

## Analysis of the United States' Response to NATO's Leadership in the Mediterranean Fleet in the 20th Century

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**Abstract:** The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was established in 1949. The United States has formed a military alliance against the Soviet Union. In the "Great Diplomacy," the author used a lot of space to explain that its motive was defensive and it belonged to collective security, which is also a U.S.-centered military alliance. However, with the end of the Cold War, there had been many controversies surrounding the issue of NATO's military leadership. This paper only considers NATO's leadership in the Mediterranean fleet as an object and analyzes it from the perspective of the United States. It seeks the uncertainty on the issue of leadership and explores the ownership of leadership. There is a certain significance for the further study of the United States in the issue of NATO leadership. This paper is divided into six parts. The first is the overview of the Mediterranean region, the second is NATO's presence in the Mediterranean fleet, the third is about the leadership, the fourth and fifth are the differences in the leadership of the Mediterranean fleet, the response of United States and the reason, and the sixth is the conclusion.

### 1. Overview of the Mediterranean Region

The Mediterranean region has very important economic and military strategic interests for all countries. There is the longest international maritime traffic line and important oil transportation line. The western Mediterranean is connected to the Atlantic Ocean by a Gibraltar strait with a width of 14-43 km and a length of 90 km. In the northeast, the Dardanelles, the Marmara Sea and the Bosphorus are connected to the Black Sea. In 1869, the Suez Canal is open for traffic. The southeastern Mediterranean can be connected to the Red Sea via the Suez Canal and the Indian Ocean through the Red Sea. From the Western Europe to the Indian Ocean, through the Strait of Gibraltar - the Mediterranean - the Suez Canal - the Red Sea is a shortcut that saves the Cape of Good Hope in southern Africa. More than 10,000 kilometers away, this has made the Mediterranean leap into the world's busiest sea. At present, there are about 2,000 various vessels sailing in the Mediterranean every day. About 85% of the oil imported into Western Europe is transported through the Mediterranean Sea.

It is not only an important channel between Europe, Asia and Africa, but also an important channel for communication between the Atlantic Ocean and the Indian Ocean. The important seaports along the coast are Gibraltar (British), Marseille (France), Genoa, Naples (Italy), Split, Rijeka. (Croatia), Durres (Albania), Algiers (Algeria), Port Said (Egypt) and others.

For a long time, the Mediterranean region has become a place where the powers compete. In the early 18th century, Britain used the Mediterranean as its "inner lake." At the beginning of the 19th century when Napoleon went rampant in Europe, he wanted to seize the British control of the Mediterranean. During the First World War, the Mediterranean Sea became an area where the navies of all belligerents were active. In the Second World War, the German and Italian navies and the British navy fought fiercely in the Mediterranean. To this day, Western powers are still undergoing increasingly fierce competition in the Mediterranean. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Mediterranean Sea almost became the internal training ground for the United States' Sixth Fleet. The chief commander of the NATO's internal military command, the European Union Command, which is one of the three headquarters under the command of the European Allied Command, in

fact primarily governs the region. In fact, this region has been considered as the southern wing of the NATO Group.

## **2. About NATO's Mediterranean Fleet**

On May 28, 1969, NATO established the Mediterranean Naval Emergency Force. Since then, a joint Mediterranean Fleet has been gradually formed by NATO member states. As a standing naval force of the NATO, it mainly assumes the task of protecting the security of the south wing of NATO. The headquarter is located in Naples, Italy. Although the NATO-based Mediterranean fleet belongs to the South European Union Command, its military chief is usually an American.

## **3. Leadership**

Leadership refers to the power that a person gains because he has a certain status or quality. This power can be used to influence others and make others act according to his advice, suggestions, or orders. Gilpin referred to leadership as sovereignty or hegemony. Historical experience shows that without a free-thriving power that is dominant, international economic cooperation is extremely difficult to achieve or maintain. Conflicts will become commonplace. Gilpin calls hegemony as political leadership.

NATO's fleet in the Mediterranean is a united force that is sent by all member countries. When it operates, like in international relations, in order to prevent conflicts and achieve better cooperation and achieve common interests, it will inevitably require an influential country to take the lead. Because the Mediterranean Fleet belongs to NATO and uses the NATO's reserve military assets, this article defines the leadership as the military command and property rights of NATO's fleet in the Mediterranean.

## **4. Disagreement on the Issue of the Leadership of the Mediterranean Fleet**

Since the establishment of the Fleet, the United States has been in an absolute position of leadership. Since the end of the Cold War, due to the importance of this region to southern European countries, European countries led by France, especially NATO member countries belonging to southern Europe, have begun to compete for the leadership of the Mediterranean fleet. There had been constant disputes around this issue. In 1997, France's Defense Minister Miyon's representation still insisted that the European Union's military command should be directed by the Europeans, but the time of being on duty could be a little more flexible. On January 28, the U.S. Pentagon spokesman formally rejected France's request for U.S. and European leaders to jointly lead the NATO South European Union. On March 4th, US Secretary of Defense Cohen stated that the United States is willing to re-consider NATO's command of the European Union Command. Since then, the United States had always been in a state of faltering response, and the ultimate destination of the leadership of the Mediterranean fleet also seemed to be undecided for a long time.

## **5. The United States' Response to the Leadership of the Mediterranean Fleet and Its Analysis**

Due to the importance of the Mediterranean region for the United States and South European countries, and because it was affiliated with NATO, this issue had been complicated and the United States had been fluctuating. However, according to the analysis of this article, it has the tendency to separate leadership power. However, the United States was not willing to completely give up its leadership totally.

### **5.1 The reason why the United States did not want to completely abandon the leadership of the Mediterranean fleet**

First of all, from the perspective of US national security, this region has irreplaceable security strategic interests. This makes it impossible for the United States to completely abandon its

leadership over the Mediterranean fleet. This point is mainly manifested in the attack on terrorism. In the last 10 years of 20<sup>th</sup> century, many European and American people died of terrorist violence. The root of violence is another kind of Islam, which is full of hatred and totalitarian ideology. The birthplace, training and recruitment base of this thought-form, as well as funds, come from the Greater Middle East, including the Mediterranean Basin. In order to safeguard the security and stability of the country, the leadership of the fleet is an important factor in the military's initiative to fight terrorism. The United States is also reluctant to give up its absolute position in the leadership of the fleet.

Secondly, from the perspective of international relations, given the importance of the Mediterranean region to southern European countries, controlling the region can contain South European countries and consolidate their leading position in NATO. Historically, southern European countries and countries on the southern coast of the Mediterranean have a umbilical relationship of colonial politics, economy and culture, such as France, Morocco and Algeria. From a geographical point of view, the Mediterranean region is not only a short distance away from southern European countries, but also countries on the southern coast of the Mediterranean have traditional political and economic ties with France, Italy, and other countries. Once there is a turmoil in these countries, it will inevitably bring huge scale to the countries on the northern shore of the Mediterranean. In addition, the southern Mediterranean countries have always been the supply channels for energy and raw materials of southern European countries. More than 60% of energy sources rely on imports, of which the dependence on oil imports is even higher. It can be seen that the Mediterranean region has important security and economic benefits for southern European countries. The United States, which has always been a leader in NATO's efforts to consolidate its dominance on the one hand, does everything possible to make NATO's 'global strategy' service. To make NATO a more solid tool, it is bound to prevent any country from splitting, take control of the fleet's leadership, control the Mediterranean region, and constrain the NATO member states of southern Europe, making these southern European countries, especially France which historically had more colonies on the south coast of the Mediterranean have to champion the United States' leadership in NATO, which is of great significance in preventing the splitting of NATO by countries in southern Europe, including France.

## **5.2 The reason of the United States hoped to share the leadership of the Mediterranean fleet with other southern European countries**

First of all, although the United States held the Mediterranean fleet in favor of containing South European countries, with the growth of South European countries' strength, especially France, it had long been dissatisfied with the situation in the Mediterranean that is the key area in which French national security and economic interests are controlled by the United States. Fully taking the leadership of the fleet, some southern European countries are likely to use this issue to unite to exert pressure on the United States and threaten the unity of NATO. As early as 1959, President De Gaulle had asked to revise the NATO statute and proposed that a three-nation command structure be established within NATO. Otherwise, France who got the United States and Britain's refusal immediately announced France Mediterranean fleet is not under the command of the United States in March 1959. In 1966, France withdrew from all NATO military agencies. NATO headquarters moved from Paris to Brussels. The exit of France was undoubtedly a fatal blow to NATO especially for US. Until France returned to NATO, the leadership of the Mediterranean Fleet had always been a problem that plagued NATO. Under such circumstances, the United States may have to "share" power to ensure the long-term solidarity of NATO.

Secondly, the United States hoped to make the southern European countries take on more obligations in the name of sharing the power of the leadership of the fleet, such as increasing their military spending. In fact, on this issue, the United States is biased towards giving the limited power to those South European countries who want that. US essentially required that South European paid more for part of military expenditures, and gave them some leadership, especially property rights,

with the title "Europe characteristics".<sup>1</sup> In June 1996, the NATO Foreign Ministers Summit in Berlin formally approved a resolution allowing the multinational and multinational task force to use the NATO logistical guarantees and all military assets provided by the United States for NATO when carrying out military operations without U.S involvement, but to take more military expenses. This is the first time Europeans have the right to use NATO's military assets to carry out their military activities. However, regarding NATO's presence in the Mediterranean fleet, the US-based fleet was an important part of the Mediterranean fleet from the very beginning, so this resolution only worked for military operations within the European countries that have nothing to do with the major interests of the United States. It can be seen that for the leadership of the Mediterranean fleet, the United States just wants to use the "sharing" guise of power to obtain more military spending of southern European countries. In this way, the needs of independence of South European countries was met, and the pressure on the US military was eased.

## 6. Conclusion

The United States had always been uncertain about the leadership of the Mediterranean fleet. On the one hand, although it was unwilling to lose the leadership of the fleet and was afraid that the loss of the leadership of the Mediterranean fleet threatens its NATO leadership, on the other hand, it was worried that the power had been too tight and intensified, contradictions caused NATO to split and harm to interest of US. Moreover, the financial resources of one country cannot support NATO. Therefore, this article believes that the United States tends to gradually split the use of the fleet's leadership, especially property, with southern European countries, but there is no denying the existence of another as above.

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