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Charles W. Mayer Jr

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# Looking Backwards into the Future of the Maritime Strategy, Are We Uncovering Our Center of Gravity in the Attempt to Strike at Our Opponent's?

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Commander Charles W. Mayer, Jr., U.S. Navy

Successful generals make plans to fit circumstances but do not try to create circumstances to fit plans.

George S. Patton, Jr.  
*War As I Knew It*  
1947

**W**e can develop a theory of predictable wartime Soviet naval strategy by examining the lessons learned from Germany's experiences in World Wars I and II. The geostrategic similarities between Russia today and Germany in 1914 and 1939, combined with the strong Soviet interest in using military history to support current planning, justify a review of the Maritime Strategy from the perspective of its ability to halt a concerted Soviet submarine assault on wartime shipping in the Atlantic.

The strategic similarities between Germany's situation in 1914 and 1939 and Russia's position today are thought-provoking. At the start of both World Wars, Germany was a strong, continental land power with a large standing army which could rely on interior lines of communication. The General Staff was strong, intimately connected with the government's policymaking apparatus, and totally dominated the army. The navy had no

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Commander Mayer is a 1968 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy. Having served in a variety of submarine warfare billets, both ashore and at sea, he recently completed a four and one-half year tour as commanding officer of the U.S.S. *Simon Bolivar* (SSBN 641). Commander Mayer will graduate in March 1989 from the College of Naval Warfare at the Naval War College.

part in it or in its thinking. Despite concerted efforts to enlarge and modernize its forces, the German Navy could not overcome its inferiority to its likely opponent. Equally important, it lacked a tradition of success that it could rely on to sustain it in adversity. As Admiral Sir Andrew Browne Cunningham told his staff in May 1941 when they opposed his intention to risk his fleet in order to save the beaten British Army in Crete, "It takes the Navy three years to build a ship. It would take three hundred years to rebuild a tradition."<sup>1</sup> In 1914, or even in 1939, no German admiral could say such a thing. The Soviet Navy of our time has been formed by its own traditions, which extend back nearly 300 years. They are traditions different from those of Cunningham's navy, or of ours.

Using historical precedents to anticipate the future not only can provide insights for dealing with current problems, it can also disclose how frequently military strategies, which looked good on paper, failed to anticipate what the enemy actually would do. For example, the U.S. general war plan for World War II, Rainbow 5, had been approved as recently as 26 May 1941. Yet, in the words of the Navy's official historian of that war, "the Pearl Harbor attack rendered this plan obsolete." Admiral King later noted that "the Navy failed to appreciate what the Japanese could and did do."<sup>2</sup>

At the outset of both World Wars, Germany found itself in conflict with a historically strong maritime power. On the eve of the First World War, however, the margin of British superiority was very slim—the result of an unprecedented "battleship race" which had, in fact, severely taxed the economies of both nations.<sup>3</sup> In August 1914 Germany had 21 capital ships versus Britain's 25. Although Britain's battleship strength was further reduced to 23 by December 1914, before it started to rise, it proved more than adequate since from the beginning of hostilities the Kaiser severely curtailed the use of his fleet and personally approved all operations.<sup>4</sup>

Early in 1916, under a new fleet commander, Admiral Scheer, the High Seas Fleet was operated more aggressively. The strategy of planning to isolate a portion of Britain's Grand Fleet, and then overwhelm it, led to the Battle of Jutland on 31 May 1916. While the British suffered the heaviest losses, and the Germans claimed a victory, it was Lord Hankey who later observed that "on the morning after the battle, Jellicoe [the British fleet commander] found himself in undisputed possession of the North sea. . . ." The German fleet had retired to its bases, from which it ventured hardly more often than before Jutland, until mutiny destroyed it as a fighting force in October 1918.<sup>5</sup>

If her capital ships could not help Germany at sea, this was not true of her submarines. Although initially visualized as scouts and torpedo attack units to operate with the fleet, an additional use for the submarine quickly became obvious. As early as October 1914 proposals were made to the Fleet

Commander to “start a shipping panic” by a U-boat campaign in retaliation for British mining of the Channel approaches. The priority of U-boat employment by the spring of 1916 can be judged by the following message which was sent to two of the most successful boats: “It is recalled to the commanders that the most efficacious means of crushing England, our principal enemy, is to increase as energetically as possible the shortage of shipping space from which she suffers. However satisfying may be the destruction of warships, they constitute for the moment a means of action much less important than the destruction of enemy shipping.”<sup>6</sup>

The German submarine campaign began slowly. Starting with just 25 boats capable of high seas operations (which meant that only two or three at a time were on station) in the first six months of the war, submarines sank only 10 merchant ships.<sup>7</sup> The first period of unrestricted submarine attacks on British shipping, between February and October 1915, produced only a modest loss to the Allies of 900,000 tons. The second period, which started in February 1917, was quite different. By the end of April 1917, one and a quarter million tons had been lost, and in the next four months another one and a half million tons were sunk. British ships were being lost faster than they could be replaced, and it was estimated that by July Britain would have enough wheat to last only six or seven weeks. But then, after months of the Prime Minister’s intense pressure on the First Sea Lord (who had maintained that the fleet could not spare the escorts) convoys were finally established on a regular basis in July 1917. Immediately thereafter, Britain’s catastrophic shipping situation began to improve dramatically.<sup>8</sup>

Germany entered World War II again facing the problem of how to confront effectively a great maritime power. Although she possessed individual warships of impressive design, the numerical imbalance between her fleet and that of Great Britain was even greater than in 1914. However, she clearly had learned in the previous conflict where her enemy’s maritime “center of gravity” was located. On 4 August 1939, top secret war orders were transmitted from Germany to two pocket battleships deployed in the Atlantic specifying only one mission should hostilities start: “The disruption and destruction of enemy merchant shipping by all possible means.”<sup>9</sup>

But if Germany recognized the importance of shipping in the European conflict, she failed to appreciate the impact of air power on a war at sea. Hermann Göring, who headed the *Luftwaffe* (or Air Force), was totally ignorant of the uses of seapower. As a result, the German Navy endured an almost total lack of air cover throughout World War II. One of Admiral Dönitz’s initial actions when he replaced Admiral Raeder as head of the navy in 1943 was a direct protest to Hitler regarding the lack of air support.<sup>10</sup>

However, in spite of the absence of air cover, once again the submarines proved to be the decisive element of German seapower. Dönitz, in a report

to Hitler in 1942 explaining his strategy, wrote that “submarine warfare is war against enemy merchant shipping. We must sink ships wherever the greatest number can be sunk at the lowest cost to us. . . .”<sup>11</sup> In 1935 Hitler had repudiated the Treaty of Versailles and ended German demilitarization. This delayed start in the rebuilding of her U-boat arm meant that Germany began the war with only 57 boats in commission. But by early 1943 that number had risen to 374, and at the end of the war, Allied air attacks on shipyards and losses at sea notwithstanding, the force numbered 336 with a building rate of 20 per month. Altogether the number of submarines completed amounted to about one thousand. German submarines sank a total of 2,753 ships, a combined tonnage totalling 14,557,000 tons. The highest one-month loss was 700,000 tons, in June 1942, despite the Allies having accumulated almost three years of experience in the conduct of antisubmarine warfare. To defeat the U-boats the Allies eventually deployed 950 escort vessels and 2,200 aircraft. Even with this huge effort against them, when the war in Europe ended, eight German U-boats were operating undetected off the east coast of the United States.<sup>12</sup>

Asked after the war to assess German naval policy, Vice Admiral Eberhard Weichold, a former member of the German Naval Staff, wrote a then-classified report for the U.S. Navy. In this report he made three principal observations:

- German naval strategy was centered on the U-boat as the “only weapon which could bring about final victory.”
- Surface ship employment became “a policy of strategic defense” by retaining ships in port—holding them as a potential threat to any Allied operations.
- The Allies appreciated the role of air power at sea and the Germans did not.<sup>13</sup>

### Lessons Which a Soviet Analyst Might Draw from the German Experience in the Two World Wars

An attempt to view history through Russian eyes (or for that matter those of any other nation) is fraught with peril. Cultures and backgrounds condition the way in which people view events. The attempt is worthwhile, however, principally because of the Soviet military establishment’s obvious interest in the study of previous conflicts for the refinement and validation of their current planning. Research into German naval strategy indicates there are three “lessons” that a Soviet analyst might conclude as having direct applicability in today’s use of their fleet in support of a war in Europe.

**Conservative Employment of Major Fleet Units.** Although the Germans possessed the courage and willingness to fight, their inexperience in battle

at sea caused them to lack confidence in their ability to prevail. This state of morale strongly influenced all of their operations. Admiral Scheer's comments in his memoirs, written just after World War I, are illuminating: "The English fleet had the advantage of looking back on 100 years of proud tradition which must have given every man a sense of superiority based on the great deeds of the past."<sup>14</sup> With this mind-set, Germany's desire not to risk the fleet was a natural consequence. After the loss of the battleship *Bismarck* in May 1941, caution was the watchword in all orders from the German Admiralty to the fleet. For example, on 31 December 1942, a German force of one battleship, one heavy cruiser and six destroyers encountered a British convoy escorted by only five destroyers and two corvettes. When the convoy's escorts moved forward aggressively to attack, the German commander, fearful of losing ships, broke off the action and allowed the convoy to escape.<sup>15</sup>

A second reason for their conservatism in surface ship operations can be attributed to the overriding continental considerations of a European conflict. During World War I the army's General Staff saw the High Seas Fleet as only a "shield against landings on the North Sea coast" and said to the navy that "any risk to its overall strength was unacceptable."<sup>16</sup> This attitude was still alive and well in the next war.

Lack of organic air cover was the final reason for cautious fleet operations. Throughout World War II the German Navy suffered from the unwillingness of the *Luftwaffe* to support naval operations. In contrast, British air power played a key role in sinking Germany's two most powerful ships, the *Bismarck* and *Tirpitz*.

***Aggressive Employment of Submarines in the Atlantic.*** There is every reason to believe that any Soviet analyst studying German naval strategy would conclude that aggressive, unrestricted employment of submarines would have been the key to defeating the Allies in Europe. Although there was some hesitancy to allow unrestricted submarine attacks on merchant shipping at the start of World War I, this was not true during the next conflict. In both wars, Germany's few diesel-electric submarines in the Atlantic caused huge shipping losses far out of proportion to their numbers. An enormous and sustained commitment of Allied resources was required to counter them.

***Convoys are the Most Effective Way to Protect Ships.*** Or, to rephrase this statement into terms a Soviet analyst might use: A nation's lack of readiness to protect its merchant shipping vastly increases the opposition's effectiveness in a submarine campaign. In both World Wars the Allies employed a variety of methods to counter the U-boats. Patrolled areas,

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armed merchant ships, minefields, decoy or Q-ships, and the formation of dedicated ASW "hunter-killer" groups were all used with varying degrees of success. However, after having studied both the Allied and German naval archives from World War II, in 1958 Vice Admiral P.W. Gretton, Royal Navy, wrote an impassioned article entitled "Why Don't We Learn From History?" for *The Naval Review*. His research had found that between 3 September 1939 and 31 May 1943, at the height of the Battle of the Atlantic, only 28 percent of merchant ships sunk were in convoys. Yet in this same period 65 percent (or two-thirds) of the submarine sinkings occurred when the U-boats were attempting to attack ships in convoys. Admiral Gretton argued forcefully that far from being a defensive measure, *convoys were in fact offensive weapons* because they forced the submarines to fight on the escorts' terms. He also termed them offensive because they were essentially an overt assertion of the Allies' ability to control and use the sea-lanes for their purposes while simultaneously denying the enemy access to them. He ended with a June 1942 quote from Admiral E.J. King: "Escort is not just one way of handling the submarine menace. It is the only way that gives any promise of success. Patrol and hunting operations have time and again proved futile."<sup>17</sup>

### A Hypothetical Soviet Naval Strategy

**Background.** Prior to developing a hypothetical Russian naval strategy based on what the Soviets may have learned from a study of German strategy in the two World Wars, the reasons for their probable use of the German experience (beyond their geopolitical similarity) needs to be addressed. First, the Soviet Union views her navy, as did Germany, principally in terms of its usefulness to her continental strategy. A recent article in the *International Defense Review* stated: "The leadership of the Soviet Armed Forces is ground forces dominated and the fleets are still considered to be primarily maritime support elements to continental operations and a means of extending homeland defense out to sea. The global role of the SSBNs places them in the strategic nuclear forces under the control of the Supreme High Command, leaving very few naval forces under operational control of the Navy in time of War."<sup>18</sup>

Second, the Soviets have frequently indicated that they consider the study of military history to be a key element in their development of military science. In addition to being a required topic of all military schools, a formal Institute of Military History was formed in 1966 and is directly subordinated to the Ministry of Defense. Further, the "Great Patriotic War," as World War II is usually referred to by the Soviets, is one of four principal conflicts studied to derive current strategies.<sup>19</sup>

The third reason to tie together current Soviet and historical German naval strategies can be discerned by examining what Soviet military leaders themselves have said about Germany's U-boat campaigns, as well as the Soviet interest in this branch of naval warfare. The following two quotes are from Admiral Gorshkov's book, *The Seapower of the State*: "The inability of the English fleet to protect its sea communications was strikingly manifest even in the period when the number of German submarines suitable for operations in the Atlantic did not exceed twenty." "If the German Command was not in a position to use on a wide scale the new submarines and new means of combat before Germany had been crushed on land by Soviet troops, *this in no way means* [emphasis supplied] that submarines as a means of combat on sea communications were somehow discredited."<sup>20</sup>

After World War II, Stalin's first 20-year building program included the construction of 1,200 submarines! Although the number built never did approach this objective, submarine development has consistently remained the centerpiece of the Soviet Navy's growth. Despite Gorshkov's talk of a "balanced fleet," Soviet actions make it clear that the submarine has been, and remains, the "capital ship" in their naval doctrine and strategy. Consider that since just 1980 the Soviets have introduced seven new submarine classes (six nuclear and one diesel). Moreover, the three new attack submarine (SSN) classes represent three distinct ship designs that incorporate two different reactor plant designs and two different hull materials.<sup>21</sup>

**Assumptions.** The development of a wartime military strategy carries with it the implication that some form of hostilities exists. Therefore, assumptions are needed in order to provide a framework in which to discuss that strategy. While every reader may not be convinced, the suppositions listed below are plausible and worthy of strong consideration:

- A conventional war in Europe starts as a result of Soviet troops invading West Germany.
- The invasion follows a period of rising tensions. Confident, however, that NATO will not initiate hostilities, the Soviets optimally deploy their ready forces prior to launching their attack.
- The war does not involve nuclear weapons. The Soviet Union publicly announces that they will not use nuclear weapons unless NATO does so first. However, their announcement also includes a vague statement that an assault against their SSBNs in "historic Russian waters" would be potentially destabilizing and might cause them to "significantly escalate" the conflict.

**Soviet Strategy at Sea.** Because strategy is, of necessity, a complex, interrelated set of actions, this hypothetical "Soviet Maritime Strategy" is divided into three broad areas.



**Employment of Surface and Naval Air Elements.** Determined not to allow their forces to be overwhelmed by the advancing carrier battle groups, the Soviets decide to deploy them in the shallow coastal seas off the Kola Peninsula. Analogous to a “fleet in being,” this offers them the following advantages:

- NATO submarine attacks on Soviet warships, surface and submarine alike, would be difficult in those shallow, restricted waters.
- SAM-armed surface ships can be positioned to augment AAW defenses against NATO’s air strikes directed against their White Sea bases.
- Both submarine and surface ships can be easily supported by either navy or air force aircraft. The Soviets are not likely to forget that “the German command underestimated the role of aviation in the operations at sea.”<sup>22</sup>
- A Soviet decision to attack Norway would find these forces well positioned to support the flanks of such a movement.

**Defense In-depth of the Homeland and Strategic Forces.** To contest the Norwegian Sea, the Soviets decide to rely on their inventory of 300,000-400,000 mines and a portion of their submarine force. After the war begins, the Soviets announce that in the weeks prior to hostilities, not only had they mined the Norwegian fjords, but also the sea approaches to the Kola Peninsula and to their SSBN patrol areas in the Barents Sea and the Arctic Ocean. As one writer observed recently, deployment of their SSBNs under the Arctic ice cap offers the Soviets some significant advantages. In addition to keeping their missiles within range of their targets, placing the SSBNs under the ice gives them an excellent place to hide, presenting any adversary with a formidable ASW task.<sup>23</sup>

With respect to mining, a recent article in *Morskoy sbornik* notes that the mines’ role “has especially increased in barrier and blockade actions.” Another article adds that “the conduct of warfare to gain command of the sea presupposes offensive minelaying to combat enemy naval forces and above all else submarines.”<sup>24</sup>

To support the mining effort, the Soviets could also establish diesel submarine patrols using two or three boats positioned between their SSBNs and the protective minefields. This arrangement would allow at least one diesel submarine to be always operating on its battery and therefore a most formidable opponent for any nuclear submarine attempting to cross their patrol area. The remaining diesel boats and the older cruise missile submarines would then be assigned to an anti-carrier mission in the southern Norwegian Sea.

**Offensive Employment of Nuclear Attack Submarines in the Atlantic.** Having analyzed German naval strategy, the Soviets, still hypothetically, conclude that interrupting the Allies’ sea lines of

communications is the key to winning in Central Europe. To achieve this objective, they take the following steps:

- They cut NATO's undersea submarine detection arrays, or SOSUS, either just before or at the commencement of hostilities.
- Gradually they move all SSBNs and modern SSGNs into the Atlantic before hostilities, giving them orders to avoid all NATO warships and be prepared to strike merchant ships.
- They sail their submarines at slow speeds to reduce their detectability.
- Submarines with the large 65-centimeter (25-inch) torpedo tubes carry the new wake homing torpedo. With its 2,000-pound warhead and outstanding performance (a range of 27 miles at 50 knots), this deadly torpedo can be used virtually as "a fire and forget" weapon against even the largest and fastest merchant ships.<sup>25</sup>

### Matching the Hypothetical Soviet Naval Strategy against the U.S. Maritime Strategy

It must be acknowledged that the assumptions, variables and unknowns inherent in a hypothetical Soviet naval strategy make it impossible to reach absolute conclusions. However, the judgments drawn from comparing past German and present Soviet capabilities have much utility in assessing the ability of our Maritime Strategy to deal with a Soviet strategy which is both within their range of capabilities and based on logical conclusions they might reach after a historical study of German naval operations. This analysis begins with what Admiral John D. Watkins describes as "Seizing the Initiative" in his article on the Maritime Strategy, a supplement to the U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings*.<sup>26</sup>

Seizing the initiative entails moving our carrier battle forces into the Norwegian Sea to destroy Soviet naval forces as they are encountered and to support NATO's northern flank. The sequence of Soviet actions already described will present the U.S. battle force commander with some difficult choices:

- Soviet naval forces will both support and be supported by land-based air power and, if attacked, their response will be very strong. To make the attack will require the commitment of a large NATO force which, in turn, will mean taking assets away from attacks on enemy targets on the ground. However, left alone, these same forces with their long-range cruise missiles will continually be a threat to the battle force.
- Soviet minefields, whether real or not, would have to be considered carefully in any operation. The battle force commander may find his position similar to that of Admiral Jellicoe, commander of the British Grand Fleet in World War I. Although Jellicoe always possessed a superior naval force,

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he found he could not risk it in any situation where that margin of superiority could be lost. Churchill's description of his predicament might apply equally to the battle force commander—"the only man on either side who could lose the war in an afternoon."<sup>27</sup>

A second element of seizing the initiative involves aggressive ASW by U.S. forces as they advance into the Norwegian Sea. But Admiral Watkins' goal of preventing the "leakage of enemy forces to the open sea" and "changing the nuclear balance" may be severely tested by the Soviets. Consider the following:

- Even if NATO's ASW effort were not overwhelmed by numbers alone, the ability to either locate or track the Soviet submarines would be seriously degraded should SOSUS be lost to us. Moreover, by intentionally operating their boats to minimize detection opportunities, the Soviets can make the area ASW problem much more difficult than it might otherwise be. This difficulty will be magnified even further by the newest, and very quiet, Soviet submarines.

- As tensions increase, the best U.S. ASW platforms, the SSNs, will be transiting to the Norwegian Sea—not searching in the Atlantic for Soviet SSNs.

- Attempts to reach the Soviet SSBNs through the minefields and screens of diesel submarines may cause a high attrition rate for Allied submarines. When screening diesel boats are operated in groups, then at least one can always be on battery propulsion and therefore as quiet or quieter than even the best SSN.

- Finally, there is the possibility that the plan to go after hostile SSBNs from the outset of a conventional war may not be politically realistic. The debate about whether or not attacking the SSBNs can be considered destabilizing has not ended, and both sides have presented logical arguments.<sup>28</sup> However, in the absence of nuclear conflict and with the inability to predict Soviet behavior absolutely, it seems both logical and probable that the President, at least initially, would proscribe attacks on the SSBNs—particularly if presented with some sort of vague Soviet statement on nuclear escalation.

In 1984 the Secretary of the Navy made sealift a primary Navy mission. In reference to this mission Admiral Watkins stated that "we will not be able to tolerate attrition typical of World War II."<sup>29</sup> Assume that the Soviets do make SLOC interdiction a priority. Further, suppose that they do deploy their submarines before initiating hostilities, recognizing that while NATO will obviously consider the deployment provocative, the Western democracies are politically incapable of "firing the first shot." Then consider:

- In a January 1988 article for *Seapower* magazine, retired Admiral Isaac Kidd pointed out that rough calculations indicate that it will be necessary

to offload 6,000 shiploads per month in Europe to support NATO in a war against the Warsaw Pact. He then noted that, while in 1975 NATO had access to 10,000 ships, today that number is 6,000 and dwindling. What concerns Admiral Kidd most is that analysts have dealt with this problem by assuming only a one-percent attrition rate, saying that losses can "never be as bad as in the past." He closes by noting that Churchill said Britain's fate "was in grave doubt" when less than 12 U-boats were in the Atlantic; and that the Soviets today have the ability to sail up to 150 submarines into the sea lanes.<sup>30</sup>

- During testimony before a Senate subcommittee in April 1988, General Duane H. Cassidy, U.S. Air Force, Commander in Chief, U.S. Transportation Command, reported that sealift was in a "steep, rapid decline" and that "the current inventory of ships suitable for strategic sealift is inadequate to meet the requirements of even a single theater conflict."<sup>31</sup>

- With all destroyers and larger warships committed to the battle groups, the U.S. Navy today has 82 fully active frigates (FF/FFG), plus 19 more that are partly manned by reservists, and 16 in mothballs. None are under construction. Taking into account the requirement for this class to provide escort for both the amphibious and underway replenishment groups, there will be about 63 available in the Atlantic and Pacific for convoy escort.<sup>32</sup> Admiral Gorshkov, in his analysis of the Battle of the Atlantic, wrote: "According to the most conservative estimates, this task [convoy protection] was fulfilled by over 1,500 shore-based planes, over 30 carriers and some 3,500 escort ships of various types."<sup>33</sup>

Even if the figure quoted earlier of 950 vessels is more accurate (Gorshkov was probably including coastal craft), and even if the NATO allies could contribute an equal number for escorts, it is certain that the Soviets have taken note of what was previously needed and what is available today.

Advocates of the current Maritime Strategy frequently point out that to date the Soviet Navy has evidenced no real interest in attacking shipping. In this regard, it might be useful to remember Admiral Chernavin's words: "One of the most important means of combat support is *maskirovka*. Its goal is to lure the adversary into confusion regarding the true intentions . . . of force operations in the theater, and the main directions of their mission execution. . . ."<sup>34</sup>

A submarine prepared to attack warships is already fully trained to conduct a war on shipping. Additionally, accurate targeting will not be of as much concern as many people believe. Given the current state of our strategic sealift capability, if the submarine fails to sink the transport carrying the tanks, but instead torpedoes the tanker which has their fuel, the effect at the front is the same.

## Now What?

In the event of a conventional war in Europe, it is likely that the Soviet Navy would employ its surface forces in a conservative manner, and in waters where Allied submarine attack would be difficult, but Soviet air support would not. Looking at the German Navy's experience in operating without air cover, those who expect our battle groups to encounter Soviet surface action groups outside an effective air umbrella will probably be disappointed.

However, should the Soviets conclude, as the Germans did twice in this century, that an unrestricted submarine campaign against shipping in the North Atlantic offers them the best chance to influence in their favor a land war in Central Europe, from the start they are likely to wage an intense assault on shipping in the Atlantic. Taking advantage of NATO's defensive nature, they would deploy their submarines into the Atlantic before initiating hostilities. While NATO would doubtless consider such a deployment provocative, providing of course that it could be detected accurately, achieving the political consensus to "fire the first shot" would be a difficult if not impossible task.

Finally, a Soviet decision, based on historical precedents, to wage an unrestricted submarine war in the Atlantic would probably be strongly reinforced by two present-day realities. First, while the West's ASW capabilities have steadily improved since 1945, nuclear propulsion and noise reduction technology have given the SSNs an order of magnitude increase in war-fighting ability over their diesel-electric predecessors. As a naval aviator with an ASW background recently observed, "We are not at the end of the submarine era. It has just begun."<sup>35</sup> Second, a war in Europe will require that NATO be reinforced immediately by strategic sealift. Today this lift capability lies somewhere between marginal and unsatisfactory, even before attrition is calculated. Moreover, the plan to prevent attrition—to avoid "leakage" of submarines into the Atlantic—is a tactic which has never been tried against a force of SSNs and which historically failed against the much less able U-boats. Further, while convoys were always successful in protecting shipping, today neither the provision of escorts nor the planning for the assembly and sailing of merchant convoys are subjects that attract much interest.

The Maritime Strategy has two weaknesses that need to be carefully reviewed. First, a basic tenet of warfare is to be prepared to deal with an enemy's capabilities and not his intentions. The Maritime Strategy presumes that although the Soviet Navy has built weapons of great offensive power, such as the Oscar or Victor III-class submarines, it will employ them only defensively. Second, while Mahan would certainly approve of the offensive

posture of our Maritime Strategy in seeking out and destroying the Soviet Navy, I am equally certain that Clausewitz would caution that in our eagerness to get at the enemy's "center of gravity" we should not unacceptably uncover our own.

As long as the defense of NATO remains second in importance to only the defense of the United States, then the overriding role of the U.S. Navy in the event of a war in Europe must be to ensure the reinforcement and resupply of our forces there and those of our Allies. Our strategy, tactics and force structure therefore should be tailored to do this even in the face of a dedicated effort to stop us. Despite giving incentives to the Soviets to attack Atlantic shipping as soon as war begins, the present Maritime Strategy relies too heavily on the Soviets doing something quite different. In fact, it presumes that the Soviets will cooperate with our plans and not deploy their submarines in any numbers until after hostilities start.

On 18 March 1942 Churchill wrote to Roosevelt to express his "deep concern" over the large number of merchant ships then being sunk off the U.S. coast, and to urge "immediate convoys." In his reply, Roosevelt said that the U.S. Navy had been "definitely slack" in preparing for such a submarine offensive.<sup>36</sup> History should not have to repeat itself.

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