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The military and political uses of Soviet seapower receive frequent comment and some see it growing beyond all legitimate bounds. This paper considers those uses, includes the major (but often overlooked) economic and commercial requirements of a maritime state, discusses its weaknesses and constraints, and assesses the threat it poses to the United States.

ASSESSING THE SOVIET NAVY

by

Steven E. Miller

Naval power is known to be a useful instrument of national policy and has frequently been employed since World War II to support the interests of the United States.¹ Navies can also be a source of conflict; thus, it is sometimes suggested that armed conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union is more likely to begin at sea—for example, in the Mediterranean—than in Central Europe.² Despite the rather readily apparent importance of and dangers associated with seapower, however, naval issues are not widely followed. Unlike the more familiar concerns about the strategic nuclear balance and the conventional balance in Europe, the U.S.-Soviet naval balance has not been the object of widespread and intense public scrutiny. As a result, both the facts and the implications of the Soviet naval buildup are less well advertised; the areas of debate in interpreting the Soviet buildup are less apparent.

The broad purpose of this essay is to provide a survey of the Soviet Navy that will be useful in assessing the growing controversy on the Soviet-American naval balance. It will do so by presenting brief answers to three basic questions. First, what are the Soviet Union's maritime interests? Second, how has the Soviet Navy grown? And third, what are the limits of and constraints on the Soviet Navy? In answering these questions one hopes that a balanced picture of the naval threat posed by the U.S.S.R. will emerge.

What are the Soviet Maritime Interests? There is no question that the Soviet Navy is now much more formidable than it was a decade or two ago. What is the subject of debate is why the Soviet Union invests significantly in naval power (that is, what interests does it seek to promote in doing so?) and the extent to which the

improvement in Soviet naval capability poses a serious threat to the American Navy.

It is commonly noted in connection with the growth of the Soviet Navy that the Soviet Union is a "continental" or a "land" power, the implication being that it has no real business—apart from messing about with Western interests—making large investments in naval power. As then Chief of Naval Operations Elmo Zumwalt, Jr. put it in a 1971 interview, there is a "dramatic difference between what the Soviets need—as basically a land power—and what we need—as basically a maritime power . . . they only can aspire to have a Navy larger than ours for purposes of interfering with our vital interests."³ Capt. John Moore, editor of *Jane's Fighting Ships*, made essentially the same point in a somewhat different way when he concluded in 1975 that "the ever growing Soviet navy has outrun the legitimate requirements of national defense."⁴ Such views presume a fairly narrow base of maritime interests to be defended by naval power. But, in fact, the U.S.S.R. has several practical maritime interests to be served; the extent to which its navy is still inadequate, merely adequate, or "illegitimately" oversized relative to its maritime interests is largely a matter of interpretation. (On such judgments, however, hinge conclusions about Soviet intentions.)

Certainly, some of the tasks demanded of the Soviet Navy are arduous ones, for the Soviet Union's first, and most important, maritime interest is the U.S. Navy. At the strategic level, American submarines armed with SLBMs pose a severe threat to the Soviet homeland. For this reason, as Admiral Gorshkov (for more than 20 years the Commander in Chief of the Soviet Navy) wrote in *Sea Power and the State*, "the most important task of our navy in this struggle (against enemy navies) will be to use our naval

power against the enemy's strategic nuclear systems in order to prevent, or to weaken as far as possible, their striking power against our own land targets."⁵ (If strategic antisubmarine warfare (ASW) is the primary mission of the Soviet Navy, then it is difficult to argue that the U.S.S.R. is possessed of a surfeit of naval power, as the U.S. sea-based strategic forces are considered the most invulnerable component of the Triad.) At the same time, U.S. strategic ASW capabilities threaten that portion of the Soviet strategic nuclear force that is at sea. The U.S.S.R. has a need, therefore, to acquire naval power to protect its sea-borne deterrent forces from America's far from insignificant ASW capability. This is affirmed in the writing of Gorshkov who predicts that in the event of war

the ocean spaces will become the arena of savage warfare between navies fighting to secure the maximum utilization of their naval power for the solution of crucial strategic tasks . . . Surface ships . . . remain the essential—and often the only—combat weapon for securing the deployment of the chief striking force of our navy: its submarine fleet.⁶

In short, the Soviet Union has an interest in defending its territory from nuclear attack and in protecting a portion of its deterrent forces through the use of naval power.

At the conventional level the U.S. Navy has the capability to obstruct Soviet political and military interests around the globe. By investing in naval power, the U.S.S.R. can raise the costs and risks of American intervention with naval power in the Third World crises, even if it cannot always pose a credible military challenge. This idea of denying the United States a "cost-free" intervention is evident in an article on the Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean by Vice Admiral Smirnov.

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"Already," he wrote in 1968, "the very presence of Soviet ships in the Mediterranean does not allow the American Sixth Fleet to carry out the aggressive ideas of the Pentagon with impunity. They cannot throw their weight around so ceremoniously as before."⁷ The other side of this point is that through naval power the U.S.S.R. can as well promote their own interests, whether by "presence" or "power-projection."⁸

Another military use to which Soviet naval power could be put—although it is not clear that it is intended to be used in this way—is to disrupt NATO shipping in the event of a protracted conventional war in Europe. It would seem prudent to prepare the capabilities to undermine an adversary's strategy; NATO's calls for large-scale reinforcement by sea.

In sum, it should not be surprising that the U.S.S.R. seeks to defend itself against the military threat posed by the U.S. Navy and to neutralize and counter its political threat. The Soviets may not be able to achieve either of these large goals, but it certainly is in their interest to try to do so. These political-military considerations add up to a rather compelling rationale for the Soviet Navy.

But the Soviet impulse toward the sea has economic and commercial as well as political and military dimensions. The Soviet Union has become a major factor in the world shipping market; indeed, it possesses the largest cargo liner fleet in the world.⁹ Not only does this fleet service most of Soviet seaborne trade, but it has also captured a significant share (roughly 20 percent) of established trade routes, and has become a substantial source of hard-currency income.¹⁰ The Soviet Union possesses as well the largest and most modern fishing fleet in the world. It provides approximately "one-third of the annual total of animal protein consumed in the Soviet Union."¹¹ For

the last 20 years the Soviet Union has been one of the three largest fishing nations in terms of catch. Clearly, the U.S.S.R. has economic as well as military interests in the oceans.

That these economic considerations have a place in Soviet thinking about naval power is evidenced once again in the writing of Gorshkov. "Naval power constitutes one of the most important factors ensuring the strengthening of (the) national economy." Stressing the interaction of the military and the economic aspects of Soviet interest in the oceans, he argued that "the totality of the means used for exploiting the riches of the World Ocean and the means used for defending the interests of the state, when rationally combined, constitute the sea power of the state and determine a country's ability to use the military-economic potentialities of the oceans to its advantage."¹² While the economic factor is clearly not foremost among the reasons why the U.S.S.R. is interested in naval power, it is yet another reason why it must seem sensible to acquire a powerful navy.

None of this makes the Soviet Union a maritime power in the same sense that the United States is a maritime power. It does not possess a great naval tradition; it is not thought of as having historically been a maritime power. It is not a huge trading power reliant on seaborne cargoes for its international commerce. Neither it nor its allies depends on imported oil brought in great quantities by sea. The Soviet Union need not ply the oceans in order to support its allies in the event of major wars.

Nevertheless, the Soviet Union is a state whose shores are washed by four seas, and whose interests are substantially affected by what transpires over, on, and under those seas. Explanations of the Soviet naval buildup need not assume malevolent intentions; the Soviet Union has more at stake than simply politically motivated disruption

of Western maritime interests. However, the problem remains that in pursuit of its own maritime interests—however defined and weighted—the Soviet Union jeopardizes Western maritime interests and places at risk Western naval power. The question of “why?” is, in the end, less important than the question “How great is the jeopardy?”

How Has the Soviet Navy Grown?

This leads us to examine the improvements in the Soviet Navy that have caused it to seem so much more threatening to so many observers. Before turning to this examination, it is necessary to note the enormous difficulties associated with evaluations of naval power. Simply stated, there is no satisfactory measure of naval power that has much meaning outside a fairly complicated context.¹³ Naval warfare is probably the most complicated form of armed conflict, combining as it does air, surface, and subsurface weapons systems in overlapping missions. Sizing up navies requires integration of a number of indicators of naval power, no one of which can really stand alone. Numbers of vessels, types of vessels, the nature of their firepower, their technological quality, their logistical support, their air support, are all vital variables. In turn, these have meaning only in terms of the missions they were designed to perform and the strategy they were meant to fulfill. Even then there remain such factors as geography, concentrations of force, and imponderables such as the weather that would influence the outcome of any particular naval engagement. Straightforward conclusions about the Soviet-American naval balance are, obviously, not possible.

That said, what do we mean when we write about the “growth” of the Soviet Navy? Part of what we mean is that the U.S. Navy has shrunk. Between 1968 and 1974 the overall size of the American Fleet declined from nearly 1,000 to well under 500.¹⁴ In the mid-1970s it

was smaller than it had been at any time since 1940.¹⁵ The reason for this decline was the block obsolescence of World War II vessels whose existence had inflated the numbers of the U.S. Navy throughout the postwar period. But regardless of how legitimate the explanation and regardless of how unimportant simple accounting is in the naval scheme of things, this decline in numbers has affected perceptions of the Soviet-American naval balance. It has led to the impression that, as one journal put it, “the U.S. Navy has been dwindling while the Soviet Navy has been expanding . . .”¹⁶ Moreover, there has been concern that, quite apart from the relative size of the U.S. Navy *vis-à-vis* the Soviet Navy, the American Fleet has become too small to perform all of its missions adequately, that it possesses too few ships to be a bona fide “two-ocean” navy. This is implied, for example, in former Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld’s final annual report, in which he claimed as one of the accomplishments of the Ford administration the “steps toward restoration of the Navy’s capability for two-ocean sea control and projection of power.”¹⁷ In short, the context in which the Soviet Navy has improved has been one in which the American Navy has—in one crude but highly visible indicator—declined; this has colored our reactions to increases in Soviet naval capability.

This leads to a second related point about what we do *not* mean by the growth in the Soviet Navy. In our imprecision we often use the term in such a way as to imply substantial augmentations in the size of the Soviet Navy. But in fact there has been no spectacular increase in the size of the Soviet Navy. In the category of major surface combatants, for example, Soviet numbers have been essentially constant (with a slight upward trend) over the last decade (see figure 1). The number of Soviet attack submarines has actually declined by nearly 200, from 430 in

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1964 to 231 in 1976 (see figure 1).¹⁸ Of course, these broad numbers mask substantial increases in particular types of systems: Soviet nuclear-powered attack submarines have increased in number from 20 in 1963 to 85 in 1978, while Soviet strategic submarines have increased from 30 in 1963 to 90 in 1978. But, in general, the "growth" of the Soviet Navy does not manifest itself in larger numbers. The most dramatic changes in the naval "numbers" balance are a result of American declines rather than Soviet increases.

Nor is it really trends in shipbuilding that are the source of concern. The relative decline in American numbers is more the result of the pace at which it has phased out obsolete and obsolescing vessels than of a worrisome lag in shipbuilding highlighted by current cut-backs in U.S. Navy ship procurement. (The problem of widespread obsolescence is one the Soviet Navy is only beginning to face.)¹⁹ In the decade between 1966 and 1976, for example, the Soviet Union produced many more ships than the United States, but well over half of them (480 out of 766) were minor combatants under 1,000 tons, while the United States outproduced the U.S.S.R. in terms of tonnage and built many more (30 to 3) major combatants of 10,000 tons or more (see figure 2).²⁰ Overall, the pattern in shipbuilding is a mixed one, with notable differences in style (in particular, the constancy of the Soviet effort as opposed to the more cyclical nature of the American program) and emphasis (with the Soviets focusing on submarines, the United States more on surface ships).²¹ But there is nothing here that would lead one to conclude that there had been, in the words of one observer, a "rather spectacular" rise in Soviet naval strength,²² or that the trends are moving against the United States. Secretary of Defense Brown noted as much in last year's hearings, stating boldly that "there is no great adverse trend there in

terms of ships."²³ (And Michael McGwire has argued that the Soviet Union suffers from a shortage of naval surface shipbuilding capacity relative to its ambitious naval agenda.)²⁴ Nevertheless, there have been areas of real growth in the Soviet Navy and there are certain trends that, if continued, could prove troubling.

This leaves us still with the question of what we do mean in referring to the growth of the Soviet Navy. The answer lies largely in two areas: quality and deployment.

The quality of the Soviet Navy has improved dramatically over the past 20 years. This improvement is manifest in several different ways. First, the Soviet Union has introduced new types of ships into its navy. The primary examples are the *Moskva*-class ASW helicopter carrier that entered service in 1967, and the 40,000-ton *Kiev*-class aircraft carrier that carries both helicopters and vertical/short take-off and landing (V/STOL) aircraft; *Kiev* entered the fleet in 1976.²⁵ Second, the Soviet Union has substantially modernized its fleet, introducing many new classes of existing types of ships. Thus Michael Klare could write in 1975 that "[B]etween 1967 and 1973, the Soviet Union introduced nearly a dozen major new classes of warships . . ."²⁶ The Soviets have also modernized their land-based naval aviation with the introduction of the *Backfire*, which significantly extends the reach of land-based airpower in performing naval missions.²⁷

Finally, the Soviet Union has exploited new technologies in pursuing its naval modernization program. This is evident in their sustained investment in nuclear-powered submarines, in their utilization of V/STOL technology with their small carriers, and especially in their acquisition of naval cruise missiles. The extent to which naval cruise missiles have or will revolutionize naval warfare is the subject of considerable debate, but there is no question that

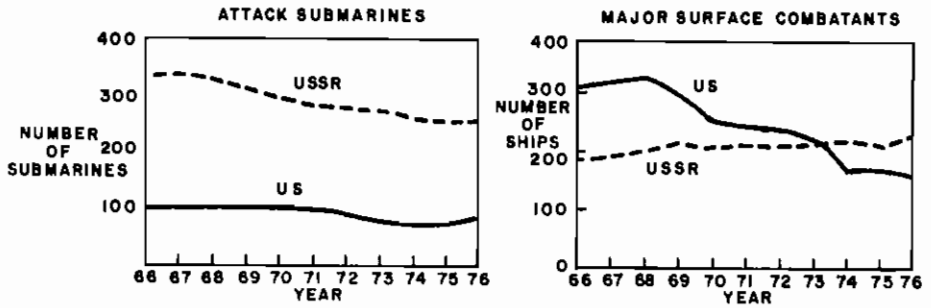


Fig. 1—Changes in Naval Force Levels—U.S./U.S.S.R. (1966-1976)

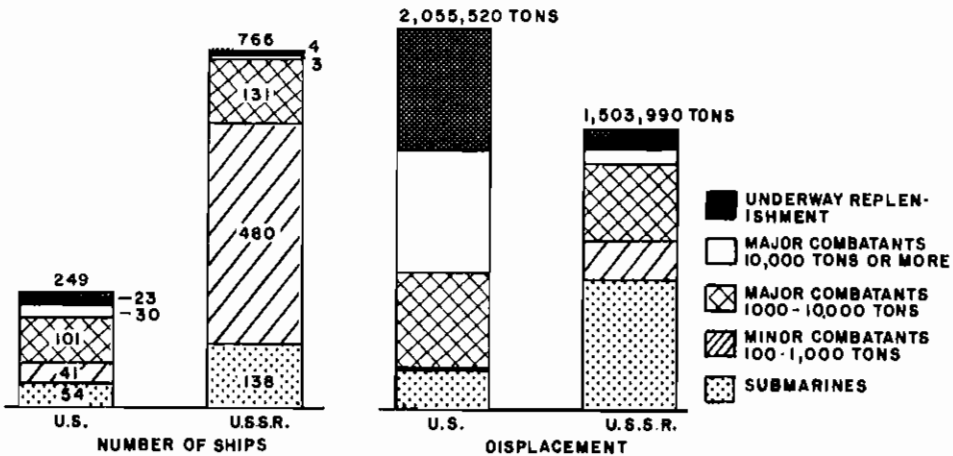


Fig. 2—U.S./U.S.S.R. Combatant Ship Deliveries¹ (1966-1976)

¹Support ships other than those capable of underway replenishment are not included.

Source: DoD, *Annual Posture Statement, FY78*.

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they pose a quite potent threat that is, at the least, difficult to counter and at most, puts surface combatants in a situation of great vulnerability. The U.S.S.R. has deployed cruise missiles on everything from fast patrol boats to nuclear submarines. Many of the newer classes of Soviet surface combatants are known as guided-missile destroyers and cruisers. And while the Soviet Union is introducing its sixth naval surface-to-surface missile, the United States is just beginning to deploy its first. If one believes, as one expert put it, that the cruise missile "has altered the naval equation beyond recognition," then there is indeed cause for concern.²⁸ The official American view is more moderate, but the U.S. Navy is spending billions to develop and provide surface platforms for the Aegis air defense system designed to counter the combined air/cruise missile threat.

In sum, the modernization of the Soviet Navy has been quite impressive, and has transformed it into a much more formidable fleet. This is one of the ways in which the Soviet Navy has "grown."

The second development at the center of what we mean by the growth of the Soviet Navy has been the appearance of the Soviet Navy throughout the globe. Forward deployment began with the stationing of a Soviet squadron in the Mediterranean in 1964. This squadron was augmented during the 1967 war, and was followed in 1969 with the establishment of a small but permanent naval presence in the Indian Ocean. By the mid-1970s Soviet naval activity included numerous visits to the Caribbean, patrols off West Africa, and expanded activities in the Pacific.²⁹ The global nature of Soviet naval prowess has been demonstrated in two extensive and worldwide exercises, Okean 70 and Okean 75.³⁰ And recent history is replete with examples of the Soviet use of their now farflung navy for political purposes in distant areas.³¹

The Soviets gain several benefits from forward deployment of their Navy, ranging from the political advantages associated with mere "presence" to the possibility of militarily deterring or at least interfering with American intervention in Third World crises. While the Soviet Navy does not possess great power projection capability, it does provide, in its present guise, another instrument of national policy with which the Soviet leadership can pursue its interests.

Accompanying the forward deployment of the Soviet Navy have been changes in the character of Soviet naval doctrine and alterations in the missions it performs. Gorshkov has placed great emphasis on the peacetime political utility of the navy.³² And whereas in the past Soviet naval behavior was explainable almost completely in terms of seaborne strategic capabilities (i.e., Soviet naval policy was formed essentially in reaction to the strategic threat posed by American ballistic missile submarines), now it was evident that "they are also responding to events in the international political arena that have no bearing whatsoever on the strategic balance—and their actions are not only responsive but initiatory as well."³³ Thus, the articulation of a more political and aggressive naval doctrine has emerged in a period in which detectable changes have occurred in the behavior of the Soviet Navy. For many in the West, this fact has reinforced the effect of Soviet forward deployment in shaping the image of a growing Soviet Navy.

There remains a large debate over whether the assertive political aspects of Soviet forward deployment ought to be seen as a secondary and somewhat incidental task or as the embodiment of an expansionist Soviet foreign policy. Some distinguished analysts hold the former view. Robert Weinland, for example, argues that "Soviet naval policy and practice are in fact predominantly

reactive in character and defensive in orientation."³⁴ But for others the link between the expanding horizons of the Soviet Navy and the outward thrust of Soviet foreign policy is a clear one. For example, former Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld has described Soviet naval expansion as part of a broader effort to achieve military superiority and international dominance, and suggests that "[S]uch maritime expansion clearly is a central element in the Soviets' effort to develop the capability to project power worldwide, to increase both their military capabilities and their political reach in areas far from their shores."³⁵ Or, as then Director of Naval Intelligence Adm. Bobby Inman explained in 1975:

Russia—whether under czars or commissars—has historically desired to play a larger role in the shaping of world events. A number of elements have conspired in the past to prevent Russia from exercising this role and one of the elements has been the lack of a sea-going navy to project Russian influence overseas . . . that weakness has been dramatically reversed . . .³⁶ (Emphasis added.)

Whether viewed as still primarily defensive or as part of the Soviet will to power, forward deployment of the Soviet Navy has shattered its former image as a coastal force and raised it to a new prominence in Western political and military thinking.

In conclusion, the U.S.S.R. is putting more capable ships in more places for more purposes than ever before. New capabilities, new deployments, new missions, new doctrine and, perhaps, expansive Soviet foreign policy: this is what we mean by the growth of the Soviet Navy.

Limits and Constraints? But there is another side to this story, for there are limits and weaknesses as well as areas of growth in Soviet naval capability. The most obvious limit on Soviet naval

power is geographical.³⁷ Geography constrains the Soviet Navy in several different ways. The vastness of the U.S.S.R. makes it difficult to implement an integrated and efficient naval supply system. The Soviet Union is required by geography to maintain four separate fleets that must be configured to operate independently; reinforcement between fleets is difficult. The northerly location of the U.S.S.R. means that it has a problem of climate, in particular in connection with the maintenance of ice-free ports; only one (at Murmansk) exists among their major bases in the Pacific, Baltic, and Barents Seas. Its northerly position also means that its navy must travel long distances to approach major oceans and shipping lanes. The Soviet Northern Fleet, for example, is based at least 2,500 miles from the main sea lines of communication between the United States and Europe. Finally, the Soviet Navy has a problem of access to the oceans because all of its egress routes are interdictable. This makes Soviet naval operations easier to monitor and easier to disrupt than is the case for the American Navy. The sum of these geographical problems constitutes a significant handicap for the Soviet Navy. As one observer has written, "a naval fleet and the national geography from which it must project its naval power are two parts of an inseparable system. Like the Germans [in the World Wars], the Soviets can have a great navy, but not necessarily be a great naval power."³⁸

A second limit on the Soviet Navy is its inadequate logistics capability. Because of its geographic problems, its supply lines are vulnerable. It, unlike the U.S. Navy, has not developed a capability for underway replenishment. Compared to the United States, the U.S.S.R. invests relatively little in its naval logistics capability (see figure 2). As a result, Soviet naval forces are extremely limited in endurance and are hampered by the fact that "[M]ost

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Soviet replenishment operations are conducted with small craft, at slow speeds, in protected anchorages, and in fair weather." In short, "the logistics capability of the Soviet Navy must be considered its weakest link . . . In no way can the Soviets deploy and sustain a fleet for long periods of time."³⁹

Of course, the establishment of overseas bases could help to compensate for logistic difficulties.⁴⁰ But try as it might, Soviet diplomacy has largely failed to obtain for the Soviet Navy anything like the still extensive—though diminished—network of American bases. To be sure, there have been a few, mostly minor, sometimes short-lived, successes but the Soviet Navy does not have access to such facilities as the full-service U.S. bases at Subic Bay in the Philippines or Rota, Spain. Indeed, it has few enough small overseas bases, and is forced to rely extensively on anchorages.

The extent to which the effectiveness of the Soviet Navy is enhanced or degraded by access or loss of access to overseas basing facilities is illustrated by the fate of the Soviet squadron in the Mediterranean. When the U.S.S.R. obtained bases in Egypt, the capability of that squadron was considerably augmented. When President Sadat deprived the U.S.S.R. of those bases, the Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean suffered.⁴¹

No doubt Soviet diplomacy will continue to seek overseas bases for the Soviet Navy, and no doubt there will be future successes (and setbacks), but overall it seems highly unlikely that the U.S.S.R. will be able to establish a chain of significant bases in the foreseeable future. Moreover, the fact that Soviet foreign policy must be attuned to the needs of the Soviet Navy draws attention to the fact that the Soviet Navy can be a determinant as well as an instrument of Soviet foreign policy. As Ken Booth has said in connection with the Soviet involvement in the Mediter-

anean, "To a degree, the naval tail has wagged the foreign policy dog for the Soviet Union . . ."⁴² This leads to the further observation that in its new role the Soviet Navy can be a burden as well as an asset, for there can be political (and economic) costs of overseas deployment. (And the political costs are not only associated with the need for bases, but also from the simple demands of involvement. Curt Gasteyger has written that "A stronger and wider presence brings with it not only advantages but, sooner or later, new responsibilities and unforeseen or unwelcome burdens for the power involved. The Soviet Union will be as unable to escape this as any previous imperial power.")⁴³ Thus the Soviet Union has an obvious interest in (and need for) overseas bases, and because it has thus far had only limited success in obtaining them, its naval power is constrained.

Another weakness, indicated by the Soviet inability to develop sufficient supply and basing networks, has been the pace of change. The Soviet Navy has come to its global pretensions rather quickly and has in some respects outrun the ability of the U.S.S.R. to accommodate its changed orientation. This is clearly the case in the areas of logistics and overseas basing. But a particular problem in this regard is that dramatic increases in the operations of the Soviet Navy have been accompanied by only incremental changes in its naval force posture. This has led to a situation in which the Soviet Navy has been "severely overstretched" operationally.⁴⁴ As a result, overseas deployments are overly long, smaller vessels are sent out on the high seas, ships are used for unintended purposes, etc. The rapid "growth" of the Soviet Navy has stretched it thin.

One way to rectify this problem is to accelerate shipbuilding in response to the new demands placed on the Soviet Navy. This the U.S.S.R. has failed to do. Rather, constant resource allocation has

been a hallmark of the Soviet naval program. Over the long run, of course, this can lead to significant cumulative increases in naval forces. But in the near term, it makes it difficult to respond flexibly to a more demanding mission structure, particularly as ships now coming into service are the product of designs and decisions of as much as a decade in the past. Moreover, Soviet shipbuilding capacity is not unlimited, and its shipbuilding program has not left a lot of slack. Therefore accelerating shipbuilding would first require purchasing new shipbuilding facilities. MccGwire has argued that to meet the requirements of the Navy Admiral Gorshkov would like to have (and feels he needs) "would entail a substantial increase in naval surface shipbuilding capacity."⁴⁵ This has not occurred, and therefore the Soviet Navy works within the framework of "long-term physical constraints."⁴⁶ This is another limit on Soviet naval power.

That the Soviet Navy has, for the most part, failed in its effort to obtain a larger allocation of resources suggests its internal political weakness. It inevitably competes for resources with the other branches of the Soviet armed services, two branches of which—the Army and the Strategic Rocket Forces—have been more favored by the Soviet leadership than the Soviet Navy. The navy is not directly represented on the highest defense decisionmaking bodies, the Politburo and the Defense Council, and "[T]here is good evidence that the Defense Ministry and the General Staff have at times exerted more influence than the Navy on naval policy decisions."⁴⁷ A common interpretation of Gorshkov's "Navies in War and Peace" series is that he was seeking to defend the Soviet Navy's interests from internal attack by illustrating in great detail the importance and usefulness of the navy. There is little doubt that in the early 1970s a debate occurred over whether the Soviet Navy is really a cost-effective

instrument of Soviet foreign policy, and Gorshkov's articles appear to be a public salvo aimed at providing a rationale for a stronger navy. What weakens the navy's position in this internal fight is that the U.S.S.R. reaps the political gains of forward deployment at present levels of resource allocation while acquiring the capability to pose a credible military threat in, say, the Indian Ocean, would cost a lot more money. Thus far it appears that the navy has lost its battle for more resources (while avoiding cuts). As a bureaucratic actor, the Soviet Navy has its problems.

In addition to these broad constraints on Soviet naval power, there are some specific operational "flaws" in the Soviet naval posture that limit its military capability. The most important of these is the almost complete lack of sea-based airpower. The Soviets have attempted to compensate for this problem by improving land-based naval aviation (e.g., *Backfire*), emphasizing cruise missiles for some air missions, and by building the *Kiev*-class V/STOL carriers. None of this really compensates for the lack of true attack carriers with aircraft as capable as the American F-14. (V/STOL carriers are an improvement over no fleet air, but large penalties in aircraft performance are paid in order to achieve the V/STOL capability.) What this means is that Soviet naval capability is highly sensitive to the availability of land-based airpower. Even with *Backfire*, this would represent a sizable constraint in any naval engagement.

A second operational limit on the Soviet Navy is that it is configured primarily for antisubmarine warfare. As a result, it does not possess a powerful power projection capability. A related point is that, partly as a result of its ASW orientation, the Soviet Navy heavily emphasizes submarines, which are quite useful for that purpose but less useful in the "presence" or "crisis management" mode.

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A final point that deserves mention is that the relative strength of the Soviet Navy is diminished by the fact that American allies are not insignificant naval powers, whereas the Soviet Union's allies have quite minor navies.

In sum, while the Soviet Navy has shown impressive growth in several areas, it is limited by problems in others. Geography inhibits Soviet naval power, logistic and basing inadequacies limit its endurance and effective reach, its overall effectiveness has been diminished by a pace of change that has overtaxed its naval force posture, its ASW configuration and lack of major seaborne airpower limit its military potency, while its relatively weak bureaucratic position and relatively fixed shipbuilding capacity prevent it from moving to reduce as much as it would like those of its weaknesses which can be remedied.

Conclusion. Given our propensity to disagree among ourselves about the magnitude of Soviet military power, the difficulty of evaluating naval power, and this mixed picture of Soviet naval strengths and weaknesses, it is inevitable that there would be a broad range of views about the nature of the Soviet naval challenge. In seeking some reasonable general conclusion about Soviet naval capability we will find no clear answer in Western opinion, for there is no consensus on this issue.

At one extreme are those who feel that the United States has already been surpassed as a naval power by the Soviet Union. "Everybody knows by now," it was reported recently in *The New Republic*, "that it is not we but the Russians who rule the seas, the relevant seas at least."⁴⁸ Whatever that comment may mean, it is representative of the not infrequently expressed general impression that the United States is lagging behind in the naval race. Thus Senator Jake Garn at last year's hearings on the defense budget: "I don't think

there is anybody who doubts—even school age children know—that our Navy is dropping behind versus the Soviet Union's; it is rather general knowledge."⁴⁹ Thus Rear Adm. Ernest Eller who wrote in 1973 that Soviet advances in naval capability "make the U.S.S.R. the number one sea power in the world."⁵⁰

A variation on this "alarmist" theme is advanced by those who argue that while the present naval balance is satisfactory to safeguard U.S. interests, the trends are against us and therefore the future bodes ill for the American Navy unless remedial action is taken. This attitude is reflected in the 1971 comment by then Chief of Naval Operations Elmo Zumwalt: "If the U.S. continues to reduce and the Soviet Union continues to increase, it's got to be inevitable that the day will come when the result will go against the U.S."⁵¹ In this analysis the answer is, of course, for the United States to buy more naval capability in order to reverse the unpleasant trends.

This perception of the Soviet-American naval balance is not so far from that which is in evidence in official U.S. Navy thought. The United States, so the argument goes, maintains a "slim margin of superiority" in the naval balance, but has lost its "margin of confidence." In order to ensure that we

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



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can be confident of the adequacy of our Navy in the future we should spend more money on it.⁵²

On the other side are those who are less worried about the Soviet Navy. Ken Booth, for example, describes the Soviet Navy as "an irritation rather than a deterrent," and concludes that "the Soviet Navy need not hinder [U.S.] intervention."⁵³ Similarly, McCwire argues that while the expanded presence of the Soviet Navy has complicated U.S. naval policy, there is not "much evidence that it has inhibited the use of naval forces by the United States."⁵⁴ How one falls in this range of views depends on how one weights and ranks the gains and weaknesses of the Soviet Navy. Those who emphasize the gains are concerned about the severity of the naval threat they see; those who feel the limits outweigh the gains are more sanguine about the challenge posed by the Soviet Navy.

This is a difficult debate to disentangle because there are facts that fit both interpretations of Soviet naval might. On balance, it seems fair to say that as a *military* threat the Soviet Navy is an uneven opponent. In those regions—the Northern Seas, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Northwest Pacific—in which the Soviets have a large concentration of forces and the support of land-based naval aviation, the Soviet Navy is a highly potent force; those are "high-risk" areas of operation for the U.S. Navy. On the other hand, in many other areas—the South Pacific, the Indian Ocean, the South Atlantic—the military potential of the Soviet Navy is marginal or insignificant.

As for Soviet naval capabilities, they too are uneven. Certain capabilities—in particular the *Backfire* aircraft and the nuclear submarines—represent a serious military threat and are quite worrisome. But others—the surface fleet, the ASW capability—seem much less of a challenge. As Vice Adm. G.E. Miller has written, the Soviet surface-ship threat

"warrants attention and respect, but it can be defeated rather easily under most conditions."⁵⁵

The sum of the total military threat posed by the Soviet Navy is, on the whole, substantially less impressive than the most impressive of its parts. The military power of the Soviet Navy is diminished by its large functional and regional areas of weakness.

It is, if possible, even more difficult to assess the Soviet Navy as a *political* threat. The "presence" of the Soviet Navy in forward deployment areas has perhaps brought the U.S.S.R. some political advantage, though to what degree and to what good is difficult to measure. No doubt forward deployment has reinforced the perception of the U.S.S.R. as a superpower. There was probably advantage to the U.S.S.R. in offsetting (in a political sense) the forward deployment of the U.S. Navy.

In terms of crisis management, the expansion of the Soviet Navy has certainly altered the political calculation of the risk of U.S. intervention, while at the same time providing some (limited) capability for Soviet intervention. However, the military weakness of the Soviet Navy in most forward deployment areas reduces its political value. Moreover, naval power itself has limits as a political instrument. McCwire has written that "[S]uccessful intervention overseas now requires a favourable balance of political forces in the host country, as well as sufficient weight of sustained involvement."⁵⁶ Navies cannot guarantee the former condition, and are not the best means of ensuring the latter.

It is sometimes argued that the Soviet Navy is more a political than a military threat. There are two observations that should be made about that possibility. First, there is nothing short of war or arms control (equally bad in some views; equally unlikely in any case) that the United States could have done to deny the U.S.S.R. the political gains that have accrued as a result of the

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expanded presence of the Soviet Navy. Second, to the extent that the Soviet naval threat is primarily political, it is susceptible to being countered by political and economic as well as military means.

NOTES

1. A recent Brookings study reports that naval units participated in 80 percent of the more than 200 instances in which the United States employed force for political purposes, and concludes that "the Navy clearly has been the foremost instrument for the United States political uses of the armed forces: at all times, in all places, and regardless of the specifics of the situation." Barry Blechman and Stephen Kaplan, *Force Without War: U.S. Armed Forces as a Political Instrument* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1978), pp. 38-39.
2. For example, see Barry Blechman, *The Control of Naval Armaments* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1975), for discussion on the dangers of Soviet-American confrontation at sea.
3. "Where the Russian Threat Keeps Growing," *U.S. News & World Report*, 13 September 1971, p. 73.
4. Quoted in Michael Klare, "Superpower Rivalry at Sea," *Foreign Policy*, Winter 1975-1976, p. 86.
5. From excerpts in S.G. Gorshkov, "The Sea Power of the State," *Survival*, January/February 1977, p. 29.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 27. See also, Gary Charbonneau, "The Soviet Navy and Forward Deployment," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, March 1979, pp. 38-39.
7. Vice Admiral N.I. Smirnov, "Soviet Navy in the Mediterranean," *Survival*, February 1969, p. 66.
8. While the question of whether the Soviet Navy is presently capable of—or even seeking to achieve—power projection is arguable; however, it is certainly high on the list of concerns of those most alarmed by the growth in Soviet naval power.
9. "Red Flag," *The Economist*, 17 June 1978, pp. 89-90.
10. On the economics of the Soviet merchant marine, see Philip Hanson, "The Soviet Merchant Marine," *Survival*, May 1970, pp. 169-172; and Richard Ackerly, "The Soviet Merchant Fleet," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, February 1976, pp. 27-37.
11. Richard Ackerly, "The Fishing Fleet and Soviet Strategy," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, July 1975, p. 31.
12. Gorshkov, pp. 24, 25.
13. For a fuller discussion of this problem, see Stansfield Turner, "The Naval Balance: Not Just a Numbers Game," *Foreign Affairs*, January 1977, pp. 339-354. Also, "The East-West Balance at Sea," in *The Military Balance, 1978-1979* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1978), pp. 114-118 and David Kassing, "General Purpose Forces: Navy and Marine Corps," in Francis Hoerber and William Schneider, Jr., eds., *Arms, Men, and Military Budgets: Issues for Fiscal Year 1978* (New York: Crane, Russak, 1977), pp. 75-78.
14. See *The Military Balance* for the appropriate years. According to former Secretary of the Navy J. William Middendorf II, the Navy peaked during the Vietnam years in June 1968 at 976 ships. See his "American Maritime Strategy and Soviet Naval Expansion," *Strategic Review*, Winter 1976.
15. Middendorf.
16. *Ibid.*, Editors introduction.
17. Donald Rumsfeld, *Annual Defense Department Report, FY 1978* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1977), p. 2 (emphasis added). For Rumsfeld's earlier, quite bleak assessment of the naval balance, see the *Annual Defense Department Report FY 1977* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1976), in which he argues that "because of a shortage of surface combatants, [the Pacific fleet] would have difficulty in protecting our lines of communication into the Western Pacific." p. v (emphasis added).
18. The figures are from *The Military Balance, 1964-1965 and 1976-1977*.
19. See George Wilson, "U.S. Navy Gains, Soviet Slips, Hill Told," *Washington Post*, 24 February 1978.
20. For similar charts comparing NATO and the Warsaw Pact, see Harold Brown, *Annual Defense Department Report, FY 1980* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1979), p. 91.
21. For more detail, see the work of Michael MccGwire, most recently "Western and Soviet Naval Building Programmes 1965-1976," *Survival*, September/October 1976, pp. 204-209. For earlier analyses, consult MccGwire's contributions to the three encyclopedic volumes on the Published by U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons, 1979

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22. Cora Bell, "Strategic Problems of the Atlantic," *Survival*, March 1970, p. 100.

23. U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services, *FY 1979 Defense Budget, Hearing* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1978), pt. 5, p. 4272.

24. Michael McCWire, "Soviet Naval Programmes," *Survival*, September/October 1973, p. 226.

25. See John Lawton, "Aircraft Carrier Joins Soviet Fleet," *Washington Post*, 19 July 1976. The second Kiev-class ship (the Minsk) has only recently entered the fleet. See "Soviet Carrier Leaves Black Sea," *The New York Times*, 26 February 1979. A third carrier is under construction.

26. Michael Klare, "Superpower Rivalry at Sea," *Foreign Policy*, Winter 1975-1976, p. 88. For a listing of classes of major Soviet naval surface combatants (including year first in service) see *The Military Balance, 1975-1976*, p. 82; for Soviet attack submarines see *The Military Balance, 1976-1977*, p. 84; for Soviet ballistic missile submarines, see John Moore, *The Soviet Navy Today* (New York: Stein and Day, 1975), pp. 73-78.

27. See William O'Neil, "Backfire: Long Shadow on the Sea Lanes," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, March 1977. For background on Soviet naval aviation, see Peter Rasmussen, "The Soviet Naval Air Force: Development, Organization, and Capabilities," *International Defense Review*, May 1978.

28. John Moore quoted in Michael Krepon, "A Navy to Match National Purposes," *Foreign Affairs*, January 1977, p. 360. For a brief discussion of advances in naval technology, see "New Naval Weapons Technologies," in *Strategic Survey 1975*, pp. 21-26.

29. For a survey of the Soviet Navy's regional activities, see Robert Kilmarx, *Soviet-United States Naval Balance* (Washington: Georgetown University, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1 April 1975).

30. See Donald Daniel, "Trends and Patterns in Major Soviet Naval Exercises," *Naval War College Review*, Spring 1978, pp. 34-41.

31. See Part VII of McCWire and McDonnell, eds., and especially Bradford Dismukes, "Soviet Employment of Naval Power for Political Purposes, 1967-1975," pp. 438-509.

32. See R. Weinland, et al., "Admiral Gorshkov's 'Navies in War and Peace,'" *Survival*, March/April 1975, p. 56.

33. Robert Weinland, "The Changing Mission of the Soviet Navy," *Survival*, May/June 1972, pp. 129-130; see also M. McCWire, "The Evolution of Soviet Naval Policy: 1960-1974," in McCWire, et al., especially pp. 522-531.

34. Weinland, "The Changing Mission of the Soviet Navy."

35. Donald Rumsfeld, "Which Five-Year Shipbuilding Program?" U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, February 1977, p. 21.

36. U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services, *FY1976 Defense Budget, Hearing* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1975), pt. 3, p. 3004.

37. The discussion that follows relies upon Clyde Smith, "Constraints of Naval Geography on Soviet Naval Power," *Naval War College Review*, September/October 1974, pp. 46-57.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

39. G.E. Miller, "An Evaluation of the Soviet Navy," in Grayson Kirk and Nils Wessell, eds., *The Soviet Threat: Myths and Realities* (New York: Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science, 1978), pp. 52, 53.

40. See Barry Blechman and Robert Weinland, "Why Coaling Stations Are Necessary in the Nuclear Age," *International Security*, Summer 1977, pp. 88-99.

41. See Robert Weinland, "Land Support for Naval Forces: Egypt and the Soviet Escadra 1962-1976," *Survival*, March/April 1978.

42. Ken Booth, "U.S. Naval Strategy: Problems of Survivability, Usability, and Credibility," *Naval War College Review*, Summer 1978, p. 21.

43. Curt Gasteyger, "World Politics on the Seven Seas," *Survival*, March 1970, p. 97.

44. The phrase is Michael McCWire's, from a description of the Soviet Navy in the 1968-1971 period, in "The Evolution of Soviet Naval Policy: 1960-1974," *Soviet Naval Policy*, pp. 530-531.

45. McCWire, "Soviet Naval Programmes," p. 226.

46. See McCWire's "Western and Soviet Naval Building Programmes 1965-1976," *Survival*, September/October 1976, p. 205.

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47. James Barry, Jr., "Soviet Naval Policy: The Institutional Setting," in *Soviet Naval Influence*, p. 112.
48. *The New Republic*, 3 February 1979, p. 42.
49. *Hearings on FY 1979*, pt. 5, p. 4197.
50. Quoted in Klare, p. 86.
51. Elmo Zumwalt interview in "Where the Russian Threat Keeps Growing," *U.S. News & World Report*, 13 September 1971, p. 72.
52. See Chief of Naval Operations Holloway's testimony in *Hearings on FY 1979*, pt. 5, pp. 4206-4210.
53. Booth, p. 19.
54. Michael MccGwire, "Maritime Strategy and the Superpowers," in *Power at Sea II: Superpowers and Navies*, Adelphi paper, no. 123 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1976), p. 18.
55. Miller, p. 50.
56. MccGwire in *Power at Sea*, p. 17.

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