The Soviet Navy
Also of Interest


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Military Lessons of the Falkland Islands War: Views from the United States, edited by Bruce W. Watson and Peter M. Dunn

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About the Book and Editors

Since Admiral Sergei G. Gorshkov was appointed to the office of commander in chief of the Soviet Navy in 1956, the Soviet Union has made a massive investment in naval construction, training, and operations. As a result, the Soviet Navy has grown from a coastal defense force to one of the world's two strongest navies. This book offers a detailed assessment of every major aspect of the Soviet Navy, from fleet structure and training facilities to command and control procedures and warfare and intelligence collection capabilities. In each case the analysis stresses the strengths and liabilities of the Soviet Navy and assesses implications for the West. The editors conclude that current trends indicate the Soviet Navy will play a major role in projecting Soviet military power in the developing world in the late 1980s and 1990s, a threat that the United States may find difficult to combat. Written by a team of academic researchers and naval analysts, the book provides a thorough understanding of the dimensions and implications of evolving Soviet naval power.

Naval Commander Bruce W. Watson is director of publications at the Defense Intelligence College and is the author of numerous military books, including Red Navy at Sea: Soviet Naval Operations on the High Seas, 1956–1980 (Westview, 1982). Susan M. Watson received her education at Trinity College and Georgetown University and is currently a free-lance editor and consultant.
FOR JOSEPH SCHIEBEL (1930–1976)

This book is dedicated to Joseph Schiebel by the authors and editors, all of whom have been associated with either Georgetown University or the Defense Intelligence College, where Professor Schiebel taught and served. Joe Schiebel began his tenure as director of the Russian Area Studies Program in 1966 and rapidly revised a lackluster program into one that was both highly respected and extremely responsive to Department of Defense needs. Likewise, he joined the faculty of the Defense Intelligence School in 1968 and was subsequently instrumental in formulating the school's proposal to establish a Master of Science in Strategic Intelligence. At both institutions, his extensive knowledge, high moral and academic standards, endless energy, and love for his students deeply moved them, prompting them to excel. Joe Schiebel suffered an untimely death in 1976; a great loss. Nonetheless, he influenced a large number of individuals who have gone on to publish, to teach, or to serve. In addition, many of his initiatives, such as the master's program at the Defense Intelligence College, were ultimately successful. Thus, we who owe so much to Joe Schiebel hope that this book repays in part his selfless efforts on our behalf.
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Since Admiral Sergei G. Gorshkov's appointment as commander in chief in 1956, the Soviet Navy has made remarkable progress, advancing from little more than a coastal defense force to one of the world's two strongest navies. Dramatic developments in hardware—ships, submarines, and aircraft—have been accompanied by equally illustrious advances in the navy's war-fighting capabilities and in naval operations that support Soviet foreign policy objectives. Such operations include port visits, responses to crises, and gaining access to port facilities. In fact, the navy has become the most important branch of the Soviet armed forces in respect to foreign policy matters, because it can be used as a diplomatic instrument in a more unobtrusive way than other military power. Navies operate on the high seas, use port facilities of other nations, make port visits, and accomplish many tasks which in and of themselves are not necessarily aggressive in nature. It is more difficult for ground and air forces to appear innocuous.

Currently Soviet ballistic missile-equipped submarines patrol with weapons targeted against major U.S. cities, and other Soviet submarines stalk U.S. aircraft carriers and other naval forces on the high seas, while Soviet ships are visiting foreign ports or are present at overseas bases. These ships play a role in the superpower rivalry for influence around the world.

The Soviet Navy is very strong, but it is vulnerable and has some serious weaknesses. Among these, we note a less than glorious naval tradition, a command and control structure so tightly regulated by the naval headquarters in Moscow that local commanders are unable or incapable of exercising decisive leadership or initiative, a development in naval construction that is uneven, an air defense that is somewhat inadequate, and weaknesses in war-fighting capabilities.

The purpose of this book is to objectively examine the Soviet Navy in its totality. The reader might well ask why we are editing a book in a field in which so much has already been written. We feel that the book makes several valuable contributions, and two particularly unique strengths are its scope and balance.

The scope is very broad. There are many excellent books dealing with various aspects of the Soviet Navy. However, we believe that this is the first to examine all aspects of that institution in an organized and consistent fashion. While looking at the Soviet Navy's history, tradition, people,
hardware, operations, and warfare capabilities, it also pays attention to the
interplay and effects of these various factors on one another.

The authors of the chapters in this book view Soviet foreign policy as
a real threat to world peace. Linked by their association with either
Georgetown University or the Defense Intelligence College, they have been
asked to provide the reader with the historical context of their topics and
then to identify Soviet strengths and liabilities. The result is material that
tries not to exaggerate Soviet strengths or to deemphasize the actual and
potential effects of Soviet naval activities. As a result, the book provides a
unique view of the Soviet Navy—one the editors feel is a valuable contribution
to the current literature.

Bruce W. Watson
Susan M. Watson
We wish to express our gratitude to several people whose invaluable assistance and support made this book possible. Foremost are the contributors, who did the research on which this work is based. We are indebted as well to the following individuals for their support and assistance: Peter M. Dunn, Douglas Lovejoy, William and Harriet Scott, Peter Tsouras, Kenneth Vernoski, Paul Holman, Patricia Howard, Gerald Hopple, James George, Norman Polmar, Frank Uhlig, Earl Tifford, and Robert De Gross. We also thank our parents, Ida and Maurice Kramer and Wallace and Viola Watson, for a lifetime of guidance and encouragement, and our brothers and sisters—Donald Watson, Thomas and Jerome Kramer, Evelyn Michon, and Cathryn French—for their interest. Additionally, we thank Frederick Praeger, Barbara Ellington, and the staff of Westview Press for their support and guidance.

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B.W.W.
S.M.W.
Part 1

The Tradition, the Service, and the People
Soviet Naval Tradition

Peter Tsouras

Like the Hydra's teeth, the seeds sown by Admiral Sergei G. Gorshkov's naval expansion have burst from the shipyards of the Soviet Union seemingly ready to challenge an apprehensive West on the high seas. Images of the technological and numerical strengths of today's Soviet Navy crowd out the subtle reality that this shiny new toy of the Soviet Union is rooted in the continuum of Russian-Soviet history and displays inherent, perhaps fatal, weaknesses derived from that tradition.

By any standard, the modern Soviet Navy represents a remarkable organizational and industrial achievement, and the Soviets have every reason to be proud. They see their naval ensign paraded aggressively around the world, undeterred by the ghosts of British glory or the watchfulness of an increasingly nervous U.S. Navy. Having jostled its way to the first rank of navies, the Soviet Navy is all too often judged by the standards of the company that it keeps, which can be a mistake. A navy is not just a collection of ships, men, and deadly weapons—the pieces in a war game. It is a human institution that follows patterns set in its developmental stages by diverse factors of history, culture, and geography. The distillation of these intangible experiences form a navy's character, and this character determines the navy's conduct and success under the ultimate stress of war.

Consistent success and achievement become a tradition of victory that can be the most animating, decisive feature of a military organization. Such a tradition instills pride and confidence and sets the standard that must be kept. Horatio Nelson's message to the fleet at Trafalgar drew upon such a tradition, with crushing effect. The character of the Soviet Navy reflects another tradition, not one of victory, but one of moderate success against regional powers and consistent failure against world-class navies.

Alfred Thayer Mahan said the first element of sea power is a nation's geographical position,¹ and Russia is a perfect example. Since the rise of Muscovy, the physical security and economic survival of the Russian state have been almost wholly dependent upon activities on the Eurasian landmass. Naval considerations, in a strategic sense, have been peripheral, seldom deflecting the land orientation of the Russian-Soviet elites. This situation is a natural outgrowth of Russia's essentially landlocked geography.
The great military lesson of Russian history is that the state's survival has never been threatened from the sea. Sea power cannot effectively pierce Russia's continental mentality. The Mongols, Teutonic Knights, Poles, Swedes, French, and Germans all marched into Russia, so it is no wonder that sea power has not always been a pressing concern for the Russians. Gorshkov ruefully admits, "the Navy of the Motherland developed rather unevenly."2

History has shown that nations that must depend upon the sea for security and livelihood are afforded some measure of protection by that element and tend to use sea power effectively. Athens, Great Britain, Japan, and the United States are good examples. Nations that view sea power as only a further road to aggrandizement tend to fail in using it because it is not an imperative of survival. Spain, France, and Germany are examples of continental powers that have overreached themselves upon the sea. Each has had to choose between continental interests and sea power, and each has consistently declined to sacrifice the former to the latter. Their strategic centers of gravity remain fixed on the continent, and their interests and attention constantly swing back to this center no matter how momentarily distracted they might be by the possibilities of sea power. In the long run, none of these powers have been able to afford both the land commitments of a continental power and the naval commitments of a sea power. As a result, the ambitions of each succumbed to the sea power counterweight that was exercised so deftly by Great Britain for three centuries.

The years since 1956 have witnessed what the Soviets have been pleased to call "the emergence of Soviet power." As in earlier attempts by other countries to dominate the continent, the Soviets have made a determined effort to build a powerful navy. The undertaking has required a great economic commitment, has marked a radical departure in policy and strategy, and has not been without its domestic critics. Admiral Sergei G. Gorshkov found it necessary to defend Soviet naval expansion in a remarkable series of articles appearing in Morskoy sbornik in 1972, entitled "Navies in War and Peace," and in a major theoretical work, Sea Power of the State, first published in Russian in 1976. In both works he attempted to establish the motherland's historical credentials as a legitimate sea power, and he sought to allay fears and silence critics by proving that there exists a naval tradition that is both ancient and a natural outgrowth of Russian-Soviet history.

The force and skill of his advocacy is testament to the importance he attaches to convincing his readership that this naval tradition actually exists. He must recognize that overcoming this psychological hurdle is a crucial milestone in the attainment of Soviet sea power. His dilemma is that he must also recognize that there is very little whole cloth from which to weave the substance of a vital naval tradition. His solution has been to resort to an interpretation of history that is both inaccurate and intentionally misleading. It is worthwhile to review Gorshkov's arguments in order to understand the paucity of a vital Russian-Soviet naval tradition and thereby the magnitude of his historical manipulation.

Gorshkov begins the historical analysis in each of his works by attacking what he considers the pernicious idea that Russia as a continental power
could not have interests at sea. He lays the blame for the entrenchment of this calumny in Russian history to foreign propaganda, which has managed to affect generation after generation of Russia's leaders. He avoids the difficulties involved in objective scholarship by labeling the offending idea as a hostile, foreign invention and casts aspersions on the intelligence and integrity of long-dead figures. By extension, he makes a similar attack on contemporary domestic critics who today question the strategic assumption inherent in the rise of Soviet sea power. Receptiveness to foreign disinformation is a very serious accusation in the Soviet Union; Gorshkov is playing bureaucratic hardball. 3

It is, however, difficult to explain how the rulers of Russia could have been so consistently gullible as to be duped for almost 400 years by an argument that, according to Gorshkov, was so manifestly not in Russia's interests. These rulers and the men who served under them oversaw the transformation of Muskovy into a state that controlled one-sixth of the earth's land surface. Gorshkov seems to imply a uniquely Russian standard of incompetence since it is doubtful that a tool as useful as Gorshkov asserts sea power to be would have been so consistently overlooked by such rapacious and successful empire-builders.

A Dubious Lineage: Russian Sea Power Before Peter I

Gorshkov begins the chronology of Russia's naval tradition with an account of an Old Slav naval expedition that penetrated the Aegean in A.D. 269 and "crushed Athens, Corinth, and Sparta and reached as far as Crete and Cyprus," stating that "sea navigation and knowledge of sea routes" among the Old Slavs was already highly developed. 4 Actually, this grand raid was the grim handiwork of the Goths, a decidedly Germanic people. If any Old Slavs participated in this expedition, it was probably as galley slaves as the Slavs at that time were still confined to the forests by stronger nomadic peoples. To enhance the achievement of the Old Slavs, however, Gorshkov grandly cites the names of the ancient cities that were overcome. Rather than being inhabited by the formidable opponents that triumphed at Marathon, Platea, and Salamis, these cities were, in the third century, sleepy and undefended Roman provincial towns that had seen no war for almost 400 years.

Gorshkov ascribes the actual birth of "Russian naval art" to the Slavs who overran many of the Balkan possessions of the eastern Roman Empire in the sixth and seventh centuries. Some of these Slavs established themselves in Macedonia and proceeded to engage in acts of piracy in the Aegean. Using dugout skiffs, theirs was a rather grubby, small-time operation to be the origin of anything as grandiose as naval art. 5

The next stage in the growth of the Russian naval tradition, according to Gorshkov, is the emergence of the early medieval state of Kievan Rus, its domination of the Black Sea, and its great naval expeditions against the eastern Roman Empire. He cites a statement made by a British authority,
Fred T. Jane, in 1904 that the Russians were the greatest and most adventurous sailors of their day. They undoubtedly were, but in that era, the name “Russian” referred to the Swedish Norse. A Norse tribe of merchant adventurers, believed to have been called “Ros,” had imposed its rule on the disorganized Slavs, and contemporary historians were referring to these men and their famed seamanship when they wrote about “the Russians.”

The Norse were eventually absorbed into the society of their Slav subjects, and the latter’s participation in raids greatly increased. It must be emphasized that the Norse naval traditions, while eagerly followed by the Slavicized rulers of Kievan Rus, consistently failed against the first-class naval defenses of Constantinople. The most dangerous threat to the city was made at the apogee of Kievan power by Sviatopolk the Great in A.D. 971, but significantly, his approach was by land through the Balkans. The last Russian naval attack on Constantinople was made in A.D. 1042. The Byzantine fleet was dispersed in campaigns against the Moslems, but the Russians were crushed by a few hastily outfitted triremes and Greek fire ships in a lethal demonstration of tactical and technological superiority. The Russian fleet was so badly beaten that the survivors had to flee by land up the west coast of the Black Sea.

Beginning during Sviatopolk’s reign, nomad depredations began to strangle Russian commercial traffic down the Dnieper and, consequently, Russian control of the Black Sea. The Mongol invasion of 1240–1241 was a catastrophe on the scale of a nuclear war. Urban populations were largely exterminated or carried off into slavery, and with them, Russia’s commercial orientation as a society died, as well as its relationship with the sea, its legacy from the Norse. The Mongol conquest resulted in a fundamental cultural reorientation of Russian society away from commerce and the sea. Whatever naval traditions the Kievan Russians had established were irrelevant in the subsequent history of Russia.

In spite of this historical watershed, which placed Kievan naval experience in the realm of dim myth, Gorshkov emphasizes that the origin of the Russian Navy predates that of the English Navy under Alfred the Great. He relishes using an English source, Fred T. Jane again, for this statement, but Gorshkov fails to point out that the English Navy was founded for sound strategic reasons while the Kievan navy was chiefly established to carry out grand-scale piracy. More to the point, Alfred’s achievement was the beginning of an unbroken tradition of victory that continuously reinforced itself, whereas the Kievan experience was separated from later Russian history by the Mongol conquest.

The Russia that shook off the Mongol yoke was agricultural, conservative, beset by deadly enemies on every habitable border, and utterly cut off from the sea. From this historical base, modern Russia developed. Gorshkov maintains that through all this time, some 400 years, the Russians retained their seafaring traditions and recognized the need to reestablish sea power. That is asking a lot of a medieval society that was slowly recovering from its brush with extinction. The irony is that the chief Russian contribution
to sea power during this period was to provide a multitude of slaves for service in the galleys of the Turkish Navy.9

Peter the Great: Reluctant Sailors for a New Navy

Upon this scene burst the dynamic character of Peter I. Excited by a fascination with the sea and its power potential, he bullied and bludgeoned the Russian people into building the second largest fleet in the world in only twenty years. His motives were unfathomable to a people whose world view remained firmly rooted in the past, yet his vision, energy, and absolute power overcame this cultural inertia. With his new fleet, he broke the power of Sweden in the Baltic and aroused the enmity of England. He is a classic example of the effect of an individual upon history, but Gorshkov barely mentions him when detailing the establishment of the Russian Navy. Gorshkov implies that Peter’s achievement was due to a collective desire of the Russian people to reach the sea, some innate understanding of sea power.10 In fact, Peter had to drag the Russian people kicking and screaming to this “heroic” task. They cursed him as the Antichrist, they hated and feared the sea, but they obeyed. A good Marxist, Gorshkov glosses over the role of the individual in history, but in this case, he is compelled to downplay it because the very immensity of Peter’s achievement highlights the intense resistance of his subjects to venture onto the sea. The fact that Peter ran so hard against the historical grain emphasizes the nonexistence of a naval tradition.

Although victorious against the Swedes, that achievement of the fledgling Russian Navy must be looked at carefully. Although the preeminent regional power of northern Europe, Sweden was opposed in the Great Northern War by a coalition, of which Russia was only one member. Russia’s population was at least ten and possibly twenty times that of Sweden and far more ruthlessly expended. Sweden’s defense of its possessions along the Baltic proved to be a strategic nightmare that the kingdom’s small population and economic resources could not solve. In the end, Swedish tactical and technological superiority on land and sea was unable to withstand Russian persistence, mass, and superior political leadership.

Russia’s first naval victory, the Battle of Hangö, illustrates this point. A small squadron of the Swedish fleet was trapped in a Finnish fjord by a force of over 100 Russian galleys captained mostly by Venetians and Greeks. The Russian admiral sent his galleys in like waves of infantry and swamped the badly outnumbered and immobilized Swedes with landing parties. By waging essentially a land battle, the Russians won their first naval victory. Anxious to establish the navy’s lineage and pride of place, Gorshkov cites Peter’s equation of the importance of Hangö with the army’s earlier victory at Poltava,11 but the two battles shared only an effective use of mass against an outnumbered enemy. Poltava, one of the decisive battles of history, destroyed the combined Swedish field armies and Sweden’s position on the continent; Hangö resulted in the loss of a small part of the Swedish fleet and contributed to the already inevitable loss of Finland.
Beating the Turks: The Golden Age of the Russian Navy

Gorshkov correctly points out that the thirty-seven years following the death of Peter the Great saw a ruinous neglect of the fleet. At one point, funds were so restricted that ships were forbidden to put to sea unless they were to transport royalty.\textsuperscript{12} The reign of Catherine the Great reversed this decline and witnessed what has been rightfully called “the golden age of the Russian Navy.” The navy’s performance was both praiseworthy and uniformly successful, but Gorshkov cannot resist the temptation to overstate the importance of the campaigns against the Swedes and Turks.

In a move of great strategic daring, Catherine ordered a strong squadron of the Baltic Fleet to attack the Turks in the Aegean in 1769 in order to facilitate the Russian drive in the Black Sea region. Gorshkov speaks of the squadron’s operations as “a remarkable example of the lengthy operations of a major sea unit totally cut off from its home bases.”\textsuperscript{13} In reality, the Russian squadron that sailed first into British waters was in such poor condition that the usually sensitive British refused to take it seriously. In what appears to have been partly a humanitarian gesture, the Russians were offered the use of British facilities for rest and repair—the squadron had by that time already suffered 232 dead and 600 sick on its voyage out of the Baltic. Catherine relieved the Russian admiral and appointed a British admiral in her service, Admiral John Elphinstone, in his place. A contemporary naval observer noted that it was only the presence of British naval officers in Russian service that allowed the squadron to reach the Levant at all. The importance of so many foreign, and especially British, officers in the Russian Navy has been uniformly ignored by both Russian and Soviet writers.\textsuperscript{14}

Gorshkov emphasizes the navy’s independence of operations from home bases, but he neglects the facts that repeated reinforcements were sent from the Baltic, the British Navy exercised a benign neutrality, and the Russians were able to make use of the considerable maritime resources and facilities of the Greek islands. The Turkish fleet proved to be hopelessly incompetent and was thrashed in every engagement. The Russian theater commander, Count Aleksei Orlov, wrote to Catherine, “The fleet [Russian] is not worth a pinch of salt. . . . If we had to do with any but Turks, there would soon be an end to this fleet.” At Chesma, the Russians handily destroyed the larger Turkish fleet in what Russian and Soviet historians claim is Russia’s greatest victory at sea. The British officers in the squadron distinguished themselves by their aggressiveness and skill, particularly their use of fire ships to destroy all but one of the Turks’ capital ships. For four years, the Russian squadron dominated the Aegean, taking islands and searching out enemy ships as far as Tripoli, but a plan by Elphinstone to force the Dardanelles was overruled by the more cautious Orlov.\textsuperscript{15}

In 1787–1788, Russia was at war simultaneously with Turkey and Sweden. The Turks were regularly beaten in the Black Sea while the Swedes and Russians mauled each other severely in the Baltic. Russian performance in
both theaters was impressive, showing a marked general improvement. Gorshkov's account of this period does not suffer from overstatement; the facts are praise enough. He does avoid mentioning the contributions of the numerous foreign line and flag officers in Russian service—such as Kon- tradmiral Pavel Ivanovitch Jones, better known as John Paul Jones. A statement by Fred T. Jane, which Gorshkov does not cite, claims that "at one time more than half the entire list of officers were of Anglo-Saxon and Celtic nationality."16

Gorshkov limits his praise to the Russian admiral F. F. Ushakov, whose genuinely able leadership resulted in the collapse of Turkish Black Sea naval power in that war and in victories against the French in the Mediterranean in the Ionian and Italian campaigns of 1797-1800. The praise is well-deserved; Admiral Ushakov was a brilliant commander worthy of the pride of any navy, and his Italian campaign should be studied as a model of amphibious and combined operations. Gorshkov criticizes Western European and U.S. naval historians for slighting Ushakov's achievements as being merely those of a pupil of Nelson. The fact that Gorshkov feels compelled to air such a concern betrays his feeling that not only the West but also perhaps a good part of his domestic audience is not sufficiently impressed by this entirely respectable page in Russian naval history. Gorshkov's emphasis on Russia's past glories in the Mediterranean also legitimates current Soviet involvement there and serves to enhance the prestige and importance of the navy's current role.

Elsewhere he shows a similar sensitivity by comparing Russian victories with British failures under supposedly similar circumstances. He contrasts the Russian capture of the fortress of Azov (1696) with the British failures to take Quebec (1691) and St. Pierre (1693). He pointedly compares Ushakov's capture of the French fortress at Corfu in 1799 with Nelson's inability to take a "weaker" French position on Malta, glossing over any of the differences in the respective campaigns that might make such comparisons awkward.17

Up to this point, post-Petrine Russia had acquired a respectable naval tradition. Solid successes had been scored against the two regional powers, Turkey and Sweden, and these victories had barred expansion along the Baltic and Black Sea littorals. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Russian and Soviet navies have been challenged by highly professional, world-class navies six times. Each time Russian naval tradition has suffered a major blow to its pride and viability.

A Century of Disasters Fighting World-Class Navies

Gorshkov faces a dilemma when he deals with the era that ends with the 1917 October Revolution. The events of those years are too close in time to the Soviet revolutionary experience to praise as fulsomely as those of previous eras, so safely and romantically in the distant past. The record of defeat is also too manifest, although Gorshkov is not above embellishing history here and there, and he transforms the defeats into lessons on the
failure to develop the navy. His accounts of earlier glories seek to establish the legitimacy of the Russian naval tradition and Russia's role and right to sea power. His subsequent accounts to 1917 emphasize the dangers to the security of the state when those natural impulses are frustrated. He maintains that the establishment of Soviet power heralded a new and clear understanding of sea power and, by implication, the reestablishment of the tradition of victory.

Of the six failures of the Russian-Soviet navies, the first three occurred before the revolution—the Crimean War, the Russo-Japanese War, and World War I. The last three have occurred since the revolution—Britain's containment of the Soviet Navy in 1918–1919, World War II, and the Cuban missile crisis. A broad thread of continuity runs through the first five events. In each, naval resources and strategy were completely subordinated to traditional military requirements, and the navy's leaders were either given no latitude for aggressive naval action or failed to make use of opportunities. With the possible exception of the Crimean War, poor training and a perceptible lack of confidence were evident in all ranks. Outstanding senior leadership was confined to a few talented men whose loss had decisive and negative effects on operations.

These weaknesses were not uncanny coincidences but the natural product of the forces of Russian-Soviet culture and history. Two features are crucial. The first is the privileged position of the army, often at the navy's expense. The fundamental question posed to Russian-Soviet leaders has been whether the security of the state would be in mortal risk if the navy were to fail or be confined to a traditional coastal defense role. In moments of acute crisis, the answer has been always no. The second feature is that cultural and political discouragement of initiative has always had a debilitating effect on the development of martial qualities that are peculiarly vital to successful navies.

These five conflicts have not been without their value as tradition builders, but unfortunately for the Gorshkov school of sea power, the wrong traditions have been enshrined in naval history. They include the repeated transformation of naval personnel into infantrymen and artillerists by the controlling military leadership, the stout defense of naval bases from sea and land attack, and good service in riverine and coastal amphibious assignments. Although these traditions sustain the deserved Russian reputation for courage, they do little to instill in Soviet seamen and officers the institutional pride and confidence they need to confront their U.S. counterparts on the high seas.

The Crimean War

The first of the great failures was the Crimean War of 1854–1856. The Russian Black Sea Fleet was well prepared to meet the traditionally incompetent Turkish Navy. At Sinop, the Russians, under the highly capable vice admiral P. S. Nakhimov, cornered and destroyed a smaller Turkish force in what was to be Russia's last fleet victory. The ensuing entry of Great
Britain and France into the war resulted in Russia's first contest with world-class navies.

The Black Sea Fleet was both outnumbered by and technically inferior to the Anglo-French navies, but its training and aggressive leadership could have made sea control by the allies difficult and frustrated support of their land operations in the Crimea. Nakhimov was eager to try to combat the Anglo-French navies but was overruled by Prince Menshikov, the theater commander. Instead, Russia's naval forces were committed to the land defense of the fleet's main base at Sevastopol. Warships were sunk to block entry into the harbor; their guns, crews, and 20,000 marines were taken to help fortify the frantically built landward defenses. Nakhimov conducted a tenacious defense for almost a year, but within a month of his loss in action, the Russians evacuated the city. Most of the remaining ships of the Black Sea Fleet had been lost during an allied sortie into the Sea of Azov, and allied expeditions into the Baltic were unopposed. The outclassed Russians kept to port. Despite the skill and desperate heroism of the Russian naval forces at Sevastopol, their role was one that belonged to the Russian Army.

The Russo-Japanese War

The Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905 was, in many respects, a replay of the Crimean War. Yet there was one major difference. The Russian Navy had been expanded to world-class size to operate for the first time out of traditional waters against a new foe that was also about to attain world-class naval status. The result was a disaster that nearly toppled the autocracy in Russia.

Nicholas II had become infatuated with naval activities and was determined to compete on the world stage. His immediate target was territorial and economic aggrandizement in the Far East, but he was stubbornly opposed by two of his ablest ministers, Count S. J. Witte and General A. N. Kuropatkin. Gorshkov must find this era of Russian naval expansion appealing since Nicholas was pursuing many of the goals Gorshkov himself has advocated, which perhaps explains why he finds space to excoriate Minister of War Kuropatkin twice in "Navies in War and Peace" for his advocacy of a continental defense strategy. In an appeal to the tsar, Kuropatkin wrote, "The lessons of history have taught us to follow the same path which our forefathers took, and see Russia’s main force to be her land Army.”

Naval expansion continued despite this opposition. By June 1900, Russia's navy was second only to Great Britain's in the number of battleships and fourth in overall tonnage, but behind these impressive figures lay a fatal inefficiency and a lack of professionalism. In 1902, the naval staff had no war planning or contingency section and no operations section. The former was created the next year, but dealt primarily with the Baltic, although the best ships and men were being sent to the Far East in anticipation of a clash with Japan. By 1904, the Russian Pacific Fleet had reached rough numerical parity with the Japanese Navy, although the quality of the fleet's ships and the training of its personnel were inferior. Gorshkov states that
Japan's numerical superiority was "beyond dispute," but this assertion is not supported by his own figures.19

The Japanese attack on the Pacific Fleet at Port Arthur found the Russians surprised and unprepared, and from that moment, the initiative was tenaciously held by Japan's highly professional navy. Ship damage in this attack was less serious than the blow to morale and confidence. The appointment of Vice Admiral S. O. Makarov as fleet commander, the best officer in the Russian Navy and a sailor of world renown, brought new enthusiasm to the fleet. He immediately initiated aggressive operations, but within a month he was killed when his flagship was sunk by a mine. His successor refused to leave the harbor, thus killing the flickering spirit of Makarov's command. The fleet's men and guns continued to be drained off to man and equip the landward defenses of Port Arthur to withstand the Japanese siege, and Japanese heavy artillery eventually wrecked most of the stripped and immobile Russian warships in the harbor. The naval personnel fought as well as their counterparts had at Sevastopol forty years before, but as in that other war, they were performing an army mission. The end was also the same. Port Arthur fell to the Japanese, who took over 9,000 unwounded Russian naval personnel as prisoners; thousands more were sick or wounded.

Desperate to relieve Port Arthur, Nicholas II approved a plan to send the best ships of the Baltic Fleet to the Far East. This new Second Pacific Squadron was to link up with the renamed First Pacific Squadron at Port Arthur, defeat the Japanese fleet, and isolate the Japanese Army in Manchuria. Considering the forces available, no rational or professional analysis could have recommended taking this gamble. The Baltic Fleet was poorly trained on all levels, had no operational experience of long ocean cruises, and was desperately short of engineers. The officers were not technically proficient, most of the seamen were recent peasant conscripts, revolutionary defeatism was rife below decks, and fleet training would have to be conducted on the voyage. The core of the battle line was to be made up of ships being rushed to completion. Most important, Russia as a belligerent would not have access to neutral ports and would have to depend on recoaling at sea for the whole voyage. Not even the Royal Navy considered recoaling at sea anything but an emergency operation.

Competition for command of the squadron was not brisk. The only flag officer who could be prevailed upon to take the command was Vice Admiral Z. V. Rozhdestvensky, who did so out of a strict concept of duty. Thanks to his organizational skills and relentless willpower, the squadron left on schedule and in some semblance of order. Unfortunately, his leadership skills were not equal to the task, and he was unable to unite the squadron into a cohesive, trained fighting force. After an epic, brutal voyage, the Second Pacific Squadron entered the war zone and was destroyed during the Battle of Tsushima. All but a few minor ships were sunk, captured, or interned. Of the Russian personnel, 4,830 died, almost 7,000 were taken prisoner, and 1,862 were interned.20
Gorshkov emphasizes that the loss of Russia's Navy was the decisive turning point of the war as Pacific Russia was now open to invasion without a fleet to defend it. He neglects to state that the Japanese Army was in no condition for further combat against a Russian Army that was receiving massive reinforcements. Japan had run out of trained manpower and credit. At this point, Russian mass and persistence might well have wiped out Japan's hard-won gains had not the 1905 revolution shortcircuited the counteroffensive. Russia conceivably could have driven the Japanese out of Manchuria even without a fleet.

World War I

World War I caught the Russian Navy in the middle of a building program designed to replace the losses of the last war. Although the ships being built were not deployed until 1915 or 1916, Russia was actually stronger in the Baltic than Germany through most of the war because the Germans were unwilling to divert resources from the German High Seas Fleet facing the British across the North Sea. The Germans purposely executed an economy-of-force operation, yet retained the initiative throughout the war.21

Prewar Russian naval war games had concluded that Germany would employ its High Seas Fleet in the Baltic and probably take St. Petersburg. This dismal conclusion acted as a brake on any initial aggressive action by the Russian Baltic Fleet. Even more debilitating was the fleet's subordination to the Russian Army—incredibly, the fleet was even subordinated to the Seventh Army, which was responsible for the protection of St. Petersburg! Only the tsar could authorize battleships to leave port for active operations against the enemy.22

The Baltic Fleet excelled at one of the few options left open to it—mine warfare, in which the Russian effort was conceded to be far more effective than the German one. The Russian mine of 1914 was superior to British mines until 1917 when the Russians gave the British their plans. Another bright spot was the damage done by British submarines and crews lent to the Baltic Fleet. Unfortunately for the Russians, the commander of the Baltic Fleet, Admiral Nikolai Ottovich von Essen, died in 1915, and he was succeeded by a far more timid man who kept the submarines in port for much of 1916.23

Despite heavy losses because of mines and submarines, the Germans generally kept the Russians on the defensive by repeatedly carrying the war into Russian waters. The Russians rarely harassed the German coast but continued their defensive posture despite the growing strength of the Baltic Fleet as new battleships and destroyers were completed. On two occasions, the Germans attempted to force a decisive action by penetrating the Gulf of Riga. In 1915, the Russians refused the challenge and turned back the German Navy with effective mine warfare and an inshore defense by small craft (plans to sortie the capital ships were frustrated by mutinies). The second German attempt, made in October 1917, successfully forced the Russians to evacuate the gulf. Gorshkov claims that the Germans lost
thirteen destroyers and six minesweepers and that twenty other ships were damaged. In fact, the Germans actually lost only two destroyers, though many other ships were damaged by mines. By this time, revolutionary fervor had wrecked what was left of the Russian Navy's cohesiveness, and in January 1918, the Russian Navy was disbanded. Its battleships were intact, having stayed out of harm's way. German opinion of the Russian Navy is harshly summarized by the German vice admiral Friedrich Ruge.

No German officer who fought the Russians in 1914–1917 had any real respect for their fleet. It is true that the ships' crews knew well enough how to fire their guns and in a tight corner they would fight bravely to the end. But what the Russians had always lacked in the Russo-Japanese War, as well as in 1914–1918, was the ability to make quick decisions and to exploit the ever-changing tactical and operational opportunities inherent to war at sea. In the First World War, the Germans, using only their oldest and most poorly armed second-rate ships, had done as they pleased with the Russian Baltic Fleet.

In contrast to the Baltic Fleet, the better-trained and more aggressive Black Sea Fleet seized and maintained the initiative against the Turkish Navy. The Germans practically took control of the Turkish Navy, which had stiffened its battle line with a German battle cruiser and a light cruiser, but these improvements were insufficient to overcome the traditional imbalance between Turkish and Russian performance in this theater. The Black Sea Fleet actively sought enemy contact and usually got the better of it. It savaged Turkish shipping in support of Russia's armies fighting in the Caucasus and also damaged the Turkish war economy, which depended on this traffic. Surprisingly, in light of the Russian fleet's abilities and Russia's ancient dream to control the straits, Russia's efforts to support the Allies' Dardanelles campaign were ineffectual.

British Containment of the New Red Navy: 1918–1919

The harsh naval discipline in the Russian Navy and proximity to the revolutionary movement in Petrograd had long made the Baltic Fleet a fertile area for propaganda and agitation, and mutinous sailors were prominent in the 1917 revolution. Gorshkov proudly quotes Lenin in describing the "Russian navymen" as "the leading detachment of the Revolution." Of the 180,000 men who had served in the Russian Navy prior to its dissolution, the 75,000 who stayed on in the new Red Navy served "on the land fronts" during the civil war. Gorshkov stresses that these troops were so effective and reliable that they were used as elite detachments on all fronts and as cadres in the formation of the Red Army.

While the Red Navy was thus engaged, British naval intervention on behalf of the new Baltic states slammed the door on Soviet operations at sea. The small British force consisted of light cruisers and destroyers, and, without too much difficulty, it was able to drive the Red Navy into the recesses of the Gulf of Finland to the naval bases at Kronstadt and Petrograd. The Soviets quickly set out new mine barriers to defend their last bases,
but the British were content to aggressively blockade the gulf. The British easily retained the initiative because Soviet operational capabilities had remained extremely low following the dissolution of the old navy. The Red Navy could do little more than attempt to entice the British to enter the minefield or to come within range of coastal batteries.

Gorshkov maintains that the Red Navy actually saved Petrograd from a determined assault by the Whites (anti-Communist Russians) and the British as it sank 18 ships and damaged 16 others. He also, somewhat implausibly, claims that of the 100 warships committed to the Baltic by the Royal Navy, 34 were sunk and 24 were damaged. By his own figures in "Navies in War and Peace," the British Grand Fleet had concentrated its whole might of 150 ships at Jutland in 1916. It is difficult to imagine that the British would commit naval resources on such a scale to fight a navy as disorganized and inefficient as the Red Navy was in its early years. Actual British losses for the whole Baltic campaign were a modest 4 ships sunk and 1 damaged, all but 1 by mines. Gorshkov also fails to discuss the British torpedo raid on Kronstadt, which sank 2 of the battleships the Soviets had so laboriously reactivated.

The only significant naval success of the period was the winter evacuation of former Russian Navy ships from Baltic regions surrendered by Russia in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Led by a former tsarist admiral, the daring "ice voyage" saved 72 warships and 132 other ships and thus was of great future strategic value as it saved a vital nucleus of ships for the Red Navy.

The Interwar Years: The Reassertion of Tradition

The new navy languished until the first two five-year plans provided enough economic muscle to make possible a great increase in the number and capability of ships and shore facilities, but training and development of doctrine failed to keep pace with the modernization and physical growth. Although the navy continued to grow, the military orientation of the USSR had swung to its natural center of gravity, the army, where it remained firmly stuck. With no little pique, Gorshkov cites the army's failure to take the Red Navy seriously.

Although Stalin actively promoted a large navy and was interested in technical details, his absence on the defense committee that oversaw the navy was in eloquent contrast to his domination of a similar committee that supervised the army. Stalin's endorsement of a large navy did not imply any intuitive understanding of sea power; rather, it appeared to be a matter of prestige and his desire to increase the tangible assets of Soviet power. Whatever his interests, they did not deflect the military purges of 1937–1938, which badly wounded the young navy's developing sense of confidence and morale. The Red Navy suffered even greater proportional losses than the Red Army. By 1938, no admiral of "sufficient stature" had survived to assume command of the navy, which fell for a brief time to an official of the Soviet secret police, the odious NKVD. In 1939, Admiral N. G. Kuznetsov, a captain the year before, was appointed to the command.
World War II

In 1941, the Red Banner Baltic Fleet appeared to be the Goliath of the Baltic. Soviet sources cite the existence of two battleships, two heavy cruisers, twenty-three destroyers, sixty-five submarines, forty-eight torpedo boats, thirty-nine mine warfare craft, and 656 naval aircraft. As in World War I, German naval strategy was to be defensive in the Baltic while directing the main effort against the Western Allies. Hitler had greatly overrated the effectiveness of the Red Navy and closed the Baltic to German traffic until the fall of Leningrad sealed the fate of the Baltic Fleet. In the face of Soviet timidity during the first months of the war, Germany's economy-of-force naval resources enabled it to take the initiative. The Germans had five submarines, twenty-eight torpedo boats, and eighty mine warfare craft; the Luftwaffe provided air support on a low priority basis. This tiny force was able to blunt whatever offensive intentions the Red Navy had and kept it on the defensive along its own coast. In the first weeks of the war, Soviet losses were exceptionally severe. Twenty-seven submarines had been lost by the end of 1941 at a cost to the Germans of one submarine and one steamer (two more German steamers had been destroyed by mines).31

The disintegration of Soviet resistance along the Baltic coast allowed Germany's army and naval forces to overrun most of the Red Navy's new bases. Surviving units of the Baltic Fleet concentrated at Reval (Tallinn), along with a large number of transports, and when that city fell to the German Army, over 200 Soviet ships attempted to evacuate to Leningrad. They promptly encountered Finnish and German minefields and were attacked by the Luftwaffe. Over 50 ships were sunk or captured and 10,000 lives lost in this "mine battle off Reval."32

In cooperation with the excellent little Finnish Navy, the Germans were able to blockade the remnants of the Red Banner Baltic Fleet in the ports of Kronstadt and Leningrad until 1944. Determined Soviet submarine sorties through German minefields in 1942 resulted in heavy Soviet losses, and the survivors sank few ships in the Baltic. Even this offensive action ceased when the Germans closed the Gulf of Finland with a mined steel net barrier.

The remaining strength of the Soviet fleet fed the defenses of Leningrad with priceless heavy guns and infantry. Over 83,000 officers and men fought as ground troops, leaving the ships with a third of their crews to operate the gun batteries. Undoubtedly this was the greatest service the fleet performed during the war. As at Sevastopol and Port Arthur, the navy was again fulfilling an army mission after having failed at its own. This phenomenon was the norm for the Red Navy during World War II. Gorshkov says 400,000 Red Navy personnel were committed to land fronts; seven naval infantry brigades even fought in the defense of Moscow. Only 100,000 men remained with the fleets and flotillas and participated in the defense of naval bases and in amphibious operations.33 It would be difficult to imagine a more ghastly admission of the general failure of the Red Navy.
The retreat of the German Army in 1944 released the Baltic Fleet from its prison pen and offered it a splendid opportunity to overwhelm the withdrawing German Navy and to trap large German ground forces against the Baltic coast. The Soviets were now in the position to duplicate the German race along the Baltic coast in 1941. They were faced with a collapsing enemy land front that would make it possible for a naval offensive to roll up the exposed sea flank, but the Soviets failed to take true advantage of this priceless opportunity.

Initiative among Soviet commanders appeared to be so constrained that days passed between the observation of an opportunity and permission to act. Apparently decisions were passed to the highest levels with the inevitable delays. There were instances of Soviet Naval Aviation forces being based only miles from German evacuation points and failing to attack. Upon discovering a situation not in their instructions, the Soviets’ reaction invariably was to take no action. The Germans were repeatedly amazed at the Soviets’ inability to seize these fleeting golden opportunities, and German accounts frequently betray a sense of professional embarrassment for the Soviets.

Soviet Naval Aviation played the main part in the pursuit of the German Navy, inflicting the loss of twenty-seven mostly small warships and forty-one transports (134,000 tons). Submarines and torpedo boats were the only other forces committed to action. Even so, the Soviets admit that their submarines fired only 152 torpedoes in action from January to May 1945 and their torpedo boats only 55 from mid-February to May. None of these forces were able to disrupt the German naval evacuation of millions of troops and refugees out of encircled coastal enclaves from Kurland in West Latvia to Pomerania. The Baltic Fleet either did not oppose the evacuations or did so in such a diffident and uncoordinated manner that the Germans were able to fight them off. At the same time, German naval gunfire provided vital support in keeping the Red Army at bay while evacuation operations were under way. What should have been a savage, relentless pursuit was instead an unparalleled account of dullness and lethargy.34

The performance of the Black Sea Fleet was considerably better, but it also maintained a coastal defense mentality from which it could not be coaxed. Its strength at the beginning of the war had been one battleship, five cruisers, sixteen destroyers, forty-seven submarines, a “significant” number of torpedo boats and other small craft, and 626 aircraft.35 The Germans had originally planned no naval attack in the Black Sea and had had no forces available. It was later concluded that naval forces were necessary to protect and logistically support the German Army’s sea flank. Because shipping could only be brought in by river or rail, Germany’s heaviest warships never exceeded 250-ton submarines. Although a considerable number of small ships were brought in or built in captured Soviet yards, the imbalance in strength was obviously greater than in the Baltic. Unlike the Baltic, Germany’s Black Sea operations were largely defensive throughout the war.

The support and later evacuation of Odessa was unquestionably the finest achievement of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, but it occurred before
German naval forces were even operating in the Black Sea. Captain First Rank Sergei G. Gorshkov commanded the skilful amphibious operation that landed 2,000 naval infantrymen behind the lines of the Romanian Army besieging Odessa, dislocating the entire effort. When the decision was made to abandon the city, the fleet conducted a model, albeit unopposed, evacuation.

The Black Sea Fleet was also quite active in supporting its chief naval base at Sevastopol. The garrison was effectively resupplied and reinforced by sea, and cruisers and destroyers provided much needed heavy artillery support. At least 20,000 men in three naval brigades and two naval infantry regiments formed a significant part of the garrison. Eventually, heavy Luftwaffe attacks forced these ships to abandon their stations, with the loss of several destroyers and transports. It was only in the last few weeks of the siege that German and Italian torpedo boats and submarines were able to reach the battle, and the Soviet resupply capability was then restricted to submarines and torpedo boats. The fleet was unable to evacuate the garrison as it had at Odessa, and the city fell with a loss of at least 130,000 men. Despite a heroic defense, the embarrassing loss of one of the Soviet Union's two major naval bases for the second time in 100 years is glossed over by Gorshkov. Although the city actually fell by storm, Gorshkov prefers to refer to its “abandonment” as if its loss had resulted from the same conscious, strategic decision that had been made about the orderly evacuation of Odessa.36

To disrupt the siege of Sevastopol, the Black Sea Fleet conducted a major amphibious operation against the Kerch Peninsula in the eastern Crimea. In this as in other amphibious operations, the Red Navy made excellent use of improvisation in order to secure the necessary shipping. The diversion succeeded, and the fall of Sevastopol was set back six months while the Germans brought a halt to the Kerch landings. Two Soviet armies were destroyed with a prisoner loss of 150,000 even though the fleet provided some half-hearted gunfire support while torpedo boats unsuccessfully tried to rescue the troops.37 The German thrust out of the Crimea and into the Caucasus eliminated the last major Soviet naval base at Novorossiysk and forced the fleet to move to inadequate facilities in Soviet Georgia. Unable to repair major units, the Soviets sent these naval crews to the land fronts.

The retreat of the German armies out of the Caucasus and back into the Crimea saw another Soviet amphibious landing on the Kerch Peninsula. It was stopped by the German Army while the German Navy strangled attempts to reinforce or evacuate the bridgehead. Both sides used large numbers of small warships in what may have been the single largest naval engagement in the theater. The Soviets were unable to break the blockade, and over 13,000 men were lost in the pocket. Major Soviet surface ships failed to intervene as they were held back by Stalin who feared they might be lost. They would not be committed at all for the rest of the war.

The advance of Soviet ground forces in 1944 around the Crimea and down the west coast of the Black Sea should have been vigorously supported
by the Red Navy. Instead, the Black Sea Fleet remained remarkably inactive. The Germans were able to continue to supply forces in the cut-off Crimea and to evacuate Odessa and other bases without hindrance from the Soviet fleet. As in the Baltic, the Red Army was dragging the Red Navy along in its wake. Only Soviet Naval Aviation actively represented the fleet in this final stage of the war in the Black Sea.

Despite Hitler's stubborn refusal to evacuate, the German Navy was still able to bring out two-thirds of the Axis forces trapped in the Crimea, and most of this effort was unopposed. The German losses in the final, bloody evacuation of Sevastopol were caused mostly by massed Soviet air power. The nine submarines that prowled outside the harbor accounted for only two transports and one auxiliary ship.

Clearly, the performance of the Red Navy was the poorest of any of the major navies during World War II. It had been brave and tenacious but handicapped by timid, unimaginative leadership, poor training on all levels, and a dogged lack of initiative. It was treated as a junior auxiliary of the Red Army and, in effect, was no more than a glorified coastal defense force, which suffered the transfer of most of its personnel to army duties. Gorshkov makes the best of this dreadful situation by proudly pointing out that in the siege of Leningrad, there was not one army division that did not have its naval contingent. So little did Stalin think of the Red Navy's performance that the shower of promotions, medals, and glory he poured upon his generals conspicuously missed his admirals. Gorshkov stood out as the only really competent flag officer in the Red Navy during the war.

Although the Red Navy lost one battleship, two cruisers, and fifty destroyers, its surface fleet was unable to sink one major Axis warship or merchantman. Soviet Naval Aviation was by far the most effective arm, but it owed its success to mass, persistence, and a lack of opposition. Its combat skills were of a low order. Only the most partisan supporter of the Red Navy could argue that its performance was credible.

The Cuban Missile Crisis

The Cuban missile crisis of 1962 brought about the Russian-Soviet Navy's sixth humiliation in slightly over 100 years, this time at the hands of the U.S. Navy. The Soviet Union found itself in an untenable position in Cuba, and only one of the Soviet armed services could possibly have rescued Soviet diplomacy—the navy. It was in the spotlight as unescorted Soviet merchantmen sailed into the teeth of the U.S. blockade. The Soviet bluff was called, and their ships turned back. The Soviet Navy was not in the position to add muscle and risk to that bluff and thereby denied the political leaders their last hope of ending the crisis on any but humiliating terms.

Not a shot was fired between the two navies in the Caribbean, yet the Soviet Navy's glaring demonstration of impotence in the face of U.S. sea power was probably more damaging to its prestige and self-image than a lost battle. At least in battle, one can lose and still fight well enough to
retain self-respect, but even this sop was denied to the Soviet Navy since its very weaknesses precluded combat, which would have resulted in a massacre. Since the crisis occurred on Gorshkov's “watch,” it is not surprising that he makes no mention of it other than to briefly describe the warlike preparations of the United States against the “island of freedom.” The one salutary effect of the crisis was that it probably added impetus to the already strong naval expansion program.

The Soviet Navy Today: Last in the Order of Precedence

The inability to develop a British kind of tradition of offensive superiority and victory has been a consistent characteristic of the Russian and Soviet navies. As a result, the Soviet Navy presently occupies last place in the order of precedence of the five Soviet military services, behind the Strategic Rocket Forces, the Ground Forces, the Troops of Air Defense, and the Air Force. It is significant that the two services created since World War II, the Soviet Strategic Rocket Forces and the Troops of Air Defense, are placed ahead of the navy in order of importance. Even date of rank of establishment has not saved the navy from being bumped to the back of the line.

Small but eloquent instances of apparent institutional bias against the navy within the armed forces are evident. Such bias is reflected in the meager number of naval titles in the various “officer library” series of recommended military reading for the Soviet officer. In the 1957 series, only one of fifteen books and in the 1964 series, not one of the seventeen books was a naval title. The noted analyst, Harriet Fast Scott, has observed, “There were probably only two naval titles among fifty important military books published 1960—9.” There is an important omission in the authoritative book by the late marshal of the Soviet Union and minister of defense A. A. Grechko, the Armed Forces of the Soviet State, published in 1975. In an eleven-page section dealing with the creation of the Red Army and Red Navy, the only mention of the navy is its date of establishment. He devotes the rest of the section to Lenin and the Red Army during the civil war.

These subtle indications of the navy's low stature within the Soviet armed forces can do little to enhance institutional confidence and morale. A more blunt indication is the navy's continued subordination to the continental mind-set of the Soviet leadership. The Baltic, Black Sea, and Pacific fleets are all subordinated to the commanders of the various theaters of operation, or “strategic directions,” who invariably are ground force officers accomplishing a traditional mission; the Northern Fleet appears to be subordinated to the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command (STAVKA). The commander in chief of the navy, Admiral Gorshkov, has no operational control over any of these fleets; he functions as an administrator and adviser. The failure of the navy to carve out its own unique mission works against the building of a naval tradition by diluting the focus and
identity of the service. The navy has reverted to its World War II role of assistant to the ground forces, an auxiliary status.

Gorshkov did attempt to break the Soviet Navy's lock on last place in the hierarchy of the armed forces by a bold theoretical stroke. He developed a brilliant concept of sea power, which he announced in *Sea Power of the State*. It contended that the navy's proper role warranted it a preeminent place among the services. He based his theory on the navy's ability to engage the enemy on sea and land with its nuclear submarines, on the concept that sea power was a vital factor in economic strength, and on the threat from the West. This new interpretation of sea power also may have been an attempt to develop a "sea-mindedness" among the Soviet leadership, which even the leadership's authorization of a massive naval expansion program has not seemed to generate. The leadership's response was seen in the second edition of Gorshkov's book, which appeared in 1976. In it, Gorshkov backpedaled from his earlier claim to naval preeminence within the armed forces and instead made obeisance to the "unified strategy," which, in essence, reaffirmed the Soviet Navy's traditional subordination to a strategy dominated by continental considerations.

The leadership's tolerance for naval expansion is explained, not by sea-mindedness, but rather by the ability of the submarine to deliver strategic nuclear strikes. For this reason, the submarine fleet is the premier arm of the service, and the surface fleet is primarily devoted to protecting it and to defeating its U.S. counterpart. This role means the navy is in the position of being just a water variation of the strategic rocket forces. Gorshkov's two works should be seen as efforts to convince the leadership that a navy has other vital uses, namely sea power. His milder stand in the second edition of *Sea Power of the State* may well indicate that he has not gotten that idea across.

Victory at Sea and Russian Culture: Do They Mix?

Charged by the Communist Party's Central Committee with creating an ocean fleet worthy of the world's first socialist country, Gorshkov has had to offset a lackluster naval tradition with numerous modern ships, a professional officer corps, and much hard training. His success has been mixed. The officer corps is technically proficient but very narrowly educated in its technical specialties. Still, the officer corps has not been able to compensate for a lack of effective petty officers. An apparent shortage of competent commanders requires the careful shifting of these scarce personnel from command to command. One is reminded of the ruinous effect on naval operations of the loss of such critical personnel as Nakhimov, Makarov, von Essen, and the new leaders shot by Stalin. The harshness of tsarist discipline has reemerged in a Soviet variant that is both pervasive and more demanding. The resultant hostility is magnified by the particularly compressed nature of navy life and can find its outlet in either apathy or the sudden breakdown of discipline. A mutiny on board the *Potemkin* in 1905 has its
modern counterpart in the mutiny aboard the Storozhevoy in 1975 for just such reasons.

The role of personal initiative and its relationship to military professionalism in Russian-Soviet culture lie at the heart of the successive military failures of the last 100 years. The suppression of initiative among the Russians is as much a historical development as the culture's continental orientation is. Both are accommodations to persistently unpleasant realities, and both have had a pernicious effect on the growth of a professionalism vital enough to foster a naval tradition of victory. The concept of military professionalism is inextricably bound up with the degree of personal initiative a culture tolerates or encourages. Western and Japanese military institutions have consistently shown a positive degree of initiative, but nothing could be more alien to traditional Russian culture and especially to modern Soviet political culture, with its preoccupation with suspicion and scapegoating.

A legacy of the Mongol conquest of Russia was the thorough debasement of political standards of behavior on the part of the ruling elite. The Mongols made princes of those people who would most ruthlessly exploit their subjects in order to pay the Mongol tribute. In later times, the growing autocracy snuffed out the independence of separate centers of cultural authority in society. Nobility, church, commerce, commoners, property, and land all became the personal possessions of the autocrat. Decision making was centralized, ruthless, and arbitrary. The following description by William Manthorpe of the average Russian seaman in the Soviet Navy should be seen as the product of such historical processes strongly reinforced by the Soviet system.

The navy man finds that he needs constant motivation, direction, and supervision to overcome his tendency to idleness, his apathy, his plodding approach to work, his reluctance to exercise initiative, and his unwillingness to discipline himself, or to depend on himself. He seems to lack the ability to organize his fellows and his work spontaneously and effectively. For a modern sailor he is technically underdeveloped, crude, and haphazard in his work. Given authority, he is likely to be bureaucratic and to exercise his power arbitrarily and harshly.44

The officer is fashioned of this same human material. In addition, he is apt to be so constantly monitored for strict compliance with exacting work and political standards that initiative, containing as it does an element of risk, is just not an acceptable option. As Christine Miller notes (Chapter 3), the officer's technical specialization does not encourage broad problem-solving experience and leaves him in the realm of a senior technician who actually conducts repairs and maintenance himself. Under these conditions, the scarcity of qualified command personnel becomes understandable.

The resultant effects upon performance are evident throughout Russian and Soviet history and have become even more pronounced since the revolution. Soviet officers in World War II who failed to carry out their orders to the letter stood a good chance of being shot or sent to a penal
battalion or certain death in a suicide attack. Rank was no protection. Displeased at the way a combat river crossing was conducted, Marshal Georgi Zhukov ordered both a corps and a division commander to be sent to a penal battalion. This is stony soil indeed in which to develop initiative.

Although certainly less fatal in peacetime, this mind-set persists: Orders tend to be carried out to the letter and seldom beyond. The officer can always find shelter, even in failure, in complying strictly with his orders. Soviet military writings abound with demands for exacting, precise compliance with regulations, orders, and instructions. In the Soviet mentality, if things go wrong, someone is always to blame. Even the Soviet use of the word "initiative" carries a different meaning. It is used in the sense of doing your own job well, never in the sense of modifying or going beyond orders as the situation dictates. The Soviets seem to recognize that they have a problem in developing self-confident, aggressive officers as articles in the Soviet military press often enjoin senior officers to cultivate "boldness" and "initiative" in their subordinates. Yet it seems that there is a fear of going too far, because these same articles will qualify this encouragement with what seems like a direct contradiction. Such institutional defects, which are rooted in the culture, are not always readily apparent in peacetime activities, and this fact tends to give a misleading impression of the navy's ability to perform in an emergency or under wartime conditions.

Conclusion

Despite its expansion, the Soviet Navy continues to suffer from the twin handicaps of the continental orientation of its leadership and a cultural inability to foster the personal initiative that is the essence of naval professionalism. Historically, these factors have resulted in the repeated failure of the navy when it has opposed the professional navies of the West and Japan. The Soviet Union's pallid naval tradition infects the service's self-image and determines its character and its relationship to the other Soviet services. Notwithstanding Gorshkov's attempts to enhance the naval tradition by distorting history, underlying flaws continue to exist. Whether these flaws will cripple the modern Soviet Navy is a crucial question for the West. It is a question that the past may well have already answered.

Notes

3. Ibid., pp. 11-12.


16. Samuel Elliot Morrison, John Paul Jones (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1957), pp. 365–383. Jones’s great potential was consistently frustrated by an inept commander, the celebrated Potemkin. When Jones did command, he was aggressive and successful, and he and the great field marshal Alexander Suvorov were mutually impressed when they met.


18. Ibid., p. 12. The irony of history saw Kuropatkin, minister of war, appointed to a theater command in the war he tried to avoid for Russia.


20. Warner and Warner, p. 32. Japanese losses were three torpedo boats and 700 killed or wounded.


22. Ibid., p. 294.


32. Achkasov and Pavlovitch, pp. 62–63. This source says 50 of over 200 ships were lost. Harrison Salisbury, The 900 Days (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 238, says 10,000 troops and civilians were lost out of the 28,000 aboard.

33. Gorshkov, Red Star Rising at Sea, p. 92.

34. Achkasov and Pavlovitch, pp. 253–254, and Ruge, The Soviets as Naval Opponents, pp. 51, 58. In February 1945, the Germans evacuated 2.2 million refugees and troops from pockets along the East Prussian and Pomeranian coasts. In April, 400,000 troops were moved out of the Bay of Danzig alone. Against operations such as these and more, it is incredible that Soviet surface and submarine forces could find the opportunity to fire only 207 torpedoes in anger over a period of five months.


37. Ruge, The Soviets as Naval Opponents, p. 78.

38. Gorshkov, Sea Power of the State, p. 144.


42. Suvorov, Inside the Soviet Army, p. 84.


naval high command have a Marxist military and political outlook. In situations in which the military and political elements of the outlook clash, the theory is that the political should predominate. On the other hand, the Soviets also believe that the ultimate objective of a Soviet commander should be to win the battle and the war. Victory excuses anything. The fact that a Soviet commander must attempt Marxist-Leninist sainthood by balancing all elements of party political control, party objectives, and the necessities of the military situation is his problem. It would appear that this balancing is easy if the battle goes according to plan, i.e., that "the first salvo works." If, however, the situation becomes more complex and the plan falls apart, variables in the political side of the equation may appear to become more significant than those in the military sphere. The Soviet commander is expected to overcome his own fears and political concerns to the point that he wins the battle. A man who has been trained his entire life to carry out orders must suddenly, under conditions of great confusion and possible adversity, give orders independent of and without guidance from higher authority. This paradox must be seen as a very high risk for the Soviets to take.

Notes


Notes

3. Ibid., p. 47.
19. Ibid., p. 54.
24. Ibid., p. 82.
Notes

bases in Norway, Iceland, or the British Isles; sustained operations in the ocean areas of the Southern Hemisphere would also require bases on friendly or captured territory.

Second, coordinated and massed strikes would require intelligence and targeting support from a central naval command post, and missiles would need midcourse correction guidance from over-the-horizon observers to achieve maximum effective range. These communications and data links are vulnerable, and any disruption of them would seriously inhibit submarine operations.

Notes


5. Gorshkov, Navy, p. 42.

6. Ibid.


The guided missile cruiser *Slava* under way in the Mediterranean in October of 1983 while en route to the Soviet Northern Fleet. Note the SS-N-12 surface-to-surface missile tube configuration forward and the vertical-launch SA-N-6 surface-to-air missile system located aft between the stacks and the *Top Dome* radar mount/helicopter hangar. (U.S. Navy)

allows it unrestricted operation whereas the *Slava*’s combat radius is restricted because the ship must refuel.

**Summary**

The weapons found on virtually all large Soviet surface combatants built or modified since 1970 reflect an excellent application of both technology and design concepts. When compared with the ships of Western navies, these combatants, in some respects, are more capable of accomplishing their wartime missions.

With ships such as the *Kirov*, the Soviets can operate virtually anywhere in the world. However, the facts that the potential nucleus of the Soviet surface action group is the *Kirov* and that its escorts will, for the near term, remain dependent on fossil fuel, mean that waging worldwide operations is problematic.

**Notes**

3. Ibid., pp. 126–129.
4. Ibid., p. 125.
6. Ibid., p. 485.
7. Ibid., p. 487.
8. Ibid., pp. 491–493.
9. Ibid., p. 484.
10. Ibid., p. 483.
11. Ibid., p. 495.
12. Ibid., p. 482.
13. Ibid., p. 487.
15. Ibid., pp. 477–478.
16. Ibid., p. 480.
17. Ibid., p. 481.
Notes


10. Ibid., pp. 24, 26.


Notes


7. The astern method is still used by several NATO navies; U.S. naval ships do not use this method except in special cases, such as refueling minesweepers, but are required by certain agreements to be capable of receiving fuel by this means from NATO tankers or merchant ships (see The Admiralty Manual of Seamanship [London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1964], pp. 380–381).


9. Tikhomirov, Managing Ship Movements, p. 119, and Aleksandrov, Handbook, p. 261. Some mention has been made in Soviet literature and in reports by Western observers of a "wake transfer method," by which cargo is thrown or lowered over the side of the supply ship for retrieval (or so it is hoped) by the receiving ship (see Mizin, "Logistic Support," p. 21).


of its land-based activities is greatly expanded yearly, and with the deployment of the Kiev, the growth of its seaborne capability has been equally significant. This activity will continue and, in future years, will include expanded Backfire operations and the staging of high-performance aircraft from aircraft carriers. Thus, the Soviet naval air threat, which is already alarming, will become even more critical in the years to come.

Notes

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
8. Ibid.


24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.


to locate Soviet force commanders as the Soviets establish more mobile command posts aboard surface ships and submarines. In essence, the Soviet Union's system of controlling naval forces in peacetime is adequate today and assures more reliable control in wartime. The implications for the West are fairly straightforward. In light of these improved capabilities, the Soviet Union has improved the effectiveness of its naval forces in combat. With control over these forces strengthened, the likelihood of better coordinated, more highly sustained attacks is greater. As long as the networks remain intact, the Soviets reason that at least a neutralization of the Western offensive capability is conceivable.

Notes


4. Yegorov, "Improving Control of Naval Forces in the First Period," pp. 36-37.


The latter is defined as naval forces operating jointly with types of forces (roda voisk) that are subordinate to another of the five branches of the armed forces.


13. V. I. Solovyev et al., Communications at Sea, translated in Joint Publications Research Service Publication no. L/8618, 15 August 1979, p. 213. Solovyev defines “reliability of communications” as “the property of ensuring continuous control under any circumstantial conditions.”


Today's Soviet antisubmarine warfare capability is far superior to that of 1956. Since the mid-1960s, several new types of antisubmarine warfare aircraft and new classes of antisubmarine warfare surface combatants and antisubmarine warfare submarines have entered service. The production of most of these classes continues at a fast rate, with no end in sight, which has enabled the Soviets to advance substantially toward accomplishing two of their 1960 goals: being able to saturate an area with antisubmarine warfare forces and developing quieter, faster, dedicated anti-ballistic missile submarine platforms. However, they still have not been able to develop an effective ocean surveillance system and therefore cannot locate patrolling U.S. submarines. In regard to acoustic detection, the Soviets have not placed the same emphasis on submarine quietness as the United States has; instead they seem to have opted for quantity and greater speed. Unless a dramatic technological breakthrough occurs in nonacoustic antisubmarine warfare, the Soviet forces will remain hampered by this overwhelming disadvantage.

In summary, although the Soviets appear to lag significantly behind the West in antisubmarine warfare, particularly in respect to ocean surveillance and localization, they have made notable progress since 1956. It should be expected that they will persist in their approach to the problem, with particular emphasis on nonacoustic detection, until they are confident that they have at least achieved parity with the West.

Notes

3. The RBU series of 250-mm and 300-mm antisubmarine rocket launchers consists of the RBU-600, the RBU-1000, the RBU-1200, the RBU-2500, and the RBU-6000. RBU stands for *raketnaya bombometnaya ustanovka*; the number is the approximate range in meters.
4. The SUW-N-1 launcher on Moskva fires the FRAS (free rocket, antisubmarine) rocket which is estimated to have a range of from fifteen to twenty miles and a nuclear warhead. The SS-N-14 is a "winged torpedo" with about a thirty-mile range. As it nears its target, the wings are shed, and the torpedo enters the water to make an acoustic homing attack. It differs from the U.S. ASROC in that the SS-N-14 is guided during flight whereas the ASROC is ballistic. The Soviets have repeatedly displayed a tendency to use proven equipment in several different applications as opposed to developing many different "customized" systems, such as the United States tends to do. Such is the case with the *Hormone A* dipping sonar, which, since the mid-1960s, has been spotted on several small antisubmarine warfare ships, suspended over the side from an amidships crane.
5. Since June 1977, the Soviets have redesignated about half of their major antisubmarine warfare combatants (large antisubmarine ships and antisubmarine warfare cruisers) with general purpose force designators, i.e., rocket cruiser, large rocket ship, and patrol/guard ship. The other half retained the antisubmarine warfare
designators. The Kiev-class units were designated as “heavy aircraft-carrying cruisers.” It is believed that the significance of this policy is not so much to deemphasize antisubmarine warfare as it is to project the Soviet Navy as a strong, multipurpose force capable of worldwide operations instead of a specialized navy with only antisubmarine warfare capabilities.
Implications

The implications of the Soviet anticarrier warfare threat are ominous. The Soviet Navy can mount multiple, combined threats from above, below, and on the sea. This capability does not mean that the era of the aircraft carrier has ended, because a carrier's multiple capabilities allow it to make a flexible response to crisis situations, which makes it extremely valuable for U.S. operations. In addition, it is the most heavily defended unit in the U.S. Navy. Nonetheless, Soviet progress in anticarrier warfare has been impressive and has inhibited U.S. naval responses to crises since 1967. This threat will be even more severe as newer aircraft and submarines and the new Soviet aircraft carrier become operational.

Notes

2. Erickson, “The Northern Theater,” p. 75.
4. Ibid., pp. 445, 447.
flying only thirty feet above the ocean's surface. Then too, although the
gun systems are not ideal against low-flying planes or cruise missiles because
of their unsophisticated fire control, their rates of fire are impressive. Each
30-mm mount can fire over 3,000 rounds a minute and each 76.2-mm dual-
purpose gun can fire 45 rounds a minute. If all these weapons were aimed
at the same target, the sheer weight of fire could result in destroying a
target that none of them could bring down individually.20

There is also a great deal of duplication in the near-zone defenses of
many of the larger Soviet ships. The several point-defense systems in the
Kara-class cruisers, for instance, mean that there would be a backup if
weapon systems were disabled. Duplication also exists within the systems.
For example, both radar and visual fire control are provided for many of
the 30-mm guns.21

Thus, despite weaknesses in the individual weapon systems, the Soviets' overall performance in the near zone would probably be high. This situation
should continue to improve as the Soviets develop more accurate fire-control
systems.

Conclusion

To reiterate, the Soviets hope to reduce the aircraft and missile threats
to their forces by attacking enemy surface combatants and aircraft before
their weapons are launched. As Robert McKeown shows (Chapter 5), Soviet
submarines certainly pose a great threat in this respect. However, once the
enemy aircraft and missiles were launched, the Soviet forces would be much
more vulnerable. The far and middle zones of their layered air defense have
many deficiencies although weaknesses in the near zone are alleviated somewhat by a redundancy of weapon systems. These weaknesses will
continue until the Soviet Navy perfects a sea-based air arm and missiles
that can protect Soviet surface forces. Until then, these forces are only
safe when operating within range of land-based air power.

Notes

1. V. Vasilev, “Development of the Antiaircraft Defense of Surface Ships,” Morskoy
sbornik 2 (February 1980):27.
2. V. I. Achkasov and N. B. Pavlovich, Soviet Naval Operations in the Great
Patriotic War (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1981), p. 63; Robert W. Herrick,
Soviet Naval Strategy: Fifty Years of Theory and Practice (Annapolis, MD: Naval
Institute Press, 1968), pp. 50–52; and Sergei G. Gorshkov, Sea Power of the State
3. Herrick, Soviet Naval Strategy, pp. 34, 49–50, and Gorshkov, Sea Power of
the State, p. 138.
4. Herrick, Soviet Naval Strategy, p. 55, and Siegfried Breyer and Norman Polmar,


11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.


for aiming antiship missiles, but also compel the Soviets to use their active sensors, which can be targeted by U.S. systems.

This measure must be accompanied by efforts to make U.S. communications links less vulnerable to the Soviets. Reducing long-range high-frequency radio transmissions; developing highly directional radio links, which are more difficult to intercept; and using security devices would make U.S. communications more immune to Soviet deception and U.S. ships more difficult to locate.

Notes

Notes


Soviet Naval Intelligence

it as being the equal of the GRU and the KGB. It has run its own agent operations for coastal reconnaissance, sabotage, and assassination, and in its use of SPETSNAZ units, it has ranked in importance with the GRU.

Soviet naval intelligence uses satellite reconnaissance as well as a number of other collection systems, and it has also branched out to conduct special electronic warfare and deception operations for the Soviet Navy. It could have its own independent agent operations in the future and could even have assassination teams in its SPETSNAZ troops. Future developments in ocean surveillance are likely to focus on more advanced and more reliable technology to allow the Soviet Navy more detailed coverage of the ocean accesses to the USSR.

Notes


3. Soviet Intelligence Services, p. 1. Peter Deriabin, a KGB officer who defected in 1953, mentioned that the Soviet Navy had its own separate intelligence organization during this period (see Peter Deriabin and Frank Gibney, The Secret World [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959], p. 74). The People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD), the Red Army (GRU), and the Red Fleet (Soviet Naval Intelligence Directorate) had similar and parallel networks during World War II. Ismail Akhmedov, a Chief Intelligence Directorate officer who defected in 1942, talked about a then-recent reorganization affecting the KGB, the GRU, and naval intelligence, confirming that the Soviet Naval Intelligence Directorate was then on the same national organizational level. According to this reorganization, information from all three agencies in a foreign country was supposed to go to the Soviet ambassador before it went to Moscow (see Patterns of Communist Espionage [Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1958], p. 31).


5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.


Conclusion

Geographic liabilities—in hospitable climate, restricted access to the world's oceans, isolation from major sea lanes and strategically important regions, and finally, the separation of the fleets by hundreds and often thousands of miles—are the major factors influencing Soviet naval strategy and out-of-area operations. The Mediterranean Fleet was established to preclude the containment of Soviet naval power in the Black Sea during wartime or during a crisis, and most ships in the Indian Ocean Squadron are staged from the Pacific Fleet rather than from the Black Sea Fleet to prevent dependence on the vulnerable Suez Canal. Rather than risk isolating the squadron, the Soviets have chosen the much more remote Pacific Fleet from which to stage their ships to the Indian Ocean. As Mark Carolla demonstrates (Chapter 14), this arrangement has drastically impeded the level of Indian Ocean Squadron operations. Finally, the Soviets have sent aircraft to Cuba, Africa, and Asia to provide services to their naval forces that could not be provided by aircraft flying from Soviet bases.

The necessity for out-of-area fleet operations has created its own set of problems, primarily the need to use foreign ports for maintenance and the need to resupply the fleet over vulnerable sea lines of communication that are subject to hostile interdiction. To compensate for geographic liabilities, the Soviet Navy has consistently sought access to foreign naval bases to support its fleets. In the quest for such bases, the Soviets often have been assertive in their use of naval power during crises, with the hope of winning access to the ports of one of the contenders.

The following chapters discuss the Soviet naval operations of the fleets in the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian oceans and in the Baltic, Black, Mediterranean, and Caribbean seas. To truly understand these operations, however, one must always remember that they are prompted, in large part, by geographic considerations.

Notes

1. "Out-of-area presence, or presence on the high seas, is defined in terms of a basic unit of measurement called the out-of-area ship day. In the case of the USSR, out-of-area encompasses all the world's ocean areas except Soviet inland waterways, coastal waters, and local exercise areas. For example, whenever a Soviet ship travels westward from the North Cape, exits from the Baltic, passes southward through the Turkish straits, leaves the Sea of Japan, or proceeds eastward from the Sea of Okhotsk, the ship is out-of-area. An out-of-area ship day is an entire day or a portion of a day spent by a ship outside local waters" (Bruce W. Watson, Red Navy at Sea: Soviet Naval Operations on the High Seas, 1956–1980 [Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1982], p. 21). See ibid. for the importance of analyzing ship-day figures.
Notes


Much of the Baltic Fleet would be capable of conducting operations in the North Sea, if supported by captured Danish or West German bases, and some of the major surface combatants and submarines could operate with Northern Fleet forces in the waters beyond the North Sea. The chief problem would be passing safely through NATO defenses at the Danish straits. Some Baltic Fleet ships could join the Northern Fleet before a war by leaving the Baltic under the guise of conducting exercises. The alternative would be a potentially expensive forced passage, especially if NATO defenses around Denmark had not been totally crushed.18

Soviet naval aircraft in the Baltic could also support Soviet operations in the North and Norwegian seas. Should these aircraft fly from both the Northern and the Baltic fleets, NATO's air-defense problem would be increased significantly. In addition to supporting ground force operations, the Baltic Fleet could also assist in capturing enemy shore facilities, ports, and airfields.19

Implications

The four principal missions of the Soviet Baltic Fleet can be viewed separately only for purposes of clarification and academic discussion. The reality of the Soviet operational environment demands a much broader approach to planning and executing military operations. One or more conflict areas are grouped together for command and control purposes into a theater of operation (TVD). In the case of the Baltic Fleet, several possible command links to adjacent forces can be hypothesized. Past operations suggest a strong link to the Northern Fleet as well as to ground and air forces operating on the coasts of the Baltic Sea and the Kola Peninsula. One analyst has suggested the existence of a Soviet Northern TVD. Such an entity could logically include such diverse forces as strategic rocket force elements, long range aviation units, KGB border troops, internal security and civil defense troops, and air formations.20

The important point to remember when considering the Baltic Fleet is that it does not stand alone. Rather, it is a part of the whole Soviet military establishment, which is fully integrated by the Soviet General Staff according to a unified strategy.

Notes


19. Ibid.

power. Although they have had some significant successes in the area, they also have had a few failures—for example, they have not been permitted to build a permanent naval base. Many observers would argue that the costs of their operation in West Africa outweigh whatever benefits or advantages they may have gained. Nonetheless, the Soviet naval contingent is the only major foreign naval force in the area. It is significant, but it cannot and must not be considered invulnerable. It can interdict the sea lanes along the coast of Africa but doing so would surely provoke a harsh response from the West. Thus, the advantages of this deployed force cannot truly be realized in peacetime.

Nonetheless, through its West African contingent, the Soviet Union has a naval force established in an area where there is no countervailing U.S. power. In wars such as the Angolan conflict to which the United States chooses not to respond, this force can have a significant political and military effect. Therefore, it must be considered as an important factor in both African politics and international relations.

Notes


This military weakness creates a political weakness for the Soviets. The United States is sensitive to Caribbean security and will not tolerate an unlimited Soviet naval buildup in the basin. Thus, the Soviets must proceed cautiously lest the United States react, possibly reversing Soviet gains. This is the major reason why the Soviets have not established a constant naval presence in the region. Because of U.S. military dominance and political sensitivities, the USSR has been compelled to resort to a prolonged desensitization approach to enhance Soviet influence in the region. In the near term, however, the Soviet Navy will not seriously challenge U.S. naval hegemony in the area.

Implications for the United States

The fact that the United States currently enjoys naval superiority in the Caribbean Basin does not detract from the fact that in fifteen years, the Soviets have desensitized countries to their occasional naval operations in the region and to the construction of support bases that could be used to support more extensive naval activity. As Central America increasingly destabilizes, the Soviets may opt to increase their naval presence in light of the significant political stakes. The fact that such a presence will make the U.S. security problem more complex is obvious. What is less evident is that the purpose of such a force might be similar to the purposes of the Soviet Mediterranean Fleet and Indian Ocean Squadron—to use naval power to support Soviet political initiatives. Thus, a greater naval presence would provide greater security, which, in turn, could encourage greater adventures by the USSR.

Notes

3. Ibid.
cruise missile-equipped submarines, *Juliett*-class diesel cruise missile boats, and a fairly large contingent of *Foxtrot* and *Tango* diesel attack boats. The Mediterranean is a natural operating area for the diesel submarine as its lack of speed and endurance in comparison with nuclear units is much less important here than in the broad oceans. Nothing in the sea is quieter than a diesel submarine on battery, and a *Foxtrot* or a *Tango* sitting undetected in the Gibraltar or Sicily straits would be a serious threat to passing surface ships and submarines.

The surface presence in the Mediterranean varies considerably, but typically includes four or five *Kashin* and *Krivak*, two or three minesweepers and small frigates, and perhaps fifteen auxiliary ships of numerous types. The *Moskva* and the *Leningrad* helicopter carriers occasionally deploy to the area, as do the old *Sverdlov*-class command cruiser the *Zhidanov* and the *Kynda*-class cruiser the *Admiral Golovko*. The Black Sea Fleet's most impressive surface combatants, the four *Karas*, rarely appear in the Mediterranean. The Black Sea units are sometimes reinforced in the Mediterranean by Northern Fleet surface ships. Until it went in for an overhaul in the early 1980s, the Northern Fleet carrier the *Kiev* made annual winter deployments to the Mediterranean, and the large cruiser the *Kirov* made a similar deployment in early 1984. In late 1983 and early 1984, several Northern Fleet destroyers and frigates conducted an unusually lengthy stay in the Mediterranean, presumably in response to tensions in Lebanon.

The Soviet Mediterranean Fleet's operations are centered around a number of anchorages, of which the most important are the north of Sollum anchorage off the coast of Egypt and the Hammamet anchorage off Tunisia. Some use is made of facilities in Tartus, Syria, and Tobruk, Libya, but the fleet is basically self-sustaining; the Soviet experiences in Egypt and Somalia attest to the risks of an overreliance on extensive shore establishments abroad. Soviet ships spend most of their time moored in these anchorages or shuttling back and forth among them. Occasionally, the combatants sortie to conduct anticarrier and antisubmarine exercises or to conduct port visits. Operations are concentrated in the central and eastern Mediterranean, and Soviet interest in allied units sharpens as they move eastward. U.S. carriers in the eastern Mediterranean, which is within striking range of the Soviet Union, are subjected to frequent but not constant close surveillance. As one might suppose, the level of this surveillance increases during times of Middle East tension.

The Soviet Navy in the Mediterranean does not perform the fundamental strategic missions undertaken by the Northern and Pacific fleets. But it is in the Mediterranean that the U.S. and Soviet navies are engaged in their most direct confrontation, and it is there that a serious conflict between them is most likely to begin.

Notes


9. The surface-to-surface missile strength of the Black Sea Fleet will increase considerably if some of the new Slava-class missile cruisers are stationed in the Black Sea, which appears likely. The lead ship conducted its maiden deployment to the Mediterranean and Northern Fleet waters in late 1983 before returning to the Black Sea.
support from its two principal Pacific maritime allies—Japan and Australia. Recent internal debates in those countries have recognized that the growth of the Soviet Pacific Fleet is a cause for concern that can be countered only by a new, united resolve that is credibly supported by real growth in allied Pacific theater naval forces.

Notes
2. Ibid., p. 87.
continue its operations in the region. Added to the U.S. ships in the Indian Ocean, a formidable force would be formed that could oppose the Soviets in the area, provided there were political resolve among the Western democracies.  

Implications

Since 1968, the Soviet Union's Indian Ocean Squadron has operated continuously in the region. Focusing its activity in the southern Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Socotra Island areas, it has conducted an impressive port visit program and has gained access to Ethiopian and South Yemeni ports. It has responded to several crises and was quite effective in one of these, the Ethiopian-Somali War.

The constant Soviet naval presence has peacetime and wartime implications for the United States. In peacetime, it amounts to a continuous and significant naval presence in a region where the United States often stations only a token naval force, which, in turn, gives the USSR a certain degree of political influence. In wartime, in conjunction with attacks by land-based Soviet aircraft, squadron submarines could attack U.S. and other Western naval forces in the region and could attempt to block the flow of oil from the Gulf. Assuming that in a general war, U.S. naval power would be concentrated in the North Atlantic, this squadron could pose a significant problem for the West.

Notes

and permit an optimal use of naval forces. In antisubmarine warfare, aircraft identify submarine threats rapidly, which allows the other naval forces to react more promptly. Soviet aircraft are also able to conduct strike missions against Western shipping, which can disrupt economic trade or military resupply. Finally, naval aircraft can defend Soviet sea and air lines of communications, thereby assuring logistic support to Soviet naval ships on the high seas.

Through these capabilities, Soviet Naval Aviation allows the navy to deploy surface combatsants and submarines further from Soviet bases and ensures their passage through the choke points to the high seas. In addition, staging naval aircraft to foreign airfields gives the air crews valuable training. Additionally, operational problems can be discovered and corrected, fuel is conserved, manpower is used more effectively, and aircraft spend greater time on station. All of these factors contribute to a greater crisis response and management capability.

Conversely, the greatest obstacle to Soviet basing is the political instability of the regimes granting the basing and staging privileges. As the expulsions from Egypt and Somalia vividly demonstrate, such instability makes long-range planning very difficult. Security, support, and cost are also problems. Security is a problem since Soviet activities abroad cannot be isolated from surveillance as easily as they can in the USSR. There is a shortage of facilities to perform major overhauls on aircraft and avionics, and the cost and effort required to expand runways or to build taxiways, parking areas, fuel depots, shelters, and communications stations are generally considerable.

In summary, as naval operations continue to expand geographically, Soviet Naval Aviation will have to protect its forces in areas beyond land-based fighter protection. Air superiority is vital to sea control and fleet survival, and land-based Soviet naval air power, composed primarily of bomber aircraft, keeps the navy tethered to the shore—even if it is by a longer and stronger cord. Development of high performance carrier-based aircraft is the best option, and the one the Soviets are now pursuing.

Notes

1. Staging is refueling and other ground support services.
10. Ibid., pp. 58-60.
willingness to support client regimes has resulted in an expansion of their influence at U.S. expense. Through its navy, the USSR has gained recognition as a key factor in Third World affairs and has succeeded in constraining U.S. freedom of action on the high seas.

Moscow will continue to respond to crises on the basis of its evaluation of the merits of a particular crisis. When the Soviets' security or political interests are directly affected, they will use their navy to demonstrate both their concern and their military strength with an eye toward inhibiting Western initiatives. They will use their navy only when they believe it can promote their interests and it is strong enough to do so. These responses probably will become more complex and, when the United States chooses not to respond, more assertive and aggressive. Soviet naval force levels in areas where the USSR currently maintains a permanent naval presence (the Mediterranean, Indian Ocean, South China Sea, and West Africa) are likely to expand gradually as the Soviets show their power and resolve to exert military leverage. Soviet naval operations in areas more distant from home are also likely, and the Soviet Union will continue its efforts to gain increased access to facilities abroad to support these operations.

Notes

7. This was the second time the Soviets opportunely increased the size of their fleet (the other time being during the October 1973 war). Whether these augmentations simply occurred or whether they signaled Soviet foreknowledge of the impending wars remains undetermined.
of Soviet planning. More ominously, it shows the thoughtful integration of means to achieve a unified strategy of remarkable consistency.

Notes


3. Viktor Suvorov in his account of life in the Soviet Army, The Liberators (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1983), relates how tens of thousands of officers, the complements of whole military districts, were impressed to play the roles of enlisted men in the tightly choreographed Dnieper exercises of 1967.


12. Sergei G. Gorshkov, Red Star Rising at Sea, ed. Herbert Preston (Annapolis MD: U.S. Naval Institute, 1974), p. 119. When Gorshkov lists the nationalities included in the Soviet Navy, he omits the Lithuanians, Kazakhs, and other Moslems of the four Central Asian republics. Normal Soviet practice would have included all fifteen nationalities of the constituent republics, unless he is indicating that these nationalities are severely underrepresented in the Soviet Navy.


22. Ibid., p. 96.

Notes

12. Ibid., p. 28.
adequate air defense will continue to plague the squadron, at least into the
1990s, unless an adequate sea-based air capability can be developed.

Conclusion

The Soviet Navy is a complex mixture of strengths and weaknesses. Its
personnel handicaps include a modest heritage, a rebellious tradition, an
overpowering command and control system, and poor morale. These liabilities
are offset by a long-term consistency that is a unique advantage. Similar
strengths and weaknesses are found in Soviet naval construction, capabilities,
and operations. In the final analysis, the Soviet Navy is best characterized
as a military force that has made great progress and will make even greater
progress in the future. It is, however, nothing more than an instrument
of state power, and it is in the correct analysis of the Soviet state, particularly
of its defense and foreign policy goals, that the answers lie—the answers
that will inform the West most accurately as to how to cope with and
contain this new Soviet Navy.

Notes

1. Interview with Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., U.S. Navy (Retired), 22 October
   the 1980s and 1990s,” in Bruce W. Watson and Peter M. Dunn, eds., The Future
   of the Soviet Navy: An Assessment to the Year 2000 (Boulder, CO: Westview Press,
   1986), pp. 31–47.


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