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MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Some Current Problems of Naval Science

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Some Current Problems of Naval Science

by Fleet Admiral of the Soviet Union S. Gorshkov

At the present time the preeminent position in the aggressive bloc of our probable enemies is occupied by nations in whose armed forces the navy has long played a leading role. This being the case, the Communist Party and the Soviet Government strive unceasingly to maintain the Navy's capability to guarantee the security of the maritime boundaries of our country, to destroy nuclear groupings of enemy naval forces, and to operate in all areas of the world ocean, successfully fulfilling the task of safeguarding the national interests of the USSR. The fundamental changes in the forces and equipment of our Navy in the postwar years have shattered traditional views on its missions and methods of fulfilling them and on its overall role and place in modern warfare. The further development of the fleet also requires serious theoretical research and the refinement of several principles of its use under modern conditions. In this connection, the editors turned to the Commander-in-Chief of the Navy, Fleet Admiral of the Soviet Union S.G. Gorshkov, with the request that he reply to a series of questions.

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Question To what degree is scientific research increasing its role in solving the problems of the development of the Navy and its use in modern warfare?

Answer Scientific research and analysis are increasingly becoming the foundation for the main directions of current naval development, for the future makeup of each arm of the naval forces, and for the methods of their operational-strategic use in war and peace.

At the same time, science is emerging as one of the main forces accelerating the development of the fleet and of naval art.

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The development of science allows us not only to concentrate our main attention on working out the top priority problems defined during the creation and development of qualitatively new forces and equipment, but also to determine ways of fundamentally increasing the combat capabilities of our Navy and of achieving superiority in all aspects over the navies of our probable enemies. It goes without saying that one of the most important of these problems is the comprehensive development of methods and models for conducting combat operations at sea, especially independent fleet operations, and joint actions of the Navy with other branches of the armed forces and with the combined naval forces of the Warsaw Pact countries.

In turn, the further development of the Navy and the growth of its role in modern warfare demand further broadening of the scientific research front in both naval art and the engineering-technical field.

It is also necessary to take into account that the problems of developing and using naval forces encompass a very large circle of questions, forming the subject of research by many branches of science, from the "purely" technical sciences, such as shipbuilding, oceanology, and hydrography to such divisions of military science as tactics and the art of operations.

All of these scientific fields, each of which interrelates with other branches of knowledge, are of use in achieving a single common goal, and are therefore combined into one branch of military knowledge--naval science.

The existence of naval science as one of the special components of a single Soviet military science is not only legitimate but also necessary. Naval science, sharing Marxist-Leninist principles and a single methodology with military science, investigates the methods of conducting military actions which take place under the special conditions of oceans and seas and in which the Navy participates as the main force. This grouping of a specific body of knowledge into a separate science does not represent some kind of an exception; rather, it corresponds to the present general process of specialization of sciences.

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The combining of the total body of naval knowledge into a separate science is dictated not only by the specific character of this knowledge but also by practical necessity. The main threat to the security of our country used to be from an enemy whose military power was based on land armies. Since World War II, the aggressive bloc of our probable enemies has been represented by states with powerful, modern naval forces capable of decisively influencing the situation on all fronts of an armed conflict.

Therefore, under modern conditions, the significance of naval science for all of the armed forces is greater than ever before, and it would be difficult to overestimate its role in ensuring the defense of the interests of our country and of all countries of the socialist commonwealth. The more thorough and detailed our investigation of the most important problems of naval science, the greater will be the results attained in the further development of the Soviet Armed Forces as a whole.

Thus, considering the experience of the past, scientifically examining the present, and anticipating the future, naval science is called upon to reflect more fully the aspects of development of theory and to work out practical recommendations for conducting military operations on oceans and seas under modern conditions.

Question To what extent do our accumulated views on the role and significance of theaters of military operations (TMO) correspond to the new combat capabilities of the Soviet Navy and the probable conditions under which it will have to carry out combat operations in a war against a powerful naval antagonist?

Answer The question of theaters of military operations is one of our major strategic problems having great practical significance. This problem has a history of its own. It has been resolved each time on the basis of the characteristics of the war to be fought and an analysis of the influence exerted on it by political, economic, geographical, and particularly, military factors.

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In the event of a nuclear world war, which may envelop the entire earth, it will differ from all past wars in the most fundamental way. Therefore, as with many other strategic problems, a new solution is also required for the questions of theaters, their boundaries, and the location and importance of each one from the viewpoint of the importance of the strategic missions to be fulfilled in them and of the strategic groupings of our forces created for them.

In our opinion, the general trends affecting our definitions of theaters are as follows. First, the growth in size of theaters, caused by the characteristics of modern weapons, the rapidity with which they can be used, and the vast distances over which they can be employed.

2 Second, the mutual penetration and overlapping of the boundaries of individual theaters. Because of these factors, it will be incorrect under modern conditions to make a distinction between ground and maritime theaters. It is more correct to have two concepts: continental theaters (in which seas adjacent to continents must be included as well as the land); and ocean theaters, in which the coastal areas of continents must be included, in particular those in which naval forces are based.

[ Third, the theaters must be self-contained and independent as regards the type and composition of their groupings of forces capable of performing strategic operations and as regards the unity of concept of their use and coordination with other theaters. ]

Under modern conditions, military actions in ocean theaters definitely have strategic significance, because of their influence on the attainment of common goals and because of the composition of the groupings of forces participating in them. These groupings will include forces from several fleets, major formations and large units from other branches of the armed forces, and, in particular, long-range aircraft. The influence of the operations carried out on the oceans by these groupings of forces, both on the general course of the war and on the achievement of the final results of the war, will be determined,

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at least in large measure, by the fact that over forty percent of the nuclear potential of our probable enemies is already concentrated in their naval forces. Moreover, these weapons are clearly not designated as much for use against naval forces as for attacking our installations and groupings of forces on all fronts of the struggle and very deep into the rear area.

Considering these vital indicators, the large area of the earth's surface involved, and the independence of ocean operations from continental theaters, we may conclude that ocean theaters now fully qualify as independent theaters of military operations.

Since it goes beyond the limits of our commentary to define the boundaries of continental theaters, we will dwell on the ocean theaters only. An ocean theater consists of a vast expanse of ocean with its seas and islands, the adjacent area of the continental coastline, and the air space above both, in which areas strategic groupings of armed forces are deployed for the fulfilment of strategic missions leading to the attainment of the political goals of the war. The most important strategic mission in ocean theaters is the total defeat or decisive weakening of major nuclear groupings of enemy naval forces and the destruction of militarily important ground installations on enemy territory.

We must consider the first and foremost ocean theater to be the Atlantic Theater, where the main forces of the opposing sides are concentrated and where the primary missions of the war will clearly be performed. Next in order are the Pacific, Indian, and Arctic theaters.

The Mediterranean Theater, where major groupings of forces are concentrated, must be viewed as being of vital strategic significance. In our opinion, this theater qualifies for inclusion among the ocean theaters. ]

Question Under modern conditions, does the concept of supremacy of the seas remain applicable to a specific situation on seas and oceans or to certain areas of maritime theaters?

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Answer As is well known, supremacy of the seas means favorable conditions for using naval forces in an operation and the achievement of their assigned tasks.\* This concept had already developed in the Russian Navy at the time of the Northern War of 1700-1721 and was not adopted from the British as is often maintained in foreign and even our own literature. In the 1870's questions of supremacy of the seas comprised an important division of the training program of the Naval School.

The importance of this question did not escape the attention of V.I. Lenin himself, who made a thorough scientific analysis of the reasons for Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. He emphasized that the fall of Port Arthur "settled the question of domination of the seas--the principal and fundamental question of the present war" (Complete Collected Works, Volume 9, page 153).

The problems of supremacy of the seas have been studied in the Soviet Navy as well. The views of individual officers of the Russian and Soviet Navies naturally differ a great deal on the essence of supremacy of the seas and the methods of attaining it. This is explained mainly by the fact that for more than two hundred years the essence of this concept was distorted by many bourgeois naval theoreticians such as Colomb, Mahan, and their followers. However, from the first day of its existence, Soviet naval science repudiated attempts to extend concepts of armed combat at sea into the realm of national policy and to identify "supremacy of the sea" with "domination of the world". We viewed the idea of supremacy of the sea not as an end in itself but only as the specific conditions ensuring the successful fulfilment of given objectives by our naval forces and weapons in designated areas of a theater.

It is true that at one time we rejected the concept of supremacy of the seas altogether, replacing it with the concept of favorable operating conditions. The reason for this lay in attempts to interpret the concept of supremacy of the seas as

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\* The same thing as predominance on the sea, ruling (commanding) the sea, favorable operating conditions, etc.

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a reactionary, outdated idea introduced into our Soviet science by bourgeois military science. However, further research into the possible conditions for conducting combat operations at sea obliged us to return each time to the concept of supremacy of the seas and to give it an interpretation appropriate to Soviet military ideology.

For a relatively long time before World War II, the concept of supremacy of the seas was discussed in our manuals, where it was emphasized that such supremacy is the creation of conditions promoting successful fulfilment of the missions assigned to the fleet. In this connection, conditions meant those elements of the situation which promoted the creation of necessary groupings by our naval forces, the delivery of strikes, and the fulfilment of assigned combat missions without appreciable deviation from the set plan. In order to bring about these conditions, we anticipated a stubborn and often lengthy struggle using various forces and weapons at sea, in the air, and in some instances even coastal areas.

World War II underlined the necessity of gaining supremacy of the seas in order to conduct major offensive operations and to ensure our capability to carry out large-scale maritime transport.

In the postwar period, especially with the appearance of missile/nuclear weapons, we did not devote proper attention to working out the problems of gaining supremacy of the seas, since it was considered that this category would not be characteristic of nuclear warfare.

Meanwhile, from the collation of the experience of operational training and of experience from naval combat service, as well as study of the views of our probable enemy concerning the character and methods of conducting a future war, we conclude that we must do additional work on this problem--on a new technical and scientific basis, of course, proceeding from the actual capabilities of our present ocean fleet. The task of military researchers, therefore, is to resolve this problem for nuclear and non-nuclear war and to work out practical recommendations for the fleets regarding ways and means of gaining supremacy of the seas in combat with a powerful naval antagonist.

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In light of the international situation, the Party and government are doing everything possible to continually strengthen our naval power and to maintain its defensive capability at the highest level. General Secretary of the CC/CPSU Comrade L.I. Brezhnev reminded us of this once again at the International Congress of Communist and Workers Parties [Moscow, June 1969].

The tasks of further increasing the combat readiness of the Navy are making great demands on science and are giving rise to a need for expanding the front and the depth of research into current problems of naval science. Its development by all possible means will be an appropriate reply to the CC/CPSU call for a selfless struggle toward the further strengthening of our country's defensive capability and an appropriate welcome to the hundredth anniversary of the birth of V.I. Lenin.

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