

CHAPTER 3

BACKGROUND TO SUPERPOWER NAVAL INVOLVEMENT

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Soviet Union

Within the past twenty years the Soviet Union has begun to expand the role of its Navy, moving from a strictly defensive posture with a force reserved for wartime contingencies to a more flexible one that is useful in a variety of peacetime missions. To achieve this about face the Soviet Navy has had to undergo considerable change. A realistic assessment of the significance of the Soviet naval presence in the Indian Ocean is not possible without some regard for the position of the Soviet Navy in the military hierarchy, the Soviet doctrine of a unitary military strategy and the broad outlines of Soviet post-war naval construction programs.

The modern Soviet Navy is a product of the post-Stalin period. During World War II the Navy played only a minor part in the war effort, with operations limited to the support of small amphibious landings, harassment of Axis shipping in the Baltic and provision of final-stage escort for some Arctic Ocean convoys to Archangel and Murmansk. Under Stalin's post-war rule, founded on old-fashioned continental Great Russian assumptions, the Navy aged and remained a coastal defence force : ill-equipped, ill-prepared to act, ill-informed about its role and ill-led to execute it. /

The advent of Krushchev led to changes. In 1956, he launched the anti-Stalin campaign with his "Secret Speech" to the XXth Communist Party Congress; the same year Admiral Gorshkov was appointed Commander of the Navy. He remains in that position

today and represents a continuous and comparatively unchanging influence on modern Soviet naval doctrine. He is the only naval representative on the Supreme Military Council which is dominated by ten Army generals and two from the Airforce. Soviet defence policy as a result is predominantly the product of a land-oriented politico-military hierarchy. One consequence of the hierarchical structure of the Soviet armed forces - in which the Navy remains the junior service, overshadowed in order of seniority by the Strategic Missile Troops, the Ground Forces, the Air Defence Forces and the Airforces - has been the past relegation of the Navy to an inferior role in Soviet military policy. It is remarkable then that Gorshkov has been able to achieve an upgrading of the Navy's position in defence policy from its role as a coastal defence force to one rivalling the US Navy as the world's most modern and powerful fleet.

In his long years in office, Gorshkov has consistently favoured the establishment of a balanced fleet, balancing strategic nuclear capability with conventional seapower and balancing the underwater and surface elements, the latter also being able to support state interests in peacetime. His designs for the Navy were frequently in conflict with the sentiments of his military and political superiors. In the 1950's and early 1960's Krushchev still relied heavily on nuclear missiles, particularly ICBMs, as fundamental to his grand strategy. It was not until Brezhnev and Kosygin assumed leadership that a truly comprehensive global military strategy was formulated. A traumatic nuclear confrontation was seen to be only one of a number of possible superpower conflict situations - and not the most probable. The way became clear to assign genuine strategic tasks to conventional forces.

In a series of articles in 1972 entitled "Navies in War and Peace", Gorshkov illustrated the significance of seapower in Russian/Soviet history. The series was intended to:

"foster the development in our officers of a unity of views on the role of navies under various historical conditions".

It is clear from the style of the articles and the way the arguments are developed that Gorshkov was addressing a wider audience in which the Soviet political leadership and the higher defence community were the most important targets.

The Gorshkov papers develop a number of points which are of particular importance in the present context:

- He advocates the creation of a significant Soviet naval tradition, and in particular a tradition of forward deployment. Gorshkov uses historical examples to demonstrate that a strong navy has helped in the past bring vast territorial gains - and is today "the most powerful weapon of Russia's foreign policy".
- He bitterly attacks "Czarists and fools" for ignoring Russia's need for a powerful offensive fleet. Everytime "Russia failed to properly emphasise development of the Fleet and its maintenance at a level necessitated by modern-day demands, the country either lost battles in wars or its peacetime policy failed to achieve designated objectives".
- He dismisses past naval armaments limitation treaties as worthless and of benefit only to the dominant naval powers because they perpetuate their superiority. Contained in this is an element of warning to the political leadership, particularly Brezhnev, who in a Moscow speech in June 1971

suggested to the United States a policy of mutual restraint in distant oceans.

- Gorshkov's analysis of the German and Japanese navies in World War II criticizes their one-sided emphasis on a simplistic defensive strategy (Germany), or an offensive strategy (Japan) to the detriment of other aspects. The German U-boat campaign failed, he maintains, because Germany ignored the importance of a protective surface fleet to combat enemy anti-submarine warfare (ASW). Conversely, the Japanese failed because the offensive fleet virtually ignored ASW. He is thus stressing the necessity for a 'balanced' navy.

In the final article of the series Gorshkov details four missions for the Soviet Navy:

Strategic Offence The marriage of nuclear powered submarines to ballistic missiles places the Navy in the forefront in this task.

Strategic Defence The Navy must be capable of denying the use of the seas in areas where hostile submarines or attack carriers could launch weapons against the Soviet Union and its allies.

Support of Ground Operations Gorshkov is not specific on how the Navy would support ground operations though it is assumed he contemplates maintenance of the sea lines of communication and denial to the enemy of its maritime support.

Naval Presence The presence of Soviet naval vessels in the oceans of the world is an impressive factor deterring any attempts at sudden aggression against the Soviet Union and its allies. Gorshkov refers specifically to the growing importance of sea bed resources to future economic development and the role of the Navy in guaranteeing the Soviet Union its rightful access to these.

The restructuring of the Soviet Navy in the 'Gorshkov model', having regard for its expanded role, has necessitated a vast ship-building program. However, the scrapping of obsolete vessels which had been built during the construction surge of World War II and the immediate post-war period has in some cases overtaken the procurement of more modern replacements in the various classes of naval shipping. In 1945 the main strategic task of the Soviet Navy in a future war was the repulsion of sea-borne invasions and carrier air attacks by the navies of the major maritime powers. The procurement program placed heavy emphasis on destroyers, medium range submarines, and land-based aircraft, while the deployment pattern placed the heaviest naval concentrations in the Baltic and Black Seas, the coastal areas closest to Soviet vital centres.

With the re-evaluation of defence policy in the mid-1950's at the time of Gorshkov's appointment, the perceived danger of a seaborne invasion had been replaced by that of a surprise nuclear attack. The new threat could not be met by the existing fleet, which by now was excessive in numbers but deficient in capacity because of its reliance on guns, torpedoes and mines and its weak anti-aircraft protection. The prime

reliance was to be placed on long-range cruise missiles. In 1956, the cruiser-building program was abruptly terminated, medium submarine production was reduced and a program for destroyer and smaller unit construction was postponed. At this time nearly half of the Navy's large ship building slipways were handed over to civilian construction. By 1957, procurement plans called for nuclear attack submarines capable of engaging aircraft carriers well away from Soviet shores. The recently completed Kotlin and Skory class destroyers were withdrawn from service to be refitted with improved anti-aircraft weapons to enable them to operate effectively in waters outside the range of the land-based air cover.

As details of the US Polaris submarine-missile system, to be introduced in 1961, became available it was necessary to strengthen the Soviet Navy's anti-submarine capability in Arctic waters, to counter the possible deployment of US submarines in that area. In response to this threat, plans were made for the procurement of a number of ASW helicopter carriers of the Moskva class. Two were under construction when the extended range of the modified Polaris missile (which had more than doubled by 1964) rendered the carriers obsolete, well before the first was completed. To engage Polaris submarines, Soviet ships would therefore need to be deployed to distant waters without the support of land-based air cover and as such would be vulnerable to air attack. Plans were then laid down for the construction of the larger Kuril class carriers which, as well as having ASW helicopters would also carry vertical/short takeoff and landing (V/STOL) aircraft for their own air defence. Unless this class too is rendered inadequate, at least six are likely

TABLE V
SOVIET SURFACE COMBATANTS, 1974 AND 1980

Type and class	Number of ships	
	1974	1980
<u>CARRIERS FOR V/STOL AIRCRAFT AND HELICOPTERS</u>		
Kiev	0	3
Moskva	2	2
<u>CRUISERS</u>		
Kara/Follow-on class	1	9
Kresta II	5	8
Kresta I	4	4
Kynda	4	4
Sverdlov	12	8
Chapaev	2	0
Kirov	1	0
<u>DESTROYERS</u>		
Krivak/Follow-on class	5	29
Kashin	19	19
Kanin	6	8
Krupny	1	0
Kotlin (SAM-equipped)	8	8
Kildin	2	2
Kotlin	18	18
Skory	20	0
Tallin	1	0
<u>FRIGATES</u>		
Grisha/Follow-on class	13	26
Kola	5	0
Riga	35	0
Mirka	25	25
Petya	43	43
<u>OTHER TYPES (DISPLACING AT LEAST 200 TONS)</u>		
Nanuchka	8	20
Osa/Follow-on class	120	120
Poti/Kronstadt/So-1/Stenka	215	185

Source : B.M. Blechman, The Control of Naval Armaments :
Prospects and Possibilities, Brookings Institution,
Washington D.C., 1975.

to be built. The first, the 'Kiev', was launched in 1975 and two more are currently under construction.

Estimates of the current Soviet naval strength vary considerably. From evidence the Committee has received, the Soviet Navy consists of 227 major surface combatants (frigate size and above), 325 submarines of which more than 130 are nuclear powered, 85 amphibious ships and 1700 other vessels which include support ships and coastal defence craft. The major combatants are made up of 3 ASW carriers, 34 cruisers, 88 destroyers and 102 frigates. The number of submarines currently in service is considerably smaller than the total of nearly 500 in the late 1950's, resulting from the progressive retirement of large numbers of diesel submarines built during that time.

As to future Soviet naval force levels, projections available suggest that the major surface combatant force in 1980 will be 216 ships, consisting of 5 carriers, 33 cruisers, 84 destroyers and 94 frigates. These projections are made on the basis that current trends in building and scrapping rates will be maintained. This represents a slight reduction in the number of ships compared with present figures, exhibiting the block obsolescence problem of the Soviet Navy stemming from the severe curtailment in the construction programs for surface vessels at the end of the 1950's in favour of submarine construction. The trend is likely to be maintained until at least 1985 when the size of the surface combatant fleet will have declined to 163 ships with the largest reduction being in frigates which will be approximately half their present number. The

TABLE VI
SOVIET SUBMARINE FORCES, 1974 AND 1980

Type and class	Number of Submarines			
	1974		1980	
	Nuclear- powered	Diesel- powered	Nuclear- powered	Diesel- powered
<u>STRATEGIC</u>	45	22	62	12
Delta	3		28	
Yankee	33		34	
Hotel	9		0	
Gulf		18		12
Zulu		4		0
<u>NONSTRATEGIC</u>	74	178	120	76
Cruise missile				
Charley/Papa/Follow-on class	13		29	
Echo II	27		27	
Juliet		16		16
Whiskey (conversions)		9		0
Cruise missile, total	40	25	56	16
Attack				
Alpha/Victor/Follow-on class	19		42	
Echo I/Hotel	3		12	
November	13		10	
Foxtrot		56		50
Zulu		25		0
Whiskey		36		0
Romeo		12		0
Bravo		4		10
Quebec		20		0
Attack, total	35	153	64	60
TOTAL	120	200	182	88

Source : B.M. Blechman, The Control of Naval Armaments : Prospects and Possibilities, Brookings Institution, Washington D.C., 1975.

Note : NATO designators are used to describe the various classes of Soviet submarines rather than the Soviet nomenclature.

tables in this section are included to give an indication of the relative size of the US and Soviet fleets and their projected size in 1980.

The submarine force in 1980 will have approximately 270 boats, of which, more than 180 will be nuclear-powered. The undersea fleet will have 74 submarines equipped with strategic nuclear missiles, 72 non-strategic boats carrying cruise missiles and a further 104 attack submarines. Again, these figures reflect the reduction in naval craft from present levels as large numbers of diesel submarines are retired and replaced with fewer, though more formidable, modern vessels.

Since World War II, Soviet naval deployments have been in line with its desire to match the deployments of Western navies, particularly that of the United States. In 1961, President Kennedy introduced new defence programs which provided for sharp increases in the procurement of strategic weapons systems. Provision was also made for the deployment of the newer, longer-range, version of the Polaris missile to the Mediterranean (in 1963) and to the Pacific (in 1964). These developments accentuated the Soviet need for forward deployments to counter the increasing numbers of US nuclear weapon carriers at sea and the sea areas in which they would have to be sought. Hence the deployment of a permanent force to the Mediterranean (1964), the Indian Ocean (1968) and the Caribbean (1969), in addition to more intensive activity in areas where Soviet naval forces were already deployed, such as the Atlantic and Western Pacific.

Thus the Indian Ocean deployment is part of a process of forward deployment which began in a modest fashion in 1945, with the maintenance of submarine surveillance in the Arctic Ocean, and has been pushed further out as the ranges of adversary weapons systems have increased. In the case of the Indian Ocean, evidence of a US strategic submarine presence has not been reported and the deployment of aircraft carriers to the region is sporadic. But a reaction to it has consistently been justified by Soviet naval strategists because the period in which successively improved versions of the Polaris missile were being introduced was also the period of the agreement on the establishment of the communications station at North West Cape and the Anglo-American surveys of Aldabra and Diego Garcia as sites for the possible establishment of future naval facilities.

United States

The assumption of greater international commitments by the United States after World War II necessitated the projection of its military power well beyond the North American landmass. The Navy is an important element of this power projection. The superiority of the US Navy permitted the supply from continental America for "Truman doctrine" operations in Korea and the protection of Nationalist Chinese forces which had been established on Taiwan in 1949. The value of superior naval forces was also demonstrated in President Kennedy's blockade of Cuba in 1962 and more recently it was this seapower that permitted President Nixon to mine the approaches to Haiphong harbour during the closing stages of the Vietnam war.

The overall US position on seapower has changed little since 1945. Even though the involvement in Indochina tended to overshadow the Navy's continuing role, it is doubtful the huge effort mounted there in 1968-70 could have been maintained without control of the sea. Since the peak of its Vietnam war strength, the Army has been significantly reduced in size (1.6m in 1968 to 0.8m in 1976) and capability, the Airforce's size and share of budgetary allocations has also fallen steadily. In comparison, the Navy has emerged well ahead experiencing the smallest reduction in personnel and increasing its share of the defence budget. The relative importance of the Navy in long-range projection of force has actually increased despite the general rundown in the US forces.

The US Chief of Naval Operations has established the Navy's role and 'raison d'etre' to be four mission areas:

Strategic Deterrence To deter an all-out attack on the United States or its allies by ensuring a "second strike" capability. The Navy's Polaris/Poseidon/Trident strategic submarine forces are fundamental to this deterrence because of their high nuclear survival probability. These same forces have the ability also to respond to a limited strike by the Soviet Union or smaller nuclear power by rapid changes in targetting. The strategic force must also maintain a "balance of power" image to reassure third countries that the US is at least the equal of the USSR in strategic weapons capability.

Sea Control With present force-levels and technology, it is not possible to guarantee complete control of the sea at all times. The Sea Control mission is then to control particular sea areas for specific periods to ensure industrial supplies

and reinforce/resupply military forces abroad. Additionally, it is to provide wartime economic and military supplies to allies and provide safety for naval forces engaged in the Projection of Power Ashore role.

Projection of Power Ashore An important strategem of the US Navy, the mission describes the impact of naval forces on land forces, through amphibious assault, to establish a beachhead from which further air and land operations can be launched and supported. This mission also encompasses naval bombardment and the tactical projection of naval airforces against land targets or in support of land force operations.

Naval Presence The use of naval forces to achieve political objectives through demonstrations of naval power to deter actions inimical to the interests of the United States and its allies and to encourage actions that are in accord with those interests.

At its present strength, the US Navy consists of some 500 ships, of which approximately 300 are combatants, together displacing nearly 6 million tonnes. Its establishment presently includes 540,000 naval personnel and 200,000 marines. The aircraft carrier, the mainstay of the US fleet in providing a flexible deployment capability consistent with the projection-of-power-ashore mission, remains the principal element of the naval arsenal. There are 2 nuclear-powered carriers, each of about 80,000 tonnes and carrying 90-100 aircraft, and 11 smaller conventionally powered carriers, 3 of which are of World War II construction and soon to be retired. As well, there are 7 helicopter carriers of 17,500 tonnes for use in conjunction with amphibious operations. It is envisaged that the 1980's carrier

TABLE VII
US AIRCRAFT CARRIER AND AMPHIBIOUS FORCES, 1974 AND 1980

Type of vessel and designation	Class	Number of ships	
		1974	1980
<u>Full-size aircraft carriers</u>			
CVN	Nimitz (nuclear-powered)	0	2
CVN	Enterprise (nuclear-powered)	1	1
CV	Forrestal and Kitty Hawk	8	8
CVA	Midway	3	1
CVA	Hancock	2	0
<u>Helicopter carriers</u>			
LHA	Tarawa	0	5
LPH	Iwo Jima	7	7
<u>Command ships</u>			
LCC	Blue Ridge	2	2
AGF	LaSalle	1	1
<u>Cargo ships</u>			
LKA	Charleston	5	5
LKA	Tulare	1	0
<u>Transports</u>			
LPA	Paul Revere	2	1
LPD	Austin	12	12
LPD	Raleigh	2	0
<u>Landing ships</u>			
LSD	Anchorage	5	5
LSD	Thomaston	8	0
LST	Newport	20	20

Source : B.M. Blechman, The Control of Naval Armaments :
Prospects and Possibilities, Brookings Institution,
Washington D.C., 1975.

TABLE VIII
US SURFACE COMBATANTS, 1974 AND 1980

Type of vessel and designation	Class	Number of ships	
		1974	1980
<u>CRUISERS</u>			
CGN	Long Beach (nuclear-powered)	1	1
CA	Salem	1	0
CG	Albany	3	0
CGN	Virginia (nuclear-powered)	0	4
CGN	California (nuclear-powered)	1	2
CGN	Truxtun (nuclear-powered)	1	1
CGN	Bainbridge (nuclear-powered)	1	1
CG	Belknap	9	9
CG	Leahy	9	9
<u>DESTROYERS</u>			
DD	Spruance	0	30
DDG	Adams	23	23
DDG	Sherman	14	14
DDG	Decatur	4	4
DG	Farragut	8	10
DD	Mitscher	2	0
DD	Fram I and II	55	0
<u>FRIGATES</u>			
FFG	Guided missile frigate	0	24
FF	Knox	44	46
FFG	Brooke	6	6
FF	Garcia	10	10
FF	Bronstein	2	2
FF	Jones	2	0
<u>PATROL COMBATANTS</u>			
PG	Asheville and Tacoma	15	10
PHM	Pegasus	0	30
SES	Surface effect ship	0	3

Source : B.M. Blechman, The Control of Naval Armaments :
Prospects and Possibilities, Brookings Institution,
Washington D.C., 1975.

force will consist of 12 major vessels (4 nuclear-powered) and 12 helicopter carriers.

In the late-1960's, the Navy increased its procurement rate for surface combatants. Additions by 1980, some of which have already been completed, include 6 nuclear-powered cruisers, 30 destroyers, 24 guided-missile frigates and 30 missile-equipped hydrofoil patrol boats. Matched to the present rate of retirement for older vessels, these additions should slightly expand the surface combatant force to approximately 240 ships. Qualitatively, however, the force will be much improved. In 1980, the average age of surface combatants will be ten years compared with the present average of more than fourteen years. There will be nine nuclear-powered cruisers and ships equipped with surface-to-air missiles will increase by 60 percent; those with antisubmarine rocket systems by 25 percent; and with helicopter support facilities by 50 percent.

The 1980's will witness a major improvement in the US submarine fleet, though the numbers of boats will decline. In the interim the underwater force will become entirely nuclear-powered as the remaining diesel units are retired. The first two strategic submarines of the new Trident class are due to be commissioned in 1980, increasing the strategic fleet to 43 boats. Designed to supplement the existing Polaris/Poseidon boats, the new vessels displacing more than 18,000 tonnes - twice the size of their predecessors - will carry missiles with a reported range of 9,000 kilometres, significantly increasing the sea areas in which the boats may be deployed. Attack submarine numbers will remain at 71 though their composite capability will

TABLE IX
US SUBMARINE FORCES, 1974 AND 1980

Type and class	Number of submarines	
	1974	1980
<u>STRATEGIC SUBMARINES</u>		
Trident	0	2
Lafayette	31	31
Ethan Allen	5	5
George Washington	5	5
Total strategic	41	43
<u>ATTACK SUBMARINES</u>		
Nuclear-powered		
Los Angeles	0	9
Sturgeon	34	37
Permit	13	13
Skipjack	5	5
Skate	4	4
Other	3	3
Total nuclear-powered attack	59	71
Diesel-powered		
Various classes	12	0
TOTAL	112	114

Source : B.M. Blechman, The Control of Naval Armaments :
Prospects and Possibilities, Brookings Institution,
Washington D.C., 1975.

improve considerably with the introduction of the Los Angeles and Sturgeon class boats which are primarily designed and equipped to counter other submarines.

Comparisons

A comparison of the development of the Soviet and United States navies in the thirty years since World War II reveals some noteworthy differences in naval policies. US policy in regard to the role of its fleet has changed little and fairly consistent construction and scrapping rates have been maintained. The USSR on the other hand, has substantially altered the role of its fleet from that of a coastal defence force to the present one of a very formidable blue water fleet, in so doing the position of the Navy in overall Soviet military policy has been substantially enhanced. As a result of this, and changes in the leadership's appreciation of the role of the Navy, Soviet naval construction and retirement programs have vacillated considerably during the period.

Since 1958, the United States has lagged behind the Soviet Union in the number of ships commissioned, 377 against 722, while in terms of displacement the total tonnage delivered to the US Navy exceeded that to its Soviet counterpart by 26 percent (3.3 m tonnes to 2.6m tonnes). For the period 1969 to 1976, deliveries to the US Navy exceeded deliveries to the Soviet Navy by 12% in the number of ships and 72% in tonnage. Soviet nuclear ship deliveries for this period, however, exceeded deliveries to the US Navy by 54% in numbers and 90% in tonnage. Since 1958, both navies have built submarine forces to take

advantage of the revolution in undersea warfare conveyed by nuclear power technology. Both have married the ballistic nuclear missile to the nuclear-powered submarine to produce a strategic weapon system with a high degree of combat survival potential. The US applied nuclear power to its major surface combatants while the Soviet application to surface ships has been confined to ice-breakers. The Soviet Navy replaced large numbers of its conventionally powered submarines as the older vessels were retired, the US Navy did not. The US Navy did replace its amphibious force, acquired during World War II, with a modern higher speed force and continued to maintain a balanced fleet of aircraft carriers, cruisers, destroyers and support ships. The Soviet Navy has acquired a modest amphibious capability and modernised its cruiser/destroyer force.

A general examination of the two navies reveals that fleets of comparable size and capability are now maintained by the two superpowers. Dissimilarities that are apparent may be explained by differences in geography, national policy and alliance systems that dictate differing US and Soviet naval force structures and deployment patterns. The national strategy of the United States is a forward strategy, driven by the basic considerations of world geopolitics. The Soviet Union is entirely located within the Eurasian landmass and its principal allies, the nations of the Warsaw Pact, are contiguous to its western border. The most probable adversaries of the USSR are the NATO forces in Western Europe and the Chinese, both located on the Eurasian continent and on the flanks of the USSR. The Soviet Union can defend itself, support its allies, or strike

its most threatening adversaries without necessarily crossing a major body of water. In contrast, the United States is characterised by its insular position on the North American continent where there are no potential enemies on its borders. Two of the States, Alaska and Hawaii, are remote from the continental United States. In this situation, the support of its allies as well as defence against attacks on the United States itself must be overseas operations. Because of their geographical positions (all are maritime states), the United States and its allies depend fundamentally on the use of the seas for their commerce and trade in peacetime, and for their lines of communication in war. The USSR and its allies, a number of which are continental landlocked states, currently do not. Because of this basic asymmetry, the primary conventional missions of the two superpowers and their respective allies differ in several respects. The US places emphasis on sea control and the projection of power ashore through attack carriers and amphibious forces while Soviet naval policy stresses defence against US power projection efforts and interdiction of US and allied economic and military support shipping on the open seas, particularly through the deployment of ASW forces.