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THE SOVIET NAVY'S ROLE IN FOREIGN POLICY

While the Soviet Navy has been often pictured recently as presenting a new challenge to America's ability to control the oceans of the world in the event of hostilities, Soviet naval forces today are in a much better position to play a more subtle but equally important role in support of Russian foreign policy. By means of eight case studies the author demonstrates the part played by Soviet Navy ships in a variety of situations, revealing how their actions directly parallel and support the Kremlin's political stance abroad.

An article

by

Commander Richard T. Ackley, U.S. Navy (Ret.)

The essential quality of a military navy is obviously its ultimate capacity to engage and fight an enemy. Yet, for the greater portion of its existence, a navy is not engaged in combat. During this time of peace, however, a navy by no means fails to exert an influence upon international affairs. This effectiveness short of war is difficult to characterize but is nevertheless pervasive and may well comprise the most significant benefit a nation derives from its naval investment.

L.W. Martin
The Sea in Modern Strategy

INTRODUCTION

The peacetime role of naval forces in a nation's foreign policy is often obscure and tends to be neglected in foreign policy literature. While the dramatic growth of the Soviet naval fleet has not gone unnoticed, most articles on

the subject have stressed the Soviet naval challenge to United States or NATO seapower. The purpose of this essay, however, will be to assess the role played by the Soviet Navy in the overall context of Russian foreign policy. We will look beyond combat capabilities and attempt to associate naval behavior with identifiable Soviet policy goals. Our concern shall center on the time frame from 1950 to 1972, with particular attention being paid to eight Soviet foreign policy thrusts subject to naval influence.

A nation's naval forces can play an impressive role in the furtherance of certain foreign policy objectives, as three centuries of British naval history reveal. In that naval vessels are owned by sovereign states and deployed in response to the will of national political leaders, their operations are directly

related to national policy considerations. Further appreciation for the vital role seapower can play in a country's foreign policy is gained from the fact that approximately 90 percent of the world's trade is carried by sea, and about 70 percent of its population lives within 30 miles of the coasts.¹ The linkage between seapower and foreign policy is not new. In the late 1800's Admiral Mahan advocated the doctrine that command of the sea is the dominant form of politics. Mahan emphasized the historical link between diplomacy and naval power. In earlier times, great powers sent gunboats up the rivers of states they were seeking to influence; today the presence of warships offshore and in foreign ports serves as a vehicle of international influence and prestige. In fact, in periods of crisis or tension, the mere appearance of a modern naval force can signal the attitude and degree of interest of its parent power. A naval ship, like an overseas embassy, is an enclave of sovereign territory, serving to symbolize and strengthen the image of the state it represents. The very mobility of warships provides them their unique quality as tools of international diplomacy.

In modern times, particularly since the middle of this century, the U.S.S.R. has capitalized on the diplomatic capabilities of its navy as an adjunct to foreign policy. However, before turning to specific examples of Soviet naval behavior, we shall first identify the Soviet foreign policies concerning us.

By foreign policy we mean a course of action that supports a concept of a state's national goals and purposes. This course of action may be active or passive; and even sometimes may seem inconsistent, as goals and purposes (national interest) may vary with time. Thus, the task of describing a country's foreign policy may be difficult—especially in a closed society such as the Soviet Union. Some Soviet policies are quite explicit; however, others must be

derived in a manner that parallels Charles Osgood's image of content analysis. That is, "an attempt to infer the characteristics and intentions of sources from inspection of the messages they produce."² On the other hand, the overall trend in Soviet foreign policy since the 1950's is not as difficult to establish as specific policies.

Under Stalin the Soviet Union pursued what might be called a foreign policy of continental dimensions. That is, Stalin's politico-military policy was largely confined in its dimensions to the Eurasian Continent. With the advent of Khrushchev, however, Soviet policy took on a worldwide proportion which was in accord with the new global power status coveted by the U.S.S.R. This global power status increased substantially under Khrushchev's successors—moving more substantially into the "Third World" and into keener rivalry with the United States. Throughout this period Soviet naval development paralleled these expanding foreign policy interests growing in scope from continental to global proportions.³

Despite the difficulties inherent in defining clear-cut individual Soviet foreign policies, we can identify a set of eight policy trends that have persisted with time—and generally are accepted by specialists in the Soviet field.

First is the policy of strategic nuclear deterrence. Nuclear deterrence is, in fact, an extension of the classical notion of balance of power. It assumes an international harmony of interest at the lowest level—that is, individual and collective survival. This policy is based on the premise that war is a deliberate act, and if each side maintains sufficient nuclear weapons and delivery systems to insure unacceptable damage to the opposing side, nuclear war can be prevented.

Second is a major thesis of communism: expansion and world domination. "For a half-century, Soviet leaders have time and again repeated that Com-

munism's ultimate objective is world domination. But many in the Free World simply refuse to believe that the Soviet leaders mean what they say."⁴

Abundant evidence exists to support expansion and world domination as continuing Soviet policies—both ideological and operational. For example, in a doctrinal context the Communists hold to the theory of historical inevitability, wherein other socio-economic-political systems will succumb to communism. Operationally, coexistence is considered a temporary condition. ". . . that is, coexistence until capitalism becomes weaker, until the Soviet Union becomes stronger, After all, if the two systems are to coexist indefinitely, the term coexistence is not necessary."⁵

Third is the Soviet policy of avoiding war with the United States. "It is no exaggeration to state that both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. have ruled out force in its nuclear form as an instrument of their national policies."⁶ Perhaps the one constant feature in Soviet-American relations has been the Soviet motivation to prevent a collision with the United States that might escalate to total war. This policy has been constant, but the motivation for the policy has changed. Herbert S. Dinerstein correctly assessed this position when he wrote:

Earlier Soviet leaders, because they were weaker than their opponents and expected to become stronger, wanted to avoid war as long as possible. Now that they wanted to avoid nuclear war and since they very much feared that any direct engagement with the United States could lead to such a war, they felt it necessary to avoid any war with the United States indefinitely.⁷

The Soviet policy of avoiding war with the United States may be seen as the antithesis of the basic Communist thesis of expansion and world domination. While in fact, these two policies do

contradict in part, it nevertheless can be said with reasonable assurance that the Soviet policy of expansion and world domination has not been dropped but has merely assumed back seat to their fear of risking war with the United States.

Fourth is the Soviet policy of claiming a belt of sovereignty extending 12 miles seaward from Soviet territory. International accord prescribes a 3-mile territorial limit, including the right of innocent passage through territorial straits that connect international bodies of water. The Soviet Union unilaterally enforces or threatens to enforce a 12-mile limit, while disclaiming the right of innocent passage through certain territorial straits connecting international waters.

Fifth is the Soviet policy of opposition to the Montreux Convention. The Kremlin desires to close the Black Sea to warships of all nations, except Black Sea powers. A constant in Russian foreign policy since czarist times, this position has been given considerable emphasis by the Soviet Government. For instance, in March 1945 the Soviet Union terminated its 1925 treaty of friendship with Turkey, applied pressure for a revision of the Montreux Convention, and attempted to gain military control over the straits leading from the Mediterranean Sea to the Black Sea.⁸ This initiative was unsuccessful, but nevertheless it served to emphasize Soviet dissatisfaction with the Montreux Convention of 1936—a situation that persists today.

Sixth is the Soviet policy of enhancing the Russian image and influence throughout the world. The most recent manifestation of this Russian design can be seen in the globetrotting expeditions of the Soviet leaders, yet it is a policy of long standing supported by propaganda, cultural exchanges, and international trade fairs. Influence overseas is a traditional byproduct associated with a strong naval presence in support of

national policy; and, as such, it has not been overlooked by the Soviets. In 1967 Fleet Admiral Kasatonov declared, "Ships' visits facilitate the development and strengthening of friendly relations between the Soviet people and the peoples of foreign countries, and they strengthen the authority and influence of our homeland in the international arena."⁹

Seventh is the Soviet policy of establishing a sphere of influence in the Arab States. Soviet presence in and support of the Arab States have increased steadily since the 1950's. Most recently the Soviets negotiated a 15-year treaty of friendship and cooperation with Egypt that may insure a Soviet presence for the foreseeable future.

Eighth is the Soviet policy of dispelling American military presence from Europe. Since the end of World War II the U.S.S.R. has worked consistently for the removal of U.S. troops, ships, and aircraft from the European theater. Within this context, persistent Soviet pressure for developing some type of a European security community, has the underlying theme of a secure Europe without the presence of foreign (U.S.) armed forces.

In order to support the above policies, the Soviet Navy required the strength and disposition to create an aura of credibility. This was necessary because at times the Soviets would surely compete with the U.S. Navy, and acting from a position of strength is a self-evident asset.

SOVIET NAVAL STRENGTH

From the standpoint of defending the territory of the Soviet Union, the U.S.S.R. does not require an immense naval establishment. Adm. Sir Nigel Henderson accurately assessed the relative requirement for NATO and Soviet naval strength when he wrote:

... the Soviets do not need to

rely on the sea for sustaining a military presence in Western Europe to anything like the same extent as the Alliance (N.A.T.O.). They operate from an enormous land base from which their armies and air force can deploy, and their logistic support uses land lines rather than sea routes. By contrast, N.A.T.O. countries rely, heavily, on the free use of the sea.¹⁰

Nevertheless, the Soviet Navy has increased steadily in strength and capability. Presently their navy is composed of about 500,000 men, 130 first-line ships, 2,200 small surface vessels, nearly 400 submarines, and a newly formed marine infantry group.¹¹ While a direct comparison between United States and Soviet naval forces is difficult due to differing ship types and weapon systems employed by each side, (figure 1), the U.S. Navy as of mid-1971 consisted of some 714 ships and 620,000 men.¹² Numbers, however, do not tell the entire story. Warship age, equipment, materiel readiness, and training are other important factors. Everything considered, U.S. naval authorities generally rank the Soviet Navy as a "first-class professional outfit,"¹³ with its newness as perhaps, one of its greatest assets (figure 2).

In an overall assessment of Soviet naval power, we must conclude that their navy is competitive with the U.S. Navy in every aspect but aviation. Although absence of aircraft carriers has, in fact, limited the Soviets in their ability to control the sea, their navy has clearly become a significant instrument of diplomacy. In assessing these gains, we shall begin by considering the strategic submarine force in its role of nuclear deterrence. It is the existence of this hidden and potent strategic force which assists the more visible conventional Soviet naval forces in their mission of effectively and directly supporting Soviet diplomacy.

	USSR	USA	UK
Attack Carriers	0	15	3
Anti-submarine Carriers	0	7	0
Helicopter Carriers and Commando Ships	2	8	2
Amphibious Assault Ships	100	150	4
Nuclear-powered Ballistic Missile Submarines	18	41	3
Nuclear-powered Cruise Missile Submarines	25	0	0
Nuclear-powered Attack Submarines	17	40	3
Conventional Ballistic Missile Submarines	35	0	0
Conventional Cruise Missile Submarines	22	0	0
Conventional Attack Submarines	263	62	22
Surface-to-surface Missile Cruisers	8	0	0
Other Missile Cruisers	1	9	0
Conventional Cruisers	11	4	1
Large Missile Destroyers and Frigates	24	60	6
Ocean-going Escorts	176	200	56
Missile Patrol Boats	130	0	0

Figure 1—Active Fleets

Source: Institute of Strategic Studies and *Jane's Fighting Ships*.

Cited in: David Fairhall, *Russian Sea Power* (Boston: Gambit, 1971), p. 250.

Distribution by Age	Number of Ships	
	USA	USSR
0-4 years	108	431
5-9 years	96	486
10-14 years	130	589
15-19 years	39	67
More than 19 years	521	2

Source: Report to the House of Representatives Committee on Armed Services, March 1969.

Distribution by Type	USA		USSR	
	Number	Average Age	Number	Average Age
Cruisers	14	21	20	12
Conventional Submarines	69	21	300	10
Ballistic Missile Submarines	41	4	15	5
Nuclear Attack Submarines	36	4	20	5
Destroyers	171	22	50	15
Frigates	59	4	30	5
Amphibious Ships	156	19	40	5

Figure 2—Comparative Age of the Russian and American Fleets

Source: Report to the House Committee on Armed Services, March 1969.

Cited in: Fairhall, p. 251.

THE SOVIET STRATEGIC SUBMARINE FORCE

The navy contributes its share to the maintenance of a Soviet nuclear deterrent with its missile launching submarines. In demonstrating the rapid growth of Soviet strategic forces, Senator Henry Jackson reported that in the space of 5 years, from 1966 to 1971, the overall strategic balance has moved in favor of the Soviet Union. Jackson revealed that in 1966 the United States had about 600 submarine-launched ballistic missiles and the Soviets had about 100. By mid-1971 the United States had 656 submarine-launched missiles, while the Soviet missile force had grown to almost 400 launchers—and is expected to overtake the United States in 2 or 3 years.¹⁴ In terms of technology and allocation of resources, this is perhaps the most dramatic naval development in recent years.

Nuclear superiority or nuclear parity may heighten a nation's confidence and thus indirectly bolster its willingness to pursue certain foreign policy objectives; however, the diplomatic significance of a large nuclear arsenal is not directly proportional to its destructive capacity. The United States held unquestioned nuclear superiority from the end of World War II through the 1960's, yet it did not extract any vital political concessions from the U.S.S.R.¹⁵ Nuclear superiority or parity does not in itself automatically provide a special claim to success in diplomacy between nuclear powers, but it does enable the nuclear contestants to bargain, influence, and maneuver more effectively with weaker third powers. Accordingly, the Soviet strategic submarine force supports the policy of nuclear deterrence which, at the same time, permits Soviet conventional naval forces to be more impressive and effective in supporting Soviet policy at the lower nonnuclear level.

CONVENTIONAL SOVIET NAVAL FORCES IN FOREIGN POLICY

In assessing the role of Soviet conventional naval forces in foreign policy, we will focus on eight examples that illustrate the navy's role supporting one or more of the foreign policies outlined above.

• **The 12-Mile Limit and the Right of Innocent Passage.** On 21 November 1966, Capt. William K. Earle, USCG (now retired), Commanding Officer of the U.S. Coast Guard icebreaker *Edisto*, proposed to the Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard that two USCG icebreakers circumnavigate the world via the Arctic basin route with the purpose of collecting new oceanographic and other scientific data. The contemplated voyage would commence at a point north of Spitsbergen on 17 August 1967, proceed easterly across the Eurasian and Canadian Arctic, and terminate 5 weeks later in Baffin Bay on 21 September 1967. The proposed track lay entirely within the high seas, outside territorial waters of the U.S.S.R., and north of the usual Northern Sea Route followed by Russian convoys. The proposed track was north of the Soviet islands of Severnaya Zemlya, but in the event of impassable ice, an alternate passage through the 22-mile wide Boris Vilkitsky Straits was to be followed. (See figure 3.) No Soviet objection to this latter transit was anticipated, in that the proposed route followed the established doctrine of innocent passage, as well as the international concept of the 3-mile limit of full national sovereignty.¹⁶

The circumnavigation of the Arctic basin was approved for the icebreakers *Edisto* and *Eastwind*. Under constant surveillance by Soviet aircraft, the two icebreakers, with the aid of helicopter reconnaissance flights, failed to find open water or breakable ice north of

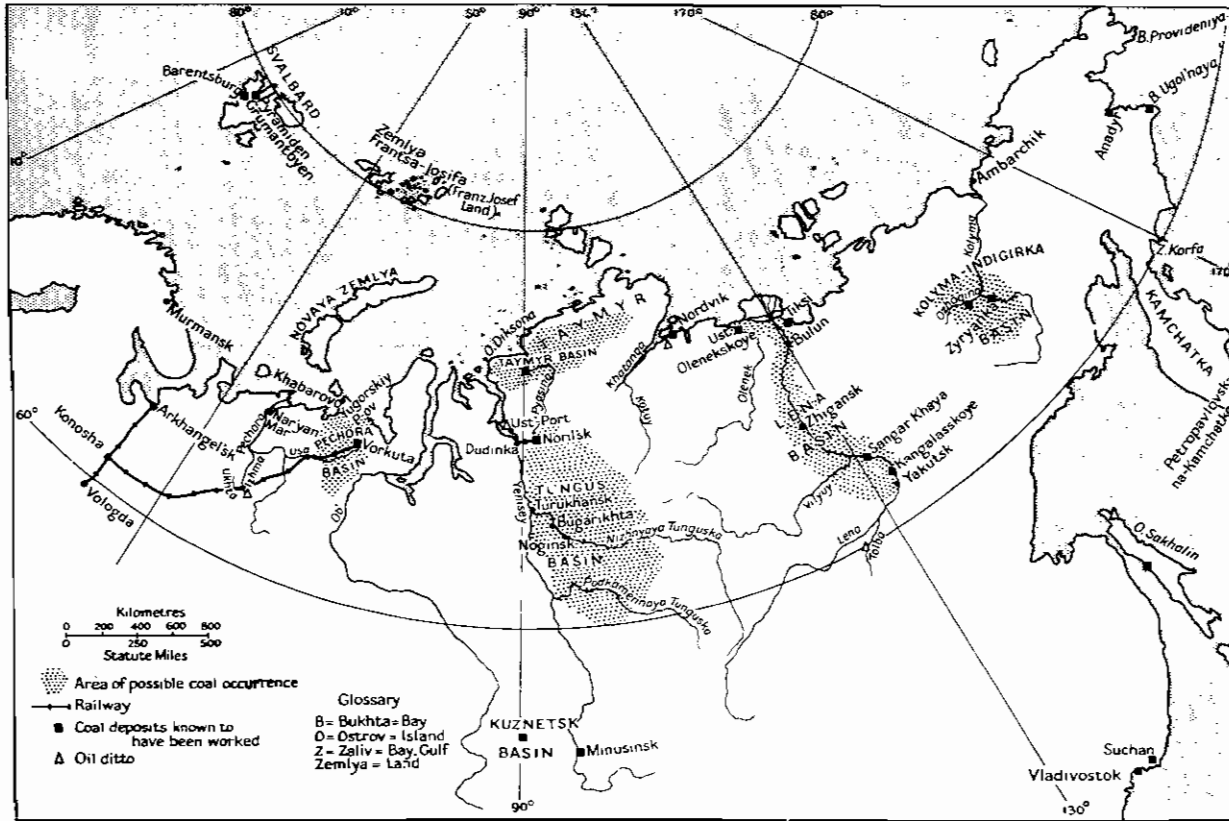


Figure 3.

Source: Terence Armstrong, *The Northern Sea Route* (Cambridge, Eng.: University Press (1952), p. 80.

Severnaya Zemlya and notified the Soviets of their intention to transit the Vilkitsky Straits. On 28 August 1967, in response to the radio message from the ships, the Soviets made it unmistakably clear that the icebreakers would be prevented from sailing the Vilkitsky Straits on the pretext that such a passage would constitute a violation of their frontier.¹⁷ The State Department issued a strong protest, but the icebreakers were ordered to abandon their mission rather than challenge a Soviet warning in an area where the Soviet Union possessed unquestioned sea and air supremacy in the area of possible confrontation. Whether the issue was the 12-mile limit or the right of innocent passage, the threatened use of Soviet seapower was sufficient to cause cancellation of *Edisto's* and *Eastwind's* voyage. Here the threat of confrontation by Soviet seapower supported the policy of a 12-mile limit and disallowed the right of innocent passage through a strait between international bodies of water.¹⁸

• **The Black Sea and the Montreux Convention.** As early as 1922 the Soviet Government was opposed to the transit of foreign warships through the Turkish Straits. In fact, the Lausanne Conference of 1922 (forerunner of the Montreux Convention) had as a central theme the opening or closing of the straits to foreign warships, and Moscow's position was that the passage should be closed.¹⁹ In the 1930's Turkey demanded the right to rearm and fortify the straits. The Soviet Union supported Turkey's position because it would place control of the straits in the hands of a friendly power. Hence, the Montreux Convention was called in June-July 1936 to consider the new straits situation. The Convention fixed limits on the quantity and tonnage of foreign warships passing through the Straits.²⁰ The only significant restriction levied on the U.S.S.R. was a

prohibition against submarines exiting the Black Sea, except to go to another port for repairs.

In August 1946, in an exchange of notes between the Soviet Chargé d'Affaires in Washington and the Acting Secretary of State, the Soviet Government proposed five principles for establishing a new regime for the straits. The first three principles were generally agreed to by the United States and consisted of: open passage of merchant ships of all countries, open passage of warships of Black Sea powers, and a prohibition of passage of warships not belonging to Black Sea powers—except in cases especially provided for. The final two items, to which the United States did not express agreement, were: the straits passage was to be handled by an agency composed of Turkey and other Black Sea powers, and that Turkey and the U.S.S.R. organize the defense of the straits for the prevention of their use by countries hostile to the Black Sea powers.²¹ The Soviet proposals were not considered a basis for negotiations and consequently the terms of the Montreux Convention which, incidentally, the United States accepted but did not sign, remain in effect to this day.

The U.S. position is that it has the right to operate warships in the Black Sea in accordance with the terms of the Montreux Convention. Accordingly, it sends two 6th Fleet destroyers into the area every 6 months to show the flag and exercise the U.S. Navy's right to sail anywhere on the high seas.²² These periodic visits are considered inflammatory by the Soviets who, in turn, dispatch their naval vessels and aircraft to shadow and harass U.S. ships from the time they enter the Black Sea until they depart.²³ The Soviets claim the United States violates the Montreux Convention by sending destroyers equipped with ASROC (antisubmarine rockets) through the straits, as the ASROC caliber exceeds the 203mm.

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Convention limit. The United States responds that ASROC is not a gun, and the Convention only refers to guns. Nevertheless, the Soviets do not consider the U.S. probes routine sailings. Tass commentator Leonid Velichanskiy said, "... a provocation remains a provocation regardless of the fact that it is repeated twice a year."²⁴ Along the same vein, A. Sharifov, writing in *Izvestiya*, claimed, "The provocative visit by American ships to the Black Sea is aimed at troubling the clear waters of the good-neighbor relations of the Black Sea countries."²⁵

Soviet policy has been constant in its rejection of foreign warships sailing in the Black Sea. The Soviet position is: "The land of the Soviets is a Black Sea power; the waters of the Black Sea are joined with the Mediterranean through the Bosphorous and Dardanelles. The striving of the Soviet Union to protect its vital state interests in the region is completely natural and lawful."²⁶

Like the case of the USCG ice-breakers, U.S. warships in the Black Sea are operating in a hostile environment, where the U.S.S.R. maintains the upper hand in sea and airpower. Accordingly, one might reason that the United States, by occasional naval probes into the Black Sea, has made a point *de jure*, while the U.S.S.R., by maintaining effective naval control, has made its point *de facto*.

• **The Soviet Navy in the Korean and Vietnamese Wars.** In assessing the role of the Soviet Navy in foreign policy, we can conveniently discuss the Korean and Vietnamese conflicts simultaneously, as in both events Soviet naval forces avoided scrupulously any direct contact or provocation of U.S. forces. Apparently, the Soviet Union evaluated their interest in both conflicts as peripheral rather than vital. In both conflicts the United States committed ground, air, and naval forces against an invading Communist regime. In both conflicts

the Soviet Union backed the Communist regime—but short of committing Soviet Armed Forces. Neither war resulted in severing Soviet-American diplomatic relations nor did it involve military action between the two nuclear powers. Certain tacit rules of warfare were observed including: no nuclear weapons, no Russians, no Chinese territory, no Japanese territory, no bombing of ships at sea or even airfields on the United Nations (and South Vietnamese) sides of the line.²⁷ Even though both conflicts were costly in terms of lives and supplies, they remained contained geographically. The Soviet Navy has, in effect, avoided any involvement in either conflict, thereby tacitly, but pointedly, supporting the Soviet foreign policy of avoiding war with the United States.

• **The Soviet Navy in the Cuban Missile Crisis.** By 10 a.m., 24 October 1962, warships of the U.S. 2d Fleet were positioned along an arc 500-miles east of Cuba in response to President Kennedy's order to establish a naval quarantine to halt the buildup and force removal of recently discovered Soviet surface-to-surface missiles in Cuba. The freighters carrying Khrushchev's missiles were only protected by a few Soviet submarines, deadly instruments of war but relatively inflexible and unimpressive for a diplomatic show of force. Admittedly, while the Soviet intent was to install missiles in Cuba surreptitiously—possibly explaining the lack of surface warship escorts—some argue there simply were no surface warships available.²⁸ In this case, unlike those discussed above, the United States perceived the installation of Soviet medium- and intermediate-range ballistic missiles in Cuba as an immediate threat to the United States itself and consequently was willing to commit the whole of U.S. military power to removing the installations in question. As Herbert Dinerstein points out, the heart

of the issue was one of military parity. The installation of the missiles in Cuba would have put the U.S.S.R. within easy reach of achieving parity or superiority in deliverable nuclear weapons systems capable of destroying the United States.²⁹ The Kremlin, it appears, was attempting to install the missiles surreptitiously because of their strategic weakness vis-a-vis the United States. Thus, when they were caught in the act, the Soviets were willing to take President Kennedy's face-saving way out, rather than become embroiled in a war they could not hope to win. As Admiral Zumwalt points out: "They found that despite their [Soviet] substantial superiority in submarines, they simply did not have the naval capability to oppose with any confidence of success the naval quarantine imposed by us in response to their challenge. Their decision therefore was to withdraw."³⁰

The Cuban missile crisis represents a situation for which the Soviet Navy was simply not equipped to support national policy—either diplomatically or militarily. When the Russians were finally faced with a determined U.S. naval quarantine, the Soviet Navy followed the pragmatic policy of Soviet diplomacy since World War II, that of avoiding war with the United States.

• **The Soviet Navy in the Indian Ocean.** Following the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, the Soviet Union intervened in the Yemeni civil war; a first step toward the Indian Ocean. Then, on 16 January 1968, the British announced their military withdrawal east of Suez, to be completed by the end of 1971. A few weeks later a Soviet naval force commenced a historic cruise and goodwill tour of the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf. The Soviet task force was small, composed of a cruiser, missile destroyer, and an antisubmarine vessel, all of the Soviet Pacific Fleet. The cruise exceeded 4 months in duration and, as the Soviets reported, traveled through two

oceans and many seas making friendly visits to India, Somali, Iraq, Pakistan, Iran, Peoples Republic of South Yemen, and Ceylon.³¹ Since this initial naval cruise into the Indian Ocean, the Soviets have had as many as 30 ships in the ocean at a time, and rarely fewer than 10.³²

Why, then, have the Soviets maintained a permanent naval presence in the Indian Ocean? While the initial timing of Russia's naval entry into the Indian Ocean may be explained in terms of sheer opportunism, undoubtedly long-term strategic considerations made the move by the U.S.S.R. inevitable. The Indian Ocean is of strategic interest to the competing superpowers, in part because of its geography—the continents of Africa, Asia, and Australia all touch the Indian Ocean—and in part because of the politics of the riparian states that border it.³³ Because many of the African and Asian Third World states are uncommitted in the East-West struggle, this presents a productive area in which the Soviets might seek to exercise their influence in the hope of bolstering Soviet worldwide prestige and fostering the growth of governments friendly to Moscow. The Soviet Navy, then, has supported and is supporting Russian foreign policy in the Indian Ocean area by enhancing Russia's image and providing a military presence on the scene which might be used in a number of ways to strengthen Moscow's political hand vis-a-vis hostile local governments as well as the United States.

• **Soviet Navy Fleet Exercises.** Fleet exercises are designed primarily for battle training; however, they serve to publicize the capabilities, effectiveness, and war readiness of a navy. In peacetime the reputation of a navy begins with its actual hardware, (ships and equipment), but must ultimately include an assessment of the navy's operational capabilities and materiel readiness. The decade of the 1960's was the

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period of emergence of the Soviet Navy as an increasingly capable fighting force. This was most apparent in their fleet maneuvers. The increasing complexity of Soviet naval exercises has been well documented in the world's press and certainly has served to enhance the prestige and image of the U.S.S.R. as a real power at sea.

In 1962 a major Soviet naval exercise was conducted in the North Atlantic and Norwegian Sea. It involved four surface warships, about 20 submarines, and a small number of land-based patrol planes. The nature of the exercise was to improve the ability of the Soviet naval forces to protect their homeland.³⁴

Just 8 years later, in 1970, however, the Soviets conducted a vastly different exercise named Okean (figure 4). It involved about 150 surface ships, 50 submarines—several of them nuclear-powered—and several hundred aircraft. Included in the surface ship group were two new guided-missile helicopter carriers and new missile-equipped cruisers and destroyers. The exercise was world-wide in scope, ranging through the Baltic, Norwegian, Barents, Black, Philippine, and Mediterranean Seas, the Sea of Japan, the Atlantic, the Pacific, and Indian Oceans. The exercise was several weeks in duration, and in the words of the U.S. Secretary of the Navy John Chafee, "In its global scope, Operation Okean exceeded any previous exercises of any nation in naval history."³⁵ The Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet Fleet, Adm. Sergei Gorshkov, discussing the maneuvers in *Krasnaya Zvezda* said,

A century-old dream of our people has become a reality. The flags of Soviet ships now fly in the farthest corners of the seas and oceans. Our navy has become a real power and can successfully protect the state interests of the Soviet Union and of the whole socialist camp.³⁶

The Soviet Navy underwent a dra-

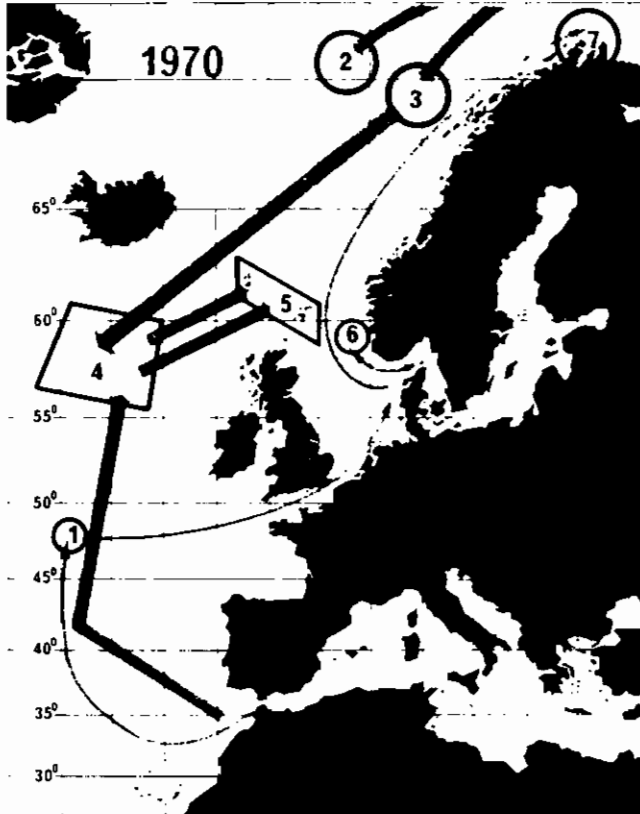
matic change during the decade of the 1960's. They outgrew their traditional role of being the seaward flank of the Red army. Today the Soviet Navy stands as an equal among equals in the Soviet Ministry of Defense.

Soviet naval leaders understand the value of a navy's reputation and have assembled, trained, exercised, and advertised a real force to be reckoned with. Extensive fleet exercises such as Okean have helped raise the status of the Soviet Navy to one of a credible force with a professional reputation—desirable qualities for a first-class navy in battle or in diplomacy. The side effect of a reputation for naval professionalism is a simple transfer of the prestige and capability associated with the navy to a sympathetic attitude toward the Soviet state. In other words, the Soviet state benefits from the favorable impressions created by its navy.

● **The Soviet Navy and Extended Cruises.** In some respects the Soviet Union is emulating the practices of America's Great White Fleet at the turn of the century. They have increasingly conducted distant cruises, shown their new and impressive warships in foreign ports, received widespread press coverage, and, in general, supported a policy of projecting a favorable Soviet image abroad.

The Soviets first claimed an open naval capability in 1962 when the nuclear submarine *Leninskiy Komsomol* reached the North Pole and later reaffirmed it in 1966, when a detachment of Soviet nuclear-powered submarines, commanded by Rear Adm. A.E. Sorokin, completed their first submerged, and accompanied, around-the-world cruise.³⁷

By July 1969 the Soviets made their first naval entry into the Gulf of Mexico. Seven Soviet surface ships and one nuclear-powered submarine penetrated the Gulf of Mexico to a point 300 miles south of the mouth of the Mississippi.³⁸



On 14 April the Soviet Ministry of Defence announced a Naval exercise, named "OKEAN", to be conducted in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The exercise started rather badly when a Soviet Nuclear submarine sank in area (1) on 12 April. That same week a Soviet replenishment auxiliary convoy of 9 ships appeared North of North Cape and proceeded to area (2). Some days later two task groups of surface ships from the North Fleet followed, bringing the total deployed strength to 26 ships.

Anti-submarine warfare exercises were conducted in area (3) from 13 to 18 April. On 21 April an exercise with forces from the Mediterranean and the North Fleet battle group was scheduled in area (4). Replenishing of the two major groups took place in area (5).

Two groups of surface vessels moved out of the Baltic and operated in area (6). A landing exercise was held in area (7).

Figure 4—Exercise Okean in NATO Area

Source: *NATO Letter*, September 1970, p. 10.

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Two additional naval visits into the Caribbean took place within 15 months of the first. One observer, James D. Theberge, sees these intrusions into the Caribbean as a challenge to the Monroe Doctrine, strengthening of the image of the Soviet Union as a rising power, and an attempt to undermine the U.S. position in Latin America and the Caribbean while carefully avoiding the risk of direct confrontation with the United States.³⁹

In September 1971 the biggest flotilla of Soviet warships ever seen in Hawaiian waters was observed. It consisted of 10 ships; three submarines, a light cruiser, two destroyers, a merchant tanker, submarine tender, and support craft. The voyage originated in Vladivostok, proceeded along the Aleutians and through the Northern Pacific, sailing between the Hawaiian Islands, then returned to Soviet territory. Adm. John S. McCain, Jr., U.S. Commander in Chief Pacific, commenting on this cruise said, "Their visit to our sea frontier is a classic example of the use of sea power to accomplish national objectives. It demonstrated their power, their range and mobility and versatility at sea in a manner that can't be ignored by our nation's defense planners."⁴⁰

Extended deployments by the Soviet Fleet into most all the world's oceans and seas illustrate the increasing Soviet capability and willingness to project their seapower as a worldwide instrument of foreign policy.

• **The Soviet Union in the Middle East and the Mediterranean Sea.** Since the days of Catherine the Great, Russia has viewed the Middle East as an area of considerable interest, but only since the mid-1950's has Moscow been able to make a political impact of significant proportions in the area. After Moshe Dayan's visit to Paris in 1954, France agreed to supply the Israeli Army with tanks, planes, missiles, and radar. The Americans, perhaps in their reluctance

to support an enemy of the Baghdad Pact, would only sell arms to Egypt on a cash basis—a condition Egypt could not meet. In any event, the Soviet Union was quick to grasp an opportunity and early in 1955 offered to sell arms to Nasser.⁴¹ The arms agreement, followed by the July 1956 withdrawal of the U.S. offer to finance the Aswan Dam, set the stage for the polarization of the Middle East. It also marked the beginning of an extended and expanding Russian presence in the area. The Soviet position was secured by extending military and economic aid to the Arab States in such quantity and under such favorable terms that virtually all Western influence was eliminated. Equally important, the U.S.S.R. obtained naval base rights on the Mediterranean, thereby fulfilling an objective sought since the days of the czars.⁴²

The Soviet Union's increased involvement in the Middle East was reflected at sea, as the bulk of Soviet military and economic aid moved by ship. Perhaps in the Mahanian tradition, the Soviet Navy followed the merchant marine, but whatever the motivation, by the eve of the 1967 Arab-Israeli crisis, the Soviets had 15 to 20 ships operating in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. As the Arab-Israeli situation continued to intensify, the Soviets dispatched an additional 10 naval ships through the Dardanelles. "This action did, however, mark a watershed in the use of Soviet naval power. For the first time, Soviet naval units were used to demonstrate a foreign policy commitment during a crisis."⁴³ The Soviets claim that their navy was a decisive factor in deterring or "frustrating the adventurous plans" of the Israelis and their "imperialist" backers.⁴⁴ In fact, in October 1967, following the sinking of the Israeli destroyer *Eilat* by an Egyptian missile patrol boat, several units of the Soviet Navy entered Egyptian and Syrian ports, quite likely restraining the Israelis from conducting a retaliatory strike.

In addition to providing a visible show of force in support of Soviet Middle East policy, the Soviet naval units provided moral support for the Arab peoples and gained a degree of prestige from world press coverage. Of greater significance, however, was the Soviet naval commitment to the policy of avoiding war with the United States. Despite the Soviet naval (moral) support to the Arab Nations, the Soviets maneuvered carefully to avoid any incident with the U.S. 6th Fleet that might be misinterpreted or escalate out of control.

The buildup of Soviet naval ships in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, in conjunction with the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, proved to be a watershed for Soviet naval policy in the area. Since that time the U.S.S.R. has maintained a permanent naval fleet in the Mediterranean, averaging 35 to 40 ships, including submarines.⁴⁵ The existence of a Soviet Mediterranean Fleet has provided new opportunities for the Kremlin to support its foreign policy. Perhaps highest priority has been devoted to the persistent demand for removal of U.S. military presence in Europe.

The Soviet Mediterranean Fleet is allegedly operating in the eastern Mediterranean for the protection of Soviet interests and guarding the approaches to the Black Sea. In turn, the Soviet leadership claims that the U.S. 6th Fleet has no legitimate reason to occupy the Mediterranean. For example, Brezhnev, at the Karlovy Vary meeting in April 1967 said,

There is no justification whatever for the constant presence of the U.S. Fleet in waters washing the shores of Southern Europe. One would like to ask: What are the grounds, 20 years after the end of World War II, for the U.S. Sixth Fleet to cruise the Mediterranean and to use military bases, ports, and supply bases in a number of Mediterranean countries . . . The

time has come to demand the complete withdrawal of the U.S. Sixth Fleet from the Mediterranean.⁴⁶

The Soviet naval expansion in the Mediterranean was noted officially at the December 1967 Brussels meeting of the NATO Council. The Council suggested that the U.S.S.R. might see in the turbulent Middle East an opportunity to expedite the removal of Western influence from the area and establish itself as the dominant power at the strategic meetingplace of the European, Asian, and African Continents.⁴⁷ Events since that time have served to confirm the Council's assessment.

As previously noted, the absence of aircraft carriers in the Soviet Fleet places it at a disadvantage in terms of combat capability vis-a-vis the U.S. Fleet. This deficiency has been offset in part, however, by the surface-to-surface missile-systems employed widely throughout the Soviet Navy. Thus, despite their lack of carrier airpower, Soviet Fleet presents the image of a credible threat to the U.S. 6th Fleet, thereby satisfying the military prerequisite for an effective diplomatic offensive in the area.

We can, perhaps, gain an insight into Soviet objectives in the Mediterranean by assessing Soviet criticisms of Western navies operating in the same area. K. Timofeyev, writing in the Soviet Journal, *International Affairs*, defines Western motives as follows:

The imperialist powers keep their navies in what may be called the nerve centres of the world, such as the Mediterranean, which tops the list. The Mediterranean attracts the imperialist powers because of its great strategic importance as a highly suitable area from which to keep threatening the Soviet Union and other socialist countries in Europe. Whoever rules the roost in that area, they contend, can control land, sea and air routes

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between Europe, Asia and Africa, lord it over the countries of Southern Europe and the Middle East, from which European NATO countries receive up to 75% of its vital oil supply.⁴⁸

Recent developments in Malta appear to be a mirror image of the Soviets following Mr. Timofeyev's thesis. Malta, which controls the narrow seas between Africa and Sicily, was the NATO Mediterranean naval headquarters. At the request of Maltese Premier Dom Mintoff, NATO agreed to withdraw from the island. Forty-eight hours later the Soviet Ambassador to London, Mikhail Smirnovsky, arrived in Malta for talks.⁴⁹ On 28 December 1971, diplomatic sources reported that Malta had concluded a new commercial accord with the Soviet Union and that it appeared to be part of a determined Soviet drive to establish naval facilities on the island for its growing Mediterranean fleet.⁵⁰ The following day the British Government announced their decision to withdraw all forces from the island. On 4 January 1972, the U.S. 6th Fleet was barred from using Malta's facilities.⁵¹ While the situation in Malta remains unclear as of this writing, it is apparent that the Soviets are attempting to replace Western influence on that strategic island.

As early as 1968 Soviet naval leaders were convinced that their navy was replacing the U.S. 6th Fleet as the dominant power in the Mediterranean. Fleet Adm. V. Kasatonov, First Deputy of the Main Naval Staff, said in July 1968, "Our surface ships and submarines successfully sail in the Mediterranean Sea, where for a long time the U.S. Sixth Fleet was the undivided master. . . . There is not a sea or ocean where Soviet sailors are not located, nor is there a port they do not know."⁵²

The Soviet naval expansion in the Mediterranean has resulted in a corresponding limitation in the freedom of movement for the U.S. Fleet. Arab

ports are generally closed to U.S. warships; in fact, nearly all north African states have barred the 6th Fleet from their ports since the June 1967 war. Similarly, anti-American feelings have militated against the U.S. Fleet using many other ports in the area that were previously friendly. Nevertheless, one must now view the eastern portion of the Mediterranean as realistically under Soviet influence.

The Soviet Navy's role in the support of foreign policy is perhaps nowhere more apparent than it is in the Middle East and Mediterranean Sea. It supports Soviet policies of promoting Russia's prestige and influence, avoiding war with the United States, establishing a sphere of influence in the Arab States, and discouraging American naval presence. All of these policies are important, but Martin Edmons and John Skitt suggest that the principal objective of the Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean is the creation of the requisite environment for the Communist States as a whole to replace the West as the political, economic, and military mentor of the Middle East countries.⁵³

SUMMARY AND TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS

In a period of two decades, the Soviet Union has developed a modern navy employing the latest ship design, equipment, and weapons systems. Advanced technology has been balanced with rigorous progressive training, both in shipboard and staff functions. The net result is a first-class fleet that competes favorably with the U.S. Navy in every aspect, except carrier-based aviation. The Soviet Fleet presents itself to the world as an effective fighting force, yet this new Soviet Navy has never seen combat. Its primary peacetime function appears to be contributing toward the realization of Soviet foreign policy objectives.

By assessing the role of the Soviet

Navy in foreign policy, we may be able to draw some tentative conclusions—tentative because our data are limited in quantity which, in turn, could mislead our qualitative judgments. Nevertheless, the patterns that emerge from our present analysis suggest:

1. The Soviet Navy aggressively supports Soviet policies oriented toward the defense of the homeland in areas peripheral to the Soviet coast, but such support is short of irrevocable combat (e.g., 12-mile limit and in the Black Sea).

2. The Soviet Navy avoids involvement in "limited wars" when U.S. combat forces are participants, thereby avoiding incidents of possible conflict, and lending support to the policy of avoiding war with the United States (e.g., Korean and Vietnamese wars).

3. The navy supports adventurist Soviet policies, but short of direct hostilities that would lead to war with the United States (e.g., Cuban missile crisis, Arab-Israeli Six-Day war).

4. The Soviet Navy supports the foreign policy of enhancing Soviet international prestige and power by maintaining an overseas naval presence and by conducting extended cruises and exercises (e.g., naval presence in the Mediterranean Sea and Indian Ocean, fleet exercises, and distant cruises).

It is difficult to determine the relative success of these policies as seen from the Kremlin; yet it appears that the most immediate and far-reaching role of the Soviet Navy has been in the area of ideology and the politics of persuasion. Peoples friendly to the United States are becoming less surprised when they encounter Soviet ships at sea or in port. The technical quality and military smartness of Soviet vessels are viewed as a credit to the Soviet Union. In areas friendly to the Soviet

Union, the presence of Soviet warships serves as a moral support the regime in power and provide an image of support and security for the local people.⁵⁴ To uncommitted and nonaligned nations, the presence of Soviet warships may tend to encourage their association with the U.S.S.R.—a friendly, progressive, and industrialized world power.

All in all, it can be seen that the Soviet Navy has been a vehicle for the export of Soviet foreign policy on a grand and worldwide scale. The navy performs diplomatic functions that cannot be duplicated by any other branch of the armed services or by any other civilian agency. The peacetime role of the Soviet Navy is indeed significant and perhaps, in part, explains the motivation of a great land power to construct a modern fleet and carry its ideological battle to sea.

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



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He who controls communications by sea controls his fate; the master of the seas is master of the situation.

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