

The U.S. Navy is proceeding with the construction of a homeport for the battleship USS Iowa and other nuclear-armed warships on Staten Island in New York City Harbour. In October 1987 the New York City Board of Estimates (BOE) demanded that an emergency planning document based on a possible nuclear accident in NYC harbour be prepared. Two drafts of such a document have been prepared and rejected by the BOE. A third draft is currently being prepared.

The Coalition for a Nuclear-Free Harbour (CNFH) carried out its own study for such an accident. A computer study of the distribution of plutonium from one nuclear warhead involved in an accident found that this could cause over 30,000 latent cancer deaths as well as other illnesses and birth defects. A companion study for CNFH concluded that such an accident could not be effectively planned for.

CNPH is also active in questioning the entire homeporting strategy, as the dream of a 600-ship navy begins to fade as the need for defence budget cuts grows. The Coalition is pressing for putting Iowa-class battleships back into storage as a way to save money and to contribute to world disarmament. CNFH are also focussing on the danger and destabilising effects of sea launched cruise missiles. They are also helping to launch Voters for a Nuclear-Free New York City in order to help elect an anti-homeport mayor and other city officials.

CNPH has held a number of protest demonstrations at the proposed base. To date, there have been 97 arrests at Stapleton, Staten Island. Further demonstrations are planned for the end of April/May, during Fleet Week. President Bush may dedicate the pier at the homeport; and for City Hall on June 3rd and 5th during Disarm the Seas week.

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Copies are available of CNFH's 224-page study NO SAFE HARBOR: The Consequences of a Nuclear Weapons Accident in New York Harbor, for \$25 sent to the above address, cheques payable to 'Coalition for a Nuclear-Free Harbor'.

NORTH STAR '89: U.S. WAR GAMES IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC

The U.S. conducted war games on a grand scale in the North Atlantic in the first week of March. The exercises included low-level bombing missions into northern Scotland simulating attacks on the USSR, and naval manoeuvres in the Norwegian Sea, thereby threatening major Soviet bases on the Kola Peninsula.

Leading the exercise was the aircraft carrier USS America, which was involved in the 1986 U.S. attack on Libya. Along with its battle group, the USS America sailed across the Scotland-Iceland gap and was joined by other NATO vessels assigned to protect the U.S. Strike Fleet from Soviet submarines.

Though the navies of Britain, W. Germany, the Netherlands, Canada and Norway participated in the exercise, code-named North Star '89, it was classified as a U.S. national operation. NATO members, particularly the Norwegians, expressed reservations about the aggressive nature of the war games. Malcolm Spaven, in Scottish Defence News, said, "The fact that 'North Star '89' is a US national exercise not a NATO one, is an expression of these differences. The US carrier battle group would be more constrained in its operations if it was forced to adhere to NATO, as opposed to US, rules of engagement."

Russia

According to the Observer (5.3.89) NATO intelligence services have recently observed a complete absence of Soviet warships in their usual patrolling grounds in the Atlantic and have concluded that the Soviet North Atlantic fleet has come under Gorbachev's doctrine of 'reasonable sufficiency' after 20 years of aggressive forward deployment.

This change in Soviet strategy was later denied by a Norwegian NATO official in another British newspaper the Daily Telegraph. We can only hope that the first report is the correct one!

This possible reduction in Soviet submarine movements takes place at a time when the U.S. is planning at least 8 more Trident subs in the Atlantic, the U.K. is building 4 Trident subs, and France is increasing its nuclear warhead arsenal from 80 to 592!

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Russian nuclear-powered icebreaker in "near meltdown"

Public concern over the risks of nuclear propulsion has been reported from the Soviet Union, where nuclear-powered surface ships are in wider use than elsewhere.

The icebreaker "Rossiya" was undergoing maintenance in Murmansk last November when crew error triggered an emergency which could have led to a meltdown in its reactor within 30 minutes if corrective action had not been taken in time.

Mr. Rostislav Nikol'sky, interviewed in "Vodni Transport", the Russian Merchant Navy Ministry newspaper, on March 4th, said that regulations enforcing procedures on nuclear-powered vessels had recently been tightened, and that it was difficult to find crew to serve on such ships because of difficult living conditions.

On the same day, "Tass" reported that, following a dockworkers' boycott at Vladivostok and Magadan of the "Seymorput", a nuclear-powered lighter used to load and unload larger ships, the crew had gone ashore at Vladivostok to reassure local people that the ship posed no ecological threat.



Ireland

URANIUM SHIPMENTS BANNED FROM DUBLIN

Shipments of uranium fuel for nuclear reactors have been banned from Dublin port by the Irish government, after it was revealed that ships carrying the material were calling at the port several times a year.

The fuel is in the form of a gas, uranium hexafluoride, which is transported on a commercial container ship between Ellesmere, near Liverpool in England, and the Baltic port of Riga, in the Soviet Union to be processed at one of the world's largest commercial uranium enrichment plants nearby. The ship calls at Dublin as part of its regular fortnightly trip with general cargo between Riga and Britain, and in fact carries most Soviet-Irish trade.

The gas, also known as 'hex', is sent to Riga before being made into fuel rods for nuclear reactors. The hex comes from British Nuclear Fuels, who process uranium for a number of countries. Most of the hex is for use by other countries, although a small amount is re-imported to Britain for use there.

The hex is carried in containers about 12.5 feet long and about four feet in diameter. They hold approximately 12.5 tonnes of the

hex, which is only very mildly radioactive. It is chemically extremely reactive, however, and can explode on contact with water, as well as being toxic.

The containers are stored on the deck of the ships, which are run by the Latvian Shipping Company. The vessel normally used on the route is the container ship Inzhener Kyrells, although its sister ship Inzhener Sukhorukov sometimes makes the run. The uranium hexafluoride is carried on most trips from Ellesmere to Riga, but only occasionally in the other direction, as the enriched hex is sent directly to the third country from Riga. The empty containers are however brought back on board the Latvian ships.

The Irish government was embarrassed at the revelation last September that the vessels were calling in to Dublin port with the nuclear materials on board, as it is officially opposed to the expansion of the British nuclear industry. It has repeatedly called for the closure of the Sellafield nuclear reprocessing plant.

Vessels carrying the material are being kept out under an agreement made with the shipping agent, Dublin Maritime, last October, rather than by law. Any violation of the agreement would, however, be obvious as British Nuclear Fuels (BNFL) have to inform the Irish radiation monitoring authorities of any shipments coming through Dublin. The fact that BNFL had been issued with a licence by the Irish radiation monitoring agency to allow them to transport the fuel through Dublin proved to be further embarrassment to the government.

The net effect of the ban is that the ships must travel directly between Riga and Ellesmere when they have the hex on board, without stopping off at Dublin on the way. Only about four shipments came through Dublin each year, as the containers were usually empty when travelling from the Soviet Union to Britain.

A ship carrying uranium hexafluoride from France to Riga sank off the Belgian coast in August 1984, resulting in a recovery operation said to have cost £2.5 million sterling. Some containers for the gas were salvaged over a period of a month after the Mont Louis sank in 45 feet of water about 12 miles off Ostend. The French government said at the time that the container could stay underwater for a year without leaking.

The Marine Port and General Workers' Union, which handles the ships at Dublin, passed a resolution at their annual conference in October against either nuclear materials or warheads being brought into port.

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