

1981

U.S. Soviet Military Balance

R.J. Zlatoper

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Zlatoper, R.J. (1981) "U.S. Soviet Military Balance," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 34 : No. 1 , Article 14.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol34/iss1/14>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

matters) it might usefully have been followed farther, to deal with important or controversial assistant secretaries (Gustavus Vasa Fox, Theodore Roosevelt) and with the most important of civilian administrators, Charles W. Goldsborough, whose service from 1798 to 1843 spanned the careers in office of 13 department heads.

Because, in their widely varying terms of service, some secretaries had wars to fight, some had crises to cope with or reforms to push through, and some found little or nothing to do, the sketches naturally vary greatly in length. Nathan Goff, whose term lasted 2 months, gets one page; David Henshaw, whose 7-month recess appointment was rejected by the Senate, gets three, as does Thomas Gilmer, whose 9 days in office were terminated by the explosion of the great gun on *Princeton*. At the other extreme come the wartime incumbents Josephus Daniels (56), Frank Knox (50), Gideon Welles (40), and John Davis Long (27). If these allocations seem generally judicious, some surprise may be occasioned by a scheme that gives Francis P. Matthews 44 pages and James Forrestal a mere 15. More generally, it may be said, the recent past seems to evoke a tendency to wordiness and irrelevance. The biographies in Volume II (since 1913) are twice as long as those in Volume I; the postunification secretaries, no longer of cabinet status, average 21 pages apiece while those important and interesting figures—Chandler, Whitney, Tracy, and Herbert—who presided over the naval revival of the 1880s and 1890s average out at a disappointing seven.

As well as in length, the essays vary widely in quality. Some hold the reader's interest; some badly need editing for style and syntax; some repeat or contradict others; in some the research seems superficial or out of date; some bibliographical notes are helpful and some are not. If there is a general

problem with this treatment of "men and measures" it is in the prevailing tone, which reflects the views of Mahan as interpreted by the Sprouts: a hankering, no matter what the state of the world or the needs of the nation, for concentrated forces maneuvering in squadrons. This somewhat old-fashioned attitude is reflected both in the recurrent themes that transcend individual essays and in the areas of administrative activity that are largely overlooked. Considerable attention is given to progress (or the lack of it) in naval architecture, and to the long-continuing efforts to establish ranks above that of captain, to organize a naval school, to provide for selection by merit, and to move toward some kind of a general staff. Contrariwise, little heed is paid such matters as the shifting patterns of peacetime deployment, the missions of the cruising squadrons, the protection of citizens abroad, the management of overseas logistics, or the development of naval communications.

In summary it may be said that as a readily available reference work *American Secretaries of the Navy* will have a certain usefulness if employed with caution with respect not only to what it contains but what it does not. Like most Naval Institute publications, these volumes are handsomely produced; they also contain an inordinate number of typographical errors.

JAMES A. FIELD, JR.
Swarthmore College

Collins, John M. *U.S.-Soviet Military Balance: Concepts and Capabilities 1960-1980*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980. 645pp.

On 20 April 1963, then-Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara stated: "You cannot make decisions simply by asking yourself whether something might be nice to have. You have to make a judgment on how much is enough."

John M. Collins, the Senior Specialist in National Defense at the Library of Congress, has now published a comprehensive work that implicitly responds to the question: to wit, during the past two decades, the nation certainly hasn't done nearly "enough" on any military front. Collins' somber view of comparative trends in the U.S. and Soviet forces and capabilities will concern even the most committed advocate of disarmament.

In 419 pages of text and 226 of detailed annexes and appendixes, the author leads the reader through a 20-year litany of declining U.S. military strength *vis-à-vis* Soviet advances in almost every martial category. The nation's clear strategic and conventional superiorities in 1960 have evaporated, causing the primary mission of America's defense decisionmakers to be modified to matching "meaningful ends with measured means while minimizing risks." Starting from this premise, Collins proceeds to: first, "assess" current net assessment techniques; and, second, derive his own assessment of U.S.-U.S.S.R. interests, doctrine, trends, regional balances, issues, and options.

His introduction to net assessment processes cogently outlines the strengths and weaknesses of current comparison techniques. In a single chapter he provides the uninitiated with insight into: "inclusive" (e.g., U.S. versus U.S.S.R.), "selective" (e.g., theater nuclear), "technological" (e.g., XM-1 tank versus T-72 tank), "static" (i.e., snapshots of a period), and "dynamic" (i.e., portraying trends or predicting outcomes) assessments.

After recounting the nation's superior national security position in 1960, Collins investigates the "political, economic, military, and social impediments" that have prevented U.S. Armed Forces from improving as rapidly as their Soviet counterparts. The principal causes of the unfavorable

trend, in Collins' estimation, have been a dearth of direct threats to the United States, the diversion of Vietnam, and American economic weakness. Conversely, the Soviets have steadily increased their commitment to increased military capabilities following their 1962 humiliation in Cuba.

In assessing organizations and functions, Collins notes that Soviets "accrue important advantages from secrecy, central control, and stable assignments for political leadership as well as military professionals in top echelons." The United States benefits from efficiency and flexibility, but suffers critically in such areas as intelligence collection because of the inherent "openness" of its society. Collins expresses doubts about the validity of direct dollar-to-ruble expenditure comparisons while acknowledging that "statistics on investment versus consumption provide clues to long range priorities." He contrasts U.S.S.R. reliance on simplicity with the U.S. desire for superlative performance, compares Soviet "quantity" orientation with American "quality" desires, then concludes that "Perhaps most of all, the *potential* for superiority will prove meaningless, if we fail to compete."

In correlating strategic nuclear trends, Collins asserts that U.S. nuclear strategy is now predicated on new principles, devised to cope with the unprecedented problems introduced by the advent of mass destruction weapons. Meanwhile, Soviet theorists maintain traditional standards. He traces the U.S. course from "assured ascendancy" (in the late 1950s), through "assured destruction" (in the 1960s), to its current "assured anxiety" (in the 1970s). He then concludes that our growing vulnerability in this area has resulted in a dependence on arms control agreements, a dependence that may not be shared totally by a Soviet Union that has fewer incentives to

compromise than does the United States. The author is also extremely critical of the nation's failure to pursue strategic defense systems while noting the significant efforts the U.S.S.R. has undertaken to protect its people and production base.

On general-purpose forces, "U.S. quality at this stage can no longer compensate completely for the lack of flexibility caused by quantitative inferiority...." United States' economy of force now necessitates a defensive strategy in Western Europe and limits the options of tactical airpower. The U.S. Navy, with its "sea control" mission, is confronted by a greatly expanded Soviet Navy, which needs only to exercise "sea denial" to succeed. In fact, Collins believes, the Navy is now at a crossroads. "America's Navy is marginally capable of carrying out its mission in support of national strategy.... Serious students of naval strategy sum up the situation with one succinct statement: the future U.S. Navy faces reduced options and reinforced risks." In contrasting mobility forces, Collins finds improved Soviet capabilities on one hand, with efficient U.S. airlift but deficient sealift capabilities on the other.

Collins then delves into alliance systems and regional balances noting that unity of command and strategic initiative favor the Warsaw Pact, as does the lack of substantive growth in NATO members' military capabilities. Analysis of the Far East indicates that neither power can reasonably expect to apply decisive influence. In the Middle East, the Soviets need only act as a "spoiler" to succeed in constraining U.S. options. The Rapid Deployment Force could successfully engage minor Third World opposition but is no match for possible Soviet power in that area.

Collins concludes with the observation that despite rampant numerical imbalances favoring the Soviets in most manpower/material

comparisons, "A mirror image between U.S. and Soviet Armed Services is neither necessary nor desirable." After advocating improvements in U.S. nuclear, chemical/biological, and conventional capabilities, Collins states that "The lack of U.S. flexibility is in large part a self-inflicted wound that results from decisions promulgated over the past two decades." In his estimation, no miraculous cures seem imminent. "More money to operate, maintain, and refurbish U.S. Armed Forces may be imperative at this point, but bolstering budgets will produce fewer defense benefits than desired unless U.S. leaders stand back, survey the strategic forest instead of the tactical trees, challenge assumptions, subordinate special interests, stress proven principles, and press for practical change."

Collins' work should be a mandatory addition to the libraries of individuals interested in military history and defense decisionmaking. Well-documented and thoroughly indexed, it is a comprehensive, up-to-date reference text that will unquestionably garner accolades for its author. Authoritative and detailed, yet readable, the book is uniquely valuable in setting the stage for the changes in military balance that will take place during the 1980s.

R.J. ZLATOPER
 Commander, U.S. Navy

Couhat, Jean Labayle, ed. *Combat Fleets of the World 1980/1981*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1980. 794pp.

The third biennial English language edition of this French publication has now become available through the efforts of the U.S. Naval Institute and A.D. Baker III. It is again larger (by 142 pages) than the previous edition and contains more photographs and details than before. I found it more readable,