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Sensors May Help Track Drift-Net Fleets -- Sub Detectors Can Track Boats

By [Dee Norton](#)

An underwater listening system created in the 1950s to find Soviet submarines may be used to track boats illegally fishing with drift nets in the North Pacific.

Last month the Enforcement Division of the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Navy's Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command began discussing the possibility of using the Sound Surveillance System.

The system, known as SOSUS, rings the North Pacific and part of the Atlantic with hundreds of underwater listening devices called hydrophones.

SOSUS hydrophones were highlighted in Tom Clancy's best-selling novel and subsequent movie, "The Hunt for Red October."

The hydrophones are spaced at 5- to 15-mile intervals along cables on the ocean floor, according to the 1990-91 issue of Jane's Underwater Warfare Systems publication.

TRACKING FISHING CRAFT

The hydrophones are linked to shore-based computers that record and help the Navy analyze underwater sounds to locate, track and, if possible, identify submarines of the former Soviet Union.

"It is physically possible to track fishing craft with SOSUS," said Capt. James Harnes, public-affairs director for the Navy's warfare-systems command (SPAWARS). But that has not been done and is currently not a part of the Navy's mission, Harnes said.

Steve Springer, special agent in charge of the Enforcement Division of the National Marine Fisheries Service, recently went to SPAWARS headquarters in Arlington, Va., to meet with technical-staff members.

"The meeting was strictly exploratory," Springer said. "They (SPAWARS staff) know nothing about high-seas drift-net fleets but are interested in our problems and what our requirements are.

"We are hopeful. That is about the best I can say. This (SOSUS) is something that is in place but set up for something entirely different than our drift-net enforcement problem."

EXPENSE IS A HURDLE

Springer said his hope for surveillance help from SOSUS has been tempered by the possible expense. "The cost numbers could be from the low to hundreds of millions, and I don't have any money."

Nonetheless, both agencies are evaluating ways they could work together and a series of meetings is expected this spring and summer, Springer said.

The idea of using SOSUS to track drift-net boats was brought to Springer by Dave Lewis and Ron Abileah, managers of several programs for SRI International, once called Stanford Research Institute.

Lewis has indicated Springer's cost estimates could be far too high.

"I think \$500,000 would pay for the tests and take about three months," he said.

Additional research and equipment could bring the cost of using the system to \$2 million, Lewis said.

"We don't see this as being a major diversion of the system. We have found nothing in our preliminary work that shows an adverse effect on the Navy's mission and no need to make major changes. We would process different things a little differently."

Lewis believes "the Navy is perfectly willing. They are not the stopper. The stopper is who is going to pay for it."

If the money were available and a contract quickly written, the testing, research and equipment installation could be done by the beginning of next year's drift-net season, Lewis said.

DOTTING THE PACIFIC

Information about the system itself isn't easy to find.

The 1979 yearbook of World Armaments and Disarmaments published by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute included a map showing presumed locations of SOSUS hydrophones and their range. The

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