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The Soviet Navy in the Persian Gulf: Naval Diplomacy in a Combat Zone

Norman Cigar

The recent deployment of Soviet warships to the Persian Gulf—despite their limited number—constitutes a significant use of Soviet naval power in an area of considerable strategic significance. Although Russian warships sailed in the Gulf during Czarist times, and Soviet warships first made their appearance there in 1968, they did not operate there on a steady basis, and since then have visited there infrequently. In addition to the implications for U.S.-Soviet relations in the Gulf, this exercise in Soviet naval diplomacy may also reflect current Soviet thinking on the use of naval power in Third World crises.

Since the mid-1950s, the Soviet Navy has developed into an oceangoing force. Equally important, the late Admiral Sergei Gorshkov (the Navy's Commander in Chief from 1956 until his replacement by Admiral Vladimir Chernavin in December 1985) was a forceful proponent of the new Soviet doctrine of naval power projection in the pursuit of state interests. With the emergence of a new political era under Secretary-General Mikhail Gorbachev, a reexamination of military thinking in terms of political and fiscal costs and benefits, particularly in times of crisis, could be expected.¹ Within this context, the situation in the Gulf has represented both opportunities and dilemmas to the new Soviet leadership in concrete terms.

Opportunities and Dilemmas—the Political Context

The escalating threat to Soviet shipping in the Gulf appears to have been the precipitant for the initial deployment of a single Soviet naval combatant in September 1986, after the Iranians had fired on, stopped, and searched the Soviet merchant ship *Pyotr Emtsov*, which was heading to Kuwait with arms ultimately destined for Iraq. While Moscow's overt motivation for

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its initial deployment was an immediate security need, one can lend equal—if not greater—weight to the political considerations related to its policy in the Gulf.

The decision to deploy naval forces patently “in harm’s way” in the Gulf must not have been an easy one for Moscow and should be viewed in the context of the regional goals that Soviet policymakers want to achieve. In themselves, these goals have at times been competing, presenting a complex set of dilemmas.

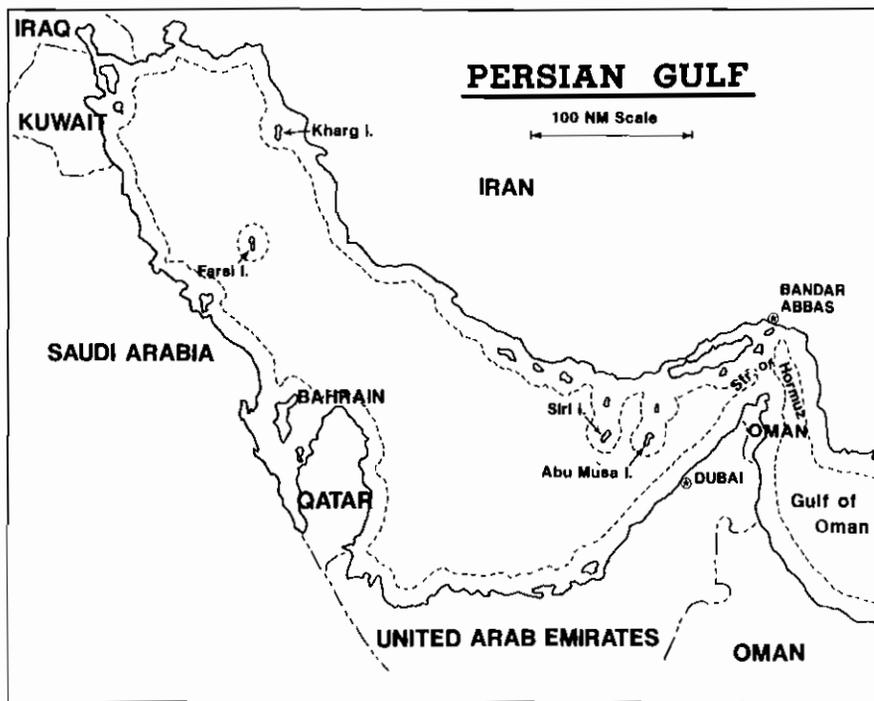
To a great extent, Moscow’s policy in the Gulf, and in the Middle East overall, can be seen in terms of its relations with the United States. In the Middle East—and in particular the Persian Gulf where it has felt excluded more than elsewhere—the U.S.S.R. has sought to gain recognition of its equality as a superpower and to play a role in shaping events, not least of all because of the Gulf’s strategic significance.²

The Iran-Iraq war, naturally, loomed large in Soviet approaches to the Gulf. Despite its potential for regional destabilization, an increased U.S. presence, and other negative aspects of the war for Soviet interests, Moscow sought to use the war to enhance its entrée to the region.

Although the U.S.S.R. has been Iraq’s main arms supplier and despite some sharp public criticism of the Iranian regime and frequent periods of rocky relations with it over the past few years, Moscow has continued to seek to develop a position in both Baghdad and Tehran. While unlikely to risk an established relationship with Iraq for uncertain gains in Tehran, Moscow also made efforts to keep a foot in the door in Iran, to at least position itself for any opportunities in the post-Khomeini era.³ In particular, Moscow sought to have links with both Iran and Iraq and to be seen as a regional player in order to be in a position to act as a mediator for the two countries, as it offered to do on a number of occasions.⁴ Moscow no doubt hoped that, if successful, this would gain the gratitude of not only the two belligerents, but also the moderate Arab states which are close to the West—especially those of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Egypt and Jordan, all of whom, to varying degrees, have feared Iran and supported Iraq.

In particular, the U.S.S.R. under Gorbachev was intensifying its efforts to woo the GCC states. This was likely to be a new arena for U.S.-Soviet competition if Moscow was interested in diminishing U.S. influence in the region, since the U.S. presence in Iraq was limited, and nonexistent in Iran. Despite the shadow of Afghanistan, Moscow was already making some inroads, establishing relations with Oman and the United Arab Emirates, and expanding political contacts, even with Saudi Arabia.

At the same time, while pursuing a more activist policy in what is a sensitive area for the West, the U.S.S.R. has been anxious to avoid arousing U.S. concern and to ensure that it does not undermine the emerging U.S.-Soviet relationship.⁵ In the complex set of relationships faced in the Gulf,



The area of activity. The dashed line off the coast indicates the 12-mile territorial sea.

Moscow has had to consider the potential impact on, and reactions of, multiple actors before making any major move.

The initial deployment of a single combatant can be viewed within this broader political context. Obvious reluctance to stand up to greater Iranian truculence would have not only complicated greatly Soviet arms deliveries to Iraq—a mainstay of Soviet policy⁶—but also would have cost Moscow credibility with both the Arabs and Iran. Moreover, at this initial stage, Moscow may have felt that its introduction of a single ship, while sufficient to send Iran a signal, was so limited that it would not elicit any U.S. reaction.

However, when Kuwait, one of Iraq's main financial backers and its most important supply route for security assistance—faced by an escalating Iranian threat to its shipping—approached Moscow in November 1986 with a request for Soviet naval protection, the necessary decision involved different stakes and dilemmas. The substantial additional escort commitment that this would have entailed and the fact that Kuwaiti assets would be protected could have been expected to be provocative to Iran because it would support the Iraqi war effort, at least indirectly, and to the United States because of the potential Soviet inroads into the Gulf.

On the other hand, even though some GCC states such as Saudi Arabia may not have been completely comfortable with an increased Soviet presence, nevertheless, a resolute Soviet response—particularly in the absence of one by the United States, which was also to be approached by Kuwait in December 1986—could have been expected to be viewed to Moscow's credit in the region. Perhaps of even greater importance than a lack of security for shipping, the situation provided an unexpected opportunity and a convenient rationale for a greater Soviet presence. Apparently, Moscow calculated that such an initiative on its part would not elicit a major U.S. reaction, perhaps in expectation that the Reagan administration would be reluctant to expand its involvement in the Gulf while embroiled in the developing Irangate affair. To Moscow, this also may have given the appearance of an *entrée*, in view of the Arabs' disillusionment with recent U.S. arms sales to Tehran.⁷

In any event, Moscow apparently felt that the benefits of deploying—or the consequences of not deploying—outweighed the drawbacks and reportedly accepted, in principle, to make Soviet tankers available for charter to Kuwait, and negotiations on the specific terms took place in Moscow in January 1987. When the Kuwaitis then suggested the reflagging of 11 of their own tankers under a Soviet flag, Moscow swiftly agreed. This would have raised the stakes even higher. As things turned out, however, the United States preempted the Soviet reflagging plan by its own agreement with Kuwait to do so on 7 March 1987.⁸ Reportedly, Moscow continued, unsuccessfully, to offer to reflag and protect some of Kuwait's tankers, but had to settle for an agreement to charter three of its own tankers to Kuwait, with an option for two more, on a one-year lease, which was signed on 1 April and renewed in 1988.⁹

It is not clear how long a commitment the Kremlin envisioned when it made its first decision to deploy and, later, when it made its reflagging offer to Kuwait. Whether initially or subsequently, however, there must have been a decision to make more than just a short-term commitment, as indicated by the length of time the Soviet naval force subsequently stayed on station. The permanent deployment of a *Goryn*-class salvage tug to the task force in 1987 also points in that direction.¹⁰ Moscow, moreover, was to promote—however disingenuously—a United Nations naval task force for the Gulf, which would have entailed its continued participation in operations, albeit under a different guise, over an extended period.

Legitimizing a Policy

Having made its decision to deploy to the Gulf, the U.S.S.R. was apparently anxious to provide its presence with appropriate legitimacy both at home and abroad. Foremost among the justifications put forward was

the fact that the Persian Gulf is "very near the Soviet border" and that, as a corollary, the U.S.S.R. has major political and economic interests there. Moreover, it was stressed that the Soviet Navy was operating consonant with "international law" and had a legal right to act in the "international waters" of the Gulf.¹¹ Moscow also stressed its own concern for the general principle of "freedom of navigation," as it has done consistently in the past. Apart from concerns for this principle, normal for a major sea power, Moscow's recourse to this justification would also complicate condemnations of its naval presence by the United States, which emphasized this as the main issue leading to its own deployment to the Gulf. Soviet sources were also careful to portray the Soviet presence as being at the invitation of, and having the agreement of, the states of the Gulf.¹² For the Navy itself, carrying out its "duty," as Rear Admiral R. Paromov termed it, seemed sufficient justification.¹³

Media coverage of the U.S.S.R.'s naval deployment has been extensive by Soviet standards. Journalists were even detailed with the fleet to keep audiences at home up-to-date both in the military and general press. The first indication to Soviet readers that Soviet warships were operating in the region, apparently, was in the military newspaper *Krasnaya zvezda* in January 1987, while negotiations were going on between Moscow and Kuwait.¹⁴ Perhaps this was intended to prepare the public for the upsurge in naval activity that would have followed had the full Kuwaiti deal gone through. Although subsequently there was a hiatus until the incidents involving Soviet ships the following May, reporting since then has even extended to some operational details about which the Soviets are normally tight-lipped. Although in part this can be attributed to Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost*, this does not suffice as a full explanation, since coverage of the Gulf stands in sharp contrast with the almost complete silence during the confrontation between Libya and the United States in early 1986, which witnessed the deployment of an even more impressive Soviet naval task force in the Eastern and Central Mediterranean than that deployed in the Gulf.

Although one cannot be sure why Soviet media treatment of the Gulf has been so extensive, it may be connected with the Soviet leadership's care to mobilize opinion. If a Soviet commitment was seen as potentially long-term and at least liable to involve casualties, some explanation of Soviet interests would appear to have been reasonable, particularly if it could have been portrayed as protecting the borders of the homeland and not, as in the case of Libya, supporting a pariah state. Moreover, many of the Soviet press accounts placed an emphasis on the limited and cautious nature of Soviet involvement in the Gulf, suggesting a desire to reassure domestic audiences, probably including members of the armed forces, that the U.S.S.R. was not about to get embroiled in yet another conflict in the region.

Some discussion, in fact, may have been harder to avoid since the Soviet media had long portrayed the Gulf as a very dangerous and unpredictable area complete with frequent photos of burning ships. Most accounts contained reassurances to the families of sailors involved that they were doing well, including articles in response to inquiries from “concerned parents.”

Care was also taken to give the impression that the Soviet public was solidly behind their government on this issue. In a man-in-the-street interview with Muscovites in *Izvestiya*, for example, all opinions published were staunchly in this vein. Thus, a sailor visiting the capital concluded that “Soviet ships are perfectly right to be there,” while at the same time allaying readers’ fears of escalating involvement by opining that “there is no need to expand our presence there at the moment.” Even a musician, admitting that she tried not to follow politics, nevertheless “knew” that the U.S.S.R. was “acting correctly.”¹⁵ At the same time, Soviet representatives, when speaking to the Western media, were very circumspect about the Soviet naval presence in the Gulf and downplayed its role.¹⁶ This probably stemmed from a desire to avoid providing justification for the West’s on-going deployment and to avoid arousing further political concern abroad.

The Threat Environment and the Soviet Response

The primary tactical mission of the Soviet deployment was the protection of Soviet shipping. The threat faced by Soviet merchant ships and combatants was, by and large, the same as that faced by their Western counterparts. Soviet concerns were to focus on Iranian mines and small boats—the “mosquito fleet” manned by the Revolutionary Guard and mounting a variety of light armaments—and mines. Operations in the Gulf, in fact, have validated for the Soviets—who have referred favorably to vague “NATO press sources”—that mines remain “an effective, reliable, and relatively cheap means of naval warfare.”¹⁷ Soviet crews calculated the mine threat to be especially great at night, because of the difficulty in spotting them.

The Silkworm shore-to-ship missiles, first acquired from China in 1986, with their 1,100-pound warhead and 50-plus nautical mile (NM) range, also gave Iran a formidable additional capability. Their emplacement in the Strait of Hormuz and on the Faw Peninsula (until its recapture by Iraq in April 1988) placed maritime transit through the Strait and in Kuwaiti waters in particular jeopardy.¹⁸ The threat from Iran’s surface naval combatants (three destroyers of U.S. origin and 15 frigates at the outset)—only about half of which were operational—and from F-4, F-5, and F-14 fixed-wing aircraft (only about 60-70 operational) was more limited, though not negligible for unarmed ships. To deal with possible Iranian attempts to board and search escorted ships, special “counterboarding groups” were placed on Soviet

warships.¹⁹ Finally, the Soviets were cognizant of the ever-present possibility of an accidental strike (including presumably by Iraq) as had occurred against the U.S.S. *Stark*.²⁰ The Soviets viewed the surface threat as greatest in the area of the Strait of Hormuz, and that from mines from that point north to Kuwait.²¹

Soviet personnel deployed to the Gulf came to view the threat, whatever the political maneuverings at a level above them by the policymakers to deter it, as a real one. According to the commander of the *Stoykii*, an escorting destroyer, for example, "sailing conditions are reminiscent of combat" and "there are seldom quiet days."²² In fact, the commander of another destroyer, the *Boevoy*, felt that the threat in the Gulf "is present permanently."²³

As things turned out, the composition of the Soviet naval force that was deployed meshed well with the threat as it evolved. Specifically, minesweeping ships were useful in dealing with the mine threat, while larger surface combatants—destroyers and frigates—were appropriate against surface and air threats. The presence of the *Goryn*-class seagoing salvage tug mentioned earlier, while a reasonable precaution, was also an indication that the Soviets did not exclude, and were willing to risk, damage as part of the cost of pursuing their policy goals in this situation.²⁴

The absence of large Soviet combatants, on the other hand, was noticeable, particularly in contrast to the presence of U.S. carrier and battleship battle groups. To a great extent, one can assume that the U.S.S.R. avoided the deployment of such large combatants in a trade-off between operational needs and the political benefits of a low profile. Significantly, the U.S.S.R. did not deploy anticarrier groups to counterbalance U.S. carrier task forces, as has been the case in some other regional crises. The intent clearly was to underline that—operationally at least—it was not the United States which was the adversary. A more powerful deployment, which would have provided greater security for the ships involved, could well have alarmed the United States and the West even more than it did. At the same time, it would have perhaps antagonized Iran unduly, raising the risk of a military reaction and complicating Moscow's gambit to improve its position in Tehran by encouraging it to focus its wrath on the greater U.S. presence. On the other hand, Moscow was also careful to reassure its home public that Soviet forces as deployed were adequate for their mission.²⁵ The Soviets apparently drew the conclusion early that the United States would mount only "limited" retaliatory strikes against Iran, while a full-scale invasion was assessed as unlikely,²⁶ thus minimizing the likelihood and attendant risks

Confrontation and Avoidance

Balancing all of its goals was not an easy task for Moscow, particularly insofar as it wanted to avoid a direct confrontation with Tehran, which was likely to view Soviet activities in the Gulf as being, to a large extent, supportive of the Iraqi war effort. The Iranians, during certain periods, sought to harass the Soviets, as they did Western forces, in order to pressure them to leave the Gulf, or at least to make the point that the U.S.S.R.'s superpower status would not deter Tehran from acting if its vital interests were at stake.

Although the Soviets did not suffer any casualties, there were numerous incidents involving Soviet freighters, tankers, and warships.²⁷

The first confrontation between a Soviet warship and the Iranians, according to a terse TASS report, appears to have occurred on 18 April 1987, when an Iranian ship threatened to open fire on a Soviet merchant ship, but was warned off by radio, presumably by the accompanying Soviet escort. On 6 May 1987, however, two unidentified—but without a doubt Iranian—speedboats approached the freighter *Ivan Koroteev* while off Dubai on its way to Dammam, Saudi Arabia, carrying, according to TASS, “building materials and drainage pipes.” Ignoring the freighter’s radio queries, the speedboats proceeded to rake it with RPG and machine-gun fire from a distance of 30-40 meters. The damage inflicted was more symbolic than substantive, and the freighter was able to continue at reduced speed on to Dammam, although it subsequently went to Trieste, Italy, for repairs. The attacks could be interpreted as a message by Tehran, both to show Moscow that it would not be intimidated by a superpower and to the GCC states to make them aware that Soviet protection would be imperfect at best. At a press conference, Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Petrovskii identified Iran publicly as the attacker and noted that the U.S.S.R. had sent a memorandum to Tehran over the incident, and reaffirmed Moscow’s commitment to “defend freedom of navigation in the Gulf.”²⁸

Just a few days later, on 17 May, however, the Soviet tanker *Marshal Chuykov* was to strike a mine near the Kuwaiti port of Al-Ahmadi during its first trip since its charter to Kuwait. The mine blew a hole in the starboard hull, forcing the tanker to proceed to Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE), for repairs.²⁹ The Soviets publicly hinted that the Iranians were to blame.³⁰

There are indications that Moscow had underestimated the extent of the threat initially and, in particular, Tehran’s willingness to challenge Moscow. The *Ivan Koroteev*, for example, was unescorted when it was attacked. In fact, as the director of the freighter’s shipping firm in Novorossiisk acknowledged, its crew had been keeping only “ordinary watch.”³¹ A further indication of the low threat perception is that the ship’s crew had included women, an is common Soviet practice.³² Even Rear Admirals

Aleksandr Smolin, in charge of the Navy watch room back home, appears to have been handling the first transit of the chartered *Marshal Chuykov* quite routinely and was on his way out the door when news reached him of the mining incident.³³ The *Marshal Chuykov*, too, apparently had been escorted only part of the way. The escorting minesweeper *Zaryad*, in effect, had turned back and the tanker had been on its own when it hit the mine.³⁴

As a result, Soviet policymakers must have faced a “fish or cut bait” dilemma. Either the escort presence was made credible and its rules of engagement expanded—involving an escalation in Soviet involvement—or Moscow would have had to acquiesce to humiliation by Tehran. Such a bold, open challenge would have been difficult for Moscow to ignore entirely without sacrificing some credibility and encouraging further similar attacks. At the same time, however, a Soviet overreaction could have diverted Iran from the Iran-U.S. confrontation nexus—which served Soviet interests—and transformed it into a U.S.S.R.-Iran confrontation, which Moscow wanted to avoid.

Although Moscow decided to forego retaliation, it did reaffirm its commitment by extending protection to all Soviet ships henceforth and beefed up its minesweeper escorts. Moscow also sent strong messages to Tehran that such behavior would not be tolerated. On the same day of the *Ivan Koroteev* incident, for example, the Soviets reportedly flew 50 aircraft into Iranian airspace, expressing displeasure in tangible form and reminding Iran of the U.S.S.R.’s presence on its northern border.³⁵ Soviet spokesmen also implied that the Soviet combatants’ rules of engagement in the Gulf would now be less restrictive. One Soviet official, for example, warned that the U.S.S.R. “would respond with all the means approved by international law” and that, indeed, it would “respond violently. Iran must realize that and be well aware of what we are saying.”³⁶ The Soviets apparently also remonstrated to Iran directly. For example, Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Petrovskii, in an interview given after returning from Tehran, admonished that “piratic actions”—Moscow’s categorization of Iran’s behavior in the Gulf—opened up the way for a U.S. military buildup,³⁷ suggesting that he had probably also tried to appeal to Iran’s self-interest in his talks.

Subsequently, escort efforts were to become noticeably more aggressive. Although there was to be no further damage from mines or gunfire, there were other confrontations with Iranian forces. In July 1987, for example, another leased tanker, the *Makhachkal* was approached one night by an Iranian frigate near the Strait of Hormuz, but the latter left when the Soviet escort came closer.³⁸ In late October 1987, according to *Krasnaya zvezda*, when a speedboat dashed across the bow of the freighter *Ivan Shepetkov* and did not answer an inquiring signal, the accompanying fleet minesweeper *Kurskiy Komsomolez* quickly intervened and prepared to take action had the

speedboat attacked. In that case—the captain “must open fire.” The same “decisive measures” by the captain of the antisubmarine corvette *Komsomolets Gruzii* similarly had “sent night ‘guests’ packing” somewhat earlier.³⁹

There were also several direct confrontations between Iranian and Soviet warships. In the first incident, probably in April 1987, an Iranian frigate harassed the minesweeper *Zaryad* by beaming a searchlight on it. On another unspecified date, an unidentified Iranian warship challenged the frigate *Ladnyi* while the latter was escorting a tanker, ordering it to “stop and drop anchor or else we will open fire!” Although nothing came of the confrontation and the Soviets later assessed that the Iranians’ objective was just to test their nerves, the *Ladnyi*’s crew at the time was apparently poised to return any fire.⁴⁰ In another incident in November 1987, an Iranian frigate approached a Soviet freighter and tanker under escort. “Maneuvering dangerously,” the Iranian warship “aimed its weapons” at the tanker. For the escorting destroyer *Stoykii*, “of course it was necessary to intervene.” Despite a radio warning, the Iranian frigate continued its “dangerous course.” The escort decided to get closer and “if necessary repulse an attack. There was no other way.”⁴¹ As reported by ABC-TV news, the Soviet warship even “readied its radar-guided weapons.” The Iranian captain apparently did not like this, radioing the Soviet warship to stop locking on him. When the Soviet warship did not comply, the Iranian frigate backed down and sailed away quietly. According to the commander of the *Stoykii*, however, even in 1988, “tense situations are arising on practically every escort operation”⁴² and, a Soviet officer serving in the Gulf characterized the Iranians as “unpredictable” in their attitude toward Soviet ships.⁴³ There seems little doubt, from numerous accounts, that Soviet warships would have fired back if attacked, although Moscow, for political reasons, would have been loathe to embark on broader retaliation.

While Iran was not averse to testing the Soviets’ “red lines,” it was careful, as it was with the United States, to minimize the likelihood of retaliation. Moreover, although the Soviets were to come in for their share of harassment at the hands of the Iranians, they benefited from Tehran’s apparent decision to focus on the United States as the greater and more imminent threat and from its intention to avoid facing two adversaries at the same time. Tehran, likewise, hoped to strengthen some of its contacts with the U.S.S.R. as a lever against the United States and to drive a wedge in Moscow’s relationship with the Gulf Arabs.⁴⁴

Soviet Operations

The Routine of Escort Duty. The Soviet naval force was placed under the command of newly promoted Rear Admiral Valerii Sergeev from the very

beginning. Sergeev has been depicted by the Soviet press as being a dynamic, no-nonsense, seagoing officer with extensive experience with the Pacific Fleet. He also had some political-military experience, having visited a number of regional states in the past.⁴⁵

The number of ships on station, with most laying at anchor in the Gulf of Oman, just outside the Persian Gulf, averaged about a dozen, with at least three surface combatants, several minesweeping ships, a *Vytyegrales*-class command and control ship, an *Alligator*-class landing ship, and various auxiliary and support ships. Naval units came from the Baltic, Black Sea, and Pacific Fleets. This force structure was consistent with the Soviet Navy's conservative operational procedure of making very certain that any naval force deployed has the capabilities to fulfill its mission. One can assume that command and control from the U.S.S.R. for operations in such a sensitive and dynamic area has been tight. Even Soviet merchant ships have been in continuous direct radio contact with their headquarters back home during cruises in the Gulf.⁴⁶

In typical operations, a Soviet surface combatant (destroyer or frigate), at anchorage in the Gulf of Oman, has met merchantmen and tankers on their way to the Persian Gulf and provided them with an escort (*okhrana*) across the Strait of Hormuz up to the vicinity of the port of Dubai. There, the ships being escorted have been handed over to the small minesweepers for the second leg of the journey further north, since mines have been a major threat in that part of the Gulf.⁴⁷ Minesweeping, however, turned out to be a problem area for Soviet ships in the Gulf. The crew of at least one minesweeper, even though its evaluation reports back home had been good, when actually on station, turned out to have been trained inadequately and not at all in certain clearing procedures.⁴⁸

For the return trip, the reverse procedure has been used. Soviet convoys have preferred to transit the Strait of Hormuz at night to minimize contact with Iranian forces. Ships have been escorted individually or several (up to four) at a time. One destroyer, the *Boevoy*, for example, by the time it was relieved in early December 1987, had already made 16 crossings, escorting a total of 22 ships.⁴⁹ Soviet warships have escorted merchantmen not only to Arab ports, but to Iranian ones as well, such as the bulk carrier *Khudozhnik Gabashvili*, escorted to Bandar Abbas in 1987.⁵⁰

Although Soviet warships had no mission to protect ships of other countries, the latter sometimes tagged along with Soviet convoys, particularly to take advantage of the waters being cleared of mines.⁵¹ In desperation, at least one ship from another country called for help from Soviet warships, perhaps hoping to at least frighten off its Iranian attacker.⁵²

Moreover, there are indications that the Soviets at some point may have

been testing the waters for a potential expansion of their protection role to foreign ships.⁵³

A supplementary mission of the Soviet warships was to keep an eye on Western ships in the area. This was intended both for operational intelligence collection and to gain an insight into Western intentions.⁵⁴ Finally, the deployment to the Gulf also provided valuable training. In fact, the realistic experience gained in the Gulf was said to have been the reason why the frigate *Ladnyi* was able to take first place in subsequent exercises after returning home to the Black Sea Fleet.⁵⁵ A field staff would check out each new ship as it came on station for duty in the Gulf, monitoring its performance in realistic exercises similar to the operations it would be carrying out and helping it to eliminate shortcomings. Operations in the Gulf revealed weaknesses that might not have been noticed otherwise. Rear Admiral Sergeev personally supervised the testing of the crew of the guided missile destroyer *Admiral Tributs*, which was to be his flagship, after meeting it in Aden, and insisted on correcting weaknesses he observed before allowing it to operate in the Gulf.⁵⁶ In general terms, valuable practical experience will have been gained in a new area of operations, which can facilitate future deployments. It is recognized in Soviet Navy circles that "the hard school of the Persian Gulf" has provided lessons that are "unique and vital for real combat" in such areas as that of organization of combat training, logistics, and even uniforms, and that they have applicability to the entire Navy. However, passing them on has not been easy, and they have not been studied or applied systematically even to ships about to be deployed to the Gulf.⁵⁷

Operational Difficulties. Deployment to the Gulf was not easy for the Soviet Navy, and one should view this as a significant effort by the Navy. From a logistical point of view, virtually all immediate support had to be afloat, given the lack of access to nearby shore facilities, although Soviet auxiliaries were able to use Gulf ports for replenishment and limited R&R.⁵⁸ Though, as Moscow likes to point out, the Persian Gulf may be close to the U.S.S.R.'s borders, this is so only "as the crow flies." Seen in practical naval terms, however, it is very much, as Rear Admiral Paromov observed, at "a great distance from our homeland,"⁵⁹ with all that that entails. The closest major point of access is the port of Aden, some 1,400 NM from the Strait of Hormuz. Home bases for the Black Sea (Sevastopol) and the Pacific Fleets (Vladivostok) are, respectively, about 4,000 and 6,300 NM away.

The Soviet Navy leadership no doubt recognized the implications of this situation both on time on station and on the deployed warships' capabilities. As is usual practice in such long-distance deployments, an *Oskol*-class "floating workshop" repair ship from the Black Sea Fleet was detailed to the Gulf area,⁶⁰ as well as the salvage ship noted above. For some emergency

repairs, naval combatants even had to have recourse to technicians borrowed from merchant ships in the area.⁶¹ The lack of facilities also meant waiting for long periods in anchorages in the Gulf of Oman. Speaking of its drawbacks, a machinist who was interviewed complained that “the experienced mariner does not like such layovers because, among other reasons, here in the tropics, the bottom of a ship becomes encrusted rapidly.”⁶² Concern with the hazards of operating under such conditions—such as having to refuel at sea (“a dangerous procedure” which leads to “many collisions”)—was freely admitted on board the *Admiral Tributs*.⁶³

The absence of naval air power must also have hampered Soviet operations, both in the area of intelligence and tactical air cover. Intelligence for the task force had to be processed, reportedly, at the Soviet Embassy in Kuwait⁶⁴ and, while one can assume that Soviet satellite coverage of the area provided valuable information, it likely could not assure the constant inputs required in such a dynamic environment. Air reconnaissance aircraft from the U.S.S.R. would have had to overfly Iran or other regional states to operate over the Gulf. The two Soviet I1-38 Mays stationed in South Yemen have a range of only about 2,000 NM (without loiter time). This is insufficient to operate effectively inside the Gulf, even if the GCC states had granted overflight rights, although they could be used to monitor Western forces outside the immediate Gulf area.⁶⁵ Land-based tactical aircraft, likewise, would have had a difficult time deploying to the Gulf, even by overflying Iran. The absence of contingency on-shore medical facilities in the GCC countries for potential casualties was another weak point. When a sailor on a ship in the general area of operations became ill, for example, he had to be evacuated to Aden, where the nearest available hospital was located.⁶⁶

In human terms, duty in the Gulf was also to be “difficult,” as the Captain of the *Boevoy* termed it. The extremes in heat and humidity, in addition to the constant stress from the threat, added up to “an oppressive psychological situation” and “affected the nerves.”⁶⁷ Life aboard Soviet warships, never known for their comfort, apparently could be very trying under such conditions. In the engine rooms, with temperatures reaching 180-200 degrees Fahrenheit, the heat caused some sailors to lose consciousness.⁶⁸ Reportedly, the situation was made even worse than necessary due to administrative negligence, which resulted in some ships deploying without refrigerators or basic air conditioners.⁶⁹ Even the high water temperature and sharks had to be considered when undertaking diving operations during the summer. In winter, on the other hand, violent tropical storms buffeted the ships (although this also reduced operations by Iranian speedboats). The deployment of a small number of relatively small warships in itself entailed a trade-off between achieving a low profile and the increased logistics

requirements and pressure on crews over long periods. One minesweeper, for example, was to log 14,000 miles in escort duty in the Gulf in just two months.⁷⁰ Not surprisingly, the Captain of the *Stoykii* was to acknowledge early on that “we’re already tired.”⁷¹ Soviet sources have also identified such negative factors on morale as persistent foul-ups with mail delivery, unkept promises of R&R in the region, shortages of fresh food, “zero information,” and low danger pay (“not roubles, but kopeks”), made worse by the fact that Soviet sailors knew their U.S. counterparts enjoyed better conditions.⁷² Still, as could be expected under the circumstances, when asked what the single hardest thing was for sailors in the Gulf, one officer admitted frankly that it was getting accustomed to “combat conditions.”⁷³ Navy spokesmen have gone out of their way repeatedly to stress the heroism, resolve, patience, and professionalism of Soviet sailors in the Gulf under such adverse conditions.⁷⁴

The Soviets apparently did make attempts to obtain access to some facilities at least in Kuwait. As Aleksandr Ivanov, Chief of the Arab Gulf and Jordan Branch in the Soviet Foreign Ministry, admitted to a Kuwaiti newspaper, “All we want is civilian facilities . . . and I use the word civilian . . . such as for repair and supply of ships.”⁷⁵ At the same time, in part perhaps to allay local suspicions, the Soviets took some care to avoid giving the appearance that they were seeking bases within the Gulf, something they had consistently accused the United States of trying to do. This, however, was perhaps more the case of making a virtue out of necessity, as even those GCC states which have relations with the U.S.S.R. have been extremely reluctant to extend such facilities to the Soviet Navy. Even Kuwait, the most direct beneficiary of the Soviet naval presence was not forthcoming, not only because of the domestic and regional political sensitivities involved, but probably also to avoid complicating its newly found closeness with the United States.⁷⁶ Also at play may have been the GCC states’ desire to avoid antagonizing Iran unduly by granting either superpower any more access than absolutely necessary unless their own security situation deteriorated significantly.

The deployment to the Gulf has probably highlighted the importance of those forward facilities to which the Soviets do have access. The value of the facilities in Ethiopia and South Yemen, in particular, will increase if operations in the Gulf become more frequent in the future. Moscow may seek to expand its existing levels of access there and elsewhere along the way.⁷⁷

An increased number of high-level port visits to some Indian Ocean countries—including warships rotated to and out of the Gulf—also seems to have occurred. Although, in some cases, the visits were no doubt planned well in advance, using other rationale—such as the 70th anniversary of the Russian Revolution or South Yemen’s national holiday—it nevertheless

placed additional Soviet warships closer to the Gulf for a longer period in case a surge of larger combatants were needed. At the same time, it also permitted "showing the flag" as an additional mission.

Soviet Naval Diplomacy—Political and Operational Dynamics

Balancing the United States. The official Soviet reaction to the increased U.S. naval deployment to the Gulf was predictably hostile. A constant theme was to be that the United States was using the heightened tension in the Gulf to expand its military presence and to gain permanent basing rights and that this would be aimed, specifically, against the U.S.S.R.'s own security. The Soviet press portrayed the U.S. naval presence as disproportionate to the need, claiming that it was "the largest U.S. concentration [of naval forces] since Vietnam," although in fact it was smaller than the naval force the United States deployed in the region in 1980-81. At the same time, this was mixed with some awe at the "great force" which the United States was able to deploy "thousands of miles" from its shores.⁷⁸

To a great extent, as seen, the significant U.S. naval buildup in the Gulf was in reaction to the actual and potential Soviet initiative with Kuwait. Moscow, in fact, apparently miscalculated Washington's response to perceived Soviet attempts to gain an entrée into the Gulf. From Moscow's vantage point, the United States probably reacted more broadly and successfully than expected.

The United States was to obtain unprecedented, albeit still limited, acceptance by, and cooperation from, the Arab states of the Gulf for its naval presence.⁷⁹ As a result, one of Moscow's stated fears, the establishment of a major permanent U.S. presence in the Gulf, seemed to materialize unexpectedly, whether or not the United States had actually planned for it, with prospects for additional access.⁸⁰ Even more significant, the U.S. deployment enabled Washington to shore up its overall relationship with the Arab world.

Moreover, the U.S.S.R. could have expected, with some justification, that a divergence over policy in the Gulf would engender considerable friction between the United States and its allies, as had happened before when out-of-area operations were broached within Nato. Instead, to the apparent surprise of the Soviets, in a quite unusual show of solidarity, France and Great Britain increased their presence, and even Italy, Belgium, and the Netherlands deployed naval forces to the Gulf, while the FRG sent ships to the Mediterranean to free other Nato forces for duty in the Gulf, complementing and cooperating with, at least unofficially, their U.S. counterparts.⁸¹ The Soviet press quickly adopted a critical tone toward

Europe's naval role, calling it "expanded imperialist interference in the region."⁸²

Given the logistic and political constraints, and disparity in naval capabilities available, the U.S.S.R. would have had to strain to compete with a major U.S. effort in the region. Once Moscow realized that the United States would make a significant commitment to the Gulf, this became a major Soviet preoccupation. As such, the reduction and, if possible, removal of the expanded U.S. naval presence became one of Moscow's primary short-term objectives. The Soviet press quickly focused on the fact that the United States is "thousands of miles" from the Gulf and expressed its doubts whether the United States really had any vital interests in the region.⁸³

In this vein, Moscow began to promote the removal of all "foreign" fleets from the Gulf. During Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to the U.S.S.R. in May 1985, Secretary-General Mikhail Gorbachev had already revived the traditional Soviet proposal to turn the Indian Ocean (of which the U.S.S.R. considers the Persian Gulf a part) into a "zone of peace." This envisioned removing the navies of all nonlittoral states from the Indian Ocean. When the proposal resurfaced in 1987, it had assumed a more specific focus on the Gulf. While on a visit to Iraq and several of the GCC states in late April 1987, Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Petrovskii announced Moscow's readiness to enter into treaties with "all states using the waters of the Indian Ocean," with the expressed purpose of "guaranteeing the security of maritime communications, including of the Persian gulf and the Strait of Hormuz."⁸⁴ He repeated the call when he visited Iran the following June. While useful for propaganda purposes, this approach was not likely to be any more successful than similar proposals made on earlier occasions, given the asymmetry of Soviet and Western interests in the Gulf region and the uneven trade-off involved. However, Moscow's proposals, intended as a lever *vis-à-vis* the United States, did run parallel to Iran's interests and seemed to win some points for the Soviets in Tehran at the time.⁸⁵

The United Nations Arena. Another tack toward the same objective was initiated when Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze first officially proposed on 23 September 1987 that a U.N. naval task force be set up to ensure freedom of navigation in the Gulf. Gorbachev had laid the groundwork a few days earlier with effusive praise for U.N. peacekeeping efforts in general, and this was buttressed by Moscow's unusual payment in full of its 1987 U.N. quota, including, as Soviet sources stressed, for the "armed forces of the U.N."⁸⁶ Although calls for the simple withdrawal of all foreign forces from the Gulf and Indian Ocean recurred occasionally, even by Gorbachev in October 1987 in a letter to Indian politicians, the arena for naval diplomacy had clearly shifted to the United Nations.

Having failed to prevent a large U.S. and even European deployment, a transfer of responsibility to the United Nations would place constraints—including a Soviet Security Council veto—on U.S. freedom of action and diminish the rationale for a large Western presence. Under the Soviet proposal, the Military Staff Committee of the Security Council—on which the Chiefs of Staff of member countries would take part—would have had operational control. However, it was not clear how Moscow envisioned the implementation of its proposal in concrete terms, including the key questions of the mission and composition of the task force. One Soviet commentator interpreted the proposal as entailing the removal of all warships “excluding minesweepers,” which were to be allowed to operate “under U.N. auspices” for a “fixed period” until the mines had been cleared, whereupon they too would be withdrawn.⁸⁷ On the other hand, while Soviet spokesman Ivanov was telling the Arab press specifically that the U.N. task force would contain only warships from nonaligned countries, Gorbachev himself went on record as being willing to envision the participation of both U.S. and Soviet ships.⁸⁸

To a large extent, Soviet policy in the U.N. arena must be viewed in the context of Moscow’s broader policy toward Iran and the Gulf Arabs. The escalating tension in the Gulf, and its own greater activism, made it increasingly complicated for the U.S.S.R. to maintain its position with both sides in the war. Moscow’s courting of Tehran,⁸⁹ in the hope of taking advantage of heightened U.S.-Iranian tensions, predictably engendered resentment and some sharp public criticism from many Arabs, including those friendliest to the U.S.S.R., such as Iraq and Kuwait. Moscow even felt obliged to allay publicly Arab doubts by denying vociferously allegations that it was providing arms to Iran. The U.S.S.R.’s stiffer stand against Iran at the United Nations—including support for U.N. Resolution 598, passed on 20 July 1987—was likely part of this damage control effort to placate the Gulf Arabs. At the same time, however, Moscow sought to avoid alienating Iran completely on this issue, apparently hoping to make political gains in Tehran and to avoid further Iranian pressure in Afghanistan.

The proposal for a U.N. naval task force may have seemed to Moscow as the most realistic way to further its goals and to afford it international legitimacy for its own interests and presence, while balancing its equities with Iran and the Gulf Arabs. The U.S.S.R. could now point to its willingness to ensure maritime security through the United Nations and even to cut off arms traffic to Iran, while probably hoping that debate over the mode of implementation and over the shape of a naval task force would absolve it from concrete steps in the immediate future.

By December 1987, the Soviets were even assuring Iraq that they were willing to allow a U.N. force to apply an arms embargo against Iran as a follow-on to Resolution 598.⁹⁰ Indeed, naval enforcement would have been

key to its effectiveness, as without an accompanying naval blockade any embargo would have been, at best, partial; at worst, toothless. However, Moscow's insistence that any embargo be enforced only by a U.N. force did not bode well for strict enforcement.

While a statement issued on 24 December 1987 by the Soviet Ambassador to the United Nations, Aleksandr Belonogov, favoring moves to enforce Resolution 598, significantly omitted the removal of U.S. naval forces from the Gulf as a precondition to its implementation, it was debatable whether Moscow would actually have gone along with an arms embargo—much less its enforcement—had it come time for the Security Council to draft concrete provisions.⁹¹ Moscow's concern with establishing influence with both sides, while spurring it to at least some visible activity at the U.N., impeded its full-fledged commitment to a policy that would have forced it to choose sides definitively. The Gulf Arabs, in fact, accused Moscow of actually obstructing Security Council efforts to put pressure on Iran.⁹²

Subsequently, Moscow was to use each flare-up in the Gulf involving U.S. forces—such as the April 1988 clash with Iran and the July 1988 shoot-down of Iran Air 655—to refocus attention on its proposal for a U.N. task force.

At the same time as these proposals were first floated, Moscow also began to display a greater sensitivity to the West's interests in the Gulf, perhaps hoping to make its offers more palatable. By mid-1987, the Soviet press had begun to acknowledge that the Gulf is important strategically to the United States and Nato because of its oil, even calling U.S. interests there "understandable." Simultaneously, the Soviet press began to emphasize that the U.S.S.R.'s presence in the Gulf was not aimed against these interests and that, specifically, it would not interfere with the flow of oil; however, it was reiterated that Soviet political and economic interests in the Gulf must also be recognized.⁹³

Soviet Proposals—U.S. and Regional Perceptions. Moscow's suggestion of a U.N. naval task force was not likely to bear fruit. A State Department spokesman announced in late December 1987 that the United States would be willing to study the Soviet proposal without commitment—provided the Security Council approved an arms embargo against Iran—but would oppose any linkage between a U.N. naval force and the U.S. task force in the Gulf deployed to protect U.S. shipping.⁹⁴ Visiting Kuwait in January 1988, Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci characterized the Soviet proposal as "very vague" and "inappropriate at this stage," stressing again that the United States would consider it only after the imposition of an arms embargo on Iran.⁹⁵ The United States remained cool to such proposals, out of concern that Soviet participation in a multinational effort would legitimize its naval presence and encourage Soviet demands for access to ports and

facilities. Moreover, the likelihood of participation by other countries was seen as small.⁹⁶

Reactions by the Arab states of the Gulf were equally unfavorable, despite the fact that Moscow promoted actively its U.N. naval plan with Iraq and the GCC. First Deputy Foreign Minister Yulii Vorontsov, for example, while visiting Kuwait and Iraq in late October 1987, asked that the plan be placed on the agenda on the Arab League Summit scheduled for the following month in Amman, Jordan.⁹⁷ Despite his intensive efforts, TASS gave no Iraqi reaction at the time to the public appeal he made, in itself an indication of Baghdad's coolness to the idea. The subsequent Amman Summit ignored the plan. Nevertheless, Moscow continued to canvass support for the plan in the Gulf countries, including the sending of a special envoy, Mikhail Sytenko, to Iraq in mid-December 1987 and a special mission to the Gulf in April 1988 by a delegation from the Supreme Soviet, but the results were not likely to be encouraging, particularly as long as there was a shooting war in the Gulf.⁹⁸ Even the change in Iraq's fortunes on the battlefield did not lead to a change in its attitude on this issue.⁹⁹

All along, Moscow sought to convince the Gulf Arab states and international opinion that it was the United States and European naval presence which had led to higher tension and was a stumbling block to peace in the Gulf.¹⁰⁰ In fact, the idea also was promoted that it was the Western navies which were responsible for Iran's increased aggressiveness.¹⁰¹ The implied corollary was that if the Western presence were reduced, the Iranian threat would also recede. At the same time, during periods of stepped up ship attacks, the Soviet media attempted to portray U.S. protection as ineffective.¹⁰²

The Gulf Arabs, however, were openly skeptical about the Soviet arguments. The withdrawal of Western naval forces clearly would have favored Iran, as Iraq and the GCC states stated publicly. A U.N. task force would likely have been a pallid substitute in firepower and resolve, even if it had materialized at all. Plans for a U.N. force, at base, ran counter to perceived Iraqi interests to involve the United States and Europe more deeply in order to focus attention on the war and to engender additional pressure on Tehran to accept a cease-fire. Kuwait also shared this interest, while it and the other GCC states were also anxious to obtain effective protection against Iranian threats. In general, the Gulf Arabs viewed this Soviet proposal with concern, believing it to be a Soviet gesture to Tehran designed to engineer an overall rapprochement with Iran at their expense.¹⁰³

Iran, on the other hand, was more positive. The Speaker of Iran's Parliament, Ali Akbar Rafsanjani, for example, expressed his willingness to approve a U.N. task force, provided the superpowers did not take part.¹⁰⁴

In fact, Tehran at times placed emphasis on mutual interests with the

U.S.S.R. as a lever against the U.S. presence in the Gulf. The Iranian ambassador to Moscow, for example, interpreted the Soviet plan sympathetically as stemming from a desire to “see a lessening of the American role in whatever way possible” in the Gulf, while glossing benignly over Moscow’s own presence there.¹⁰⁵ Iranian support could be seen as the converse of Arab opposition to the U.N. plan, as it would have relieved U.S. pressure on Iran and given it a freer hand in dealing with the GCC. In addition to undermining the GCC’s faith in the American security umbrella, getting U.S. forces out of the Gulf would have been construed as a major diplomatic victory for Tehran.

The U.S.S.R. was able to continue its precarious balancing act, since both sides saw some benefits in Moscow’s good will. Maintaining this position has not always been easy for the Soviets, however, as shown by Tehran’s outraged reaction toward Moscow for having provided Scud missiles to Iraq in the wake of intensified attacks against Iranian targets in early 1988. To deflect Iran’s wrath, in fact, Moscow thought it prudent to take the initiative at the U.N. to promote an end to the “war of the cities.”

Despite some harsh words and even veiled threats directed at Moscow from both the Gulf Arabs and Iran, both sides continued to deal with the Soviets. In fact, Moscow could have interpreted with some justification that its new contacts with Saudi Arabia and the establishment of relations with Qatar in 1988 were proof that its policy of dealing with all parties in the Gulf was on the right track.

Soviet-U.S. Relations at Sea. At the operational level, U.S.-Soviet relations were to be considerably better than in earlier crisis situations. To be sure, the official Soviet view of the U.S. Navy’s operations was very critical, especially of U.S. actions against Iran, even in self-defense. The closest instance to expressing understanding for the use of force by the United States against Iran was then-Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces Marshal Sergei Akhromeev’s cautious and noncommittal criticism of Iran’s mining activities, which had led to the U.S. sinking of the Iranian minelayer *Iran Ajr*.¹⁰⁶

Soviet commanders on the scene purportedly expressed—for the record at least—their own criticism of U.S. Navy operational procedures. The Captain of the *Boevoy*, for example, told *Pravda* that U.S. ships behaved “provocatively,” even alleging that the U.S.S. *Missouri* sailed at night without its lights and would “act like a tanker,” hoping to entice Iranian speedboat attacks so it could open fire.¹⁰⁷

The U.S.S.R. ruled out official combined operations with the United States in the Gulf, probably out of concern to avoid being dragged into a clash with Iran or to heighten the distinction between the two superpowers’ policy.¹⁰⁸ In practical terms, however, Soviet warships were to be unusually

cooperative with their American counterparts. Since July 1987, for example, Soviet and U.S. ships in the Gulf routinely exchanged tactical intelligence on mines, when the destroyer U.S.S. *Kidd* warned a passing Soviet warship of the minefield near Farsi Island, where the reflagged tanker *Bridgeton* had just struck a mine.¹⁰⁹ Soviet ships also sailed near at least one U.S. convoy to take advantage indirectly of its protection.¹¹⁰ On 5 January 1988, a combined military operation—although of an ad hoc and limited nature—took place when a Soviet minesweeper radioed the location of a suspected mine to U.S. forces who dispatched two helicopters to assist in the search.¹¹¹ What was even more novel than this pragmatic cooperation was a markedly friendly Soviet attitude toward U.S. ships. The Captain of the *Kidd*, for example, upon returning home from the Gulf, characterized operational relations with the Soviet warships as “cordial.” On one occasion, a Soviet warship passing the *Kidd* escorting a convoy even flashed the message: “Good luck on your convoy, from your friends.”¹¹²

In great part, this attitude could be attributed to the Soviet task force’s practical need for cooperation, given the limited assets at its disposal and the real threat faced. A key element not present during the naval deployment during the Libyan crisis was that the United States, in operational terms, was not the adversary. At least tactically, the United States and the U.S.S.R. shared common objectives in dealing with a common threat to their ships—Iran.¹¹³

If anything, events in the Gulf have highlighted the value of naval power to the U.S.S.R. This must have given Admiral Gorshkov, who called the Navy “a most effective means in state policy in peacetime,” a certain satisfaction in his last days. Without a blue-water capability, the U.S.S.R. would have been hard-pressed to play a role in the Gulf or to protect its interests, even *vis-à-vis* a small power like Iran, without escalating to an undesired level. As naval analysts have pointed out, naval power is the most flexible and least provocative form of power projection.¹¹⁴ In the case of the Gulf, not only did the specific circumstances preclude any type of credible response except a naval one, this also had the advantage of serving as a continuous and visible deterrent without violating Iran’s sovereignty or depending on the GCC’s territory. One advantage to the fleet, of course, is that thanks to its ability to use international waters, others would have found it very difficult to keep it out of an area like the Gulf.

Soviet Navy spokesmen, for their part, were quick to emphasize the value of naval power as a foreign policy tool, using arguments and language cast very much in the Gorshkovian mold. One Soviet captain, for example, focused on the fact that the United States was able to project “a great force” to the Gulf, thousands of miles from its shores, thanks to its Navy, stressing that “U.S. imperialism gives an important role to the Navy.” For him,

indeed, the relationship between a navy and power was clearly validated by events in the Gulf, for "on the other side of the ocean, they do not hide the fact that if one has a powerful fleet, one can find one's self 'the neighbor' of any coastal state."¹¹⁵

Similarly, there have been constant reminders by the Navy that without its armed protection, Soviet merchant shipping would not have been able to operate at all in the Gulf. The intention was, clearly, to emphasize the setback to Moscow's foreign policy that would have resulted if Soviet arms carriers and tankers were unable to carry out their mission. One Navy spokesman, Vice Admiral V.I. Panin, in fact, took advantage of his discussion of the role being played by the Soviet Navy in the Gulf as a springboard to make a thinly disguised pitch for continued financial support for his service. As he saw it, the Soviet Navy had to be able to keep up with the U.S. Navy, which he stressed receives one-third of the "Pentagon's colossal budget."¹¹⁶

Despite the inhibiting parameters set by Moscow's foreign policy, in military terms, the Soviet Navy acquitted itself well. It succeeded in deterring, by and large, Iranian attacks and intimidation (though not harassment). While, in part, this was attributable to the focus of Iran's wrath against the United States, without a naval presence Soviet ships would still have been tempting targets for search and seizure.¹¹⁷

However, the Navy's significance has probably been even greater in political terms where it displayed its versatility *vis-à-vis* multiple targets. While it is difficult to measure the exact contribution of the U.S.S.R.'s naval deployment toward the achievement of its foreign policy goals—particularly while the situation is still evolving—some preliminary conclusions are possible.

A naval force is an instrument of foreign policy and can be only as effective as the foreign policy goals that are set. In the Gulf, the Soviet Navy had to operate under countervailing pressures, dictated by Moscow's complicated overall relations with the other political players. It was used successfully to signal support for the GCC and Iraq, as well as resolve to Iran.¹¹⁸

At the same time, naval diplomacy was used to try to effect a change in the status quo with respect to the United States. While the Iranian threat was a factor in the initial Soviet deployment, the anticipated impact of the deployment in political terms on the U.S.S.R.'s interplay with the United States may have been a more significant factor, perhaps from the very beginning.

Even though not directed in military terms against the United States, the Soviet presence has nevertheless been directed against the United States in political terms. Even when cooperating on an operational level with U.S. forces, the Soviet naval contingent competed politically, helping

imperceptibly to erode the status quo, which had favored the United States. It has demonstrated clearly that the West no longer has a naval monopoly in the area and that the United States is no longer the only country able to project power into the Gulf on a substantial scale. By establishing a recognized Soviet naval presence in the Gulf alongside that of the United States, Moscow also can more easily claim a role in the political process affecting the area. A good part of Moscow's unprecedented activism in the Gulf, as seen, revolved around its deployment and subsequent proposals for a U.N. naval force. Convincing the United States to set up a combined force in which both navies would cooperate would have enshrined this recognition. To be sure, the U.S. military presence increased to unexpected levels in the Gulf, something that Moscow no doubt would have liked to avoid. However, even this was not exclusively negative, as things turned out, for it diverted Iran's attention away from the Soviet Navy and facilitated the acceptance of its own presence in the Gulf.

Aleksandr Bovin, a prominent political commentator, expressed the new-found sense of equality in the Gulf and confidence in a strengthened negotiating position when he observed that: "Fate has sent us partners. There is nothing one can do about it. We will not brush the Americans aside. It is necessary to talk to them, including about the Gulf."¹⁹ Despite the seeming deference to the U.S. role, the emphasis on negotiating as equals on the Gulf implies a new situation, for until recently Moscow could not have expected much of a role, if any, for itself there. At the same time, the Soviets would probably welcome U.S. willingness to deal on a naval presence as a step toward the U.S. Navy's recognition of its Soviet counterpart as an equal, which has been a long-standing goal of the Soviet Navy. In part, this is spurred by Moscow's view of a blue-water navy as an attribute of a superpower and a desire for fuller recognition of that status.

In effect, the Soviet naval force could be used as a bargaining chip with the United States. Seeking the moral high ground by appealing for a deescalation of tension in Gulf waters, the U.S.S.R. has been able to offer a trade-off in naval presence to the United States to ostensibly accomplish that.

Moscow, in fact, continued to press for an "equal" pullback of both U.S. and Soviet naval forces, portraying the two as equivalent. Yet not only was the U.S. naval deployment there much larger, but there has been a U.S. naval presence in the Gulf permanently since 1949, not to speak of the considerably larger overall nonmilitary Western equities requiring protection. It did not matter, perhaps, if the United States and Soviet naval deployments were clearly disproportionate in size and combat potential. In political terms, the relative weight of the two deployments was more

balanced, since to some extent Soviet warships could be viewed as symbolic of overall Soviet power and resolve rather than in isolation.

Of course, this does not mean that these developments were either planned or predicted by Soviet decision makers when the original deployment was ordered. Some of the gains, quite likely, were fortuitous. Others may be temporary, as it is not clear how effectively Moscow can translate its presence into a role in shaping events in the Gulf over the longer term.

Iran's acceptance of a cease-fire in late July 1988, based on U.N. Resolution 598, as expected, had an impact on the Soviet naval presence. Harassment of Soviet shipping stopped and escorts have been scaled back, although minesweepers, in particular, are still used to protect ships from mines laid during the hostilities. Although the maritime security situation has improved noticeably, tension nevertheless is likely to continue for some time between Iran and Iraq, including in the Gulf. This probably provided an incentive and rationale for Soviet warships to remain on station.

However, as noted, quite apart from the Iranian stance, Moscow's presence also has depended on its goals *vis-à-vis* the regional states and the United States. In fact, the focus of the Soviet rationale for its naval deployment has been shared between protection from Iran and competition with the United States.¹²⁰ Soviet naval spokesmen often argued a purported need to balance the U.S. presence in terms of providing security for the U.S.S.R. itself and, just before the cease-fire, even hinted at a possible upgrading of the Soviet presence on that basis.¹²¹ Thus, it was not surprising to see the Soviets try to tarry in the area as long as they could. In fact, in mid-October 1988, well after the cease-fire came into effect, Moscow reiterated its intention to continue the oil tanker charter deal with Kuwait.¹²² Moreover, the possibility of instability eventually developing in post-Khomeini Iran may motivate the U.S.S.R. to maintain a naval presence nearby. This would facilitate a surge to deal with any contingencies which might arise in that situation, including limiting U.S. options.

In the post cease-fire period, Moscow continued to pursue—if anything with even greater energy—its proposal for a U.N. fleet as a peacekeeping force in the Gulf.¹²³ As had been true all along, while this would have reduced unilateral Soviet naval activity, it would have allowed Soviet ships to operate in the Gulf under a different guise, thus granting Moscow recognition as a permanent and legitimate player in the area. This might also have led to access to local facilities for Soviet ships operating under a U.N. flag. Such a task force, with Soviet participation, could also inhibit U.S. freedom of action in potential future crises. The decreased risk in the Gulf, in fact, may have encouraged Moscow to wait and see how rapidly the new U.S. administration would draw down or if it would be more pliant on the issue of forming a U.N. task force

However, with the immediate threat past, the GCC states were likely to feel that a large military presence in the Gulf by either superpower, and the related superpower rivalry, was unwelcome.¹²⁴ While the GCC states might now look more favorably to a U.N. force as an international commitment to monitor and maintain the cease-fire, they would probably want one that did not include the United States or U.S.S.R. As a corollary, however, Moscow may now find a more receptive regional audience when it calls for the removal of both Soviet and U.S. forces, which would be a success for the U.S.S.R., given the greater U.S. interests involved.

With an end to Soviet escort duty, the Soviet Navy may well try to extend its welcome by "making itself useful," such as by offering its services to clear the mines and war debris from the Gulf and the Shatt Al-Arab waterway which divides Iran and Iraq, as it has done before—in the Suez Canal and in Bangladesh—in similar postwar situations.

To be sure, Moscow achieved less than it would have if the United States had been less willing to increase its commitment in the Gulf, although this was beyond the control of the Soviet Navy and the Soviet Government. The prospects for increased Soviet influence in Iran, Iraq, or the GCC states will continue to be limited by their traditional mistrust of Soviet intentions. Nevertheless, Moscow has placed itself in a better position to make a case for participation in a U.N. naval force should one be established, as well as to be generally useful to regional players as a source of arms and a lever *vis-à-vis* the United States on regional issues. Moscow is likely to establish or expand its relations with most of the GCC states in the near future. As part of its regional diplomacy, in fact, it would not be surprising if Soviet naval visits to the Gulf countries to show the flag increase, once the situation stabilizes.

Ultimately, the most lasting effect of the Soviet naval deployment may be a "desensitization" of the GCC states to a Soviet presence in the area and an erosion of earlier perceptions of the U.S.S.R. as a direct threat. The regional states have accepted the U.S.S.R. as a player in the Gulf as never before. Even the West—despite its disapproval in principle—eventually came to treat the Soviet presence as a *fait accompli*.¹²⁵

Moscow, willy-nilly, has been able to achieve a legitimacy of usage by its presence in the Gulf. The precedent for Soviet operations in yet another area has been set and should facilitate similar operations there in the future. In the past, Soviet naval deployments to new areas in response to crises have led to a continued naval presence even when the specific crisis subsided. It will be interesting to see if Gorbachev's "new thinking" on foreign policy will mean a change in this pattern and a reversion to Soviet neglect of the Gulf in deference to Western interests there, or if political gains at the expense of the United States will be too tempting to pass up. More broadly,

the success and low political and military cost of the Soviet deployment to the Gulf is likely to reinforce Moscow's willingness to consider using its naval forces in similar situations elsewhere in the future.

Notes

1. See, for example, Robert C. Suggs, "Silently, in Darkness and Fog," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings*, June 1986, pp. 40-48, and William H.J. Manthorpe, Jr., "The Soviet View," *ibid*, pp. 138-139, for a discussion of these issues.

2. For example, speaking of the Gulf, Yevgenii Primakov, Director of the Institute of World Economics and International Relations, candidate member of the CPSU Central Committee, and influential voice on Third World affairs, noted: "The Americans treat us as an equal partner at the world level but they do not want us to be a partner or an equal power at regional levels. Why should we not have the same rights as they do? . . . From the very beginning we never accepted the Gulf as an American lake." Interview by Raghida Dirgham, "America Will Not Invade Iran or Oppose the Syrian-Iraqi Rapprochement," *Al-Hawadith*, (London), 25 September 1987, p. 27. Vice Admiral V.I. Panin (Chief of the Navy's Political Directorate) likewise accused the United States of seeking "hegemony" in the Gulf, "Ships and People," *Trud*, 26 July 1987, p. 3, as did the Soviet government statement of 3 July 1987 on the Gulf, which spoke of the United States' "long ago worn-out ideas of military-political hegemony in this strategically important region." "Statement by the Soviet Government," *Pravda*, 4 July 1987, p. 3.

3. As Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Petrovskii noted regarding the importance of maintaining channels open to Tehran, "quantity will in the long term lead to qualitative change in relations." Interview by Khalil Matar, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* (London), 2 June 1988, in Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), *The Soviet Union (SOV)-88-111*, p. 32. The Iranians, for their own ends, had encouraged these perceptions. In this vein, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister, Mohammed Larjani, told the first Soviet journalist to visit Iran in four years: "The current obstacles [in Soviet-Iranian relations] are of a temporary nature. Sooner or later, they will disappear, and the ties of good neighborliness with the Soviet Union will remain." A. Stepanov, "Iran: Behind the War's Facade," *Pravda*, 20 March 1987, p. 4.

4. Israel's Defense Minister Rabin reported one such Soviet offer to both belligerents to host a Gulf peace conference, made by Deputy Foreign Minister Yulii Vorontsov when he visited both Iraq and Iran, but which Tehran refused. Martin Sieff and James M. Dorsey, "Soviet Bid to Host Gulf Peace Talks Disclosed," *The Washington Times*, 3 July 1987, p. 8. Even at the last minute, after both Iran and Iraq had agreed to accept the U.N.-sponsored cease-fire, Moscow tried to bypass this forum by inviting the belligerents to come to Tashkent, instead, for Soviet-sponsored talks. *KYODO* (Tokyo, Japan), 23 July 1988, FBIS-SOV-88-142, p. 28.

5. Speaking of the Gulf situation, *Izvestiya* reported that during recent U.S.-Soviet talks on regional conflicts "both sides were unanimous in their wish not to generate an atmosphere of Soviet-U.S. confrontation in such crisis situations," Vikentii Matveev, "What are They After?" 4 June 1987, p. 4. Likewise, during a press conference while in the United States, Gorbachev stressed to American audiences the necessity of ensuring that the Gulf situation did not blow up and suggested U.S.-Soviet cooperation in their "responsible role" there. "Press Conference by the CPSU Central Committee General Secretary M.S. Gorbachev," *Krasnaya zvezda (KZ)*, 12 December 1987, p. 6.

6. Notwithstanding Soviet Rear Admiral R. Paromov's assurances that Soviet cargo ships which sail in the Gulf carry "mostly agricultural machinery." "In a Complex Situation. Our Ships in the Persian Gulf," *KZ*, 25 August 1987, p. 1. In fact, between the Fall of 1986 and late 1987, the Soviets were to escort over forty arms carriers to Kuwait. U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *War in the Persian Gulf: The U.S. Takes Sides*, Staff Report (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., November 1987), p. 41.

7. At the same time, Irangate may have spurred Moscow toward greater activity in late 1986, since it likely refueled old Soviet fears that the United States might reestablish part of its former influence in Tehran, however unrealistic that may seem in retrospect.

8. It was clearly Moscow's serious consideration of the Kuwaiti request and the anticipated repercussions which served as the catalyst for the U.S. deployment. Thus, President Ronald Reagan was to note in a speech that "In a word, if we don't do the job, the Soviets will," David Hoffman, "Protecting Tankers Vital, Reagan Warns," *The Washington Post*, 16 June 1987, p. 1. Likewise, speaking in retrospect before the House of Representatives on the impact the U.S.S.R.'s reflagging would have had, Assistant Secretary of State Richard W. Murphy noted: "Had it [i.e., the U.S.S.R.] gained the

extra responsibility . . . they [i.e., the Soviets] would have had every reason to expect the sort of access to ports and harbors of the Gulf that we have had since the Middle East forces mission was established forty years ago. . . . We were not prepared on this issue to see the Soviet Union gain that type of access to the Gulf." U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, *Developments in the Middle East, Hearings* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 28 July 1987), p. 25. It could be argued that the Kuwaitis were counting on such sensitivity in order to elicit a U.S. commitment. Their subsequent use of Soviet tankers on charter fits into the pattern which has developed of seeking assistance from both superpowers as leverage and maximum guarantee for security.

9. These tankers have been used for long-distance hauls to Pakistan, Europe, and Australia.

10. Capt. 3rd Rank V. Urban, "Salvage Tugs," *KZ*, 1 September 1987, p. 1.

11. Indeed, "everyone" was said to be "duty-bound" to protect maritime routes in the Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz from "international piracy," according to Aleksandr Ivanov, Chief of the Arab Gulf and Jordan Section in the Soviet Foreign Ministry. Interview by Muhammad Yunus *Al-Ra'y Al-'Anum* (Kuwait), 1 June 1987, FBIS-SOV-87-109, p. E-3. Earlier, however, General Vladimir L. Govorov, a Soviet Deputy Defense Minister, while on a visit to Kuwait in early 1986, had explicitly disapproved of the United States sending a warship into the Gulf to prevent Iran from searching U.S. merchantmen. Interview by Sulayman Falihan, "We Hold a High Estimation of the Kuwaiti Army's Capacity for Modern Weaponry," *Al-Watan* (Kuwait), 18 January 1986, Joint Publications Research Service, JPRS-NES-86-032, p. 84.

12. Soviet government statement of 3 July 1987, *Pravda* 4 July 1987, *op. cit.*

13. *KZ*, 25 August 1987, *op. cit.*

14. V. Matveychuk, *KZ*, 13 January 1987. The article was actually entitled "An Encounter in the Indian Ocean," and dealt with Soviet merchantmen, but slipped in the fact that Soviet warships were operating in the Persian Gulf area.

15. "Your Opinion? Persian Gulf," *Izvestiya*, 7 August 1987, p. 5.

16. The Soviet Ambassador to the United States, Yuri Dubinin, for example, termed the Soviet deployment as "only a minor military presence," Jack Nelson, "Envoy Denies Soviet Ships Will Escort Kuwait Tankers," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 17 June 1987, p. 1. A spokesman for the Foreign Ministry similarly characterized the Soviet naval presence as "a drop in the ocean compared to the armada brought in by the Pentagon," Mark Whitaker, "Gorbachev's Gulf Game," *Newsweek*, 20 July 1987, p. 33.

17. Capt. 2nd Rank V. Vilenko, "They Are Preparing a Mine War on NATO Staffs and Armies," *KZ*, 18 December 1987, p. 3. In fact, even ships operating in the Atlantic now include countermine training in their exercises, since the Soviets believe that experience in the Gulf has shown that "every sailor must master confidently" this skill, Capt. 3rd Rank V. Pavlyutkin, "With a Landing Force on Board," *KZ*, 23 August 1988, p. 1.

18. There were reports, in fact, that Moscow was "extremely annoyed" at China for providing the Silkworms to Iran, and that it complained to Beijing about it, "A Soviet Show of Force to Iran," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 6 June 1987, p. 8.

19. Capt 3rd Rank A. Trigub, "Taking into Account the Complexity of the Situation," *Morskoy sbornik*, February 1988, p. 48.

20. A representative from the Main Naval Staff was asked by a reporter from *KZ*: "If, let's suppose, by accident, force is used against Soviet merchant ships, how should a commander react?" The reply was: "They must not flinch. However, their main concern should be to prevent any provocations before they occur," (emphasis added). Interview by Capt. 3rd Rank V. Urban, "On Burning Waves," *KZ*, 4 October 1987, p. 1. According to a Soviet naval reporter detailed to the Gulf, on at least one occasion an unidentified fighter (which turned out to be Iraqi), looking for targets, apparently made a preliminary attack pass on a Soviet tanker—sending the accompanying escort's crew scrambling to battle stations—before recognizing that this was a Soviet tanker. Capt. 2nd Rank S. Turchenko, "In the Persian Gulf. 2. Miles and Mines," *KZ*, 11 February 1988, p. 2.

21. This appears to have been the consensus of, among others, the captains of a Soviet tanker and auxiliary, as well as of a naval reporter stationed on the *Stoykii*. V. Shevchenko, "The Persian Gulf. We Go Through Mined Waters. The Captain of the Soviet Tanker *Makhachikal* Talks," *Izvestiya*, 22 August 1987, p. 5; F. Pisarevskii and Capt. 2nd Rank S. Turchenko, "Night 'Transit,'" *KZ*, 7 January 1988, p. 1 and Capt. 2nd Rank L. Maslodudov, "On the Abu Dhabi 'Traverse Bearing,'" 9 January 1988, p. 1.

22. Capt. 3rd Rank V. Kovatev, "When the *Stoykii* Is Nearby," *KZ*, 20 November 1987, p. 1. Rear Admiral Sergeev, in fact, noted that Soviet ships were operating "in conditions of a combat situation." "According to Soviet Criteria. Lessons Learned from Sailing in the Persian Gulf," *KZ*, 15 January 1988, p. 1.

23. V. Belyakov, "Up to the Traverse Bearing of the Port of Dubai," *Pravda*, 6 December 1987, p.

24. Indeed, the tug was said to be standing by to rescue both merchantmen and warships, *KZ*, 1 September 1987, *op. cit.*

25. For example, when an officer on the *Boevoy*, on one of its escort trips, was asked by a reporter: "Did you act alone?" his reply was: "Of course! . . . One ship such as ours is sufficient to defend several merchant ships," *Pravda*, 6 December 1987, *op. cit.* However, on occasion, up to three minesweepers escorted a single tanker, as was the case when the *Marshal Chuykov* sailed for Kuwait the second time, after having undergone repairs in Dubai. V. Peresada, "I Go Through the Persian Gulf," *Pravda*, 29 August 1987, p. 5. The Navy, for its part, felt that the forces as deployed were "the minimum necessary" for the mission. Capt. 2nd Rank S. Turchenko, "In the Persian Gulf. 1. Flames over the Waves," *KZ*, 9 February 1988, p. 2.

26. Y. Primakov, *Al-Hawadith* (London), *op. cit.*, p. 27.

27. The only known Soviet casualty of the operation occurred in May 1988, when the unarmed auxiliary *Olenka*, returning from duty in the Gulf, was attacked in the Red Sea by an unidentified speedboat, probably belonging to an Eritrean insurgent group. The ship's radioman was killed by gunfire from the speedboat. "Combat Medal for the Radio Operator," *Izvestiya*, 12 October 1988, p. 6.

28. KUNA (Kuwait News Agency) in English, 11 May 1987, FBIS-SOV-87-091, p. 11-1.

29. *Pravda*, 29 August 1987, *op. cit.*

30. According to a TASS report quoted by "Soviet Ship Believed Possibly Targeted," *Journal of Commerce* (New York), 27 May 1987, p. 3-B. The Captain of the stricken ship noted: "If it was a mine, then it probably was put in the path of the *Marshal Chuykov* not long before the explosion." Two other cargo ships—and probable arms carriers—the *Ivan Shepetkov* and *Sovetskije Profsoyuzy*, were also fired upon by "some unidentified speedboats" at about this time (although it is not clear from the accounts exactly when), *KZ*, 4 October 1987, *op. cit.*

31. Yu. Dmitriyev and O. Kvyatkovskii, "Through Pirate Fire," *Trud*, 12 May 1987, p. 3.

32. "Act of Piracy in the Persian Gulf," *Trud*, 7 May 1987, p. 3. After an apparent reassessment of the threat, crews of civilian ships sailing in the Gulf subsequently became men-only. O. Kvyatkovskii "On Burning Waves," *Trud*, 25 September 1987. Women, however, remained in the crews of naval auxiliaries, Capt. 2nd Rank S. Turchenko, "In the Persian Gulf. 3. Heroic Passages," *KZ*, 12 February 1988, p. 2.

33. Captain-Lieutenant Yu. Gladkevich, "The Admiral's Watch," *KZ*, 16 January 1988, p. 2. Navy spokesmen, however, have noted that the attacked cargo ship was unescorted "because of reasons not depending on the Navy," *KZ*, 9 February 1988, *op. cit.* This suggests that the Navy was apparently in favor of an escort, but had perhaps been overruled as a result of a political decision to maintain a low profile and due to a misreading of the threat.

34. Senior Lieutenant E. Tarasov, "The Hot Charts of the Zatyad," *Morskoi sbornik*, July 1988, p. 34.

35. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 6 June 1987, *op. cit.*

36. Ivanov, while visiting Kuwait, "Soviet Will Retaliate if Shipping Hit in Gulf," *The Washington Times*, 2 June 1987, p. 10. In part, he may have wanted to appear unusually tough in order to bolster Soviet credibility with the GCC.

37. Petrovskii, after his visit to Tehran, as reported by TASS. As part of its courting of Tehran, the U.S.S.R. subsequently sought to downplay in public areas of friction such as the *Marshal Chuykov* affair. Thus, *Izvestiya* offered Tehran plausible denial of a somewhat farfetched nature, noting that while it could not be excluded that the mine that damaged the ship was Iranian, there were also other possibilities, such as mines floating from the war zone, *Izvestiya*, 22 August 1987, *op. cit.*

38. *Ibid.*

39. Capt. 3rd Rank V. Kovatev, "Our Ships in the Persian Gulf. In the Mined Channel," *KZ*, 15 November 1987, p. 1 and Capt. 2nd Rank L. Maslodudov, "Stoykii," *KZ*, 17 January 1988, p. 2. The Captain of one of the leased tankers admitted that such incidents between Iranian speedboats and Soviet escorts were plentiful. *Trud*, 25 September 1987, *op. cit.*

40. According to the Political officer of the *Ladnyi*, Lieutenant V. Solodkov, "If in a Single Bunch. . . ." *Kommunist vooruzhennykh sil*, March 1988, p. 55.

41. *KZ*, 20 November 1987, *op. cit.*

42. TASS International Service in Russian, 1 January 1988, FBIS-SOV-88-004, p. 27.

43. Captain-Lieutenant I. Yusupov, "Special Watch," *KZ*, 5 May 1988, p. 1.

44. In fact, Iran publicly characterized Soviet naval policy in the Gulf not "as a threat to the regional states or an element to increase tension, but as a legitimate defensive measure," for the U.S.S.R.'s southern borders, presumably from a U.S. threat. Tehran International Service in Persian, "Historical Political Review," 18 August 1987, FBIS-NES-87-160, p. S-8.

45. Capt. 2nd Rank S. Turchenko, "The Flagship's Pennant," *KZ*, 23 January 1988, p. 3.

46. *Trud*, 12 May 1987, *op. cit.*

47. On one trip in November 1987, for example, a frigate sighted over twenty mines. *KZ*, 20 November 1987, *op. cit.*
48. Article by Rear Admiral Sergeev. *KZ*, 15 January 1988, *op. cit.*
49. *Pravda*, 6 December 1987, *op. cit.*
50. *KZ*, 4 October 1987, *op. cit.*
51. *Pravda*, 6 December 1987, *op. cit.*
52. The Captain of the Romanian tanker *Dacia*, being shelled by an Iranian frigate near Dubai, radioed: "Any Russian warship, I need immediate help!" "U.S. Warship Confronts Iraqi Planes," *The Washington Post*, 27 November 1987, p. 46. From later information, it appears, in fact, that this was a Kuwaiti ship trying to slip into the Gulf disguised as the *Dacia*, Patrick E. Tyler and Jonathan C. Randal, "Gulf Policy Said to Boost U.S. Credibility," *The Washington Post*, 11 January 1988, p. 1.
53. Soviet naval sources, for example, expressed frustration at their inability to intervene to help foreign ships under attack. In at least one instance, reportedly at the Captain's own initiative—which seems unlikely—a Soviet warship even sent its lifeboats to rescue the crew of a stricken Greek tanker, though they were preempted by another rescue ship, *KZ*, 9 February 1988, *op. cit.*
54. The guided missile destroyer *Admiral Tributs*, for example, while in the Arabian Sea on its way to the Gulf, used its helicopter to monitor "the movement of NATO ships." Capt. 2nd Rank S. Turchenko, "At Night over the Ocean," *KZ*, 6 December 1987, p. 1.
55. Capt. 3rd Rank V. Pasyakin, "They Did Not Begin with A's," *KZ*, 5 January 1988, p. 1. Naval sources, however, complained bitterly about not being allowed to train with live fire in the Gulf, contrasting this with British operating procedures there, and in fact sometimes did so anyhow, despite orders, Capt. 3rd Rank V. Pasyakin, "Seven Years as a Commander," *KZ*, 21 October 1988, p. 1.
56. Rear Admiral Sergeev, in a surprisingly frank article, excoriated logistic and training shortcomings that have appeared in ships operating in the Gulf. He blamed "the 'paper' mentality," which he says encourages good efficiency reports on paper even for inadequate performance. *KZ*, 15 January 1988, *op. cit.* One such problem which reportedly arose in the Gulf was a "bottleneck" in coordinating between the operations room and action stations on ships, *ibid.*
57. Capt. 2nd Rank L. Maslodudov, "Tested in the Persian Gulf," *KZ*, 26 February 1988, p. 2.
58. *KZ*, 7 January 1988, *op. cit.* and *KZ*, 21 October 1988, *op. cit.*
59. *KZ*, 25 August 1987, *op. cit.*
60. Capt. 3rd Rank V. Kovatev, "With High Quality," *KZ*, 27 November 1987, p. 1.
61. For example, after a swivel gear on a gun broke, due to "carelessness by sailors," the frigate *Revnostnyi* had to call on help from a tanker to fix it, *KZ*, 13 January 1987, *op. cit.* Persistent coordination problems with headquarters in obtaining appropriate technicians, in fact, prompted one exasperated captain to wonder aloud sarcastically "Can they really know better in an office on land?" Capt. 3rd Rank I. Mikhaylov, "Is the View Better from the Office?" *KZ*, 26 August 1988, p. 1.
62. *KZ*, 13 January 1987, *op. cit.*
63. Capt. 2nd Rank S. Turchenko, "Repair at Sea," *KZ*, 25 November 1987, p. 1.
64. Richard Sale, "U.S. Soviet Navies in Gulf Arc Said Sharing Mine Data," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 4 October 1987, p. 15.
65. As the Captain of the *Admiral Tributs* stressed when speaking of the role of his ship's helicopter ("the long arm of the ship") in providing early warning, its value can be appreciated fully only by "a tactically blind commander," *KZ*, 6 December 1987, *op. cit.* Because of the short distances and the adverse atmospheric conditions, surface-based radar ordinarily is not a very effective means of early warning in the Gulf.
66. Senior Lieutenant V. Shechuchenko, "Unexpected Port Call," *KZ*, 19 September 1987. In fact, the lone surgeon deployed with the Soviet task force was even forced to perform an emergency operation on a sailor even though he himself had a broken hand, *KZ*, 12 February 1988, *op. cit.*
67. *Pravda*, 6 December 1987, *op. cit.*
68. *KZ*, 17 January 1988, *op. cit.* One sailor in the Gulf compared the engine room on his ship to "a Russian bathhouse." Capt. 2nd Rank S. Turchenko, "A War Is Going on Nearby . . . Our Ships in the Persian Gulf," *KZ*, 24 December 1987, p. 1. As admitted by the *Ladnyi's* political officer in a roundtable discussion, sailors "from big cities, accustomed to a comfortable life" have been especially vulnerable to endurance problems in the Gulf, "The Army of the Revolution, the People's Army," *Kommunist*, February 1988, p. 60.
69. *KZ*, 15 January 1988, *op. cit.*
70. According to Admiral of the Fleet Chernavin. "The Ship's Commander: Post and Personality," *Kommunist vooruzhennykh sil*, July 1988, p. 31. As is common Soviet naval practice, in the Gulf it has been the officers who usually have stood watch—along with personnel who are members of the Communist Party—adding to the burden on them, *KZ*, 17 January 1988, *op. cit.* One warship was said

to have made several escort trips without a respite, with crews forced to stay at their posts continuously, and the Captain spending days with practically no sleep. *KZ*, 9 February 1988.

71. *KZ*, 20 November 1987, *op. cit.*

72. Yuril Tepyakov, "Convoy," *Moscow News*, 28 August 1988, p. 8.

73. *KZ*, 15 November 1987, *op. cit.*

74. There were even proposals to grant the honorific title and flag of "guard," reserved for battle-tested vessels, to the *Stoykii* for its operations in combat (*po-frontovomu*), *KZ*, 17 January 1988, *op. cit.*

75. *Al-Ra'y Al-'Amm* (Kuwait), 1 June 1987, *op. cit.*, p. E-3.

76. Reportedly, the GCC states assured the United States that Soviet warships would not be allowed to use their ports and facilities, David B. Ottoway, "U.S. Expects Pact with Saudis Soon," *The Washington Post*, 19 June 1987, p. 29.

77. Interestingly, Admiral Chernavin visited Syria (his first visit to that country) in November 1987, where he discussed "strengthening cooperation" with his hosts. "Visit to Syria," *KZ*, 13 November 1987, p. 3. According to public testimony by the Director of Naval Intelligence, Rear Admiral William O. Studeman, before Congress on 1 March 1988, the Soviets, in fact subsequently did upgrade the naval facilities at Tartus, which will provide additional maintenance and support capabilities to Soviet ships.

78. Capt. 1st Rank V. Kuzar, "Where the American Armada's Course is Headed," *KZ*, 11 October 1987, p. 3.

79. Indeed, not only did the GCC states and other Arab moderates such as Egypt and Jordan react favorably to the U.S. and European naval presence, even Iraq's former sensitivity was transformed into unprecedented understanding.

80. An article in *Morskoy sbornik* soon after the U.S. buildup began focused on existing U.S. access in the Gulf and on the efforts of the United States to "entice" the GCC states into providing additional support in exchange for its protection, Capt. 1st Rank A. Alkhimenko, "The Pentagon's Map of the Indian Ocean," August 1987, p. 78.

81. On 28 May 1987, for example, Moscow TV noted that the European allies were "obviously reluctant" to be drawn into the Gulf by the United States. Boris Kalyagin, "The World Today," 29 May 1987, FBIS-SOV-87-103, p. H-2, and, as late as August, the Soviet press was still reporting that Nato would refuse to do so (e.g., Capt. 3rd Rank V. Mikhaylov, "Minesweeping," *KZ*, 9 August 1987, p. 1). The Soviet media evinced surprise when Western countries did deploy, for example noting that French policy had "changed radically" when it decided to send in its minesweepers, Yu. Kovalenko, "The Path of Escalation," *Izvestiya*, 6 September 1987, p. 4.

82. Valdimir Peresada, "International Overview," *Pravda*, 16 August 1987, p. 4.

83. See the 3 July 1987 Soviet government statement, *Pravda*, 4 July 1987, *op. cit.*

84. "The Middle East: The Time Is Ripe for Negotiations," *Izvestiya*, 28 April 1987, p. 4.

85. For example, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Larjani, while visiting Moscow, highlighted this commonality of interests, focusing on "the dangerous actions" of the United States, V[ladimir] Peresada "Cannon Shot Over the Gulf," *Pravda*, 9 September 1987, p. 4. Iran's Prime Minister Huseyn Musavi, asked in an interview the reason for the recent improvement in Iranian-Soviet relations, likewise singled out the fact that "the Soviet Union opposes the increasing presence of the military forces of the United States and of its allies in the Persian Gulf," Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 17 December 1987, FBIS-NES-87-242, p. 50.

86. Manki Ponomarev, "Security and the U.N.'s Potential," *KZ*, 30 October 1987, p. 3. In fact, stories appeared in the press on Soviet-U.S. cooperation as U.N. observers in the Sinai (V. Belyakov, "Combined Watch—American and Soviet Officers Do It in Egypt," *Pravda*, 6 October 1987, p. 5) and even on Soviet-U.S. cooperation on delivery of assistance to the U.S.S.R. by way of the Gulf through Iran during World War II, with calls for the revival of "the spirit of cooperation and mutual trust which existed then," P[avel] Demchenko, "A Special Task," *Pravda*, 2 December 1987, p. 5.

87. I. Persyanov, "Do Not Play with Fire," *Trud*, 30 September 1987, p. 3.

88. *Al-Itihad Al-Ushu'i* (Ahu Dhabi, UAE), 22 October 1987, in FBIS-SOV-87-207, p. 8 and *Pravda*, 1 November 1987. Similar mixed signals seem to have been sent intentionally. Thus Vorontsov went to Kuwait with a message from Gorbachev to the effect that the U.N. fleet could have Soviet and U.S. ships (no doubt to reassure the Kuwaitis of its effectiveness) ("Message Is Delivered," *Pravda*, 1 November 1987, p. 4), while the next day he was delivering a message in Tehran from Shevardnadze to the effect that the U.N. fleet would replace ships of all non-littoral states (which had been an Iranian goal) ("Discussions in Tehran," *Pravda*, 2 November 1987, p. 5).

89. Beginning with Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati's visit to the U.S.S.R. in February 1987, negotiations began which led to accords on Caspian Sea shipping, resumed air service, a gas deal, and the return of some Soviet experts to Iran, as well as softer treatment of Iran in the Soviet media.

90. David B. Ottoway, "Soviets Urge U.N. Flotilla in Mideast," *The Washington Post*, 16 December 1987, p. 1. Resolution 598 called on both belligerents to accept a cease-fire and threatened the imposition of sanctions on the party failing to comply.

91. Ambassador Belonogov, in fact, had left his country a way out, qualifying Soviet support by saying that "concrete action, naturally, will be governed by our assessment of the situation concerning consultations between the Secretary-General and the two belligerents," Richard Beeston, "U.S. Welcomes Soviet Support for Gulf Cease-Fire," *The Washington Times*, 25 December 1987, p. B-6. Ernest Zverev, the Soviet ambassador to Kuwait, in interviews with the Kuwaiti media, likewise sought to deflect Arab attention from an embargo, claiming that enforcement would be "very difficult," and that it would not stop the war in any event, KUNA, 19 January 1988, in FBIS-SOV-88-011, p. 37, and, Interview by Nasir Al-Khadidi, *Al-Qabas* (Kuwait), FBIS-SOV-88-013, p. 20. This stance continued unchanged, with Ivanov even telling Arab audiences that an embargo "will lead to an end to the dialogue with the Iranian Government," *Al-Siyasah*, (Kuwait), 26 April 1988, FBIS-SOV-88-084.

92. The Iraqi Foreign Minister, for example, accused the Soviets of being in no hurry at the U.N., Interview by Raghida Dirgham, *Al-Hawadith*, 23 October 1987, FBIS-NES-87-209, p. 25.

93. See the political commentary by Aleksandr Bovin in "The Gulf," in *Izvestiya*, 31 July 1987, p. 5. Also KZ, 9 August 1987, *op. cit.* and E. Firmachenkov, "The Persian Gulf: Oil and Politics," *Izvestiya*, 16 October 1987, p. 4, which claims that without Gulf oil "NATO's military machine would fairly quickly be on the skids."

94. "U.N. Fleet Idea Not Ruled Out," *The Washington Post*, 29 December 1987, p. 12.

95. "Carlucci Favors Embargo of Iran Over U.N. Force," *The Washington Times*, 6 January 1988, p. 17.

96. U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, Defense Policy and Investigations Subcommittees, *National Security Policy Implications of United States Operations in the Persian Gulf*, Report (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1987), p. 42.

97. WAKH (Bahraini national news agency), 3 November 1987, FBIS-SOV-87-212, p. 23.

98. The fact that, during his visit, Sytenko characterized an embargo as an "unbalanced and hasty resolution" must not have put his hosts in a favorable frame of mind toward his promotion of a U.N. fleet. WAKH in English, 16 December 1987, FBIS-NES-87-242, p. 22. Likewise, there was no response by Jordan's King Hussein to several public calls for a U.N. fleet by his hosts while on a visit to Moscow, with Saudi Arabia probably being the intended ultimate audience on this occasion, e.g., "According to Principles of Mutual Respect," *Izvestiya*, 23 December 1987, p. 4.

99. For example, a visiting Iraqi official's reply to Gromyko's public call for the need to replace "foreign" navies with a U.N. fleet was not published, indicating disagreement. "Discussions with Iraq's Representative," *Izvestiya*, 15 July 1988, p. 2.

100. In a meeting between Secretary of State George Shultz and Foreign Minister Shevardnadze, the latter emphasized that "the inassing of the U.S. military presence in the area of the Persian Gulf will lead to further heightening of tension and seriously hamper finding ways to end the conflict," "Talks in New York," *Izvestiya*, 26 September 1987, p. 4. Likewise, Vorontsov, visiting Kuwait, warned his hosts that the United States could cause the Gulf war to escalate since the U.S. Navy's activity could lead to situations which could "stoke the fire of war even hotter," *Pravda*, 1 November 1987, *op. cit.* The effect of Soviet ships, on the other hand, was contrasted explicitly to that of the U.S. Navy. According to the Soviet government statement of 3 July 1987, Soviet ships in the Gulf "have no connection whatsoever with tension in the region." *Pravda*, 4 July 1987, *op. cit.*

101. Rear Admiral Paromov, for example, noted that as a result of the presence of the Western navies, the Gulf "is becoming increasingly dangerous for ships of all nations." KZ, 25 August 1987, *op. cit.*, while a Soviet tanker captain believed that the upsurge in mines during the Summer of 1987 "coincided" with the increased U.S. presence, *Izvestiya*, 22 August 1987, *op. cit.*

102. E.g., Pavel Demchenko, "Paradoxes of the 'Tanker' War," *Pravda*, 7 January 1988, p. 5 and A. Ostalskii, "Repeated Offender of the Might-Makes-Right-Law," *Izvestiya*, 20 April 1988, p. 5.

103. "The Hour of Truth," *Al-Ra'y Al-'Amm*, 26 October 1987, FBIS-NES-87-210, pp. 12-13.

104. Interview reported by Delhi Domestic Service in English, 26 October 1987, FBIS-NES-82-207, p. 46.

105. *Keyhan* (Tehran), 3 December 1987, FBIS-NES-87-242, p. 53.

106. "It is difficult to say if Iran was caught red-handed. . . . We were not there. But if it were the case that the Iranians were laying mines, there is no justification. It would be a violation of international law." Don Oberdorfer, "Soviets Urge Truce in Iran-Iraq War," *The Washington Post*, 24 Published by U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons, 1989

September 1987, p. 32. Since this arose in an interview given to ABC-TV, however, one can assume that the response was tailored to American audiences to some extent.

107. *Pravda*, 6 December 1987, *op. cit.*

108. In a news conference, Admiral Nikolay Amelko, Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, stated: "It is illogical for Soviet and U.S. warships to conduct combined operations in the Arab Gulf region, since this runs counter to our ideology and our viewpoint on this region. Our objectives are completely different, not to speak of our intentions," "The Soviet Union Opposes Military Operations in the Persian Gulf," *Al-Raya* (Aden), 26 July 1987, p. 2.

109. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 4 October 1987, *op. cit.*

110. *Pravda*, 29 August 1987, *op. cit.* and William Matthews, "Kidd's Back Home from Action, Tension in Gulf," *Navy Times*, 14 December 1987, p. 3.

111. Elaine Sciolino, "U.S. and Soviet, in Gulf; Show Rare Cooperation," *The New York Times*, 14 January 1988, p. 14.

112. *Navy Times*, 14 December 1987, *op. cit.*

113. In fact, in September 1987, both Moscow and Washington—though separately—sent messages "of concern" to Libya after the United States had informed Moscow that Tripoli was about to transfer Soviet-made mines to Iran by plane, Elaine Sciolino, "U.S. and Soviet Protest to Libya over Iran Mines," *The New York Times*, 11 September 1987, p. 1.

114. For an insightful analysis of the role of the Soviet Navy in the pursuit of state interests in the Third World in general, see Bruce W. Watson, "The Soviet Navy in the Third World," in James L. George, ed., *The Soviet and Other Communist Navies: The View from the Mid-1980s* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1986), pp. 251-272.

115. *KZ*, 11 October 1987, *op. cit.* To strengthen his case further, he noted that over the last thirty years of 215 occasions when the United States has used military power for political goals, 177 of these involved the Navy.

116. *Trud*, 26 July 1987, *op. cit.*

117. Indeed, the humiliating alternative to escort was highlighted in the Soviet media on a number of occasions, such as the report of a Yugoslav freighter which the Iranians wanted to search. When it refused, the Iranians fired on it and forced it to submit, V. Shevchenko, "The Persian Gulf: Long-Term Operation," *Izvestiya*, 24 August 1987, p. 3.

118. By contrast, it has not always been possible for Moscow to affect events ashore in Iran, especially with the type of ships on station, as illustrated by its inability to prevent the attacks against its consulate in Isfahan in December 1987 and the Embassy in Tehran in March 1988.

119. *Izvestiya*, 31 July 1987, *op. cit.* Likewise, he quotes favorably an American journalist who had observed that "Soviet ships in any case are already there, and any map of the region would cause one to ask 'Why shouldn't they be there?'"

120. Yevgenii Priunakov, for example, expressed the rationalization for the Soviet presence directly in terms of that of the United States: "Well, if they [i.e., the Americans] refuse [to withdraw], we stay," *Al-Hawadith*, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

121. Speaking of the Soviet and U.S. task forces in the Gulf, for example, one Navy spokesman noted that "It is the mission of the Soviet sailors to counter this armada and, if necessary, to parry any blow directed against the U.S.S.R.," Senior Lieutenant V. Babelskii, "In the Indian Ocean," *KZ*, 26 June 1988, p. 1. Moreover, according to the Deputy-Commander of the Main Naval Staff, Vice Admiral D. Komarov, given the "strategic intent" of the U.S. deployment, "We do not consider that the qualitative and quantitative character of our forces in the Persian Gulf will remain unchanged in the future," Capt. 2nd Rank S. Turchenko, "Watch the Persian Gulf," *KZ*, 9 June 1988, p. 2.

122. Deputy Foreign Minister Petrovskii speaking to the Kuwaiti daily *Al-Qabas*: "The Time Has Come to Translate into Concrete Terms the International Consensus on an International Conference," as reported by *Al-Dustur* (Amman, Jordan), 15 October 1988, p. 21.

123. In fact, according to Petrovskii, Moscow is now in favor of using U.N. naval forces to protect freedom of navigation in other areas when the need arises, as a general principle. Leonard Doyle, "USSR to Get Seat At Middle East Talks," *The Independent* (London), 24 October 1988, p. 10.

124. In fact, an editorial in Kuwait's *Al-Ra'y Al-Amm* (22 October 1988) was highly critical of Moscow's call for a U.N. naval force, noting that this "will be followed by requests to obtain facilities and naval and ground bases. Hence there will be a return to sharing control and colonizing the region after we removed the old colonization. . . . We assert that most of our problems are created by the big powers, their conspiracies, and their interference." "The Big Powers, the Gulf, and the Crossword Puzzle," FBIS-NES-88-205, p. 29.

125. According to Richard Murphy, the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, in testimony before the House of Representatives on 15 December 1987, "Well, the purpose of the reflagging is not to keep the Soviets out. *The Soviets are in the Gulf*. . . . It's never been 100 percent win lose. We feel we have minimized the Soviet role in the Gulf" (emphasis added). U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittees on Arms Control, International Security and Science, and on Europe and the Middle East, *U.S. Policy in the Persian Gulf*, Hearing (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1988), pp. 36-37.

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"The Soviet Union and the United States got together to protect their freedom to maneuver against each other."

Elliot Richardson, in a lecture about
the Third United Nations Law of the
Sea Conference
5 August 1983