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PROFESSIONAL READING

Reading About the Soviets—in English

by

Norman Polmar*

At the end of World War II—almost four decades ago—Soviet dictator Josef Stalin initiated a massive naval buildup. The West knew little of the details of this buildup and there was a dearth of English-language writings on the Soviet Navy. Little of what was happening behind the “iron curtain” was known in the West and, in the opinion of many of the contemporary observers, little that was happening was worthy of note. That judgment was based more on the indications of the quality of Stalin’s fleet-building program and not the quantity, which was, in some respects, remarkable for any country in peacetime.

For the first two decades after the war only three major books were published. Mairin Mitchell’s *The Maritime History of Russia 848-1948* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1949) had little coverage of the Soviet period. However, there were worthwhile discussions of naval and shipbuilding matters, and of the personalities that affected postwar developments.

More useful was M.G. Saunder’s *The Soviet Navy* (New York: Praeger, 1958), which comprised a set of essays by Western naval officers, analysts, and journalists. Saunders, a commander in the Royal Navy, provided a most valuable overview in his introduction to the book.

The first significant American effort in this field was Robert Waring Herrick’s *Soviet Naval Strategy* (Annapolis, Md.: US Naval Institute, 1968). With the subtitle “Fifty Years of Theory and Practice,” Herrick’s heavily annotated

work suggested that the Soviet Navy was defensively oriented. The book encountered significant opposition within the US Navy, which was attempting to rationalize new ships and aircraft on the basis of the emerging Soviet threat; especially the new missile-armed ships and nuclear submarines being produced under the direction of Admiral S.G. Gorshkov, who had become commander-in-chief of the navy and a deputy minister of defense in January 1956. Herrick, a retired US naval intelligence officer had, like Saunders, served in Moscow as an assistant attaché. A lengthy version of Herrick's thesis was also published in the US Naval Institute's annual *Naval Review* 1967.

Similar to the book situation, there were few articles on the Soviet Navy appearing in Western publications into the early 1960s, and those which did were mostly superficial or historical and, in some instances, both.

This situation began to change radically in the 1960s as the Soviet Navy significantly increased at-sea (out-of-area) operations, making their ships and aircraft more visible to Western observers. Also, enhanced Western intelligence collection activities provided Western navies with more information they could release about the Soviet fleet. A steady flow of books and articles on Soviet naval and maritime subjects began in the 1960s, and the flow continues unabated. In addition to the specific books listed below, the so-called "Dalhousie papers" are recommended reading. These are the published collections of papers presented at a series of conferences on the Soviet Navy chaired by Michael MccGwire, a formal Royal Navy intelligence officer, at Dalhousie University, Halifax. (MccGwire also served as an assistant naval attaché in Moscow.) The papers are by many of the leading Western analysts of Soviet naval developments and have been published as *Soviet Naval Developments: Capability and Context* (1973), *Soviet Naval Policy: Objectives and Constraints* (1975), and *Soviet Naval Influence: Domestic and Foreign Dimensions* (1977), all by Praeger, New York. Together, these volumes cover most aspects of the Soviet Navy, most of them in a scholarly manner.

Several years later MccGwire summarized his views in the May 1980 *Naval Review* issue of the Naval Institute *Proceedings* under the title "The Rationale for the Development of Soviet Seapower." A complementary albeit different view is provided in a comprehensive article by Dr. Norman Friedman, "The Soviet Fleet in Transition" in the May 1983 *Naval Review* issue.

One other set of conference papers, while now somewhat dated, made a significant contribution to the understanding of Soviet naval issues. Published as *The Soviet Union in Europe and the Near East: Her Capabilities and Intentions* (London: Royal United Services Institute), this was the result of a seminar sponsored by Southampton University and the RUSI at Milford-on-Sea in March 1970.

Western Books. Among the books that appear to have significance in this field are:

Robert B. Bathurst, *Understanding the Soviet Navy: A Handbook* (Newport,

R.I.: Naval War College Press, 1979), an effort to put the modern Soviet Navy into perspective as a navy and an institution; this soft-cover book is by a retired US Navy captain, a specialist in intelligence and Soviet politico-military affairs.

Alexander Boyd, *The Soviet Air Force Since 1918* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1977). This is the best of several general books on the Soviet air force; the subject is significant because of the position of Soviet naval aviation within the overall scheme of Soviet "air power."

James Cable, *Gunboat Diplomacy* (New York: Praeger, 1971). This is an excellent analysis of this subject with appropriate coverage of Soviet efforts; a revised edition appeared in 1981 (New York: St. Martin's Press).

John Erickson, *The Soviet High Command 1918-1941* (London: Macmillan, 1962). Professor Erickson, considered the dean of Soviet defense establishment analysts, covers the development of that establishment and the Soviet military philosophy behind it that continues to prevail today. Although Erickson's research and coverage of the Soviet Navy is limited, he has written a useful—but now quite dated—essay "The Soviet Naval High Command" for the May 1973 *Naval Review* issue of the *Proceedings*. Erickson's *Soviet Military Power* (Washington, D.C.: US Strategic Institute, 1973) is a soft-cover volume with a valuable overview of the Soviet armed forces. It is an updated version of the author's *Soviet Military Power* published by the RUSI in 1971.

David Fairhall, *Russian Sea Power* (Boston: Gambit, 1971). Fairhall, an English journalist, provides a highly readable account stressing Soviet commercial activities at sea. (The English edition's title, *Russia Looks to the Sea*, was closer to the mark; the American cover shows a Soviet submarine missile streaking skyward—an example of a misreading of the coverage of the book by the publisher.)

Robin Higham and Jacob W. Kipp, editors, *Soviet Aviation and Air Power* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1977). This is a collection of essays on Soviet aviation, albeit mostly historical, with adequate mention of the naval air arm.

David R. Jones, editor, *The Military-Naval Encyclopedia of Russia and the Soviet Union* (Gulf Breeze, Fla.: Academic International Press). This ambitious project, relying extensively on Russian-language sources, is historically oriented, but does cover the post-World War II period. Three volumes (though ADP) have been published, with the articles mostly by members of the academic community.

John Jordan, *Soviet Warships* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1983). The author has detailed and particularly well illustrated discussions of modern Soviet aircraft carriers, cruisers, and destroyers.

John Moore, *The Soviet Navy Today* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1975) sought to provide a single-volume overview of the Soviet Navy with basic data listings on Soviet ships and aircraft.

Norman Polmar, *Soviet Naval Power—Challenge for the 1970s* (New York: Crane, Russak, 1972). The second edition of a college text, by the author of this review, describes Soviet naval developments since World War II. The last chapter, “Alarmist versus Realist,” seeks to bring perspective to the extreme positions put forth on the Soviet naval “threat.”

Harriet Fast Scott and William Scott, *The Armed Forces of the USSR* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1979). While not specifically emphasizing the Soviet Navy, and there are some errors in the naval section, this is a detailed and highly annotated description of the structure of the Soviet military establishment. They both served in the US embassy in Moscow, he for two tours as US Air Force attaché.

James D. Theberge, *Soviet Seapower in the Caribbean: Political and Strategic Implications* (New York: Praeger, 1972). This volume is limited in scope and to some extent overtaken by events, but explains Soviet naval efforts in this area and their significance.

Edward L. Warner III, *The Military in Contemporary Soviet Politics* (New York: Praeger, 1977). This “institutional analysis” is more philosophical than the Scotts’ work, and covers more of the institutional factors. However, it is useful and heavily annotated.

US Department of Defense, *Soviet Military Power* (Washington, D.C.: US Govt. Print. Off., 1983). This is the second edition of a heavily illustrated, impressive exposition by the Secretary of Defense on the Soviet “threat.” Produced to help support the Reagan administration’s defense program, this “slick,” soft-cover volume provides significant data on Soviet naval issues. (The first edition, a bit more sophomoric, was published in 1981).

US Navy, *Understanding Soviet Naval Developments* (Washington, D.C.: US Govt. Print. Off., 1981). This is the fourth edition of a basic reference book on the Soviet Navy, first published in 1974. Prepared by the US Director of Naval Intelligence and Chief of Information, this soft-cover book is an invaluable introduction to the subject. The book is also published in a hard-cover, updated edition by the Nautical & Aviation Publishing Co. (Annapolis, Md.).

Bruce W. Watson, *Red Navy at Sea* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1982). Subtitled “Soviet Naval Operations on the High Seas, 1956-1980,” this is an excellent description and assessment of Soviet fleet operations, with emphasis on port visits and their political-military significance. Watson is a commander in the US Navy.

Two other books are often cited in bibliographies of Soviet naval matters, Rear Admiral Ernest M. Eller’s *The Soviet Sea Challenge* (Chicago: Crowles Book Co., 1972) and Donald W. Mitchell’s *A History of Russian and Soviet Sea Power* (New York: Macmillan, 1974). Eller, a former director of US Naval History tells little about the Soviets and much about the US Navy—past and present. The Mitchell book, a tome of more than 600 pages, has little to

Soviet Writings. A number of books written in the Soviet Union addressing naval matters are readily available in English. Most significant are the writings of Admiral Gorshkov, who has directed the development of the Red fleet for almost three decades. While a prolific writer in Soviet journals, particular significance was attached to his 11 articles on "Navies in War and in Peace," originally published in *Morskoy Sbornik* [Naval Digest] in 1972-1973. Gorshkov explained the development of modern navies, rationalizing the need for the USSR to have a large, far-ranging fleet. These articles were, in turn, reprinted in the Naval Institute *Proceedings* in 1974 with each article accompanied by a commentary by a US naval officer. Subsequently, the Naval Institute published the articles and commentaries as the soft-cover book *Red Star Rising* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1974).

Gorshkov's "second" book, *The Sea Power of the State* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1979), expands his views of the importance of sea power to a nation, arguing that the Soviet Navy should have a dominant role in all areas of the world except Europe.

(A useful effort at placing Gorshkov and his view in perspective is German historian-author Dr. Jürgen Rohwer's "Admiral Gorshkov and the Influence of History Upon Sea Power" in the May 1981 *Naval Review* issue of the *Proceedings*.)

Nikita Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers, The Last Testament* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974). Khrushchev, who had appointed Gorshkov as Navy CinC, is reputed to have dictated two volumes of memoirs. This second volume provides major coverage of military developments during his tenure as First Secretary of the Communist Party (1953-1964), especially the chapter "The Navy," which gives his perspective of "The Fall of Admiral Kuznetsov" and "The Rise of Admiral Gorshkov."

V.D. Sokolovskiy, *Soviet Military Strategy* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Research Institute, 1975). This is the third edition of Marshal Sokolovskiy's modern classic, which provides a defense-level look at naval missions and requirements. The volume is edited and has a commentary and analysis of differences in the three editions by Harriet Fast Scott.

Although not dealing specifically with Soviet naval subjects, the reader should be aware of the "Soviet Military Thought" series, translated and published under the auspices of the US Air Force. These books are written largely by Soviet officers on a variety of national security and military subjects, among them military psychology and pedagogy, operational art and tactics, and the relationship of the Soviet state and the military. While heavily laden with political verbiage that makes them slow reading, these publications do convey the basis of Soviet military thinking. The translations are available in paperback from the US Government Printing Office.

The Soviets publish the monthly journal *Soviet Military Review* in several languages, including English. Although intended for foreign readers, it

contains numerous articles on naval subjects that also appear in internal Soviet publications.

Reference Works. The newest reference work in this area is the third edition of *Guide to the Soviet Navy* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1983), by the author of this review. The volume, which largely follows the format and style of the same author's *The Ships and Aircraft of the U.S. Fleet*, describes the ships, aircraft, personnel, organization, and shore establishment of the Soviet Navy as well as such related issues as missions and tactics, merchant marine, shipbuilding industry, etc. Two previous English-language editions were written by Messrs. Siegfried Breyer and Polmar (1977) and by Breyer (1970). The first edition, dated 1964, was published in German. It is now planned for publication in the new format at three-year intervals.

During the past few years *Combat Fleets of the World* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press) has emerged as probably the best "annual" reference volume addressing the world's navies, especially the Soviet and Warsaw Pact fleets. This volume is adopted from the French *Flottes de Combat* and published every second year in English.

Weyer's Warships of the World is similarly published in English in alternate years (Annapolis, Md.: Nautical & Aviation Publishing Co.), being originally produced in German. While this is a highly "abbreviated" pocket-size book, it is a handy and relatively affordable volume.

Jane's Fighting Ships, published annually, continues as the largest and most expensive naval reference work (London: Jane's).

Valuable for descriptions of contemporary Soviet aircraft is *Jane's All the World's Aircraft* (London: Jane's Publishing Co.), edited by J.W.R. Taylor. And, while not an annual, a valuable reference for data on contemporary Soviet naval aircraft is Bill Sweetman's *Soviet Military Aircraft* (Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1981).

A few recent reference volumes address Soviet merchant ships in detail. Ambrose Greenway's *Soviet Merchant Ships* (White Plains, N.Y.: Sheridan House, 1981) is a very useful book updated every few years. It provides brief discussions and characteristics of Soviet merchant, fishing, and research ships as well as icebreakers. Greenway also publishes a companion work, *Comecon Merchant Ships* (White Plains, N.Y.: Sheridan House, 1981), on the commercial fleets of the lesser East bloc powers.

Soviet Bloc Merchant Ships by Bruno Bock and Klaus Bock is the English-language edition (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1981) of a German-language listing of Eastern bloc merchant ships. There are useful introductory discussions, but the ship listings are particularly austere with only small line drawings for illustration.

held by the various committees that consider defense programs. These include periodic briefings from the director of Naval Intelligence on Soviet naval matters as well as limited discussions by other senior naval officials. Of particular interest during the 1960s and 1970s were the statements of Admiral H.G. Rickover, at the time head of the US Navy's nuclear propulsion program, before various committees of the House and Senate and, especially, the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy.

Also during the 1970s the Congressional Research Service (CRS) prepared a series of compendiums entitled *Soviet Oceans Development* that were published by the Senate Committee on Commerce. These included essays on a variety of Soviet naval and maritime subjects.

Government Reports. Beyond the *Soviet Military Power* and *Understanding Soviet Naval Developments* cited above, less elaborate unclassified reports on various aspects of Soviet naval activity are published on occasion by the Central Intelligence Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, and Center for Naval Analyses (CNA). The usefulness of these documents varies. Each agency has lists of these publications available.

Messrs. Robert Weinland, James McConnell, and Bradford Dismukes, senior CNA analysts, have produced several significant reports over the past few years as well as articles in various defense journals in this field.

Journals and Magazines. Since the early 1960s there has been a vast number of articles in the professional and public press on Soviet naval and maritime matters. The principal English-language journals addressing the subject are the *Proceedings* and *Naval War College Review* in the United States, and *Navy International* and *International Defense Review* in Europe.

During the 1970s the large *Naval Review*, which in 1970 began doubling as the May issue of the *Proceedings*, had a special feature on recent Soviet naval developments. These are most useful, having been written successively by Naval Academy Professor Robert Daly and Captain William Manthorpe. In the May 1978 *Naval Review* issue Manthorpe wrote an interesting article with the provocative title "The Influence of Being Russian on the Officers and Men of the Soviet Navy." Another comprehensive article on Soviet naval personnel is Captain James Kehoe's "Naval Officers: Ours and Theirs" in the February 1978 *Proceedings*, while Manthorpe has a short but incisive note on "Attaining Command at Sea—Soviet Style" in the November 1975 issue.

Several perceptive articles on Soviet military manpower—with significant implications for the Soviet Navy—have been authored by Dr. Ellen Jones of the Defense Intelligence Agency. Among them are "Soviet Military Manpower: Prospects in the 1980s" in *Strategic Review* (Fall 1981) and "Minorities in the Soviet Armed Forces" in *Comparative Strategy* (Vol. III, No.

The *Proceedings* has also presented an excellent series of articles based on the comparative analyses of US and Soviet warship design by Captain Kehoe in "Destroyer Seakeeping: Ours and Theirs" (November 1973), "Warship Design: Ours and Theirs" (August 1975), and "U.S. and Soviet Ship Design Practices, 1950-1980" (May 1982 *Naval Review*). Kehoe and Kenneth Brower have also produced several articles on specific Soviet ship types for the *Proceedings* as has John Jordan in England for *Navy International*.

In addition to the above articles, the October 1982 issue of the *Proceedings* carried an unprecedented series of articles on the modern Soviet Navy written by Messrs. Polmar and Friedman (missions and tactics), Commander Dean Sedgwick (command and control), Lieutenant Kevin Lynch (sea-based aviation), Andrew Hull (surface forces), Dr. Milan Vego (attack submarines), Lieutenant Commander Gerry Thomas (Pacific Fleet), Robert Suggs (training), Captain Roger Barnett and Dr. Edward Lacey (*Morskoy Sbornik*), Brigadier General E.F. Black, (national leadership), Lieutenant Commander Ted Wile (mine warfare), Lieutenant Colonel Dominik Nargele (naval infantry), Captain Robert Wyman (Baltic Fleet), Captain Robert McKeown (merchant fleet), and A.D. Baker (ship types).

Some of these authors appear regularly in the *Proceedings* and other professional journals. Vego, a former Yugoslav officer, provided a detailed description of Soviet missile and torpedo boat tactics in "Tactical Employment of Soviet FPBs" in the June and July 1980 *Proceedings*, while some thoughts on Soviet ASW are found in Polmar's "Thinking About Soviet ASW," May 1976 *Naval Review Proceedings*, "Soviet ASW—highly capable or irrelevant?" *International Defense Review*, Number 5, 1979. These are mainly hardware-oriented articles. A useful discussion of how Admiral Gorshkov may use one of his most expensive pieces of hardware—the nuclear carrier now under construction—is found in Dr. Dov Zakheim's "A Carrier for Admiral Gorshkov" in the January-February 1982 *Naval War College Review*.

The *Proceedings* has also presented a detailed description of "Soviet Ship Types" by A.D. Baker published in November 1980, December 1980, and October 1982. Soviet ship names are addressed by Lieutenant Commander Charles E. Adams and A.D. Baker in "Soviet Naval Ship Names," *Proceedings*, July 1979, and Commander Tyrone G. Martin in "What's in a Name?" *Proceedings*, July 1974. Subjects on which relatively little has been written are the use of tactical nuclear weapons and electronic warfare at sea. Two excellent works are Captain Linton F. Brooks' "Tactical Nuclear Weapons: The Forgotten Facet of Naval Weapons" in the January 1980 *Proceedings*, and Lieutenant Commander Guy Thomas, "Soviet Radio Electronic Combat and the US Navy," in the *Naval War College Review*, July-August 1982. Friedman has also touched on the related command-and-control issues in "C³ War at Sea," *Proceedings*, May *Naval Review* 1977, as has Polmar in "Soviet C³," *Air Force Magazine*, June 1980. All have significance for dealing with the Soviets at sea.

Beyond articles on Soviet naval and maritime subjects that appear regularly in the *Proceedings*, *Naval War College Review*, and *Navy International*, there are relevant articles in the periodicals *Problems of Communism* (published by the US Information Agency), *Strategic Review* (US Strategic Institute), and the commercial publications *International Defense Review*, *Armada*, and *Naval Forces*. The annual March issue of *Air Force Magazine* is a Soviet Aerospace Almanac which contains a wide range of articles, some of which relate to naval activities.

Finally, the reader is recommended to the British magazines *Air International* and *Flight International* for details of Soviet naval aircraft.

“Willmott deals harshly with the reputations of a number of Allied and Japanese commanders. Two such cases are Gen. Douglas MacArthur and his so-called defense of Luzon and Adm. Chuichi Nagumo’s conduct of the Pearl Harbor attack. However, Willmott also shows that Allied failures in East Asia were not all caused by worthless commanders but also by the fact that except for the Americans the Allied governments did not have a strategy . . . and were thus overtaken by events.”

Willmott, H.P. *Empires in the Balance: Japanese and Allied Pacific Strategies to April 1942*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1982. 487pp. \$24.95

HP. Willmott’s *Empires in the Balance* is a brilliant analysis of the events leading up to the Second World War in the Pacific and the first five months of that conflict. There is no new information in *Empires in the Balance* and it is based entirely on secondary sources, but what Willmott has done is to break away from the narrow nationalist view of events at the beginning of the Pacific war. Instead, the author gives a broad analysis of the actions of both the Allies and the Japanese while portraying a number of events from very new and different points of view.

An example of Willmott’s original perspective can be seen in his assessment of Pearl Harbor. From the number of battleships sunk, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was a success. But when this attack is placed in a wider historical context by Willmott, Pearl Harbor is the beginning of the Japanese road to defeat. First and most important, Pearl Harbor politically united the American people as nothing else could and made the utter and absolute defeat of Japan the major objective of the United States. Also, the Japanese muffed the attack itself by sinking for the most part only battleships and by not attacking Pearl Harbor again and again until it was