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## Challenge

Richard G. Colbert

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# CHALLENGE!

Circumstances have caused the Mediterranean Sea to play a greater part in the history of the world, both in a commercial and a military point of view, than any other sheet of water of the same size. Nation after nation has striven to control it, and the strife goes on . . . but should any chance add to the control of the Black Sea Basin, which Russia has, the possession to the entrance to the Mediterranean, the existing strategic conditions affecting sea power would all be modified.

Mahan: *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, 1890



naval forces are now freely operating, in force, in this most vital sea. While the challenge of this Soviet Fleet to the Sixth Fleet is of great consequence to the U.S. Navy, of equal significance is the implication of this Soviet move in the assessment of future, long range Soviet strategy.

A month has passed since I discussed with you, in rather broad and general terms, the recent shift in Soviet national strategy away from one founded principally on a continental military strategy toward one that incorporates the concept of a worldwide maritime power. This month I would like to focus more closely on one geographic area of the world where increased Soviet presence is an ever-threatening challenge to the peace and the security of the free world--I refer specifically to the Mediterranean.

It has become quite apparent that the current leadership in the Kremlin has accomplished what the czars and even Stalin failed to do--that is, it has projected a major Soviet military, political and economic presence into the Mediterranean basin. In spite of our attempts to bar Russian expansion in the Eastern Mediterranean by the Truman Doctrine, the Eisenhower Doctrine and the Baghdad Pact in the 1940s and 1950s, the Soviets now have bridged these former obstacles; as a result Soviet

The Soviets have traditionally been a land power and have historically been primarily concerned with the geopolitical preservation of the U.S.S.R. Their strategy has been based on the maintenance of "buffer states" around the periphery of Soviet territory. It has been the Red Army that has shouldered the burden of protecting the Soviet homeland, with the Soviet Navy having the primary mission of supporting the land forces in coastal waters and in adjacent seas. However, the Soviets' projection in recent years, of a substantial naval force in the Mediterranean, strongly suggests that they have purged themselves of the continental mentality that in the past has pervaded their strategic thought. By their own leaders' statements the mission of the Soviet Navy has changed from a strictly defensive one to now include a role as "a principal offensive arm" of the Soviet Supreme Command.

Western influence that had long dominated the Mediterranean area was initially breached in the mid 1950s by the Soviet political offensive that

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appealed to Arab nationalism in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq and supported these states against Israel, using military and economic aid as tools. This political offensive was widened in the 1960s to include Algeria and Yemen and, to a degree, Iran, a recipient of considerable Soviet economic aid. As the political climate became more favorable, with increasing Arab dependence on Moscow, the Soviets responded by increasing their naval strength in the Eastern Mediterranean. At the time of the Arab-Israeli war the Soviets had a substantial naval force present in the Mediterranean.

While the Soviets suffered a major setback in their relations with the Arab States when they did not intervene with military force in the Arabs' behalf in this short and disastrous war of June 1967, it proved only temporary. They rapidly reasserted their position in the following months by quickly providing massive economic and military aid to the defeated nations in the aftermath of the war, supplementing this with large and impressive naval forces visiting ports such as Latakia, Port Said, Alexandria, and Algiers with Soviet admirals proclaiming support for the Arab States. On balance, the planning and implementation of this strategy combining political, psychological, economic and military factors was a remarkable example of overall coordination at the national level in Moscow. It succeeded. Today the U.S.S.R. would appear to have established itself as a significant power in the Mediterranean with key states on the Southern perimeter under her direct influence, if not control.

Having succeeded in the Mediterranean, there would appear to be every reason for the Soviet leadership to look to the contiguous area of the Red Sea, Indian Ocean and oil-rich Persian Gulf as the next target. With the announced withdrawal of British forces from this area in the next few years and statements from many responsible spokes-

men in the United States that this nation will "no longer be the unilateral policeman of the world" and will not replace the British presence there, Moscow might well look on this area as the logical next place to exploit its successful "Mediterranean Strategy." The recent cruise of a Russian naval squadron visiting ports in East Africa, the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf as well as India and Pakistan *for the first time in history* may well signal Soviet intentions. The unconfirmed reports of Soviet naval bases being established in the area, if proven true, would clearly indicate Soviet intentions.

Some authorities have argued that without attack aircraft carriers Soviet naval strategy must necessarily be defensive. This logic possibly has some merit for conflicts that might take place in the wide expanses of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, but not in the Mediterranean Sea. In World War II, German land-based aviation was quite effective in limiting Allied naval power in the Mediterranean and in supporting airborne invasions of Crete and other islands in the region. We certainly must credit Soviet land-based aircraft, equipped with standoff long range air-to-surface missiles, with a like capability if deployed in the area. Additionally, the sophisticated surface-to-surface missile capabilities of Soviet patrol boats, surface ships and submarines pose a significant threat. Therefore, while the U.S. Sixth Fleet with its attack carriers still possesses today a marked superiority vis-a-vis the Soviet Naval forces in the Mediterranean, future U.S. superiority could be challenged when one considers the missile attack capability not only of Soviet, but possibly Soviet controlled indigenous forces which might well develop in this area, particularly if U.S.S.R. political activities continue to prosper.

While this challenge would be valid in a hot war strategy, especially if it was based on a surprise missile attack against

our carriers and major elements of the Sixth Fleet from a peacetime environment, it is doubtful if a *rational* Soviet leadership would consider it. The consequences of escalation to general war would certainly restrain them from such a course of action. Too, in assessing their goals in the area and recognizing the political and psychological success already achieved, any strategy which might involve a direct military confrontation with U.S. forces would seem to offer unnecessary hazards. Preferable would seem to be a cold war strategy, an expansion of that which they are already embarked upon. Thus, with the selective use of military and economic assistance, and by progressively increasing and making visible their military capabilities—including a substantial amphibious capability (possibly based on the aircraft carrier MOSKVA which recently deployed into the area)—they could achieve their national goals, step by step. They may well have concluded that with this strategy they can outflank NATO to the South, without firing a gun and without fear of escalation.

If so, it in many ways poses an enigmatic problem for the United States and NATO. Such a Soviet strategy would not in itself be in contravention of international law or historical practice. The British followed a strategy not unlike this over many years in the

development of their empire. A U.S. and NATO strategy to counter this Soviet strategy poses a real challenge.

This is particularly true when one considers possible Soviet intentions now vis-a-vis the Algerian base of Mers-el-Kebir, (sitting near the entrance to the Mediterranean), and possibly later in relation to Tanzania, Aden, French Somaliland, Eritrea and the oil-rich Persian Gulf states. In hostile hands, these areas could have a major impact on the security of the United States and other NATO countries.

But what can be identified as the central issue, the core, in this problem as regards the U.S. Navy? Since World War II the U.S. Navy has been largely left alone in the exploitation of naval power, but it now has a serious contender. The Soviet switch to an offensive naval capability in the Mediterranean, even though limited to a cold war environment, deserves immediate attention and intensive study by our national policy planners backed up by our naval planners. We at the Naval War College may be able to contribute.

We must meet this threat and, over the longer term, effectively counter the many implications that this new Soviet strategy presents. Admiral Mahan perceived the problem, and his forewarning has today become our challenge.



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