress made in MNC in the home theatre, the lack of significant political barriers to their use, and successful operations with S9, Dutch and Polish submarines were able to integrate and operate effectively in the Mediterranean. Much weightier problems existed relating to the Greeks, French, and Italians.

### **The Nature of Multinational Naval Cooperation in the Mediterranean**

When the *Narval* joined the British, the situation for MNC was simple. It represented an extension of Churchill’s declared policy of demonstrating an effort of United Nations and supporting a strong Free French. The reason for the “defection” of the *Narval* from Vichy was given as the strong anti-fascist and pro-De Gaulle feelings of the commanding officer, François Drogou, and many of the crew. Drogou was known to keep a private diary and to correspond with his wife, both of which affirmed his strong desire to fight on for Free France.<sup>62</sup> The *Narval* was incorporated into the section of S1 based at Malta and allowed to operate with relative freedom until its loss. Similarly, the Dutch and Polish submarines that arrived from 1941 onwards were quickly assimilated, having already been a part of successful MNC within S9. The addition of the Yugoslav submarine had no impact on MNC simply because it appears to have spent virtually the entire war in port. Admiral Cunningham cited serious mechanical problems and a half-trained crew in determining this approach.<sup>63</sup>

59. Simpson, *Periscope View*, 168. The original Anglo-Polish agreement had considered only Germany as an aggressor.

60. Admiral (Submarines) to Admiralty, 28 June 1942, ADM 199/615, TNA. The minutes attached to this signal show the widespread approval.

61. Simpson, *Periscope View*, 168–70, 217–18; NSH Submarines, vol 2, 227, ADM 234/381, TNA.

62. “War Incidents December 1940, Enclosure A,” 2, Manuscript A1941/5, Royal Naval Submarine Museum, Gosport, United Kingdom.

63. “War Diary, August 1941,” in Simpson, ed., *The Cunningham Papers*, 1:502.

Initially, there was little to hamper MNC regarding the Greeks, and in fact there was a good foundation for it in recent history. British personnel had been involved quite closely with the training of Greek naval personnel since before the First World War. Between the Italian invasion in 1940 and the Axis conquest of Greece in 1941, the British had cooperated with Greek naval units on several operations in the Adriatic and Aegean to satisfactory effect.<sup>64</sup> The addition of the Greek navy was particularly welcomed, as the need for warships was acute after the disastrous Allied losses over Greece and Crete. The Greeks also had several other advantages as an ally; the Mediterranean was their home theatre, and thus they were very familiar with the region and could provide local knowledge. Their small submarine force had also operated against the Italian supply lines in the Adriatic with some success, and so had relevant combat experience.

Unlike those of the other Allied nations to date, the Greek government-in-exile was split between Cairo and London, with significant elements and the armed forces at the former but the king and prime minister at the latter until joining the rest in 1943.<sup>65</sup> Keeping the Greek armed forces based in the eastern Mediterranean was logical, as Greece's interests were overridingly based there, and Egypt had a sizeable Greek population. The Greek navy was thus dealt with more directly by the C-in-C Mediterranean for matters of MNC, rather than from London. There was little contact with the MNC structure based in the UK beyond the training of new personnel or the commissioning of new vessels there, and this disconnect was later acknowledged by the PNLO.<sup>66</sup> For this reason of disconnection, a formal agreement for military cooperation along the lines of that with Poland or the Netherlands was not initially sought. The fact that Greece was a purely Middle Eastern power, and so likely to raise and train forces primarily in areas that were not sovereign UK territory, was at first deemed a barrier.<sup>67</sup> Some surface units were transferred to the Greeks on an ad-hoc basis, but nothing was formally enshrined until the signing of the Anglo-Hellenic Military Cooperation Agreement in March 1942. This agreement officially placed the Greeks under RN operational control and involved a direct commitment to lend them warships.<sup>68</sup> It included submarines, and one British and one captured Italian vessel were later given.

Politically, having Greek military assistance would not just add to Churchill's "United Nations" concept, but could work towards strengthening Anglo-Greek

64. "War Diary, December 1940," in Simpson, ed., *The Cunningham Papers*, 1:209–10, 219, 221.

65. Richard Clogg, "The Greek Government in Exile," *International History Review* 1, no. 3 (1979): 378–79.

66. Remarks on Allied navies on supersession of PNLO, 23 January 1943, ADM 199/615, TNA.

67. Ward to Gilmour, 5 October 1941, 2, FO 371/29859, TNA.

68. "Agreement between the Royal Hellenic Government and the Government of the United Kingdom concerning the Organisation and Employment of the Greek Armed Forces," 9 March 1942, FO 371/32206, TNA.

relations in general. The primary British aim regarding Greece throughout the war was to retain influence there. As the deputy head of the Foreign Office, Orme Sargent, put it in 1943, "Greece is and always has been a vital interest."<sup>69</sup> Any future return to the continent via the Balkans and maintenance of postwar influence would benefit greatly from both a favorable Greek population and Greek government to be put in place after liberation. The British had recognized that the Greek government-in-exile was not representative of Greece in general and that the king did not hold great popularity, but it was all they had to work with at first. Effective use of the Greek armed forces could be one strand of a stated policy to improve its standing amongst the Greek population.<sup>70</sup>

British policy regarding Greece quickly became much more convoluted due to the intransigence of the king and government-in-exile, their increasing alienation from the Greek population, and the increasing popularity and success of communist-leaning resistance groups there. This had little effect on the Greek navy though, which over 1941–1943 cooperated effectively with the RN. Their submarine force operated in the most crucial areas of the Mediterranean, with S10 from Malta and S1 from Egypt and the Levant. They worked within the key roles of interdicting Axis shipping to North Africa and also in the Adriatic and Aegean, often bringing praise from RN officers.<sup>71</sup> They were thus able to become the most successful of the various Allied submarine forces in the theatre in terms of sinkings.

Over this period, dissatisfaction with the government-in-exile over the lack of left-leaning representation had increased. Subsequent unrest bled into the Greek army and led to several incidents of unrest.<sup>72</sup> The navy remained relatively insulated from this thanks to a heavily "royalist" leaning in its recruitment. This selective approach was ended in spring 1943 thanks to several changes in related areas of the Greek naval command. Among the lower ranks, there was increasing support for the communist-leaning guerillas and organizations in Greece.<sup>73</sup> Some minor incidents of unrest took place over 1943–1944, but the situation reached a head in April 1944 with a full-blown naval mutiny at Alexandria.

Greek ships refused to sail until the government-in-exile included representatives of the resistance groups. Although a fuming Churchill authorized the use of force by the RN, it was in the end left to loyalist Greek elements to resolve the situation themselves. In the aftermath, the Greek navy temporarily

69. Clogg, "Greek Government in Exile," 390.

70. Procopis Papastratis, *British Policy towards Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 15, 25–26, 30–32; Clogg, "Greek Government in Exile," 392; Elisabeth Barker, *British Policy in South East Europe in the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1976), 154–56.

71. For instance, Commodore, Levant Area, to C-in-C Levant, enclosure no. 5, 9 June 1943, ADM 178/215, TNA, singles out the submarine *Papanicolos*.

72. Commodore, Levant Area, to C-in-C Levant, enclosure no. 5, 9 June 1943, ADM 178/215, TNA.

73. Mark C. Jones, "Misunderstood and Forgotten: The Greek Naval Mutiny of April 1944," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 20, no. 2 (2002): 373–74, 377.

ceased operations through a combination of British restriction and a lack of personnel after arrests. Operations for the navy as a whole did not resume at a meaningful level until late July. Churchill determined that no more warships would be lent to the Greeks, as he felt they could end up contributing to a Greek civil war. Transfers that were already planned were quickly cancelled.<sup>74</sup>

Yet in spite of such events, three of the Greek submarines were once again fully manned by mid-May, although with RN-supplied telegraphists.<sup>75</sup> This was likely a security measure, and much of the replacement personnel had gone through training with a submarine liaison officer from S1, which probably included a vetting process. Greek submarines were among the first vessels to restart operations, heading to sea as of late May and restarting patrols in early June. They were once again sent back to the main offensive operating area at this stage—the Aegean. The only notable restriction to Greek submarine operations imposed by the British was that the *Papanicolas*, some of whose crew had been at the heart of the mutiny, was assigned to A/S training at Gibraltar instead.<sup>76</sup> It remained there until the return to Greece in October.

The situation regarding MNC had returned to something approaching normal despite a full mutiny, and there were two main reasons. The first was the sheer need for the Greek forces at a time when so many RN vessels had been withdrawn from the theatre. The C-in-C Mediterranean complained in May that the lack of Greek ships had “seriously handicapped” him.<sup>77</sup> The second was the issue of postwar influence in Greece. The stated British policy was outlined in May as “to retain Greece as a British sphere of influence and to prevent Russian domination of Greece which would gravely prejudice our strategical position in the eastern Mediterranean.”<sup>78</sup> That month the British had begun planning a military return to Greece in the light of an expected future German withdrawal. The plan was to reinstall a reformed government-in-exile, and forestall a takeover by the communist elements of the resistance. In order for this to be successful, the government would have to be viewed as legitimate by the Greek people, and so the involvement of Greek forces was a necessity. As Harold Macmillan, resident minister in the Mediterranean, noted: “The Greek government must not appear to be under our political influence—from the point of view of either their public or ours!”<sup>79</sup> When the operation came, the government was transported in Greek ships, and the Greek navy took a visible part

74. “Commissioning of HMS Cowdrey and Disposal of Greek Seamen at Chatham,” 11 May 1944, ADM 199/290B.

75. NSH, *Submarines*, vol. 2, 238, ADM 234/381, TNA.

76. Jones, “Misunderstood and Forgotten,” 386.

77. John Cunningham to Andrew Cunningham, 26 May 1944, in Simpson, ed., *The Cunningham Papers*, 2:288. John Cunningham became C-in-C Mediterranean in October 1943.

78. Papastratis, *British Policy towards Greece*, 198.

79. Entry for 16 October 1944, in Harold Macmillan, *War Diaries: The Mediterranean, 1943–1945* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 554. On legitimacy, see also the entry for 12 September 1944, 520.

overall. MNC had been rescued by political need, resulting in the Greeks returning to the forefront of submarine warfare.

A similar situation did not exist regarding the French after the Allied landings in North-West Africa, November 1942, had brought the question of Allied control of the Vichy navy back to the fore again. While Admiral Francois Darlan's switch of allegiance from Vichy had potentially brought large quantities of naval resources into the Allied cause, the political situation was extremely complex. In December 1942, Admiral Jacques Moreau (commanding French naval forces in Algeria) met with Cunningham on behalf of Darlan, expressing desire for the French navy's re-entry to the war effort, and to coordinate arrangements for it. Moreau suggested establishing one French liaison officer at Gibraltar to coordinate convoys between Casablanca and Dakar and another in London, initially to oversee French shipping interests.<sup>80</sup>

The need for a liaison officer based at Gibraltar was generally accepted within the Admiralty, as "a French liaison officer can be regarded as part of the military arrangements between the Allied Forces and the Darlan administration." However, the installation of a liaison officer in London was thought likely to be interpreted negatively by the Free French as a "rather more definite acknowledgement of the Darlan regime." Nevertheless, it was acknowledged that for effective MNC to take place, it would be greatly beneficial to have both these liaison officers in place. The installation of an officer in London would also likely have an important *quid pro quo* element in ensuring French cooperation.<sup>81</sup>

British policy, later crystallised at the Casablanca conference in January 1943, was to encourage the French factions to work together with a view to permanent re-integration in the future.<sup>82</sup> The diplomatic and broader military reasons for this were numerous and beyond the scope of this study, but in naval terms it would ease cooperation with and bring important resources to the Allied side and hopefully encourage French elements elsewhere to join the Allies. As Cunningham put it, "It is evidently a matter of great urgency to get the two naval factions together if we are to start working with French ships out here."<sup>83</sup> He urged finding French officers who would be agreeable to both factions in order to begin negotiations. The problem of finding the right people was a thorny one though. The suggested French officer (Delaye) for Gibraltar brought broad British support, from Cunningham, the Foreign Office, and the Admiralty. This was temporarily thrown into sharp relief when the British military attaché in Madrid, who had previously

80. NCXF to Admiralty, 1631/A, 2 December 1942, ADM 1/13367, TNA.

81. Minute by Head of Military Branch, 4 December 1942, ADM 1/13367, TNA.

82. Llewellyn Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, vol. 2 (London: HMSO, 1971), 403–4, 408–10; P. M. H. Bell, *France and Britain, 1940–1994: The Long Separation* (London: Longman, 1997), 47; Macmillan, *The Blast of War, 1939–1945* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 232.

83. NCXF to Admiralty, 29 December 1942, ADM 1/13367, TNA.

84. R. T. Thomas, *Britain and Vichy*, 72; VA Gibraltar to NCXF, 12 December 1942, ADM 1/13367, TNA.

worked with Delaye, provoked suspicions he would simply act as a Vichy spy.<sup>84</sup> He was briefly blocked from taking up the position, but concerns were later dismissed and the post was created in January 1943. Questions did continue to be raised over Delaye's suitability, along with accusations about his spreading anti-British sentiment, but he remained in place.<sup>85</sup>

The question of a liaison officer in London ran on for much longer. The suggestion by Darlan of Admiral Raymond Fenard for the post was perceived as something that could drive a wedge between De Gaulle and the FFNF. There were suspicions that it might have been devised by Darlan for just such a purpose.<sup>86</sup> Another candidate was rejected immediately after being described as a "thoroughly bad lot" who was "altogether unacceptable." An alternative suggested by Darlan's de facto successor, Henri Giraud, was rejected for his "difficulty and intransigence" towards working with the British.<sup>87</sup>

By February, there was renewed optimism that the situation could be resolved. The death of Darlan in December 1942, the establishment of liaison officers at Gibraltar and Freetown, and the acceptance by the French of BNLOs on their warships were all pointed to as indicators of significant progress. The argument for a renewed effort gained support across Whitehall.<sup>88</sup> Yet even after the official joint establishment of the French Committee for National Liberation, a report on Allied naval contingents in June noted that "The arrangement so far reached between General De Gaulle and Giraud has not yet led to any rearrangement in the administration of the respective naval forces, which continue to function as before." It was only in August, after the FFNF were fused with the French navy in North Africa into the "Marine Nationale" and a single naval HQ was created at Algiers, that the UK naval mission was established.<sup>89</sup>

The lack of détente between the French factions and the drawn-out process of implementing a structure for improved MNC were having a direct effect on submarine warfare at a time when the British were turning all available vessels against Axis shipping to Tunisia.<sup>90</sup> The Free French had pressed the Admiralty to station all their submarines in the Mediterranean in spring 1943, which would have been in line with British wishes. Yet the PNLO reported that after the failure to reach a more concrete agreement with Giraud's faction, Free French policy had been reversed and they now wanted them kept out of the Mediterranean

85. Governor and C-in-C Gibraltar to NCXF, 23 December 1942, ADM 1/13367, TNA; Military Attache, Madrid to Governor, Gibraltar, 9 July 1943, ADM 1/13367; Foreign Office to Resident Minister, Algiers, 13 July 1943.

86. Admiralty to NCXF, 11 December 1942, FO 660/4, TNA.

87. Admiralty to NCXF, 3 January 1943, TNA FO 660/4.

88. French Naval Mission in the UK, minute by Head of M (I), 1 February 1943, ADM 1/13367, TNA; Strang to Waldock, 13 February 1943; Weston to Strang, 24 February 1943.

89. Auphan and Mordal, *French Navy*, 274, 289; Quarterly report on Allied naval contingents, July–September 1943, 1, ADM 178/215, TNA.

90. Simpson, *Periscope View*, 268–69.



entirely.<sup>91</sup> This was particularly unfortunate as the FFNF submarines had been singled out as their “high point” in terms of efficiency and fighting spirit.<sup>92</sup> In the end only a single Free French submarine was sent, at a later date.

Mechanical issues were to be a major factor in the use of any of the French forces, as they had suffered from varying levels of neglect under Vichy due to the restrictive terms of the armistice agreement.<sup>93</sup> Repairs and refits would be required in many cases before operations could commence. British priorities for the French navy, laid down in January 1943, listed submarines as third in order of importance, behind ocean-going destroyers to be used for escort operations, and cruisers for anti-raider work. The submarines would be split, depending on their mechanical states, between those for active operational work and those to be used for A/S training purposes.<sup>94</sup>

Difficulties of relations between the French factions and of the time required for refits meant progress was slow in returning their submarines to operations. The resulting effects on the morale of the French crews and on MNC in general were very negative. A potential solution was proposed by the captain of S8 in May 1943. He noted the poor state of the submarines, but also the large numbers of highly trained officers and ratings who would perform well given a chance. He suggested that providing them with a “U” class submarine would be cheaper than excessive refits and would greatly encourage French cooperation. Cunningham latched on to this idea, suggesting that currently there was genuine enthusiasm for combat operations, but constant involvement solely in A/S training would irrevocably damage morale. “Dangling the bait” of a submarine would not just make better use of the trained personnel, but would also improve MNC by making the French more willing to do the less attractive jobs.<sup>95</sup>

The suggestion brought a slew of negative reactions from within the Admiralty. Cunningham was told that the current policy was not to lend any warships other than auxiliaries to the Giraudist French, but also that they had yet to earn the right. After all, “The Greeks, for example, had to serve a long apprenticeship on active service against the enemy, making the best of their antiquated submarines before they were given a new one” and “it has been an invariable rule and a matter of principle that new construction British submarines are not offered to our allies until they have proved themselves.”<sup>96</sup> Instead, those few French submarines that could

91. Quarterly report on Allied Naval Contingents, Apr–June 1943, 1, ADM 199/615, TNA.

92. Remarks on Allied Navies on supersession of PNLO, Minute by PNLO, 13 January 1943, ADM 199/615, TNA.

93. See Martin Thomas, “After Mers-El-Kebir: The Armed Neutrality of the French Vichy Navy 1940–1943,” *English Historical Review* 112, no. 447 (1997): 648, 663.

94. 17 January 1943, FO 660/4, 5397, TNA.

95. C-in-C Mediterranean to Admiralty, 5 May 1943, ADM 1/13369, TNA; C-in-C Med to Admiralty, 11 May 1943.

96. “Future employment of French submarines,” minute by Head of M.II, 6 June 1943, ADM 1/13369, TNA; minute by Admiral (Submarines), 11 June 1943.

be repaired and made ready for offensive operations would be, but this would take a lower priority than the majority, which would get minimal refits to act as targets for A/S training. This included sending many out of the theatre to work in the Caribbean where they could free up British and American vessels from the role.<sup>97</sup> An opportunity to “prove themselves” would simply never come. The concept of offering a submarine might well have improved MNC, as it had done with other Allied nations, but it fell afoul of two interlinked issues: first, doing so would alienate other allies; and second, the distrustful attitudes of the British towards those who had been involved with Vichy. It is worth noting that over the same period in early 1943, the British lent a new submarine to the FFNF (renamed *Curie*), which was later sent to the Mediterranean with a captain who had served in S9.<sup>98</sup>

The complication of matters for MNC caused by the absorption of the former Vichy French was further exacerbated by the adoption of the new Italian government under Pietro Badoglio as “co-belligerents.” The guiding line for the organisation and disposition of the Italian fleet came from a pact signed between Cunningham and the Italian Minister for Marine, Raffaele De Courten. Known as the “Cunningham-De Courten agreement,” it stated that “Such ships as can be employed to actively assist in the Allied effort will be kept in commission and be used under the orders of the C-in-C Mediterranean, as may be arranged between the Allied C-in-C and the Italian Government.”<sup>99</sup> Under the agreement, a high-ranking flag officer was set to act in a liaison role with the Italian Ministry of Marine at Taranto, dealing with administrative issues, handling problems of liaison, and disseminating orders from the C-in-C Mediterranean. The Badoglio government was generally keen to agree to the use of their forces as co-belligerents on Allied terms. Doing so would hopefully ensure Italy a significant place in postwar Europe, with retention of her sovereign territory.<sup>100</sup> For the Italian navy, it could ensure that they retain ownership of as much of it as possible for the remainder of the war, and after its end. This view appears to have been maintained by the Minister for Marine through 1944.<sup>101</sup> From the Italian perspective, the more willing and effective their military assistance to the Allies could be, the greater the likelihood of a positive outcome for them on both issues.

97. “Future employment of French submarines,” minute by Director of Plans, 14 June 1943, ADM 1/13369, TNA.

98. Captain S9 to Admiral (Submarines), 2 March 1943, ADM 178/215, TNA, outlines the decision to use a member from within S9.

99. “Memorandum Agreement on the Employment and Disposition of the Italian Fleet and Mercantile Marine between the Allied Naval C-in-C, acting on behalf of the Allied C-in-C and the Italian Minister of Marine,” 23 September 1943, WO 204/2971, TNA.

100. Moshe Gat, *Britain and Italy, 1943–1949: The Decline of British Influence* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1996), 24, 26–27.

101. An example of the belief by De Courten that this would be the case can be found in John Cunningham to Andrew Cunningham, 26 May 1944, in Simpson, ed., *The Cunningham Papers*, 2:289.

For the Allies it created yet another difficult situation. Having the Italians as co-belligerents could help ease the passage of Allied forces in Italy. In the case of their navy and naval authorities, this could, and did, mean important aid in clearing and opening vital ports quickly.<sup>102</sup> Recognizing a declared anti-fascist government in Italy was also seen as an important psychological blow for the Axis. Yet entering some form of alliance with the Italians could be seen as working too closely with men who had previously been key figures in a fascist regime, while it was also expected to alienate the French, Greeks, and Yugoslavs. It was for this reason that a “co-belligerent” status was recognised rather than an alliance.<sup>103</sup>

Allied designs on the Italian fleet were rather different to the Italian intention. In a meeting of the British War Cabinet, it was suggested that parts of the fleet be taken over by Allied crews and used where required, although escort forces could continue to run with Italian crews. In the case of the large submarine force, it was suggested that the ocean-going types could be manned by British or American crews and sent to the Far East. The rest would be useful for A/S purposes, for which there was always a demand, or “no doubt would be acceptable if offered to smaller Allied Navies.”<sup>104</sup>

The possibility of transferring Italian submarines was quickly seized on by some. The captain of S8 once again suggested that the French would benefit from being given either British or Italian vessels, although he accepted the former was unlikely. He reported varying states of competency, morale, and willingness among the French crews at Oran, from the “efficient performance” of the *Casabianca* to the crew of *Perle*, who were “timid in the extreme.” He noted that there was a general willingness to get on patrol, but that material deficiencies among the old boats were seriously hampering this. The transfer of submarines would be the “only remedy” to further decreasing morale and could get the most from the best crews.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, the C-in-C Levant requested three of the most modern Italian submarines to be transferred to the Greeks stationed with him. Two of these would replace losses they had incurred, while a third would allow the use of experienced spare crew members.<sup>106</sup> However, it was decided that the transfer of Italian submarines to the French would be considered “impolitic in light of the cooperation being given by the Italians.” Giving Italian submarines to the Greeks was ruled out as it would likely raise requests directly from the French, although it was noted that giving them to the Dutch or Polish could be acceptable.<sup>107</sup>

The British found themselves faced with a fundamental problem regarding the Italians. As Macmillan summarised:

102. Roskill, *War at Sea*, 3, pt. 1:182.

103. Gat, *Britain and Italy*, 26–27; Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, 2:486, 538–39, 541.

104. COS(43) 224th meeting (O), 22 September 1943, CAB 79/64, TNA.

105. Captain S8 to PNLO, 22 September 1943, ADM 199/1340, TNA.

106. C-in-C Levant to Admiralty, 4 October 1943, ADM 223/584, TNA.

107. C-in-C Mediterranean to Admiralty, 6 October 1943, ADM 223/584, TNA; BAD to Admiralty, 19 December 1943.

On the one hand, we want to get the Italian Navy, naval bases, dockyards and workshops to cooperate with us; on the other we want to take physical possession of their ships, give some to the Russians, some to the Greeks, some to the French, some to the Yugoslavs and some to ourselves, leaving at the end of the war a weak or non-existent Italian Navy in the Mediterranean.<sup>108</sup>

The need for Italian submarines that were manned by Italians was minimal, but the need for their repair facilities and surface escort forces was significant. Removing the former could hamper the will and efficiency of the latter.<sup>109</sup> Treading this difficult line meant no submarines were transferred. British policy towards cooperation with the French thus remained unchanged despite the opportunity offered through Italian resources. They would not affect any great repairs to the French submarines or allow them any significant operational role in the Mediterranean. The few capable submarines that were classified as “Operational” were allowed to conduct some limited offensive patrols in the western Mediterranean, and special operations such as landing stores and agents in Corsica and Southern France.<sup>110</sup> The rest were divided between those allocated to A/S training roles, and those that would simply be “laid up.” By June 1944, only five of the eighteen in the Mediterranean were considered operational and only four as appropriate for A/S training. The rest were laid up and considered useless.<sup>111</sup>

While there were political problems with allotting Italian resources to the other Allies, allowing the Italians to operate significantly themselves would bring about others. The recognition of the Italians as co-belligerents was seen one factor in the ever-lowering popularity of the Greek government-in-exile among the Greek population. Indeed, it was doing the image of the British no favours with the Greeks either, and enemy propaganda had been rife in exacerbating this situation.<sup>112</sup> The British desire to maintain influence in postwar Greece has already been noted. Increasing cooperation with the much-loathed Italians could endanger this.

There were also practical issues of the mechanical state of the Italian forces. The co-belligerent submarines were in varying states of repair. It was thought that most required a short refit, but they were generally “no worse than the French.” The recommendation by C-in-C Mediterranean was that six should be used for supply purposes in the Aegean, two for operations in the Adriatic, and four for power supply to Naples. The rest that could be made operable should be consigned to A/S training roles. Seven were deemed not worth refitting at all and consigned for scrapping.<sup>113</sup> Even this limited level of assignment proved

108. Entry for 12 November 1943 in Macmillan, *War Diaries*, 290.

109. Entry for 4 November 1943 in *ibid.*, 277.

110. NSH, Submarines, vol. 2, 180, 189, ADM 234/381, TNA.

111. Admiralty pink list entry for 2 June 1944, ADM 187/37, TNA.

112. Policy towards Greece, 14 November 1943, 1, CAB 66/43/18, TNA.

113. C-in-C Mediterranean to Admiralty, 23 November 1943, ADM 223/584, TNA; Admiralty pink list entry for 2 June 1944, ADM 187/37, TNA.

difficult. Five submarines did briefly operate in a supply role during the abortive Dodecanese campaign of late 1943, but their involvement was soon limited due to serious mechanical problems.<sup>114</sup> The only active operations conducted were a small number in the Adriatic by two vessels, picking up stranded pockets of Italians from the eastern coast and landing agents and saboteurs.<sup>115</sup>

The question of where the Italian navy could operate was greatly constrained by political issues relating to the other nations. The Allied military government in Italy had decreed that Italian ships were not allowed to enter Greek or Yugoslav ports “for political reasons.”<sup>116</sup> Keeping them separate from the French and Greeks became a preoccupation. When the Greek submarine *Matrozos* (formerly the captured Italian *Perla*), arrived at Taranto dockyard in July 1944, Italian dockworkers and naval personnel were sufficiently incensed that they threw bricks at the Greek crew. The British flag officer at the port threatened to post armed guards in the event of further incidents. After a series of altercations between French and Italian personnel and workers at Taranto in mid-1944, the British were forced to cancel shore leave for French sailors there.<sup>117</sup> Even sending the submarines for A/S training purposes was complex. The main base in theatre for such activity was at Oran, where the French were based. As the C-in-C Mediterranean warned the Admiralty, “It should be borne in mind that the French and Italians are not, repeat not, a good mixture,” a view they agreed with.<sup>118</sup> A reduced number were sent to Oran and kept separate from the French, conducting a more limited scope of exercises than first planned. An easier option was to send them out of the theatre entirely, and eight were sent to Bermuda instead. These combined political and technical reasons left the Italian submarines sitting largely idle for the rest of the war, but also prevented them from being transferred to other Allies.

### Conclusions

Allied submarines operating under British control formed a significant proportion of the total effort in the Mediterranean from April 1941. This had increased to around half the total proportion by the middle of 1943 and formed the overwhelming majority by the end of that year. In spite of such a large presence and the importance of submarine warfare, they achieved relatively little and failed to have a great impact on the war in the Mediterranean. This was primarily due to difficulties in MNC.

114. C-in-C Levant to Admiralty, 3 November 1943, ADM 1/13300, TNA.

115. Bragadin, *Italian Navy*, 344.

116. Report of Navy sub-commission for October 1944, WO 204/2653, TNA. Although this report is from October, it refers to an ongoing policy.

117. “Report of Proceedings, 1 July to 31 July, 1944” Flag Officer Liaison, Italy, 4 August 1944, 2, ADM 199/1451, TNA.

118. C-in-C Mediterranean to Admiralty, 23 November 1943, ADM 223/584, TNA; Requirements of A/S Training Squadrons, minute by Head of M. Branch, 1 December 1943, ADM 1/13300, TNA.

The British had built up an effective framework for MNC in the home theatre, and S9 was representative of what it could achieve. The amalgamation of those submarines in a single “parent unit” eased the difficulties of different languages, cultures, equipment, procedures, and so on. This then allowed the Allied crews to prove themselves to skeptics over their involvement through successful operations, and so prompted the RN to lend them further submarines. By contrast, no dedicated flotilla was ever set up in the Mediterranean, and it would almost certainly have proved impossible. Certainly the Dutch and Polish vessels that had served with S9 were able to integrate quickly thanks to the progress that had already been made in the home theatre, and were sent where they were most required. MNC involving them, and initially the Greeks, was generally smooth. The total number of submarines was far too vast for a single flotilla, but multinational groupings (or even multifactional in the French case) of any form were to prove difficult or impossible. The French factions were eventually integrated, but the formation of a structure for MNC and getting them to work together took a long time. Meanwhile, a crucial period for submarine warfare during the war in Tunisia slipped by with the French mostly sitting idle. Even after French integration, activity was very limited, as was cooperation with the RN. Even brief or chance meetings between the Greeks/French and their former enemy, the Italians, ended in problems.

The fact that the French and Greeks did not wish to work with the Italians is hardly surprising given their previous hostilities and the manner in which Italy had declared war on each of them. Yet British control of the co-belligerent Italian navy actually offered an opportunity to improve MNC with the French and Greeks by offering them Italian resources. This could have allayed some of the serious mechanical problems that were being suffered and encouraged greater activity from the French in particular, including the opportunity to “prove themselves.” However, this fell afoul of a need to maintain the international perception of co-belligerency and the level of Italian cooperation that was already underway. The need to promote cooperation with the French was not strong enough to overcome this. There was more appetite relating to the Greeks because of British hopes for postwar influence, as shown by the willingness to restore MNC after their mutiny. Yet giving them Italian submarines was seen to be too difficult to achieve without further damaging strained relations with the French. The delicate balance over relations had to be maintained.

While there were certainly always difficulties relating to MNC in the home theatre, the various nations were united in a desire to defeat the Axis powers that had exiled them. In the Mediterranean, the additions included nations who had previously been hostile neutrals or enemies. For the British in 1940–1941, there was a pressing need for all available resources and manpower, and for showing a united international front in the continued war effort. By the time the serious difficulties relating to MNC in the Mediterranean appeared, that need had vastly decreased, as the British were part of one of the most powerful alliances the world had ever seen. In the end, divisions such as those between the French factions, the

French and the Italians, or the Greeks and Italians, and the complex dynamics of Mediterranean politics were too great to overcome. The best the British managed to do was segregate the difficult nations and “sideline” a large portion of their forces, consigning large quantities of men and materiel to minor operations or even nothing at all, in spite of a need for the submarines.

Jones was quite right to praise the effort of the British and Allied nations in S9 in forming the basis for, and the conduct of, successful multinational naval operations in the home theatre when the conditions were favorable. It set an important foundation for MNC within NATO, and stands as an important case study for the RN in what can be achieved within alliances. The Mediterranean, however, demonstrated the limits of what could be achieved in a complex and prohibitive situation. Ultimately, MNC was poor, and led to the under-use of a large quantity of manpower and equipment, something that might have otherwise benefitted an overstretched RN. It represents another important case study of the difficulties in operating alongside partners outside of a traditional formal alliance.