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THE SOVIET UNION AND THE SOUTHERN SEA ROUTE

by

Lieutenant Commander James T. Westwood, U.S. Navy

At least since 1946, there has been a strong, persistent impression in the United States that the keys to understanding Soviet interests in Southwest Asia are linked to oil and the ability to regulate or deny that oil to other nations.¹ The Russians also are widely held to be intent on acquiring a warm-water port, that is, a year-around port, on the Indian Ocean. These perceptions have been sharpened recently by the findings of certain U.S. government agencies that the U.S.S.R. is running short on oil and perhaps as soon as 1985 could become a net importer, by the fall of the imperial government of Iran in early 1979, and by the U.S.S.R.'s military invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. These events have caused major changes in U.S. policy, strategy, and military organization relative to Southwest Asia. A sharp rise in U.S. national interest in the greater Persian Gulf area has been conditioned by both our increased dependence on foreign sources of petroleum and the vast increase in its cost.

In the 1970s, the U.S.S.R. was the world's largest producer of oil. Most of the oil it exports goes to the

Eastern European communist countries, while the U.S.S.R.'s own rate of consumption is less than half that of the United States. Accordingly, Soviet officials and commentators characterize Western references to any imminent oil shortages in their country as "myths." Indeed, even U.S. official and private agencies are sharply divided as to whether the U.S.S.R. is running short of oil for its own and friendly foreign consumption or even if it will in this century.

The basic conditions of the Soviet Union's economy are that it is insulated from the direct effects of supply and demand and that it tends to be self-sufficient. Neither of these fundamental conditions suggests an inclination to rely heavily on foreign sources of so critical a resource as oil. Nor does the U.S.S.R. appear to have begun the long-term channel development which would make it possible for large, deep-draft tankers bearing large quantities of oil to enter Soviet ports. Other indicators would be the construction of extensive, specialized port and pipeline facilities for importation; there are no such indicators.

To the Russians' apparent long-term impulse to gain "warm-water" ports on the periphery of the Indian Ocean, there is an up-and-down recurrence of interest in the history of their foreign policy. This first surfaced around the year 1700 and reappeared briefly about 1800. In the 1900s, this "drive" apparently became more prominent. During World War II, the goal was achieved briefly when a sea-land route was established through Iran and the Indian Ocean.² This route carried most of the Allied logistic support of the Soviet war against Germany. Churchill saw transportation of Western arms to the Soviet Union by this route as even more important than Western access to Iranian oil.³

One of the problems of this history is that, amidst Western imputations, it is difficult to define actual Russian policy. In the nineteenth century, the British appear to have overestimated greatly both the intentions and the capabilities of the Russians in Southwest Asia. Nowadays, however, we in the West may be underappreciating Soviet strategy, of which ports are an ingredient, in Southwest Asia. In fact, the keys to Soviet strategy in Southwest Asia appear to be, not oil, but strategic lines of communication.

The notion that the Soviets so covet Middle Eastern oil that they would seize and control the Persian Gulf oilfields by force of arms is offset by at least three factors: (1) the expected international reactions; (2) the relative inability of a military occupation or civilian conscript force to operate the fields once seized; and (3) the availability of less bellicose opportunities for influencing changes to current petroleum distribution patterns. Yet, the U.S.S.R. has not offered Middle Eastern oil producers better terms than those existing for several years, e.g., higher prices or more hard currency. No one has observed Soviet attempts to purchase Persian Gulf oil on a large scale. The Soviets do buy small

quantities of oil, but even were they to purchase 100 million tons in a year, that would amount only to about 10 percent of the area's production.

If one reads what the Soviets say and pays attention to what they do, he can reach some conclusions about their strategy for Southwest Asia. Within that framework, one objective stands out: the expansion of growth in efficiency, and protection of the Soviet Union's geo-strategic lines of communication which run through, or near, Southwest Asia. These serve the U.S.S.R.'s domestic transportation needs as well as those of and with other nations. From this the U.S.S.R. gains revenue, stature, and influence. The sea lines of communication began to be important, in a military sense, during the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-05. In a broader, grand strategic sense, Soviet maritime routing in the 1960s is instructive, though it is from the period of the ninth five year plan (1971-1975) that Soviet national policy and planning came to depend on the "Southern Sea Route" through the Indian Ocean. This dependency is conditioned by the economic, political, and military developments since the mid-1960s of the Soviet Far East and by the steady policy of aiding and abetting client national states bordering the Indian Ocean. This makes the use of Soviet shipping in the southern seas a mandatory factor in Moscow's reckoning about the present and future of Southwest Asia.

Russians define strategic issues on the basis of different determinants than do Americans. Because of the fortunes of geography, Americans define them on an intercontinental basis, usually beginning somewhere "over there." Russians define them on an intracontinental basis, beginning at their doorstep. Geography offers no choices. Soviet political and military strategy is keyed to and follows the map, mostly the map of Eurasia and the Southern

half of the eastern hemisphere. The Soviet strategic outlook is, by definition, geostrategic.

Soviet Lines of Communication.

One of the main ways in which the Soviet Union differs from the United States is that the former has more industrially rich territory that is poor in transportation than the United States has. Even though, from the standpoint of national defense and the need to connect and integrate an empire, nothing is more critical than reliable and secure lines of communication for expansion, information exchange, reinforcement and aggrandizement, the transportation system of the U.S.S.R. is underdeveloped, deficient, and costly. The country is the largest in the world. It encompasses one-sixth of the world's land surface, reaching some 6,000 miles east and west and some 3,000 miles north and south. Eleven world time zones are contained in its expanse. In this vast area, transportation looks good only when it is compared with that of the "less-developed countries." In comparison with the West, all forms of land transportation in the U.S.S.R. bear heavy loads. For a century and a half, railroads have been the leading carrier of freight and, until the 1960s, of passengers. Because of climate, topography, expanse, and economic policy, the road system is severely underdeveloped. Trucks are used mainly to feed railroad centers. The average truck haulage distance is less than twenty miles.

During the last twenty years, sea transportation has risen in importance in the economic and military life of the U.S.S.R. The total amount of merchant ship tonnage has increased markedly and has been the subject of many commentaries in the West. The Soviets have gone to sea in a big way and this increased reliance on maritime transportation affects the distribution of the overall transportation load. In 1950, railways carried 85 percent of the coun-

try's freight and 90 percent of its passengers. In 1980, railways carried only 57 percent of the freight and 33 percent of the passengers. While the difference in passenger loading is accounted for by the development of air travel, in freight, it has been pipelines and ships which have grown to carry over a third of the Soviet Union's freight load.

This basic change in transportation loading is not accounted for by advances in canal and river boats but by seagoing ships in the coastal and intracontinental trades, including the Southern Sea Route via the Indian Ocean. This growing dependence on sea lines of communication and sea transportation persists in spite of the constant pace of railway construction and modernization. It suggests a railway system which, even though it is preferred by policymakers, is inadequate in practice to support the country's growth.

There are five major industrial regions spread across the country: the Northwest, the Ukraine, the Urals, the Kuznetsk Basin, and the Komsomolsk and Khabarovsk region in the Far East. Intercourse among these scattered regions and among the several sectors of the national economy requires enormous investments in transportation. This presents a problem of grand strategic importance to Soviet authorities. The most critical problem is the transportation which *must* connect the European U.S.S.R. to the Asiatic, particularly the Far Eastern part of the country.

The Far East, especially that part south and east of the Ussuri and Amur Rivers, is strategically exposed, and separated from the main part of the country by Western Siberia and Central Asia, an inhospitable and intractable expanse amounting to about one half of the Soviet Union's territory. Though growing toward self-sufficiency and containing considerable arable land, the Soviet Far East survives on the support it gets from the "core-land" thousands

58 Naval War College Review

of miles across Siberia to the West. There are no all-weather, hard surfaced, through roads between the two parts of the Soviet Union. All support must go by the Trans-Siberian Railroad, by air—or by ship through the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific. So the Far East could be cut off in a war with either the People's Republic of China or Japan. It is clear that in Moscow this is perceived as a national security problem of great importance. Perhaps for this reason the government's capital investment in the whole area is six times higher than the nationwide average.

The region deals little in international trade, not even with the nearby People's Republic of China or Japan, thus increasing its reliance on the western part of the U.S.S.R. Nearly 20 million people live in Eastern Siberia and the Far East. From 1928 to 1960, the Soviet population from the Urals eastward rose from 23 to 32 percent of the total population while industrial production rose from 9 percent to 27 percent. These demographic and economic changes have generated massive east-west traffic flows.

Via Gibraltar, it is 17,000 miles by sea from Odessa to Vladivostok. Via the Suez Canal, the distance falls to a mere 11,000 miles. At an average speed of 14 knots, it takes 50 days by the longer route, and by the shorter, 32. Nevertheless, the transportation cost per ton is cheaper on the sea route than on the overland railroad, even though the sea route is over twice as long as the overland route. This fact represents the "opportunity side" of the opportunity-vulnerability equation of the U.S.S.R.'s Southern Sea Route. On the vulnerability side is the Soviet objection to the U.S. naval and air base at Diego Garcia: The island lies close to the most economical courses on the sea routes between European and Far Eastern Russia.

Southwest Asia and the Southern Sea Route. Though for centuries

Southwest Asia has been *the* transportation corridor linking Europe with Asia, it was not until about 1960, when the Asian part of the country had become increasingly populated and developed, that the Soviet Union found it had to depend on the area to strengthen its role on the two continents which it occupies and simultaneously, to maintain its military defenses against two perceived threats half-a-world apart, namely NATO in the West and China in the East.

Apparently, by 1970, internal air and land transportation links* proved inadequate to transfer the volume of freight and people required for the continued defense and development of the Soviet Far East. In addition to the perennial fears about Chinese threats to Soviet vital interests in the Far East, Moscow now also fears a Japanese military resurgence. These worries have caused Soviet policy and strategymakers to build up military forces in the Far East and to examine the prospects for effective reinforcement from the western region. The plausible eventuality that the eastern U.S.S.R. could be cut off by enemy military operations feeds those fears.

Because of its expanse, the U.S.S.R. is strategically close to the Indian Ocean, even though it has no port of its own there. Control of the wedge of Iran-Afghanistan-Pakistan (and the Northern Indian Ocean) would offer control over a large part of the east-west transport route. Since the Suez Canal was reopened in 1975, the U.S.S.R. is only five to seven days' steaming time from the sea routes of the Indian Ocean—routes which are at least as important to the U.S.S.R. as to any other nation. Indeed, the stage for playing out the

*The Northern Sea Route, open only about 100 days per year, has been used mainly to service developing areas in the far north of Siberia rather than to connect the eastern and western regions.

The Soviet Southern Sea Route 59

U.S.S.R.'s global drama of politico-military strategy is shifting from Europe to the Indian Ocean. The U.S.S.R. is the outside country with the shortest most direct access to Southwest Asia by land, air or sea. Of all the outside countries, only the U.S.S.R. operates on interior lines of communication, and, it is those which have been, the *sine qua non* of military operations throughout Russia's long history of gradual expansion eastward and southward. Air distances from the southern U.S.S.R. to the northern rim of the Indian Ocean are, by the standards of the area, short: 800 miles to the Arabian Sea and 600 miles to the Persian Gulf.

Were the Soviets able to shift a major portion of their east-west freight traffic onto railroads and highways running through Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan to ports on the Indian Ocean, they would be able to reduce their strategic communications problem in a way similar to that accomplished by the United States with the construction and use of the Panama Canal.

Land transportation in the triangular wedge is sparse. The major terminals, including six Pakistani and Iranian sea ports, are connected by only a few major motor roads and railroads, all of which run in a general north-south direction. These would bear the burden of any direct connection between the U.S.S.R. and the Indian Ocean. The Soviets know this and for years have been trying to improve the situation. Indeed, according to a recent writer, "the only good roads in Afghanistan are those which [were] completed in 1966, mainly by the Russians. Transit trade agreements between Afghanistan and Pakistan allow Russian goods to roll unimpeded down to the Indian Ocean."⁴ There is a paved highway running from the U.S.S.R. through Northern Afghanistan to the Pakistani railhead at the Khyber Pass. Until 1964 even that road was impassable six months out of the year. That year the U.S.S.R. opened the

Salang Tunnel through the highest ridge of the Hindu Kush Mountains.

Essentially, the 400-year history of Russian expansion and territorial acquisitions in Central and Southwest Asia is the story of expanding lines of communication. Authoritative Soviet statements and political behavior over the last ten years reveal that this "transportation fixation" on Southwest Asia has changed little.

Words as Evidence. For at least ten years, Soviet officials and journalists have commented explicitly on the premier role and the criticality of the Southern Sea Route to their country, and their dependence upon it. These insights have been overlooked by those in this country with their own ideas about Soviet strategy, policy, and motives.

As we have seen, transportation in the U.S.S.R. is a long unsolved problem. Chairman Leonid Brezhnev told the 26th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1981 that he "must dwell specifically on the performance of transport. In view of the serious character and scale of the problems . . . in transport . . . they can be solved only on a basis of a long-term comprehensive program." He went on, ". . . roads, transport, and communications are lagging behind the growing needs of the economy.

"The program has to provide for the greater coordination of all types of transport. The relocation of the power industry and raw material base to the East necessitates expeditious . . . development"

In the spring of 1977, the President of the U.S.S.R., Nikolai Podgorny, led a delegation including the Minister of the Merchant Marine to the Indian Ocean countries of Mozambique and Tanzania. In Zanzibar, Tanzania, on 24 March 1977, Podgorny stated that "communication routes passing through the

60 Naval War College Review

Indian Ocean link the European part of the U.S.S.R. with the Far Eastern part." He also discussed U.S.S.R. support for liquidating "imperialist war bases" in that Indian Ocean. That same year, while marking the 60th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, Brezhnev commented, "We have taken the line of . . . tackling the problems of raw material, fuel and energy, food and transport. The U.S.S.R. has strongly advocated a reduction of arms in the Indian Ocean over the last ten years and has championed the 'zone of peace' proposal of ASEAN." In *Bratislava Pravda* of 15 May 1981, Leonid Zamyatin, a leading public spokesman for Kremlin policies, discussed the "Soviet view of the settlement in the Middle East," during which he said that an important part of President Brezhnev's peace plan was "not to create any obstacles or threats to the normal trade exchange or use of maritime and other communications connecting the states in that part of the world with other countries."

Zamyatin continued: "We think that the freedom of navigation in that region is of vital importance not only to the United States, and we even think that it is not of that importance to the United States, whose coast is on the opposite side of the globe—as it is for the Asian and African countries as well as for the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union is willing to discuss the Persian Gulf as a separate problem. The Soviet Union, naturally, is also willing to take part in the settlement of the situation around Afghanistan. However, the Soviet Union is also not opposed to the issues concerning Afghanistan being assessed in connection with the issues of the Persian Gulf's security."

Brezhnev's 23 February 1981 address to the 26th Congress of the CPSU set forth the U.S.S.R.'s policies for the 1981-1985 period. His statements there are the basis of Zamyatin's reflections. Brezhnev called "the story of a Soviet

threat to the oil wealth of the Middle East or to the oil supply lines" a deliberate "specious tale" immediately after which he discussed demilitarization of the Indian Ocean, saying that "the sovereign rights of the countries there and *the security of maritime and other communications . . . can be guaranteed. That is the essence of the proposals made recently by the Soviet Union.*" (emphasis added)

The U.S.S.R. Minister of Merchant Marine, Timofei Guzhenko, wrote in 1978, "I want to stress that . . . our sea transport will continue to develop in accordance with the needs of the U.S.S.R. national economy." He referred to the reopened Suez Canal as being "the shorter route" from Europe to the Middle East and Far East. (*New Times*, July 1978, Moscow, pp. 22-23.) He cited data showing that "coasting trade" (which includes traffic between Soviet European and Siberian ports) constituted between 35 percent and 37 percent of the total shipments by the Soviet merchant marine from 1976 through 1978.

Guzhenko's naval counterpart, Admiral of the Fleet of the Soviet Union, Sergei G. Gorshkov, in *Seapower of the State*, his 1976 magnum opus, stated: "About one-tenth of the world's shipping is in the Indian Ocean The routes from the Black Sea to Baltic ports of the Far East . . . pass through the Indian Ocean." Gorshkov also wrote: "The role of shipping is especially great in the Far East and North where the merchant marine is practically the sole mode of transportation New major ports . . . on the Far East coast and in the Black Sea . . . will surpass most major ports in our country in level of equipment and handling capacity."

Actions as Evidence. Russian interest in strategic lines of communication in Southwest Asia is at least 259 years old, for it dates from 1723 when

The Soviet Southern Sea Route 61

Peter the Great dispatched a military expedition around the southern rim of the Caspian Sea. According to a recent study, "Even after laying the Trans-Siberian railway in 1891, the Russians needed sea transportation through the Indian Ocean because the line could not carry all the freight from European Russia to Far Eastern Russia."⁵

During the German-Soviet negotiations of 1940, the German draft of a secret protocol offered to recognize Soviet aspirations "south of the national territory of the Soviet Union in the direction of the Indian Ocean." The Soviet counterdraft specified Southwest Asia, speaking of "the area south of Batum and Baku in the general direction of the Persian Gulf." Moscow asked that this area be recognized as a centerpiece of her territorial aspirations in Asia. On 25 August 1941, Soviet forces invaded Iran and remained in the country for five years. Their military purpose was to establish and defend a strategic line of communication through Iran over which soon would pass the majority of British and American supplies used by the U.S.S.R. in the war against Germany.

There are several more recent (1960-1980) examples of Soviet behavioral interest in expanding their communications through Southwest Asia. These reveal a single theme, i.e., eventual bypassing of the long, exposed Cape of Good Hope route. Among these actions have been (1) an improved Northern Sea Route (1967-1980), (2) an internal waterway route from Leningrad to Iranian ports on the Caspian Sea (1966-1970), and (3) the so-called "Kosygin Plan" (1974) of connecting Soviet Asia with the Indian subcontinent by means of a network of transportation routes and trade relations involving Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Port expansion throughout the U.S.S.R. has been strong for twenty years, and especially during the last ten. Of twenty major ports on seven seas,

the greatest percentage of expansion has been at Petropavlovsk, Vladivostok, and Nakhodka in the Far East followed by the ports of the Black Sea. Collectively, these ports are the eastern and western terminals of the Southern Sea Route. In 1950 Nakhodka's population was 20,000. In 1980, it was over 100,000. It was the first port in the U.S.S.R. equipped to handle east-west container cargo.

Last spring, the Iranians and Soviets opened several sessions of the Permanent Soviet-Iranian Commission for Transportation. The U.S.S.R. was represented by the ministries of Merchant Fleet and Railways. The keynote of this conference was broadened cooperation involving transit shipments. Agreements were signed covering the Soviet Union's transshipments by Iranian railroad, and the delegates discussed the expansion of Soviet transiting freight volume. A year before, the 6 to 13 April 1980 issue of *Moscow News* carried advertisements for customers to subscribe to the U.S.S.R. Far Eastern Shipping Company's "land bridge" service via Iran and the Caucasus using the "Trans-Caucasian Container Service" and "express block-trains to D'Julfa" (a Soviet city on the Iranian border) with shipments to and from nine major ports in East Asia, daily from Japan.

Besides those with Iran, recent shipping agreements between the U.S.S.R. and Southwest Asian nations underscore the Soviet transportation and communications strategy for the region. On 28 December 1977, *Pravda* announced that the Black Sea Shipping Line was opening up a regular sea route between Odessa and Karachi. The article stated that the amount of cargo between the two countries in 1977 had more than doubled over that of 1976.

On 18 October 1979, the U.S.S.R. signed an agreement with the Malagasy Republic (Madagascar) which provided for regular calls by Soviet ships at Malagasy ports. In February 1980, a

62 Naval War College Review

similar agreement was signed with the Republic of the Seychelles, succeeded by another in the following year.

The Suez Canal. Soviet use of the Suez Canal brings up a provocative case of behavioral evidence. That country's current dependency on the Southern Sea Route was foretold by its growing dependency, over some twenty years, on the Suez Canal. In 1966, the last full year before the canal was closed by a local war, the U.S.S.R. was the seventh largest user, in total net tonnage, of that waterway and the fifth largest in number of voyages.

Writing in 1971, Captain Gary Sick USN (Ret.) observed that "Between 1958 and 1966 the U.S.S.R. was one of the fastest growing customers of the Suez Canal. During this period, the number of Soviet ships which transited the canal each year increased by more than 250%, and the tonnage of Soviet ships through the canal increased by more than 350%. In terms of numbers of transits through the Canal, the Soviet Union rose from 12th place to 5th place among all nations using the canal; while in terms of tonnage, it rose from 12th place to 7th place. In 1958, one out of every 31 ships through the canal was Soviet. By 1966, it was one out of every 14 ships. In tankers, Soviet frequency of usage increased from 1:30 in 1958 to 1:21 in 1966, while the frequency of freighter transits increased from 1:33 in 1958 to 1:11 by the end of the period. Soviet shipping through the canal was devoted almost entirely to national trade, i.e., most Soviet ships were carrying goods to or from the Soviet Union itself. The Soviet ships could rightfully be considered an extension of the transportation system of the Soviet State."

After the canal was reopened in June 1975, Soviet usage grew and in 1977 and 1978, the Soviet Union was the fifth largest user in tonnage. By the end of 1979, Soviet usage had grown to put it in fourth place.⁶

Intermodalism. Another item of evidence can be found in the U.S.S.R.'s rapid development of containerization during the last ten years. From 1972 to 1975 the Trans-Siberian "land-bridge" accounted for about ten percent of Soviet container traffic between western and eastern terminals. Inferentially, this suggests another route for 90 percent of the containerized freight, and in 1976, the Far Eastern Shipping Company began an all-sea container service between Europe and the Far East.

After a slow start, the U.S.S.R. is proceeding apace with development of containerization. Something over 40,000 containers are to be built during the current five-year plan, which is to end in 1985. The U.S. Maritime Administration predicts that by 1986 Soviet container carriers will have more than doubled in numbers and deadweight tonnage over 1981. Containerization's advantage on the southern strategic route linking east and west is that of intermodalism. Containers can go by rail, sea, air, and road. They ease railroad transloading at border crossing points such as that between the U.S.S.R. and Iran where the track gauges change. It appears that the prospect of improving the economic opportunities of the U.S.S.R.'s east-west "connection" via south and southwest Asian land-sea routes was a major impetus for the development of containerization in the U.S.S.R. As Soviet overland lines of communication through Southwest Asia further expand, containers are certain to carry a large share of transported goods.

The Reason for the Indian Ocean Squadron. An interesting and sometimes controversial example of Soviet behavioral evidence is the presence for more than ten years now of a Soviet naval squadron in the Indian Ocean. This squadron has consistently concentrated in the vicinity of the shipping routes and straits of the region, notably

The Soviet Southern Sea Route 63

the Gulf of Aden, straits on which the Soviet merchant and naval connections totally depend. Most observers see this as being aimed at harming Western shipping. Few discern it as being aimed at protecting Soviet shipping. Nevertheless, over more than a dozen years, the composition of the Soviet Indian Ocean naval squadron signifies its primary mission. It is consistently composed of ships and aircraft primarily suitable for reconnaissance, surveillance, logistical support, and antisurface warfare; in short, the naval functions necessary to protect shipping from interference by a hostile navy. This distinction is important because of other possible uses of a forward-deployed naval squadron, but for which its ships and aircraft, in this case, are not suited. These have not been the types and numbers of ships and aircraft useful for attacking Western shipping, antisubmarine warfare, or coercive naval "diplomacy" but, rather, those suited for the mission stated by Yuri Valikenov, Soviet representative to the Seychelles, "to secure our own maritime areas." Routinely one can find between 100 and 200 Soviet merchant ships, fishing vessels, and oceanographic ships in the Indian Ocean. On its own merits, the protection of this large number of ships and their freedom of movement justifies the cost of maintaining a surface action force on station year-round.

It is possible today that as much as one-third to one-half of the Soviet merchant fleet is committed to the Southern Sea Route.

Also in a military sense, were the Soviet Union and the P.R.C. to go to war, Chinese interference with the Trans-Siberian Railroad would transfer total dependence for Soviet reinforcement in the East onto the Southern Sea Route. This situation would be reminiscent of the Russian defeat by Japan in the Far East in 1905, which resulted, in part, from the lack of a secure sea line of

communication between European and Far Eastern Russia.

The Present and Future. A historically consistent thread running through both earlier Russian and contemporary Soviet grand strategy in Southwest Asia is the projection and protection of their own strategic lines of communication by land and by sea. Indeed, lines of communication are the theme and backbone of Russian expansion east of the Black Sea and the Ural Mountains. The success of this expansion over hundreds of years is attributable to the lack of effective resistance and to the Russian ability, granted by geography, to operate on interior lines of communication. To the extent that Soviet land and air communication routes can be expanded through Southwest Asia, particularly through the wedge of Iran-Afghanistan-Pakistan, these will be extensions of those interior routes.

However, at the point where they change to or are exclusively *sea* lines of communication, the fabric of Soviet security is fundamentally altered because there they become exterior lines of communication, attended by the problems which those may invite. In the case of the Southern Sea Route, there is no alternative for the U.S.S.R. Aside from purely geographical considerations, Soviet policy statements and behavioral evidence emphasize the absence of alternative routes to connect the separate parts of the U.S.S.R.

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY

Lt. Cdr. Westwood is a defense analyst serving in the research and analysis group of the Headquarters, Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force, MacDill AFB, Florida. Well known as a specialist in Soviet military, political, and economic affairs, Lt. Cdr. Westwood has published previously in *Naval Review*, *Army* magazine and in this journal. Prior to his current assignment, Lt. Cdr. Westwood served with the Department of Defense as a national intelligence estimator of trends and developments in Soviet maritime affairs.

64 Naval War College Review

The Iran-Afghanistan-Pakistan wedge is dominant in Soviet strategy because the extension and expansion of existing interior lines of communication through that area will improve opportunities and decrease vulnerabilities not only for the U.S.S.R.'s own east-west connection but for the routes to client and friendly states as well. This may be even more important than the issue of changing the source of energy or the question of Soviet access to and control over foreign oil supplies in the Persian Gulf.

Moreover, the military side of the U.S.S.R.'s Southern Sea Route is a critical problem from Moscow's perspective. As one American publication put it, "The vulnerability of the Trans-Siberian Railroad to Chinese seizure in the event of a war makes sea and airlift the only remaining means by which Moscow could supply the Soviet Far East and its civilian and military populations. For these reasons, the Indian Ocean as a sea line of communication is of ever-increasing importance to the internal cohesion of the Soviet Union."⁷