



NORTH ATLANTIC MILITARY COMMITTEE  
COMITE MILITAIRE DE L'ATLANTIQUE NORD



| September 2003

MC 376/1 (Military Decision)

SECRETARY GENERAL, NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANISATION

**MILITARY DECISION ON MC 376/1, NAVAL CO-OPERATION AND GUIDANCE FOR SHIPPING (NCAGS)**

1. MC 376/1, Naval Co-operation and Guidance for Shipping (NCAGS), which is at Enclosure, was endorsed by the Military Committee on 29 August 03, and is forwarded for approval by the North Atlantic Council. On approval by Council, MC 376/1 will supersede MC 376 (FINAL), 26 Aug 97.
2. This document clears IMSWM-341-03 and all SDs thereto.

**FOR THE MILITARY COMMITTEE:**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Haddacks'.

SIR PAUL HADDACKS  
Vice Admiral, UKNA  
Director  
International Military Staff

Enclosure

1. MC 376/1, Naval Co-operation and Guidance for Shipping (NCAGS)

Copy To SDL Z, IPMRS, IS/DPAO

Action Officer Capt Bull, OPS,(5498)

**MC 376/1**

**NAVAL CO-OPERATION AND GUIDANCE FOR SHIPPING (NCAGS)**

MC 376/1

NAVAL CO-OPERATION AND GUIDANCE FOR SHIPPING (NCAGS)

SECTION 1 - INTRODUCTION

**GENERAL**

1. Military operations conducted by NATO will frequently involve or have some impact on merchant shipping and likewise merchant shipping may effect NATO's military operations. MC 376/1 outlines NATO's policy on Naval Co-operation and Guidance for Shipping (NCAGS), the organisation and enabling capability which supports military operations involving merchant shipping. NCAGS supersedes Naval Control of Shipping (NCS) and includes participation in a broad range of maritime operations during peacetime, crisis or major conflict.

**AIM**

2. The aim of this document is to establish the policy for Naval Co-operation and Guidance for Shipping.

**DEFINITIONS**

3. The definitions and descriptions given below are not exhaustive, but include those required in order to conduct NCAGS operations:

a. **Naval Co-operation And Guidance For Shipping (NCAGS).** The provision of NATO military co-operation, guidance, advice, assistance and supervision to merchant shipping to enhance the safety of participating merchant ships and to support military operations.

b. **Participating Merchant Ships.** Any merchant ships, including fishing vessels, which by the submission of the appropriate proforma<sup>1</sup> are participating in an NCAGS operation.

c. **Designated Merchant Ships.** Merchant ships nominated as Designated by NATO nations through their National Shipping Authorities (NSA). These ships may have priority over other ships for higher level NCAGS activities and under Naval Supervision of Merchant Ships will comply with military orders. On request, the NAC/DPC may allow non-NATO nations to nominate ships.

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<sup>1</sup> The appropriate proforma depends on the particular NCAGS mission.

- d. **Naval Supervision of Merchant Ships.** The ultimate response of NCAGS exercised by naval authorities of mandatory routeing, control of movement and/or convoy organisation. Naval Supervision of merchant ships will be implemented only with NAC/DPC approval.
- e. **Protection of Merchant Ships.** The employment of military forces or procedures to prevent or defend against offensive actions directed at merchant ships.
- f. **Merchant Shipping.** For the purposes of NCAGS, merchant shipping includes the complete commercial maritime industry, including the fishing industry.

## SECTION 2 – POLICY

### GENERAL

- 4. The prime purpose of NCAGS is to make optimum use of co-operation between military and civil maritime authorities to support NATO's and Nations' aim to maintain an uninterrupted flow of maritime commerce while minimising disruption to military activities.
- 5. In any Joint Operational Area, NCAGS is the responsibility of The Maritime Component Commander under the Joint Force Commander<sup>2</sup>. The Maritime Component Commander also has responsibility for the employment of military forces assigned to protect merchant shipping. The two operations are closely co-ordinated under the one commander.
- 6. NCAGS personnel and operations should be fully integrated into the Combined Joint HQ and operational structures. In most cases the functions of NATO and national NCAGS are identical, although there may be certain differences in procedures and terminology.
- 7. The diverse ownership, manning and flagged status of merchant ships reflects the increased globalisation of the merchant shipping industry. This has implications both for Naval forces and the NCAGS organisation on the conduct of military operations particularly those operations which do not have a specific UN mandate or are supported by national legislation (within Economic Exclusion Zones or territorial seas). With the exception of ships under Naval Supervision, compliance by merchant shipping in any NCAGS operation is on a voluntary basis. Similarly merchant shipping is under no obligation to be part of the NCAGS system and may, excepting when under Naval Supervision, decline co-operation at any time.

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<sup>2</sup> If a Maritime Component Commander or Joint Force Commander are not appointed, then this responsibility will be executed by an appropriate level NATO Maritime Commander. This applies throughout this policy document.

## **CO-OPERATION AND GUIDANCE**

8. NCAGS operations are based on co-operation, guidance, advice and assistance. The emphasis is on a rapid exchange of information between military authorities, naval forces, merchant shipping and their respective Civil Maritime Authorities.

9. Merchant ships participate in NCAGS on a voluntary basis as guided either by their National Shipping Authorities, Owners or Operators/Masters.

10. The NCAGS organisation is obligated to ensure that the commercially sensitive information provided by the merchant shipping industry is handled as commercial-in-confidence.

11. A NATO military commander may not alter the destination of a merchant ship without the approval of the ship's owner, operator or government except when the ship is under Naval Supervision. He may, however, advise a diversion from a ship's planned route as necessary for safety, operational or tactical reasons.

12. During a maritime operation the Strategic, Regional, Joint Force and Maritime Component Commanders may be given a mission which has specific responsibilities concerning merchant shipping within a defined geographic area. The mission will always be based on a legal mandate and may involve Rules of Engagement. Merchant ships within the area may, or may not, be Participating Ships and nations may also Designate specific ships to receive NCAGS assistance and issue guidance to shipping companies.

13. The NAC/DPC may direct that Naval Supervision be implemented. These Measures will be co-ordinated by the NCAGS organisation under the Joint Force Commander and will be notified to appropriate civil maritime authorities and the Planning Board for Ocean Shipping (PBOS). The Joint Force Commander has overall responsibility for both the implementation of NCAGS procedures and the protection of merchant ships.

## **NCAGS COMMAND AND CONTROL**

14. Once a Concept of Operations has been approved by the NAC/DPC, Commanders will utilise NCAGS in the normal course of operations with the exception of Naval Supervision which requires specific NAC/DPC approval.

15. When conducting operations beyond the NATO area the Maritime Component Commander, under the Joint Force Commander, will assume the lead for NCAGS planning and execution and is to use NATO, rather than National, procedures.

16. These Commanders should note that the manpower element of NCAGS is mainly provided by Reserves and therefore activation and participation in any operation is heavily dependant on availability and National Reserve legislation.

### **SECTION 3 – APPLICATION OF NCAGS**

17. The NCAGS organisation (consisting of both national and NATO assets) can support and participate in a broad range of military operations both within and beyond the NATO area. These include:

- a. Operations relating to the safety, security and protection of merchant ships including the de-confliction of merchant ships from military activity in crisis areas. This may involve: the provision of advice, briefing to masters, provision of publications and equipment, routing, facilitating minefield lead through, accompaniment and the Naval Supervision of merchant ships including convoy operations.
- b. Crisis Response Operations including peace support and other operations under international legal mandate. These may involve: production of the merchant ship picture and the provision of advice and assisting with the protection of Sea Lines of Communications. Also support of: sanctions, embargo operations, Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations, humanitarian operations and support to intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance activities.
- c. Support to civil maritime authorities including production of the merchant ship picture and the provision of advice in support of homeland defence tasks such as the surveillance and monitoring of merchant ship movements and maritime anti-terrorism.

18. The detailed procedures required to plan and execute NCAGS will be promulgated in appropriate Allied Publications.

### **SECTION 4 – RESPONSIBILITIES**

#### **MILITARY COMMITTEE**

19. The Military Committee is responsible for ensuring that aspects of NCAGS policy, when appropriate, are included in other MC documents and to provide guidance for the conduct of NCAGS where it applies to military operations, exercises and training through the Strategic Commanders as appropriate.

#### **STRATEGIC COMMANDER**

20. The Operational Strategic Commander is responsible for updating NCAGS policy and doctrine in line with current NATO contingency planning and is to use the NATO Shipping Working Group as the prime forum in which Nations are to discuss, formulate and, in principle, agree policy and doctrine issues.

## **NATIONS**

21. Nations are responsible for ensuring that their National NCAGS organisation is kept informed of NATO NCAGS policy and that their NCAGS force structures can contribute to and participate in NATO NCAGS operations and contingency planning.

22. Nations should ensure that close co-operation and co-ordination exists between their military and Civil Maritime Authorities and merchant shipping on NCAGS issues, and that procedures exist for the rapid dissemination of significant NCAGS information.

23. When required, Nations are responsible for the supply of NATO NCAGS publications, equipment and relevant instructions to their national or Designated ships as appropriate.

## **NATO SHIPPING CENTRE**

24. A NATO Shipping Centre (NSC), authorised by the Strategic Commanders, has been established at HQ NAVNORTH at Northwood to support NATO, national and multinational operations both within and beyond the NATO area. The NSC has two principal roles. Firstly, to compile data on merchant shipping and providing that information to the Joint Force Commander, Maritime Component Commander, NCAGS Staff and warships conducting NCAGS and other naval operations. Secondly, to act as a point of contact and source of valuable information for civil maritime authorities and merchant shipping and as a communications link between naval forces at sea, civil maritime authorities and merchant shipping.