

1982

Soviet Strategy

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Recommended Citation

Bathurst, Robert B. (1982) "Soviet Strategy," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 35 : No. 2 , Article 12.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol35/iss2/12>

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PROFESSIONAL READING

**“Proof, in its way, that we have been living
in an intellectually dark age.”**

by

Robert B. Bathurst*

Baylis, John and Segal, Gerald, eds. *Soviet Strategy*. Totowa, N.J.: Allanheld Osmun, 2982. 263pp. \$31.85

There has come to be something of an Aberystwyth School of Soviet Strategic studies. The University College of Wales is the home of some very active thinkers in the field. Two, John Baylis and Gerald Segal, are both the editors and authors of a long introduction to the present volume. In addition, two of the contributors, Ken Booth and Michael McGwire, are present or former scholars there. The other writers included are well known in the field. They have been intellectual pace-setters for years. There are no surprises here.

It would be useful to be able to say in what way the Aberystwyth School is distinguished from others or in what direction it is tending. Presumably this volume should give a clue, but if it does, it is well hidden. The editors say that the reason for the book is that it sought "to combine the most important arguments from both sides [here they mean the right and the left, the hawks and the doves] presenting a broad analysis of the key features of Soviet strategy." They have tried to accomplish this task by selecting seven essays, almost establishment essays, for republication. The essays are divided into headings (which seem to me to overreach their content) and the whole 250 pages, together with the introduction, constitutes what is being called "Soviet Strategy."

One must ask who comprises the intended audience for this book. The answer is not obvious to this reader. As the authors are already widely read and their positions are well known, the value of collecting a few articles from the seventies is not immediately apparent. There is not enough work in this book to treat any one aspect of Soviet strategy or any one author adequately. Two of the articles were published first in 1973. The most recently published, Michael McGwire's, is dated 1980 but it recapitulates (albeit in a very useful form) the results of his thought of three decades.

Perhaps the value the editors had in mind was to bring these useful articles together, unless, as I have begun to fear, they had some notion that their

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Professional Reading 67

choices provide a definitive statement about the left and the right of the strategic debate. It can be stated confidently that if that is the intent of the book, then, for all of the excellence of the writers it collects, it is a failure.

The blame for that failure, however, is not entirely that of the editors. If they had read with care the work of their colleague, Ken Booth, on ethnocentrism, they might have suspected that they were trapped in a mirror image. In fact, they give evidence in a footnote at the end of their essay that they suspect as much. After fruitlessly trying to separate writers and concepts, they finally admit that "we . . . use the terms hawks and doves . . . as a symbol of positions that in reality tend to be more complex." There are better symbols.

Dividing educated writers on Soviet strategy who are widely published in English into hawks and doves is a largely hopeless task. The debate about "strategic" war conducted, especially in the United States, in the 60s and 70s, was a kind of hermetically sealed, one-dimensional rumination, conducted largely by academics who knew little enough about war and almost nothing about men, and who talked to each other (with the press and government eavesdropping), frequently without any reference whatsoever to what the Soviets either thought, said, or did.

The results were, of course, bizarre. The world still waits for the genius who can put that phase of our "thought" in a cultural and ideological perspective. In any case, the authors collected in this volume do not fit into the hawk/dove bifurcation which the editors attempted. Neither do they fit into the criticism of one-dimensionality which I suggested. But their essays were written against that background and they argue with the concepts of that period more than with the much more subtle arguments which are beginning to appear today.

The introduction by the two Aberystwyth scholars and editors, being the most contemporary piece in the book, should have set a rather more interesting intellectual framework for the articles they selected than, in fact, it did. Perhaps they, wanting to write about the whole of Soviet strategy, tackled too much, or perhaps they succumbed too easily to the pattern of trying to fit every concept into some dichotomy or other, such as hawks and doves. Had they attempted less they might have achieved more, but when, barely on page 15, they say that they have "set the general background to Soviet strategy," we have the right to voice the exasperation such a casual sweep through politics and culture engenders. Our confidence in their perception is not enhanced by the comment that "despite the change in Soviet and American leadership in the last twenty years, little has changed in Soviet strategy." The syntax poses enormous problems, but the calculations pose even more. The last twenty years takes us back to Cuba and how can one say that much has not changed since then?

What might be much more accurate to say, if one feels that this assertion should be defended, is that the West has changed its strategy very little, but the rise of the Soviet Navy, as Michael McCgwire quite weightily argues in this volume, testifies to enormous changes on the Soviet side.

There is a very sensible article by Robert Arnett which argues with those who say that the Soviets claim they could survive a nuclear war with fewer losses than during World War II. As this whole discussion takes place in that one-dimensional world I referred to, it is difficult to disagree with Arnett, but also difficult to feel that anything has been really clarified.

The selection from Ken Booth's work about the Soviets' use of the military in foreign policy is from a period before he worked so brilliantly on the role of

68 Naval War College Review

ethnocentrism in these debates. As it is, this fleeting taste of a much larger work does not seem to me to be very satisfying.

Benjamin Lambeth gives a very good lesson on how to think about Soviet military doctrine until the end of the article when he asserts that, under stress the Soviets might do anything, including throwing out the whole book of doctrine. I suppose in some sense that is true, but it does not allow us to drop the problem, forsooth. We must ask questions about stress and patterns of reaction in conditions of stress. After all, stress is part of the human condition. Because we suffer from it, we don't suddenly change into baboons.

Dennis Ross rethinks Soviet strategic policy in what we can recognize as the government position, though stated interestingly. Much of what he says is so ethnocentrically accepted that it will appear self-evident. The idea that Soviet strategic doctrine is grounded in traditionally military concerns while ours, having been taken over by the academics, is something else, sounds right, but probably isn't. What as a nation our analysts seem unable to comprehend is the many facetedness of Soviet military strategy, its political, cultural and ethnic ramifications. Nor do they seem to understand that our own military are just as much a product of our system as are the academics. Both tend to choose, eventually, a big bomb as a solution to the confusing strategic problems which they do not have either time or patience to understand thoroughly.

Included is an important piece of Raymond Garthoff's on SALT I which has been revised in the light of SALT II and the subsequent disaffection. There can be no doubt that the SALT negotiations and decisions were among the most important events of the second

half of the twentieth century, for they will be thought to have seriously influenced the record of peace or war of this century. And indeed, the historical spectacle was dazzling. The men who held the key to the world's atomization were separated by only three feet of wooden table. As Raymond Garthoff was one of the people looking at the whites of their eyes, and as the truth about SALT has not been fully established, we must go back and back to try to understand the clash of ideas that took place during those negotiations.

Hannes Adomeit's seminal work on Soviet risk-taking is, of course, one of the most important studies of Soviet political behavior. He demonstrates in a systems analysis kind of way what historians have been saying for centuries, that Russians are risk avoiders. (It is only fair to add that historians say the risk-avoidance is a function of traditional Russian poverty. Industrialization is obviously changing that.) In any case, along with Nathan Leites' "Operational Code of the Politburo," it should be included in all collections of this sort, when there is no excluding principle of selection.

And finally, there is Michael McCWire's widely published article on the rationale for the development of Soviet seapower. For those who have followed the development of Michael's thesis over the years, this article contains little that is conceptually new, but as the fruit of thirty years of observing the Soviet Navy, it is, of course, significant.

For those who have not read these articles elsewhere, this collection is valuable and convenient. For those who have, it is interesting for it is a sampling of a decade of thought on strategic questions, proof, in its way, that we have been living in an intellectually dark age.