THE SOVIET NAVY

Strengths and Liabilities

edited by Bruce W. Watson
and Susan M. Watson

Westview Press / Arms and Armour Press

The Soviet Navy

Strengths and Liabilities

edited by Bruce W. Watson
and Susan M. Watson

Westview Press • Boulder, Colorado
Arms and Armour Press • London, England

This book is included in Westview's Special Studies on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

Published in 1986 in the United States of America by Westview Press, Inc.; Frederick A. Praeger, Publisher; 5500 Central Avenue, Boulder, Colorado 80301

Published in Great Britain in 1986 by Arms and Armour Press Limited, 2-6 Hampstead High Street, London NW3 1QQ

Distributed in Australia by Capricorn Link (Australia) Pty. Ltd, P.O. Box 665, Lane Cove, New South Wales 2066, Australia

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Main entry under title:
The Soviet Navy.
(Westview special studies on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe)
Bibliography: p.
Includes index.
1. Soviet Union. Voenno-morskoĭ flot—Addresses, essays, lectures. I. Watson, Bruce W. II. Watson, Susan M., 1943- III. Series.
VA573.S586 1985 359'.00947 84-27138
ISBN 0-86531-767-4

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
The Soviet navy: strengths and liabilities.
1. Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, *Voenno-morsko ĭ flot*
I. Watson, Bruce W. II. Watson, Susan M.
359'.00947 VA573
ISBN 0-85368-721-8

Printed and bound in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The Soviet Navy

Also of Interest

Red Navy at Sea: Soviet Naval Operations on the High Seas, 1956–1980, Bruce W. Watson

†*The Armed Forces of the USSR*, Third Edition, Revised and Updated, Harriet Fast Scott and William F. Scott

Military Lessons of the Falkland Islands War: Views from the United States, edited by Bruce W. Watson and Peter M. Dunn

†Available in hardcover and paperback.

About the Book and Editors

Since Admiral Sergei G. Gorshkov was appointed to the office of commander in chief of the Soviet Navy in 1956, the Soviet Union has made a massive investment in naval construction, training, and operations. As a result, the Soviet Navy has grown from a coastal defense force to one of the world's two strongest navies. This book offers a detailed assessment of every major aspect of the Soviet Navy, from fleet structure and training facilities to command and control procedures and warfare and intelligence collection capabilities. In each case the analysis stresses the strengths and liabilities of the Soviet Navy and assesses implications for the West. The editors conclude that current trends indicate the Soviet Navy will play a major role in projecting Soviet military power in the developing world in the late 1980s and 1990s, a threat that the United States may find difficult to combat. Written by a team of academic researchers and naval analysts, the book provides a thorough understanding of the dimensions and implications of evolving Soviet naval power.

Naval Commander **Bruce W. Watson** is director of publications at the Defense Intelligence College and is the author of numerous military books, including *Red Navy at Sea: Soviet Naval Operations on the High Seas, 1956–1980* (Westview, 1982). **Susan M. Watson** received her education at Trinity College and Georgetown University and is currently a free-lance editor and consultant.

FOR JOSEPH SCHIEBEL (1930–1976)

This book is dedicated to Joseph Schiebel by the authors and editors, all of whom have been associated with either Georgetown University or the Defense Intelligence College, where Professor Schiebel taught and served. Joe Schiebel began his tenure as director of the Russian Area Studies Program in 1966 and rapidly revised a lackluster program into one that was both highly respected and extremely responsive to Department of Defense needs. Likewise, he joined the faculty of the Defense Intelligence School in 1968 and was subsequently instrumental in formulating the school's proposal to establish a Master of Science in Strategic Intelligence. At both institutions, his extensive knowledge, high moral and academic standards, endless energy, and love for his students deeply moved them, prompting them to excel. Joe Schiebel suffered an untimely death in 1976; a great loss. Nonetheless, he influenced a large number of individuals who have gone on to publish, to teach, or to serve. In addition, many of his initiatives, such as the master's program at the Defense Intelligence College, were ultimately successful. Thus, we who owe so much to Joe Schiebel hope that this book repays in part his selfless efforts on our behalf.

Preface

Since Admiral Sergei G. Gorshkov's appointment as commander in chief in 1956, the Soviet Navy has made remarkable progress, advancing from little more than a coastal defense force to one of the world's two strongest navies. Dramatic developments in hardware—ships, submarines, and aircraft—have been accompanied by equally illustrious advances in the navy's war-fighting capabilities and in naval operations that support Soviet foreign policy objectives. Such operations include port visits, responses to crises, and gaining access to port facilities. In fact, the navy has become the most important branch of the Soviet armed forces in respect to foreign policy matters, because it can be used as a diplomatic instrument in a more unobtrusive way than other military power. Navies operate on the high seas, use port facilities of other nations, make port visits, and accomplish many tasks which in and of themselves are not necessarily aggressive in nature. It is more difficult for ground and air forces to appear innocuous. Currently Soviet ballistic missile–equipped submarines patrol with weapons targeted against major U.S. cities, and other Soviet submarines stalk U.S. aircraft carriers and other naval forces on the high seas, while Soviet ships are visiting foreign ports or are present at overseas bases. These ships play a role in the superpower rivalry for influence around the world.

The Soviet Navy is very strong, but it is vulnerable and has some serious weaknesses. Among these, we note a less than glorious naval tradition, a command and control structure so tightly regulated by the naval headquarters in Moscow that local commanders are unable or incapable of exercising decisive leadership or initiative, a development in naval construction that is uneven, an air defense that is somewhat inadequate, and weaknesses in war-fighting capabilities.

The purpose of this book is to objectively examine the Soviet Navy in its totality. The reader might well ask why we are editing a book in a field in which so much has already been written. We feel that the book makes several valuable contributions, and two particularly unique strengths are its scope and balance.

The scope is very broad. There are many excellent books dealing with various aspects of the Soviet Navy. However, we believe that this is the first to examine all aspects of that institution in an organized and consistent fashion. While looking at the Soviet Navy's history, tradition, people,

hardware, operations, and warfare capabilities, it also pays attention to the interplay and effects of these various factors on one another.

The authors of the chapters in this book view Soviet foreign policy as a real threat to world peace. Linked by their association with either Georgetown University or the Defense Intelligence College, they have been asked to provide the reader with the historical context of their topics and then to identify Soviet strengths *and* liabilities. The result is material that tries not to exaggerate Soviet strengths or to deemphasize the actual and potential effects of Soviet naval activities. As a result, the book provides a unique view of the Soviet Navy—one the editors feel is a valuable contribution to the current literature.

Bruce W. Watson
Susan M. Watson

Acknowledgments

We wish to express our gratitude to several people whose invaluable assistance and support made this book possible. Foremost are the contributors, who did the research on which this work is based. We are indebted as well to the following individuals for their support and assistance: Peter M. Dunn, Douglas Lovejoy, William and Harriet Scott, Peter Tsouras, Kenneth Vernoski, Paul Holman, Patricia Howard, Gerald Hopple, James George, Norman Polmar, Frank Uhlig, Earl Tifford, and Robert De Gross. We also thank our parents, Ida and Maurice Kramer and Wallace and Viola Watson, for a lifetime of guidance and encouragement, and our brothers and sisters—Donald Watson, Thomas and Jerome Kramer, Evelyn Michon, and Cathryn French—for their interest. Additionally, we thank Frederick Praeger, Barbara Ellington, and the staff of Westview Press for their support and guidance.

Finally, we would like to thank our children—Bruce, Jr., Susan, Jennifer, and Ella—who were understanding and patient during the editing of this book and our friends Joshua, Albert, and Abigail who were supportive.

B.W.W.
S.M.W.

Contents

Tables, Figures, and Photographs

Tables

Figures

Photographs

Part 1

The Tradition, the Service, and the People

1
Soviet Naval Tradition

Peter Tsouras

Like the Hydra's teeth, the seeds sown by Admiral Sergei G. Gorshkov's naval expansion have burst from the shipyards of the Soviet Union seemingly ready to challenge an apprehensive West on the high seas. Images of the technological and numerical strengths of today's Soviet Navy crowd out the subtle reality that this shiny new toy of the Soviet Union is rooted in the continuum of Russian-Soviet history and displays inherent, perhaps fatal, weaknesses derived from that tradition.

By any standard, the modern Soviet Navy represents a remarkable organizational and industrial achievement, and the Soviets have every reason to be proud. They see their naval ensign paraded aggressively around the world, undeterred by the ghosts of British glory or the watchfulness of an increasingly nervous U.S. Navy. Having jostled its way to the first rank of navies, the Soviet Navy is all too often judged by the standards of the company that it keeps, which can be a mistake. A navy is not just a collection of ships, men, and deadly weapons—the pieces in a war game. It is a human institution that follows patterns set in its developmental stages by diverse factors of history, culture, and geography. The distillation of these intangible experiences form a navy's character, and this character determines the navy's conduct and success under the ultimate stress of war.

Consistent success and achievement become a tradition of victory that can be the most animating, decisive feature of a military organization. Such a tradition instills pride and confidence and sets the standard that must be kept. Horatio Nelson's message to the fleet at Trafalgar drew upon such a tradition, with crushing effect. The character of the Soviet Navy reflects another tradition, not one of victory, but one of moderate success against regional powers and consistent failure against world-class navies.

Alfred Thayer Mahan said the first element of sea power is a nation's geographical position,[1] and Russia is a perfect example. Since the rise of Muskovy, the physical security and economic survival of the Russian state have been almost wholly dependent upon activities on the Eurasian landmass. Naval considerations, in a strategic sense, have been peripheral, seldom deflecting the land orientation of the Russian-Soviet elites. This situation is a natural outgrowth of Russia's essentially landlocked geography.