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Navies are more than the objective projection of a nation's maritime defense needs, they are also culturally determined expressions of how the nation sees itself. For example, the U.S. Navy persists in the image of our World War II victories with the two-ocean navy, the aircraft carrier, and control of the seas concept. The ritualistic Norwegian Sea exercise is the very embodiment of this image, an image long since countered by the reality of a powerful Soviet counterforce that looks not to the past but to the future.

THE LEMMING COMPLEX: RITUAL DEATH IN THE NORWEGIAN SEA

by

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The recent series of articles on the Soviet Navy by Admiral Gorshkov and the Four Missions Concept inspired by Admiral Zumwalt give us two different ways of looking at a navy. Our conceit that strategic concepts and perceptions of vulnerability are shaped by rational analysis is shocked into the recognition that navies are also an expression of cultural intuitions. The arguments for naval power by Admirals Gorshkov and Zumwalt provide a persuasive reminder that there is no longer a clear strategy of seapower.

Behind each of their arguments is the assumption of a nearly inexhaustible wealth and inventiveness, time for development, and a distinct vagueness about the nature of future wars at sea. Although based on a belief in cause-effect analysis, their arguments spring from different philosophical systems:

the Soviet being largely deductive, ideological, and not narrowly jealous about its self-interest; while the United States proceeds in a way that is inductive, pragmatic, endlessly self-confident, and driven by the demands of a "can-do" response. In each, Mahan and Clausewitz are only faint echoes. The colonial trade essential to by Mahan is absent in the one and only a halfhearted target of the other. Clearly the game proceeds by other rules.

The old rhetoric persists, however. One is struck by the fact that Gorshkov did not need Marx to bridge the gap between the navies of Czarist and Soviet Russia and that Zumwalt's navy cannot abandon Mahan's "control of the seas" --now nostalgically called "sea control." While both navies intend to serve state interests, Gorshkov deduces those directly from the dynamics of history

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while our Navy derives its goals from a kind of national motto, perhaps the ideology of pragmatism, to be prepared.

Deterrence is a truth we take to be obvious. Our other missions lead us back to rationalizations, cultural myths, and the Second World War. Admiral Gorshkov, in this respect, has the clear advantage. He is serving the future and the proletarian revolution. Wherever and whenever the workers—so long as they qualify ideologically—are in ferment, the Soviet Union has a mission, *détente* or no *détente*. Whatever else the navy may do, it is now the instrument and symbol of the triumphant proletariat in a formerly backward (the backwardness being exaggerated for comparison and contrast) imperial power. These are the givens. They cannot change. Rivalry and hostility are facts of our coexistence.

The navy is a message. With Lenin's inspiration, peasants can leave the fields and man a powerful force far at sea. It gives proof of alternatives formerly absent. It symbolizes an umbrella keeping the imperialists in check while small nations work their will. It supports the Leninist thesis, never abandoned and now obviously and successfully pursued, of attacking imperialism at its weakest link—the source of its formerly colonial raw materials—through political, economic, or military means.

In a country with overland routes to three continents and the world's major population centers, Soviet Russia does not need to waste its intellectual powers arguing about offense or defense. Defense of the homeland or defense of some workers' revolution is a valid and honorable mission not to be discounted and not beneath anyone's honor. (It can become offense: the Russo-Finnish War, dominance of Eastern Europe, support for Egypt.) That high calling puts service interests in perspective. The army and the air force can help the navy and be helped. They may be supported without jeopardizing the budget. The ends are kept in sight and the means

balanced accordingly.

For our Navy the problems of definition are greater. The truths we held to be self-evident do not seem to be so evident any longer. We are not so confident of the wisdom of exporting democracy or of our right to the raw materials from beyond the seas. Deprived of the driving force for containment, the Navy must grope for a new strategy. In any case, if we would not argue with a relatively powerless Sheik of Kuwait when he refused to send us oil, why would we risk the world to prove our preeminence in controlling the waterways we might not use? Political colonialism is clearly dead and with it died the imperial dream of ruling the waves.

On the other hand, Marxism gave the decaying Russian messianic dream—to maintain and spread the Orthodox truth while guarding its power base at the Czarist center—new life and new form. Military power could maintain a continuity. Czarist or Marxist, the Russian vision was one of purity in the face of a corrupt and egotistical West, and its Moscow base had to be inviolate.

What Lenin contributed was the strategy of proceeding by many means, once power was secured. He understood that a subverted labor union could have the firepower of a battleship. It was for this reason that the Soviets made the world so aware of the role of international capitalism. That was their real enemy, the one they always engaged. Overseas the navy could play the role of a catalyst. Like good chess players, if the Soviets moved a pawn, they assumed the opposition was aware of the protection of the rook. That, of course, is what Gorshkov's articles are so clearly saying: a navy is a part of the total game and the total game, we know from Marx, is primarily economic.

The problem for the U.S. Navy is to understand the play. Its danger is that it will repeat the past, the great cliché of military history. That Gorshkov has

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fought the battle is evident in his article:

It should be noted that the retrospective method prevailing among naval powers for determining the character and form of employment of navies in a future war without taking into account proposed changes in the development of science, technology, and production, and also the appearance of new forms of weaponry, often did not permit the bourgeois theoreticians to foresee the development of naval forces. And only after another military clash was the entire falseness of this method objectively revealed.*

In writing that, Admiral Gorshkov must have satisfied himself that the Soviet Navy had not fallen prey to the danger of "the retrospective method." Nevertheless, no faith in logic or pure reason has insured the gift of clear vision to any nation or any man. We cannot escape understanding the world in terms of our own cultures and national visions. For the Soviet Russian, it is a belief in mass, a distrust of each other, both fear and fascination with foreigners, and an allegiance to an overall vision which tends to blot out individual differences and subtleties. These traits translate themselves into strategic decisions, allocations of funds, limitations on missions, and tactics.

What about ourselves? Our strategic concepts were based on unlimited resources, the ability to recover from any injury due to error, a belief in the goodness of rapidity of change, and faith that the passage of time brings progress. Perhaps because we were immigrants, we did not want to look back, only forward; we tended to ignore history and with it tradition. In getting used to counting something where there

had been nothing, we took statistics to be a measure of our advance.

The cliché of our leadership is to reorganize, and it is standard to denigrate one's predecessor by saying that he maintained tradition. Counting, a tool of thought, keeps popping up as a substitute for thought under the current fashionable guise of some new analytic approach. The most meaningless and persistent question about Soviet-American relations is to ask "Who's ahead?"

All of that, perhaps, was tolerable under a condition of unlimited and ever-expanding wealth, but the frontier is gone. We cannot afford to counter every capability. When you don't have enough, you have to assign probabilities to intentions. The Soviet Navy is moving in the opposite direction. With its expanding building program and unlimited resources, it is entering the period of its abundance. Its problem is to adjust to luxury (ours to adjust to scarcity), to survive its own institutionalization, to guard against decadence, to remember that it is not a thing-in-itself. It is entering a period our Navy is leaving when there will be no clear guidelines. It will be in danger, as we are, of the retrospective method.

What mechanism exists in our Navy that insures self-criticism, that guarantees that we are not refighting the last war? Our scientific standards of investigation, our rational approaches, and our pragmatic decisions do not always lead us to pure reason. Take one example. In spite of our professed use of advanced management techniques and operational analysis as guidelines, the battleship died an agonizingly slow death. At the same time, the nuclear submarine had an equally painful birth. Was that in part due to an American penchant for that which is large and visible rather than something small and obscure? One could dismiss such a notion if it were not for the 15-year American non-response to the Styx missile or, in fact,

*Hero and Admiral of the Soviet Union, Sergei Gorshkov, "Navies in War and in Peace," *Marine Review*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1972.

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to the whole revolutionary change in naval warfare introduced by the surface-to-surface missiles. There is other evidence. Operators come to grips only reluctantly with the demands of electronic warfare and the uses of deception. What is little, invisible, or perhaps only theoretical is emotionally unimpressive. Perhaps an aircraft carrier or bomber squadron more easily fits our romantic self-image.

The problems institutional organizations have in understanding themselves are not new. Highly centralized bureaucracies (certainly military organizations are that) have historically had difficulty accommodating innovation or self-criticism. The military has fiercely resisted roles, definitions, or weapons that threatened the primacy of its institutional elites. Airpower had to have its Billy Mitchell; nuclear submarines their Hyman Rickover. Ours was one of the last major nations to recognize airpower as an independent service. We still have not so honored the missile as the Soviets have in their Strategic Rocket Forces.

Normally, the role of self-criticism would be in the hands of our naval strategists and tacticians. But who are the Navy's strategists? In fact, who are the Navy's tacticians? A bibliography of naval strategy, extremely short in any case, would probably not include a single active duty naval officer. A bibliography of naval tacticians would be confined primarily to civilian contractors and civilian specialists. The Navy appears to have abdicated its intellectual responsibility. We must search for evidence that the Navy is willing to question its preconceptions.

Since those who lead the Navy are quite logically operators promoted for efficiency in the management of what they know, it is unreasonable to demand that they be vastly innovative. Their training is to improve, not create. As for the civilians, since it is the primary goal of a successful contractor to satisfy his Navy employer, it is

idealistic to expect the contractors to ask questions which they are not sure they can answer or to press forward into uncertain, and thus unprofitable, territory. The result of both of these conditions quite naturally tends toward a refinement in and a repetition of the known.

The Navy's semiannual Norwegian Sea exercise tends to confirm conditions which these assumptions suggest. The Navy has a serious and important NATO commitment which is traditionally recognized by a scenario in which our carrier task force crosses the Atlantic into the Norwegian Sea.

The script emphasizes our chief victories, with modern refinements, from the end of the last war: a carrier strike force to soften up the shore, a safe convoy of ships protected by antisubmarine tactics, and finally, an amphibious landing.

The lack of opposition at the end of the Second World War was initially assumed as part of the script. However, in the fifties the Soviet submarine force began to be threateningly large. Perhaps because it was invisible and did not operate in any great quantity in the Atlantic, it was ignored. Then, the Soviets developed surface-to-surface missiles, air-to-surface missiles, atomic powered submarines, long-range naval bombers, accurate means of detection, and finally, a very large and threatening surface fleet. But the exercise remained essentially unchanged.

In the intensive improvement of the details, the objective was slighted. It became theoretically impossible to get anything ashore because the ports would be knocked out by missiles; then it became improbable that one could get slow-moving ships through waters infested with so many submarines; finally, with air-to-surface missiles at great standoff ranges and modern means of detection, it became unlikely that the aircraft carriers could survive in a hostile environment in the Norwegian Sea. Al-

though this exercise might be valid with respect to another country and another war, it could not be valid with respect to the Soviet Union.

For the Navy, the exercise concentrated on improvements in weapons, tactics, and command and control. However, the Army began to doubt that sufficient supplies could be delivered with the necessary speed to meet modern military conditions and searched for alternatives, primarily in air cargoes. The capacity of the merchant marine deteriorated to such an extent that there was a question of whether even another Vietnam could be supported. Finally, there was nothing to convoy, nothing to take it in, and no way to get there. The exercise, however, continues; twice a year, in fact, and theoretically many times a year in war gaming and on paper. What had happened was that the exercise had become a thing-in-itself. The goal, putting something ashore, was lost sight of. But the strategic concept did not change; tactics continued with little modification; a minimal opposition was assumed to increase the probability of success. There was little correspondence with reality in a navy that considered itself rational, pragmatic, and subject to systematic analysis.

It would seem useful to inquire into the psychology of an institution which expends enormous energy and talent in support of a task which ends in repeated disaster. What can account for a failure to search for alternatives? Who do we think is fooled? In the Norwegian Sea we demonstrate our solidarity with the Norwegians, our dedication to NATO, our mastery of the tactics of the Second World War, and our indifference to the loss of our fleet and the death of our crews. It can only be referred to as a ritual act, almost entirely symbolic.

Oddly enough, the Norwegian Sea exercise is only meaningless with respect to the Soviet Navy. With lesser navies or in less contested waters, it could be

valid. Was it a kind of schizophrenia that on the strategic level all of our thoughts were focused on the "Soviet menace" while on the tactical level we ignored Soviet technical developments? Was this the result of our long years of leadership in maritime affairs? Did we ignore others because it was assumed that if it was important, we must be doing it? Certainly the popular wisdom was that the Soviet Navy, in attempting to develop an open ocean capability, was imitating ours, although nothing could have been further from the truth. What did happen was that when the Soviet Navy appeared in the Mediterranean, our options became very much reduced. The American monopoly on intervention was gone and the navies became counters to each other and, to a degree, neutralized. Our two nations had to begin achieving their strategic goals through other instruments, primarily economic and political. The competition had become more complex, fluid, and dynamic.

It would, perhaps, be valuable to formulate some propositions useful in measuring the state of our military art, our innovative capacities, and in penetrating our national illusions. Apparently, successes in a past war tend to be repeated long after their continued application should have been seriously questioned. How could we protect a convoy of slow-moving, gigantic tankers facing serious opposition from modern weapons? Does a convoy make sense in a conflict with the Soviet Union, and if the conflict is not with the Soviet Union, what other navy could or would pose any serious opposition anyhow?

Second, there is a tendency to overreact to serious threats from a previous war. The Soviets, for example, who bore the brunt of the Nazi armored blitzkrieg, have built, exercised, and perfected the tank far in excess of any conceivable requirement. Who could possibly be the enemy in Europe to justify such massive armaments? In the

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same way, the French reacted to the War of 1870 by having large numbers of infantry and cavalry ready to charge machineguns and barbed wire at the beginning of World War I. That failed and so they responded, again one war late, with that eternal trench, the Maginot Line.* That is the "retrospective method."

Third, military organizations seem to resist the introduction of radical new weapons that would cause a basic change in the force structure. They like constant small reorganizations which give an impression of dynamic movement while resisting large, presumably meaningful, ones. For the Navy, the best example is the opposition to the nuclear submarine. The Navy's emotional attachment to the aircraft carrier is a matter of record. In fact, when it became unavoidable to admit that the aircraft carrier was vulnerable to Soviet missile attacks, characteristic gambit was to refer to it as "a high value target," making it less noticeable in a verbal smokescreen. For the Air Force, of course, it was the bomber and the bomb.

How radical change comes about in the military, when it does, is indicative of the institution's dynamics. In America, it has usually been not through the military but through civilian initiative. Civilians certainly dominate strategy and appear to dominate the introduction of new weapons. The Senate supported Rickover, not the admirals. What is even more surprising is that civilians, in their "think tanks," also seem to dominate tactical development.

*Strangely enough and contrary to evidence, the U.S. Navy has not reacted to the surprise of Pearl Harbor as would be expected by dispersing the fleets. On the contrary, they are being reconcentrated into compact targets. Nor have we been very impressed with the tactics of deception in warfare. Even the *Graf Spee* had a false turret; the Egyptians built dummy MIG's and SAM's.

Strangely enough, only after deterrence has probably become assured, at least to have become so technical and political as to have begun to outgrow its military context, have we begun discovering that the Soviet Navy may have different objectives and missions and may not be an imitation of ours. In the meantime, because of an institutional blindness, perhaps, some of the problems that insure a navy's continuing viability have received scant attention. Is it because too radical a reorganization would be required or because anything less than control of the seas is a threat to our self-image that we prefer not to focus on current issues? The problems are, of course, those of police action and naval operations related to small nations. In view of a stalemate between the Soviet Union and the United States, how are small states to be protected with respect to each other and foreign sponsors? With diminishing resources and increasing antagonisms, who will police the seas and with what? Are F-4's reasonable instruments to use against fishing boats, and do we threaten trawlers with hundred thousand dollar missiles? If a ship is a symbol useful for the presence role, how much of a ship do you need? What are the psychological factors in presence? The questions go unanswered.

The Soviet Navy's apparently easy accommodation of new weapons and ideas was, in part, the result of the absence of traditional forces and experienced officers. It was also a function of having a positive strategy and the tradition of modernizing by adopting new weapons designed abroad. Professional cadres were lost both through the purges of the thirties and during the war, therefore, there was little opportunity for an institutional memory. However, once the navy has entered the Indian Ocean in strength and the political turbulence that this act inspires has subsided, it will face the same kind of problems we face. What justifies such an

enormous navy so far from home? What is an appropriate scenario? What missions compensate for such a massive outlay of the wealth of the proletariat and for so much peasant misery? The answer will not be found in Mahan, although it may be found in Marx. Surely, sheer quantity of firepower and sophistication of weapons have put the United States and the Soviet Union on a qualitative level different from that of other, smaller navies. For the two super-powers the rules are different.

Admiral Gorshkov wrote, "... the relative strength of naval forces cannot be measured in numbers of combatants or their total displacements, just as one cannot measure their combat might by the weight of the gun projectile salvoes or by the quantity of torpedoes or missiles being launched." How then do we measure them? Certainly not, as Gorshkov answers, by "solving a system of multi-critical problems for various variants of the situation and different combinations of heterogeneous forces and means." (Admiral Gorshkov, it appears, has his systems analysts.) Relative strength must be determined by relative power. A navy cannot be understood except as a part of something else. With respect to the Soviet Union, our Navy must be evaluated in a way which is quite different from the evaluation of our Navy with respect to Chile.

We tend to think about maritime power largely as Mahan defined it. The basis for his thought was the defense of a world which has now been mortally wounded. The concept of colonial powers maintaining their trade on routes which they control is no longer a meaningful strategic goal for anyone. This was precisely the world that Lenin attacked. Our Navy's strategic evolution, from the Second World War, was first to support a policy of containment and then one of sea control. The basic philosophy of sea control, however, has not been reexamined although the props have been knocked out from under it.

Witness the *Pueblo* incident, the actions of the North Vietnamese, and the power of the Sheik of Kuwait. In each of these cases we had command of the seas, the power of projection ashore, an overwhelming presence, and an awe-inspiring deterrence. But none of that was or could be brought to bear. The reason, of course, was that military force is only one element of power. That was always understood for major powers. Now it applies to the smallest as well. A new world order is evolving.

Relative to Iceland, the English enjoy the superiority of the four missions, and yet they cannot impose their will. For the United States there is a vast qualitative difference between projection in the Baltic and projection in the Persian Gulf.

The U.S. Navy's statement of its missions is no less an expression of its national character than Gorshkov's of the Soviet Navy's. They are the tools of power, not the strategy of power. Reflecting our individualistic, competitive society, they ignore our obligations to other services and emphasize our competence in the abstract. Our missions, although logical in their own way, do not suggest questions but reflect our existing force structure and our culturally derived goal of self-sufficiency.

In a disturbing way, our four missions concept, by sidestepping the big questions, helps to maintain a kind of cultural illusion and an institutional inertia. The symptom is the acceptance of the disguise for the real thing: the Norwegian Sea exercise maintains the fiction of past wars; the contractors and think tanks—some, the confidence men of the 20th century—pretending a tactical and professional competence only possessed by the experienced officer; and the thinking naval officer, seasoned, usually idealistic and dedicated, unconsulted and disdained by his own colleagues.

A final measurement of imaginative vigor is the way an institution proposes

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change. Demands for more rational, moral, or ethical approaches have been, historically, extremely ineffective unless they took account of cultural forces and imperatives. Take the unification of the services, for example, or the creation of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The individuality of the services was underrated; the force of the cultural drive for competition and success in bargaining not respected. In some respects, unification remains a goal and the Joint Chiefs, while trying to represent collective interests, have reinstated the dynamics of individual service bargaining. Meaningful change undoubtedly must come about from within an institution, from within its own norms, and consistent with its own patterns of development. For the Navy, the intellectual tradition of Mahan is there to be, somehow, revived with all that that implies; the acceptance of its intellectual responsibilities, some self-confidence in its professional knowledge, and a mechanism for self-criticism.

In the meantime, like a primitive snake dance, the Norwegian Sea exercise continues to recall past victories and frighten potential enemies. The Soviets make a ritual response. But no one can

imagine that this ceremonial combat will burst into a real battle. While we hypnotize each other into a great power stalemate, the problems are shifting to another arena difficult for our institutional mind to comprehend. After all, what is more impressive than a task force sailing into the Norwegian Sea?

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Capt. Robert B. Bathurst, U.S. Navy, did his undergraduate work in psychology at Northwestern University, earned a master's degree in English literature from Northwestern, and is a Ph.D. candidate at Brown University. He has had Russian language training at the Naval Language School in Washington, D.C., and attended the U.S. Army Advanced School of Slavic Studies at Oberammergau, Bavaria. As an intelligence officer, he has served in the Fleet Intelligence Center, Europe, as Head of Political Military Affairs, as Assistant Naval Attaché in Moscow, and as Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence for Commander in Chief, U.S. Naval Forces, Europe. Captain Bathurst currently occupies the Edwin T. Layton Military Chair of Intelligence at the Naval War College.

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No other art or science [as war] has so definitely clung to the . . . past as guidance for the future, or so far ignored the alterations of circumstances brought about by time.

Alfred Vagts: A History of Militarism, 1937