

1988

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Recommended Citation

Berkowitz, Marc J. (1988) "Soviet Naval Spetsnaz Forces," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 41 : No. 2 , Article 3.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol41/iss2/3>

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Soviet Naval Spetsnaz Forces

Marc J. Berkowitz

Soviet naval intelligence contains elite special operations forces for covert action and unconventional warfare. The "special activities" for which such commando units could be used range from paramilitary operations in the Third World, to direct action, including sabotage, in NATO-Europe. Special operations forces can have strategic value as a military instrument used against an adversary with a preponderance of forces. But they tend to have their greatest strategic impact in a military campaign when there is a balance of forces. As the U.S.S.R. continues to grow into a potent seagoing adversary, the potential leverage provided by its naval special operations forces may substantially increase.

The Soviet Navy has evolved from a coastal defense force to a blue-ocean power since World War II. Western military analysts, observing this shift away from a traditional Eurasian continental emphasis to a global power projection role, primarily have focused on the Soviet Navy's substantial capital investments as well as the reestablishment and upgrading of the Naval Infantry. Significantly less attention has been devoted to the threat posed to U.S. and Allied interests by the enhancement of Soviet naval special or unconventional warfare capabilities which could be employed in contiguous or distant regions beyond the U.S.S.R.'s borders. This is partially the result of the need to address more overt and pressing concerns. But it also reflects the difficulty of examining sensitive and less tangible activities concealed within the highly restrictive Soviet system.

The U.S.S.R. has a history of creating special categories of military forces which are either monitored or directly controlled by the Soviet intelligence and security services because of the political sensitivity of their mission and methods of operation.¹ These "special purpose" or "special designation" (*Spetsial'naya naznacheniya* or *Spetsnaz*)² units are deployed with every Soviet Army and Fleet. They are primarily subordinate to the Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) of the General Staff; although during peacetime they may come under the direction of the Committee for State Security (KGB).

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Brigade-size Spetsnaz formations are contained within each of the Soviet Navy's four fleets. These naval intelligence components provide the Soviet Union with a robust naval special warfare capability.

Soviet naval literature over the last two decades has carried on an interesting exposition of naval special warfare concepts and technologies. Until the mid-1980s, these discussions were mainly cast in terms of reviewing and analyzing the historical development and employment of naval special operations forces in the West and Japan. Following the negative publicity surrounding the "Whiskey on the Rocks" incident (the grounding of the Soviet *U-137* Whiskey-class submarine within Swedish territorial waters) in 1981 and the report of the Swedish Submarine Defense Commission in 1983, this literature became more oriented towards strictly propagandizing the threat to the U.S.S.R. from Western capabilities.³ Soviet military sources have particularly drawn notice to the upgrading of U.S. Special Operations Forces under the Reagan administration in an attempt to mitigate the damage to their own international image. For example, the Soviet military press has commented on the acquisition of additional Sea-Air-Land (SEAL) teams, new Sea Viking-class medium special warfare craft, and the refitting of two *Ethan Allen*-class submarines as special amphibious transports.⁴

The literature prior to the recent propaganda campaign nonetheless provides some insight into Soviet military thought on the value of naval special operations forces. It can be combined with the information available from open Western sources to form a composite of Soviet naval special warfare capabilities and force employment concepts. This article first traces the lineage of Soviet naval Spetsnaz forces; secondly, it examines their force posture; and finally, it assesses the threat these forces pose to U.S. and Allied interests.

Historical Lineage

The existence of special-purpose forces within the Soviet Navy can be traced back to the Second World War. The Soviet Navy first established its own intelligence service independent of the Red Army in 1940. During the "Great Patriotic War" (1941-45), it was subordinate to the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command (STAVKA). The service was charged with conducting naval intelligence operations with an emphasis on enemy-occupied coastal areas. This mission was carried out by intelligence directorates (RUs) attached to the headquarters of the Soviet Northern, Baltic, Black Sea, and Pacific Fleets. Each RU contained separate divisions for clandestine intelligence gathering, coastal reconnaissance, and covert operations.⁵ They also had intelligence analysis, signals intelligence, and communications units.

The clandestine intelligence divisions maintained field offices in the most important ports in the fleet's area of operations from which they recruited,

trained, and ran agent networks into enemy-occupied territory. The reconnaissance divisions located amphibious landing and infiltration points, captured prisoners of war, and harassed enemy coastal supply routes. The covert operations divisions collected intelligence and conducted direct action, occasionally in support of Red Army special warfare activities, behind the enemy's lines. They had their own sections for communicating with their units in the field. Personnel for the reconnaissance and covert operations divisions were drawn from the Naval Infantry or the fleet. Both divisions had access to special vessels, including submarines and patrol boats, as well as smaller craft such as fishing boats, for their operations.

The mission and role of the Soviet Navy's special-purpose forces during World War II most likely were modeled on its predecessors in the Red Army. Special-purpose units reportedly were formed initially in the ground forces in 1918 during the Civil War.⁶ They were created to carry out raids deep in the enemy rear, to collect intelligence on the disposition of enemy forces by capturing prisoners of war, particularly staff officers, behind enemy lines, and to undermine or destroy the enemy's command structure. A former Comintern agent who was attached to such a unit during Marshal Tukhachevskiy's march on Warsaw in the 1920 Soviet-Polish War wrote that its function was "to operate secretly behind Polish lines, to create diversions, to sabotage the shipment of munitions, to shatter the morale of the Polish Army by propaganda, and to furnish the general staff of the Red Army with political and military information."⁷

Soviet military sources have indirectly confirmed the existence of their World War II-era naval special-purpose forces. For example, the Commander in Chief of the Soviet Navy, Admiral of the Fleet of the Soviet Union V. N. Chernavin, recently asserted that during the Great Patriotic War the "important tactical quality of submarines, their covertness, determined their involvement in carrying out reconnaissance missions such as . . . landing reconnaissance and saboteur groups."⁸ Two historians of Soviet naval wartime operations, Captain 1st Rank V. I. Achkasov and Rear Admiral N. B. Pavlovich, have stated that special amphibious landings were undertaken to conduct sabotage and diversionary actions in the enemy rear.⁹ This could refer to the activities of the covert operations divisions. Achkasov officially recorded fourteen special landings attributed to the Northern and Baltic Fleets as well as the Azov Flotilla during the war. His count did not include "individual scouts or reconnaissance groups landed from submarines and small combatants."¹⁰ Soviet naval historian A. Emelyanov has written, however, that over fifty insertions of seaborne special reconnaissance teams were carried out by all of the Soviet fleets to provide intelligence on enemy ship movements.¹¹ These teams were typically transported by submarines to their target locations and were assisted in their missions by local partisan groups. This may be a direct reference to the operations of the coastal reconnaissance divisions.

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Another Soviet military source, Major General B. Sergeyenko, has noted that the Navy's combat operations during the Great Patriotic War included the employment of small "sabotage-reconnaissance" units which could be "delivered to an enemy occupied beach stealthily to conduct reconnaissance, destroy or damage important objectives in the enemy rear, and be evacuated after performing the mission."¹² This statement could describe the activities of both the covert operations and coastal reconnaissance divisions. Sergeyenko also noted that one of the most successful early Soviet amphibious assaults, at Grigor'yevka during the defense of Odessa in September 1941, was aided by the air drop of a naval paratroop unit which "disrupted enemy communications and spread panic in his rear."¹³ Operatives from the covert operations divisions, which sometimes penetrated as far as 200 kilometers behind enemy lines, were organized into intelligence, sabotage, and paratroop groups.¹⁴ The unit referred to by Sergeyenko may have been part of the covert operations division of the Black Sea Fleet's RU. Naval special-purpose forces evidently were also employed by the U.S.S.R. in the Far East at the outset of the Manchurian campaign in 1945. They were utilized to disrupt the operations of the Japanese occupation forces in North Korean ports.¹⁵ These units were probably part of the Pacific Fleet RU's covert operations division.

Soviet military sources have not assessed explicitly the utility of their own naval special-purpose forces during the Second World War; however, a Soviet naval officer asserted in a historical analysis of Western capabilities that naval special operations forces proved to be an effective way to strike at enemy naval forces because they "did not require large economic expenditures and permitted disabling expensive enemy military targets, tying down his forces, and creating tension in day-to-day military activity."¹⁶ The special-purpose forces employed by Soviet naval intelligence during World War II apparently received extensive combat experience in a variety of operational roles and contributed to the Soviet Navy's principal wartime mission of protecting the seaward flanks of the Red Army and supporting its offensive operations. They were the forerunners of the Spetsnaz brigades which were established within the Soviet Navy after the war.

Contemporary Force Posture

Since the Second World War, the Soviet naval intelligence service's responsibilities have expanded to include worldwide naval intelligence and ocean surveillance. RUs attached to the headquarters of the four Soviet fleets continue to carry out these missions. They are tasked with the following coverage:

- Northern Fleet—Norway, Great Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, eastern Canada, and the United States;

- Baltic Fleet—Sweden, Denmark, and West Germany;

- Black Sea Fleet—Turkey and all the countries in the Mediterranean region; and
- Pacific Fleet—Japan, China, all the countries in the Pacific Basin, western Canada, and the United States.¹⁷

The fleet RUs are subordinate to the Main Naval Staff's Intelligence Directorate and the GRU. The exact relationship between each of these intelligence components is unclear.¹⁸ However, the Fifth Directorate (Operational Intelligence) of the GRU apparently monitors the Main Naval Staff's Intelligence Directorate. The head of the Main Naval Staff's Intelligence Directorate, reportedly a vice admiral who is also a deputy chief of the GRU, in turn, oversees the activities of the fleet RUs.

While naval intelligence traditionally has been more autonomous from the GRU than the other military intelligence services, its independence probably has been reduced over the last decade. This is because the Main Naval Staff has been more closely integrated with the Soviet General Staff since Admiral N. N. Amel'ko was appointed Deputy Chief of the General Staff in 1977.¹⁹ Moreover, the Navy's autonomy within the overall Soviet military establishment probably has been diminished somewhat since Fleet Admiral of the Soviet Union S. G. Gorshkov was replaced by Fleet Admiral V. N. Chernavin as commander in chief of the Soviet Navy in 1985. These personnel changes suggest that the GRU has been able to increase its influence over naval intelligence.

The basic organization of the fleet headquarters' RUs evidently continues to be similar to their World War II structure. Each RU contains divisions for reconnaissance, clandestine intelligence gathering, and covert or Spetsnaz operations.²⁰ They also have intelligence analysis and signals intelligence divisions. The reconnaissance divisions are responsible for the operations carried out by the *Korabl razvedki* or intelligence collection ships (AGIs) and the aircraft dedicated to naval reconnaissance. They coordinate the intelligence collection activities of other vessels in the merchant and fishing fleets as well. The clandestine intelligence divisions collect intelligence through their field operative networks.

The third, or covert, operations division in each fleet RU controls a brigade-size Spetsnaz formation as well as an operational intelligence network. The brigades reportedly were first created in the late 1950s and it would appear that they were the product of an expansion and upgrading of the naval intelligence service's preexisting covert operations elements.²¹ This upgrading may have been the result of new requirements generated during a reorganization of the Soviet Union's special operations forces after Stalin's death in 1953.²²

A naval Spetsnaz brigade contains: a headquarters company, a mini-submarine group, two or three battalions of combat swimmers, a paratroop battalion, a signals company, and supporting units.²³ Total brigade strength is

approximately 700-900 men. The brigades reportedly are collocated with the Naval Infantry in each fleet area and wear the uniform of the Soviet Marines for concealment.²⁴ Personnel of the minisubmarine groups likewise wear the submariners uniform and the paratroops wear naval aviators uniforms.

These elite troops are selected for their political reliability as well as their outstanding athletic and intellectual capabilities.²⁵ They are chosen from among the best recruits of the Naval Infantry and the fleet to undergo rigorous physical and psychological combat training.²⁶ The intense regimen is intended to forge naval commandos capable of carrying out sensitive and highly sophisticated missions. Naval Spetsnaz forces receive specialized instruction which enables them to operate from a variety of surface ships, submarines, and aircraft. Their training includes: combat swimming with scuba gear and light underwater vehicles; parachuting, using high altitude/high opening and high altitude/low opening techniques as well as Ram-air chutes for conventional static line drops; infiltration tactics, including submerged departure from (mini)submarines; sabotage and underwater demolitions; hand-to-hand combat and silent killing techniques; surveillance and target selection; and the language of their target country.²⁷

Two features of the brigades are particularly interesting. First, the headquarters company includes a group of professional assassins who are tasked with executive action against the enemy's key political and military leaders. The Soviet intelligence and security services have a long and notorious history of "wet affairs" [*mokrye dela*] as assassination and terror are euphemistically termed.²⁸ A partial list of terrorist actions attributed to the U.S.S.R.'s intelligence organs between 1926 and 1960 includes over forty cases of kidnappings and/or executions.²⁹ There is some indication that a naval Spetsnaz assassination team may have been responsible for the murder of a British naval officer who was collecting intelligence on the Soviet cruiser *Ordzhonikidze* when it visited Portsmouth, England in April 1956.³⁰

The second interesting feature is the minisubmarine group. The Soviets are clearly capable of producing sophisticated undersea vehicles. They have been vigorously engaged in the research and development of manned submersibles or minisubmarines as well as unmanned or remotely operated vehicles (ROVs) since at least the 1950s, and several operational vehicles have been reported in the Soviet press.³¹ These efforts have been undertaken ostensibly for scientific research and economic purposes such as shelf research, oil and gas exploration, and fishing reconnaissance, but the Soviet Navy has clearly played a role in the development of such undersea technologies, including its submarine emergency-rescue capabilities.³² The covert production of undersea vehicles for special operations most likely was a by-product of this work.³³ Moreover, the Soviet Navy is undoubtedly developing a broad range of other capabilities to support Spetsnaz requirements such as closed-circuit

scuba gear and deep-diving equipment, swimmer delivery vehicles, submarine transports, and fast surface attack craft.

Midget or minisubmarines and ROVs employed by naval Spetsnaz forces would provide significant operational flexibility against surface, shoreline, or undersea targets. As Soviet military sources note, they are highly versatile vehicles capable of carrying torpedoes, mines, antiship missiles, and combat swimmers.³⁴ Such vehicles have limited dimensions which make sonar detection more difficult, and they may be manufactured with materials such as aluminum and plastic that provide lower hydroacoustic, magnetic, and thermal signatures. The trend in the development of minisubs and ROVs points to greater self-sufficiency, maneuverability, and lethality. Artificial intelligence holds open the possibility of "smart" undersea intelligence gathering and weapon systems.

These sophisticated capabilities would enable the U.S.S.R. to conduct undersea "special activities" in peacetime and warfighting missions in the event of a conflict. Examples of subsea covert operations the Soviets could conduct with such capabilities include:

- monitoring tests of advanced naval technologies and systems;
- examining and/or retrieving sensitive undersea equipment;
- laying passive hydroacoustic devices to track naval movements;
- tapping underwater communications lines; and
- reconnoitering amphibious insertion points, including examining the seabed and determining the water depth for landings.

The offensive military missions that minisubs and ROVs could be used for include:

- delivering combat swimmers to naval bases, mooring locations, and dispersed ship-basing points for sabotage;
- attacking submarines and surface ships in the egresses from naval bases and basing points as well as in channels and narrows with torpedoes and missiles;
- attacking underwater structures such as hydroacoustic arrays and shore defenses; and
- laying mines.

During the 1970s and early 1980s, Soviet naval theoreticians extensively analyzed the historical development of operational concepts and technologies for "underwater sabotage forces."³⁵ Soviet military literature thus provides some insight into the value attached to naval special warfare capabilities. For example, Captain 1st Rank-Engineer Yu. Belyakov asserted in a 1975 *Morskoy sbornik* [Naval Digest] article, entitled "Midget Submarines are Coming Back," that "special formations, including subunits of underwater demolitionists supported by midget submarines," will play an important role in future wars.³⁶ He further noted that "tactical surprise can be achieved through the mass use of diverse underwater sabotage equipment" and pointed out the necessity of creating "a large number of different types of technical

equipment and weapons (even including nuclear weapons) and to work out tactical methods of using them.”³⁷ Belyakov concluded by stating that “midget submarines can turn out to be an effective offensive weapon by means of which temporary tactical success and in individual cases, even operational success will be achieved. Their capabilities in coastal areas is rated especially high.”³⁸

Another Soviet naval source, Captain 1st Rank-Engineer B. Sakharov, has discussed the potential military applications of ROVs. He stated that “remote-controlled submersibles” could be employed for a variety of missions including “performing long-range underwater reconnaissance and destruction of military installations on the sea bottom.”³⁹ Soviet naval officers generally emphasize that a high degree of operational secrecy is the main advantage of underwater sabotage forces.

The analyses conducted by Soviet naval officers such as Belyakov and Sakharov may have significance beyond providing evidence of mere Soviet interest in naval special warfare capabilities. The Soviet force development process is characterized by the interaction of evolutionary improvements in technology, operational concepts, and force structure. According to Soviet military science, the deployment of new technologies in sufficient quantities directly leads to changes in employment concepts and force structure. The Soviet literature on naval special warfare therefore may indicate that Soviet naval planners were engaged in an ongoing concept refinement phase brought about by the introduction of advanced undersea technologies into the naval Spetsnaz force posture.

Threat to U.S. and Allied Interests

Soviet naval Spetsnaz forces pose a multifaceted threat to U.S. and Allied interests both in peacetime and in wartime. They could be employed in a wide variety of contingencies and at various levels of the conflict spectrum. The range of possibilities runs from peacetime training and paramilitary activities in the Third World to assaults on political and military targets in NATO-Europe, Great Britain, or even the United States in the event of full-scale warfare.

Peacetime Threat. During peacetime, naval Spetsnaz forces primarily engage in activities at the direction of the GRU to meet naval intelligence and special warfare requirements in the event of conflict. The KGB is believed to have overall responsibility under Central Committee guidance for the operational planning, coordination, and control of sensitive peacetime operations with political rather than strictly military objectives.⁴⁰ The peacetime roles of naval Spetsnaz include power projection, training and advisory assistance, and covert action or clandestine operations:

Power Projection. Naval Spetsnaz forces provide the U.S.S.R. with an important power projection instrument. They most likely would be the lead elements in any Soviet amphibious intervention in the Third World. The role of the headquarters units likely would be to arrest or assassinate the target country's political leadership. Combat swimmer and paratroop teams probably would seize "vital points," such as key communications and transportation nodes, until relieved by regular Naval Infantry forces. This would follow the Soviet style in the execution of land-based power projection operations exhibited in Czechoslovakia (1968) and Afghanistan (1979). In both cases, Spetsnaz units under KGB control were infiltrated beforehand to spearhead the operations.⁴¹

The extensive Soviet studies of British military operations during the Falklands conflict may provide some additional clues on how naval Spetsnaz might be employed for power projection. The Soviets paid particularly close attention to the employment of the Special Boat Squadron (SBS) and Special Air Service (SAS). According to Soviet sources, the British special forces played a critical role in the projection of military power to the South Atlantic.⁴² An SBS team reportedly engineered the Argentine surrender of South Georgia nearly a week before the arrival of the first British naval task force and an SAS raid of Pebble Island cleared the way for the amphibious assault of San Carlos. The Soviets have done more than just study British special forces tactics however. They apparently train in a remarkably similar fashion. A 1982 *Krasnaya zvezda* [Red Star] article, for example, uncharacteristically may have described a naval Spetsnaz exercise.⁴³ A three-man team was secretly landed on a remote section of a rocky coast, far from the enemy disposition. It traveled over several kilometers, unobserved, to its objective, and infiltrated at night. The team successfully seized its target, cutting off communications, in preparation for the forward detachments of the Naval Infantry assault force.

Training and Advisory Assistance. Some naval Spetsnaz troops most likely also serve as peacetime instructors and/or advisors to the naval special operations forces of Warsaw Pact allies. They may also provide training and assistance to surrogate forces in the Third World. These possibly could include foreign "national liberation," insurgent, and terrorist groups. Personnel from each of the Spetsnaz elements could serve in such capacities. Minisubmarines may proliferate slowly in the Third World over the coming decades. Since most Third World countries neither have the requirements for conventional submarines nor the expertise for their operation, the simpler, more cost-effective midget may be an attractive alternative for near-shore operations. Spetsnaz minisub personnel could serve as trainers for such Third World forces.

Covert Action or Clandestine Operations. Each of the naval Spetsnaz brigade's operational components—headquarters, minisubmarine, paratroop

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and combat swimmer units—provide special talents and capabilities for covert action or clandestine operations. The possible use of a naval Spetsnaz assassination team to thwart a British naval intelligence mission has already been mentioned. An equally intriguing possibility of naval Spetsnaz peacetime covert operations is the series of Soviet submarine intrusions into Scandinavian territorial waters. Some may have involved naval Spetsnaz minisubmarine and combat swimmer elements from the Soviet Baltic and possibly Northern Fleet headquarters' RUs.

The grounding of the Soviet Whiskey-class submarine *U-137* on the shoals off Sweden's Karlskrona naval base was the most publicized incident. However, the combined total of submarine observations recorded by Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and even Finland is literally in the hundreds. For example, the Swedish Submarine Defense Commission analyzed over two hundred observations made over the period 1962-1982.⁴⁴ It reported a pattern of systematic violations, essentially organized into waves of coordinated submarine operations, covering a large geographic area. These operations primarily were aimed against permanent military installations and frequently coincided with Swedish naval exercises and tests of advanced weapons.

The most likely cases of actual naval Spetsnaz involvement were the intrusions into the Stockholm Archipelago in October 1982 and Karlskrona's inner sound in February-March 1984.⁴⁵ The first incident was a coordinated operation of six Soviet submarines (including three minisubs) which penetrated the internal waters around Sweden's main naval base at Harsfjarden. The minisubs were deployed from conventional submarines which acted as "motherships." They included a tracked submersible capable of bottom-crawling and a vehicle with a reinforced keel for moving along the seafloor. One of these minisubs came within a mile of the residence of King Carl Gustaf XVI when it navigated the passage into Stockholm Harbor during a port call by U.S. naval vessels.⁴⁶ The second incident involved four different types of intruders—conventional submarines, minisubs, swimmer delivery vehicles, and frogmen—which penetrated the internal waters around the Karlskrona naval base. Landings were reported on the western islands ringing the sound during the encroachment, and Swedish soldiers even fired on what appeared to be frogmen coming ashore on Aalmo Island.

There have been many explanations proffered for the Soviet submarine intrusions. These include, *inter alia*, general naval training, reflex testing of antisubmarine warfare (ASW) capabilities, military "active measures," reconnaissance of archipelagos and fjords for crisis or wartime submarine operations, and intelligence gathering. Soviet military active measures operations generally are designed to mislead or create a false impression of a military threat to put pressure on a target country or third parties. The purported objective in this case was to politically intimidate the target country (Sweden) and/or the region (Scandinavia) through psychological

warfare; that is, the sustained violations were intended to signal that Moscow considered the region to be an integral part of its defense perimeter in order to coerce tacit acceptance of a Soviet right to operate in Scandinavian territorial waters. And they were meant to gradually wear down the Swedish Government's will to resist.⁴⁷

The Swedish Submarine Defense Commission seems to have made sound judgments with regard to possible Soviet motivations for the incursions. It rejected the notions that the violations were undertaken for general training, reflex testing, or active measures. The Commission also rejected the theory that they were conducted to examine the archipelagos and fjords as potential rebasing areas for Soviet submarines to operate from in a crisis or war.⁴⁸ Rather, it concluded that there was a combination of two probable motives: intelligence gathering and operative planning/exercising for Spetsnaz wartime employment.

Wartime Threat. Naval Spetsnaz wartime operations are intended to weaken the political-military capabilities of the target country and to assist associated or follow-on military operations. These operations would be an integrated component of the ground and naval or maritime theater of military operations (TVD) combined arms battle plans. The Soviets apparently plan for military operations in four continental Eurasian (Northwestern, Southwestern, Southern, and Far Eastern) TVDs and four maritime TVDs. The naval TVDs are the Atlantic, Pacific, Indian, and Northern-Arctic Ocean regions. These would likely be under direct naval command in wartime; while operations in areas such as the Baltic and Black Seas would be part of the continental TVDs.

Naval Spetsnaz forces would be employed to support front and fleet-level (strategic formation) operations throughout the depth of the TVD. They most likely would be infiltrated to their target locations prior to the initiation of any hostilities—during a serious crisis that the Soviets determined might lead to war—or very early in any conflict. The insertions would initially be comprised of supporting intelligence operatives and small numbers of teams. The full range of diplomatic, legal, and illegal means would be used for clandestine infiltration.⁴⁹ Minisubmarines would be transported to their target area on conventional submarines or surface vessels. Such vessels might even include fishing trawlers or research ships.⁵⁰ The modes of transportation for wartime employment of headquarters, combat swimmer, and paratroop units would range from swimmer delivery vehicles and surface ships, conventional-sized or minisubmarines, to high-speed surface assault craft, merchant or fishing vessels, and aircraft.

Each of the four naval Spetsnaz brigades would field approximately one hundred small five to twelve-man teams in wartime.⁵¹ Team size may vary according to mission, and deployed teams could combine for specific targets

before dispersing. Soviet planning for naval Spetsnaz employment probably includes predesignation of targets and areas of operation. After infiltration, the teams would first link-up with dedicated “illegal” operatives to conduct surveillance and target acquisition. They would then operate behind enemy lines, independent of regular Soviet forces, for extended periods of time. Naval Spetsnaz forces would conduct assassination, sabotage, reconnaissance, and direct attack against both political and military targets throughout any engagement. As table 1 displays, they could be employed to perform several missions against an array of undersea, surface, shoreline, and inland targets:

Naval Spetsnaz Missions and Targets

Mission Hierarchy	Potential Targets
Seaborne Nuclear Delivery	SSBNs, SLCM Platforms, Aircraft Carriers, Bases, Associated Command and Control
Command, Control, Communications and Intelligence	Command/Intelligence Centers, Communications Facilities, Radar Sites, SOSUS
Political/Military Leaders	Government/NATO Officials, Military (Naval) Command Structure
Other Military Targets	Surface Ship/Submarine Bases, Airfields, POMCUS
Reinforcements and Resupply	Ports, Harbors, Airfields
Intelligence/Reconnaissance	All of the above

Table 1

Seaborne Nuclear Delivery. The priority naval Spetsnaz wartime mission is the destruction or neutralization of enemy seaborne nuclear delivery capabilities and support facilities. The Soviets emphasize the counternuclear role of all Spetsnaz forces. The greatest number of teams therefore will be allocated for this mission. Their targets most likely would include U.S., British, and French ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs), U.S. sea-launched cruise missile (SLCM) platforms, and U.S., British, and French aircraft carriers with dual-capable aircraft, their bases, nuclear weapons storage facilities, and associated command and control nodes. Secondary or nonnuclear targets would be attacked simultaneously, but with fewer teams.

Command, Control, Communications, and Intelligence (C³I). Disruption of C³I is a critical nonnuclear Spetsnaz mission. Early warning systems are also included in this category. Targets would likely include command and intelligence centers, communications facilities, hydroacoustic arrays such as SOSUS, and radar sites. Disruption or destruction of SOSUS,

for example, could allow Soviet attack submarines and other naval forces to dash into the open ocean.

Political and Military Leaders. Another important naval Spetsnaz mission related to countering C³I is the assassination of key political and military leaders. Targets would include crucial government (and NATO) officials as well as the military and naval command.

Other Military Targets. Naval Spetsnaz forces would conduct strikes against other critical military units and installations. There are a broad range of potential targets in this mission category including surface ship and submarine bases, airfields, and pre-positioned overseas materiel configured in unit sets (POMCUS). Some naval Spetsnaz operations even would be integrated directly into the theater air operations plan. For example, according to an article by Colonel N. Semenov in the restricted General Staff journal *Voyennaya mysl'* [Military Thought], detachments consisting of "several men which are landed from submarines or dropped from aircraft" can destroy or neutralize radar stations and airfields.⁵²

Reinforcements and Resupply. Operations also would be conducted to interfere with efforts to reinforce and sustain forces. This would involve sabotage, blocking, and direct attack against airfields, ports, and harbors.

Reconnaissance/Intelligence. A basic naval Spetsnaz mission would be to conduct "special reconnaissance" on all of the targets mentioned above.⁵³ They would also be used to provide real-time intelligence on enemy force dispositions.

The Soviet Union essentially is a geographically landlocked empire. One of the main problems facing Soviet naval planners therefore is that all four of the fleets either have to seize or pass undetected through chokepoints to get underway for at-sea operations. For example, in wartime, the Northern Fleet's first priority would be to protect its strategic bases on the Kola Peninsula. It then would be concerned about moving into the Atlantic through the G.I.U.K. gap to contest the U.S. Navy's efforts to maintain the sea lines of communication to American and NATO forces on the European Continent. The Baltic Fleet would play a critical role in protecting the flank of Soviet ground forces operations on the Central Front. The Soviet objective most likely would be to make the Baltic region a protected area. In order to do so, the Baltic Fleet would have to defeat NATO naval forces in the Baltic. For the Black Sea Fleet to have any strategic impact on a global conflict, it would have to quickly move through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles to prevent itself from being bottled up. The Pacific Fleet similarly would have to move through the sea-lanes contested by Japan in order to confront the U.S. Navy on the high seas. Naval Spetsnaz forces could play an important role in each of the above scenarios. They would be particularly effective in coastal or archipelago areas where strait seizure would be dependent on achieving tactical surprise.

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The Soviet Union possesses naval Spetsnaz brigades which provide it with a robust naval special warfare capability. These naval intelligence service components are attached to the four Soviet fleets. They are special military formations, either monitored or directly controlled by the GRU and KGB, designed to perform politically sensitive and sophisticated missions. The personnel manning the brigades are extremely reliable, well-trained, and highly motivated. They are divided into teams of assassins, combat swimmers, paratroops, and minisubmarine crews for operational employment.

The forerunners of the contemporary naval *Spetsnaz* brigades most likely were the covert operations divisions within each of the Soviet wartime fleet headquarters' RUs. Units from these divisions evidently received extensive combat experience in a variety of operational roles. In the 1950s, the U.S.S.R. apparently reorganized and upgraded these units to brigade status. The organization of Soviet naval intelligence is similar to its wartime structure, however, and many of the contemporary operational characteristics of naval *Spetsnaz* forces can be traced back to Soviet World War II experience. During the last two decades, Soviet military literature has carefully analyzed naval special warfare concepts and technologies. These discussions provide useful insight into Soviet military thought on the value of naval special operations forces. They may even indicate that, beyond mere interest in naval special warfare capabilities, Soviet naval planners were actively refining naval *Spetsnaz* force employment concepts. This concept refinement may have been generated by the introduction of advanced undersea technologies, such as minisubmarines and ROVs, into the naval *Spetsnaz* force posture.

Western military analysts should, of course, pay careful attention to Soviet aircraft carrier construction and Naval Infantry force developments in scrutinizing the Soviet Navy's evolution towards a power projection role. They also should take account of the substantial and multifaceted trans-oceanic threats that the Soviet Navy's special operations forces could pose to U.S. and Allied interests both in peacetime and in wartime. Naval *Spetsnaz* forces could be utilized for power projection, training and advisory assistance, and covert action or clandestine operations in peacetime. During wartime, they could be employed to conduct assassination, sabotage, reconnaissance, and direct attack against a variety of political-military targets in the enemy rear. As the Soviet Navy continues to grow into a blue-ocean power, the potential military leverage provided by its naval special operations forces may substantially increase. Recognizing and understanding the dangers which these Soviet forces create for the United States and its allies is the first necessary step towards designing an effective response to the Soviet unconventional challenge.

Notes

1. See John J. Dziak, "Soviet Intelligence and Security Services in the Eighties: The Paramilitary Dimension," *Orbis*, Winter 1981, pp. 771-786; and Dziak, "The Soviet Approach to Special Operations," in Frank R. Barnett et al., eds., *Special Operations in U.S. Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense Univ. Press, 1983), pp. 95-120.

2. "Troops of Special Designation," [*Voyska spetsial'naya naznacheniya*], purportedly a "foreign term," is defined in the *Soviet Military Encyclopedia* as "special units and subunits in the armed forces in an array of capitalist states, designed for reconnaissance-sabotage and terroristic [sic] activities, the organization of rebellious activity and armed attacks, the directing of psychological war, propaganda, and other subversive activities." See *Sovetskaya voyennaya entsiklopediya*, (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1979), pp. 323-326.

3. The theme of the Soviet propaganda campaign was to deny any nefarious activities and to counter claims of Spetsnaz involvement by highlighting Western naval special warfare capabilities in an attempt to cast the blame elsewhere. See, for example, V. Kucher, "Trends in the Development of Midget Submarines Abroad," *Morskoy sbornik*, no. 6, 1985, pp. 89-90; G. Sizikov, "Assault and Sabotage Weapons against Ships in Base," *Morskoy sbornik*, no. 6, 1985, pp. 86-89; G. Karinenok, "Tactics of Employing Sabotage and Assault Weapons During World War II," *Morskoy sbornik*, no. 7, 1984, pp. 25-29; and A. Mikhaylov and B. Tyurin, "Midget Submarines," *Izvestiya*, 17 October 1984, p. 3.

4. See, for example, V. Cherenkov, "Missile Carriers for Saboteurs," *Krasnaya zvezda*, 11 April 1985, p. 3; and I. Belov, "The Pentagon: On a Course of Terrorism and Nuclear Subversion," *Zarubezhnoye voyennoye obozreniye*, September 1985, pp. 21-23.

5. The following discussion of the wartime structure and function of the fleet RUs is based on Calland F. Carnes, "Soviet Naval Intelligence," in Bruce W. Watson and Susan M. Watson, eds., *The Soviet Navy: Strengths and Liabilities* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1985), pp. 169-170.

6. Viktor Suvorov, *Inside Soviet Military Intelligence*, (New York: Berkley Books, 1984), p. 8. Suvorov is the pseudonym of a defector who served as a major on the General Staff's Tenth Chief Directorate (Warsaw Pact) and the staff of the Leningrad Military District.

7. Walter G. Krivitskiy, *In Stalin's Secret Service*, (New York: Harper Brothers, 1939), p. 8. Krivitskiy was a former NKVD "illegal" resident in Holland with liaison responsibilities for six other West European countries. He defected in 1937, during Stalin's purge of the intelligence and security service.

8. V. N. Chernavin, "Submarine Operations in Different Maritime Theaters of the Great Patriotic War," *Voyenno-istoricheskiy zhurnal*, no. 7, 1986, p. 19.

9. V. I. Achkasov and N. B. Pavlovich, *Soviet Naval Operations in the Great Patriotic War 1941-1945*, trans. by the U.S. Naval Intelligence Command, (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1981), p. 97.

10. V. Achkasov, "Naval Amphibious Actions in the Great Patriotic War," *Morskoy sbornik*, no. 9, 1978, p. 11.

11. A. Emelyanov, *Sovietskiye podvodniye lodki v velikoi otechestvennoi voine* [Soviet Submarines in the Great Patriotic War], (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1981), pp. 129-132.

12. B. Sergeyenko, "Naval Infantry in the Assault Force," *Morskoy sbornik*, no. 5, 1982, p. 18.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

14. Carnes, p. 169.

15. C. N. Donnelly, "Operations in the Enemy Rear: Soviet Doctrine and Tactics," *International Defense Review*, v. 13, no. 1, 1980, pp. 37-38.

16. I. Kosikov, "The Development and Tactics of Underwater Sabotage Forces," *Morskoy sbornik*, no. 3, 1976, p. 21.

17. Suvorov, p. 166.

18. *Ibid.*; and Thomas A. Brooks, "The Soviet Navy: An Update, Intelligence Collection," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, December 1985, pp. 47-49.

19. Amel'ko replaced Admiral S. M. Lobov who held the lesser title of Assistant to the Chief of the General Staff.

20. Brooks, pp. 48-49.

21. Viktor Suvorov, *Inside the Soviet Army*, (New York: Macmillan, 1983), p. 86.

22. Viktor Suvorov, "Spetsnaz and Sport," *International Defense Review*, v. 17, no. 6, 1984, p. 687.

23. Viktor Suvorov, "Spetsnaz: The Soviet Union's Special Forces," *International Defense Review*, v. 16, no. 9, 1983, p. 211.

24. Suvorov, *Inside the Soviet Army*, p. 86.

25. Political reliability most likely is determined by the KGB's Third Chief Directorate (Armed Forces Counterintelligence) based on background investigations which include assessment of records maintained during participation in the Young Pioneers, Komsomol, and Voluntary Society for Cooperation with the Army, Aviation and Fleet (DOSAAF).

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26. Fleet and Naval Infantry enlistment is for three years. The additional year of service (all other branches of the Soviet Armed Forces, except the Strategic Rocket Forces, serve for two years) allows the Navy to provide its enlisted men more extensive training. Many of these recruits probably already have specialized skills before becoming Spetsnaz since swimming, diving, and sports parachuting are all important parts of DOSAAF preinduction military training. Some recruits may be identified early on since aquatic and sports parachuting clubs are organized throughout the U.S.S.R.

27. Department of Defense, *Soviet Military Power*, 1985 ed., (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1985), p. 104; and Aleksei Myagkov, "Soviet Sabotage Training for World War III," *Soviet Analyst*, 20 December 1980, pp. 5-6. Myagkov is a former armed forces counterintelligence officer who served with the Group of Soviet Forces Germany. Before joining the KGB he was a member of an airborne division's diversionary unit.

28. "Wer," i.e., bloody. See, for example, "Wet Affairs," *Survey*, Autumn-Winter 1983, pp. 68-79. The KGB's principal executive action component is the Thirteenth Department of the First Chief Directorate.

29. "Murder International Inc.," *Survey*, Autumn-Winter 1983, pp. 82-83.

30. Carnes, p. 171.

31. See Christopher H. Dodge, "Soviet Undersea Research and Technology," in U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Commerce and National Ocean Policy Study, *Soviet Oceans Development*, 94th Cong., 2nd Sess., (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., October 1976), pp. 529-544.

32. The Soviet Navy's Search and Rescue Service operates deep submergence rescue vehicles (DSRVs) which can be carried on *India*-class diesel submarines or *Filbrus* and *Nepa*-class submarine rescue and salvage ships. See John N. Moore, ed., *Jane's Fighting Ships*, (London: Jane's Publishing Co., 1985), pp. 474, 531.

33. The Soviets have an interesting history in the research and development of undersea technologies. The first official state investment in submersibles occurred at the behest of Feliks Dzerzhinskiy, the founder of the Commission for Combating Counterrevolution and Sabotage (Cheka), in 1923. Dzerzhinskiy signed Order No. 528 of the United State Political Directorate (OGPU), the Cheka's successor, creating the Expedition for Special Purpose Underwater Work (EPRON) in order to search for the gold on board the British warship *Prince* which had sunk in the Black Sea during the Crimean War. A deep-water diving chamber, designed by Ye. G. Danilenko, was produced at the order of the OGPU to assist in EPRON's search and salvage efforts. EPRON became the Emergency-Rescue Service of the Soviet Navy during World War II. It was renamed the Search and Rescue Service in 1979. See N. K. Chiker, *Sluzhba osobogo naznacheniya: Khronika geroicheskikh del* [The Special-Purpose Service: Chronicle of Heroic Deeds], (Moscow: DOSAAF, 1975), pp. 1-20.

34. Kucher, pp. 89-90.

35. The earliest successful modern employment of a naval special warfare capability occurred in 1918 during the First World War when Italian "manned torpedoes" sank the former Austrian battleship *Viribus Unitas* in the port of Pola, Yugoslavia. Most of the major belligerents in World War II employed naval special forces. For example, in December 1941, five Japanese midget subs were used in the attack on Pearl Harbor. A daring Italian combat swimmer-manned torpedo operation was responsible for sinking the British battleships *Queen Elizabeth* and *Valiant* in the port of Alexandria, Egypt, the same year. In 1945, British midgets sank the Japanese cruiser *Takao* in Singapore Harbor and were responsible for severing the Saigon-Singapore and Saigon-Hong Kong telegraph cables.

36. Yu. Belyakov, "Midget Submarines are Coming Back," *Morskoy sbornik*, no. 6, 1975, p. 92.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

39. B. Sakharov, "Remote-Controlled Submersibles," *Morskoy sbornik*, no. 4, April 1984, p. 68.

40. Department of Defense, *Soviet Military Power*, 1987 ed., (Washington: U. S. Govt. Print. Off., 1987), p. 89. The Administrative Organs Department, with oversight of both the KGB and GRU, most likely is the responsible Central Committee apparatus.

41. See Dziak, "Soviet Intelligence and Security Services in the Eighties," pp. 781-783; and Myagkov, pp. 3-4.

42. See Ye. Rakin, "Gambling on Surprise: The Amphibious landing on the Falklands (Malvinas Islands)," *Morskoy sbornik*, no. 3, 1983, pp. 81-85; and Yu. Galkin, "The Action of British Reconnaissance-Diversionary Subunits During the Anglo-Argentine Conflict," *Zarubezhnoye voyennoye obozreniye*, no. 5, 1983, pp. 63-66.

43. A. Veldeyev, "In Hand-to-Hand Fighting," *Krasnaya zvezda*, 24 August 1982, p. 1.

44. Submarine Defense Commission, *Countering the Submarine Threat: Submarine Violations and Swedish Security Policy*, Official Report Series 13, (Stockholm: Ministry of Defense, 1983). The Norwegian Defense Ministry recorded over one hundred violations for the period 1969-1982.

45. For a description of both incidents see M. G. M. Ellis, "Sweden's Ghosts?" U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings*, March 1986, pp. 95-101. See also Lynn M. Hansen, *Soviet Navy Spetsnaz Operations on the Northern Flank: Implications for the Defense of Western Europe*, (College Station, Tex.: Center for Strategic Technology, Texas A&M University, 1984).

46. Similar tracks were found on the seabed in the Gulf of Bothnia during a later incident near Sundsvall. Tracks also have been discovered off the Japanese coast of Hokkaidō and in the Tsugaru and Sōya Straits—passages to the open ocean regularly used by the Soviet Pacific Fleet. Unsubstantiated claims of minisubmarine tracks in San Francisco Bay, the home port of the nuclear-powered aircraft carriers U.S.S. *Carl Vinson* and U.S.S. *Enterprise*, also have been reported.

47. If this was the purpose of the Soviet encroachments, of course, then they would have been a costly failure. Soviet foreign policy in the Northern tier, such as efforts to declare a nuclear-free zone, suffered as a result of the incursions. Moreover, heightened perceptions of the Soviet threat prompted increased Swedish attention to and investment in ASW capabilities.

48. Arkady Shevchenko has stated, however, that the Politburo authorized submarine violations in the early 1970s in order to chart Swedish and Norwegian fjords so that Soviet SSBNs could be concealed there in the event of a crisis. At the time, Shevchenko was a former aide to then Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. Shevchenko defected to the United States while serving as Under Secretary General of the United Nations. See Arkady N. Shevchenko, *Breaking with Moscow*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985), p. 238.

49. Suvorov points out that Spetsnaz personnel are often Olympic-class athletes and that the Soviets use the national Dynamo Sports Club and the Central Army Sports Club (ZSKA) for peacetime cover so that Spetsnaz teams can familiarize themselves with their target countries and practice surveillance and infiltration.

50. Suvorov notes that the large hatches on fishing trawlers are perfect for concealing minisubs. Some research vessels also contain hatches below the waterline for ease of operations. ROVs, of course, could be covertly deployed off almost any vessel.

51. *Soviet Military Power*, 1985 ed., p. 104.

52. N. Semenov, "Gaining Supremacy in the Air," *Voyennaya mysl*, no. 4, 1968, FPD0052/69, 27 May 1969, p. 44.

53. "Special Reconnaissance," [Spetsial'naya razvedka], purportedly a "foreign term," is defined in the *Soviet Military Encyclopedic Dictionary* as a form of reconnaissance intended to undermine the political, economic, military, and moral potential of the enemy. It is undertaken to collect information about economic and military objectives; to destroy or neutralize those objectives; to organize sabotage and diversionary-terrorist actions; and to prepare partisan groups. See *Voyenno-entsiklopedicheskiy slovar'*, (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1983), p. 698.

