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Challenge

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CHALLENGE!

As the new President of the Naval War College, the challenge I face is clear. It is the complete fulfillment of the mission of the Naval War College in a changing world--a world in which the balance of power at sea may well be shifting.

At this particular time in history we are witnessing a major shift in Soviet strategy--away from solely a continental strategy focused primarily on Europe and toward a worldwide maritime strategy. There is ample evidence that the Soviet leadership now well understands the writings of Alfred Thayer Mahan. They well appreciate the "influence of seapower on history" and are moving dynamically to exploit it.

Today as a result of events associated with the Arab-Israeli crisis, there has been much public focus on the buildup of Soviet maritime power in the Mediterranean. This is understandable. Here the Soviets have not only dramatically expanded their naval forces but have used them as a politico-military tool in furthering their objectives in that area--particularly their diplomacy in support of the Arab States. Most significant in this regard is the way the Soviets, by the use of their seapower coupled with the massive export of arms and economic aid, have wrested a politico-military victory out of what the free world believed was a sharp defeat when they failed to go to the aid of the Arab States in the Israeli-Arab war of June 1967.

Less publicized have been Soviet maritime operations on a worldwide basis. Whereas at the end of World War II the Soviet Navy's primary mission



was to support their land forces, and Russian naval forces rarely left their coastal waters and the confines of the Baltic and Black Seas, today they have expanded their operations into all of the oceans and seas of the globe.

Thus the Soviet, traditionally a land power, stands now as the second maritime power of the world. This achievement constitutes one of the most remarkable, but least publicized, transformations in recent times. It was accomplished by the rapid and balanced growth, both in quality and quantity, of their overall maritime forces. It was made possible by the rapid and dramatic development in recent years of a capability to deploy and support their forces on distant station, far from home bases.

When we refer to Soviet seapower we must think of it in the whole sense. It is not just the Soviet Navy and its warships; it also includes the full spectrum of their power at sea--their fishing fleets, their survey and hydrographic fleets, and very importantly their rapidly expanding merchant marine. And too, seapower is not just ships. Much depends on the expertise and ability to sail and use those ships, in peace and war, meaningfully and effectively.

The Soviet oceangoing fishing fleet is today the largest and most modern in the world. Their research fleet, a fleet which in numbers is larger than the rest of the world's put together, has a global program. The Soviet merchant marine is

the fastest growing in the world with an avowed aim of reaching 27 million tons by 1980; a goal that should easily be achieved. Their expanding naval forces, including the largest submarine fleet the world has ever known, comprise some of the most modern and sophisticated ships afloat today. Operationally the Soviets have demonstrated continuing and significant progress in improving their naval tactics, their training and seakeeping ability, their material maintenance, and their underway support. On balance, the current and potential capabilities of the U.S.S.R. at sea are most impressive. One of the highest military leaders of NATO has described them as "ominous."

When the Soviets evaluate United States seapower it is questionable as to how much value they would put on our privately owned fishing and merchant fleets. However, when we measure their seapower in this regard we find a unique situation. It is important to recognize here that each and every one of their fishing and merchant ships is designed, built, operated, and controlled by the government. Every one of these ships, presumably built for economic purposes, has the capability for naval auxiliary missions. Every one of these ships can be used as a valuable tool in furthering Soviet cold war strategy. Their use in a hot war could be of equal or greater value.

As military men we are primarily concerned with the capabilities rather than the intentions of a potential enemy. While capabilities can be measured accurately, intentions can change overnight. However, Soviet intentions at sea in the broad sense would seem to be clear.

The U.S.S.R. naval leadership has in the last two years voiced many public statements, making it clear that the Soviet Navy's mission has changed. It is no longer a defensive force to be kept in nearby home waters; it is described as "one of the principal offensive arms of

the Soviet supreme command, assuming this role for the first time in history." The Soviet naval building program and the expanding pattern of operations of their naval forces would document the validity of this change. The pieces fit together.

In a cold war background, the adoption by the Soviets of a worldwide maritime strategy as part of an overall national strategy to reach a goal of world domination has special implications for the United States and the free world. With the planned withdrawal of British forces from East of Suez, the U.S.S.R. may well look on the Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf, and Red Sea as the next area in which to employ the strategy that has worked so well in the Mediterranean. In recent months a Soviet naval squadron visited numerous ports in these waters. For the first time in history, Soviet warships entered the warm waters of the Persian Gulf.

In a nuclear world it now seems certain that the Russians are as aware as we of the consequences of a strategic nuclear exchange. They have undoubtedly recognized for some time that they cannot achieve their strategic goals through land warfare against NATO without the attendant hazard of escalation to nuclear holocaust. On the other hand, they may well see their way clear to those goals via a safer route--by avoiding a confrontation on land and moving to outflank NATO by the use of the sea. This is not to say that Russia has entirely abandoned her historic reliance on a continental strategy vis-a-vis Europe. Quite the contrary--what I am saying is that the Russians have broadened their overall strategy to include the projection of their power by sea; on a global basis. The threat to the United States and the free world of this adoption of a worldwide maritime strategy is clear. To the U.S. Naval War College I believe this to be a most significant challenge.

Traditionally and historically, the

Naval War College has been the fountainhead of new concepts, doctrines, and ideas within our Navy. In the face of the challenge that confronts us, I

would hope that "on my watch" we will be able to generate new and meaningful thinking responsive to this challenge.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. G. Colbert". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

R. G. COLBERT
Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy
President, Naval War College