Naval War College Review

Volume 38
Number 2 *March-April*

Article 7

1985

Soviet Navy Reactions to the Falkland Islands Conflict

Richard N. Papworth
U.S. Navy

Soviet Navy Reactions to the Falkland Islands Conflict

Lieutenant Commander Richard N. Papworth, US Navy

Since 1982 a number of articles concerning the 1982 Falkland Islands conflict have appeared in the naval press of the Soviet Union. One Soviet commentator has described the Falklands conflict as a local war in the South Atlantic. A few years ago, Soviet naval theorist Admiral Stalbo noted that the employment of naval forces in local wars "must be studied carefully as an important element of naval history which is capable of influencing contemporary naval art and the formation of individual provisions of the technical policy of developing a navy."[1] This statement suggests that analysis of Soviet reactions to conflicts such as that in the Falklands may provide clues concerning current Soviet views on maritime warfare and trends in the development of Soviet naval warfare capabilities.

Soviet reactions to the Falklands conflict also are important because in many ways the Soviet Navy's capabilities to project power at great distances from the Soviet Union are similar to the means which were available to the Royal Navy in its operation in the South Atlantic. The supporting aircraft carriers, HMS *Invincible* and HMS *Hermes*, were limited to Sea Harrier VSTOL aircraft since neither ship is equipped with catapults or arresting gear capable of supporting conventional takeoff and landing (CTOL) aircraft. Thus, the British aircraft carriers are similar to the Soviet *Kiev*-class CVHGs and the Sea Harrier is somewhat similar to the Soviet Forger VTOL aircraft which operates from the *Kiev* class. Also, the primary antiship weapon of the Royal Navy is the missile, while the premier capital ship in that navy is the submarine. Both of these points are applicable to the Soviet Navy. There also are similarities in the antiair warfare capabilities of the British and Soviet navies in that each lacks airborne early warning capabilities, and each is highly dependent upon surface-to-air missiles and guns for air defense of its surface ships.[2] Finally, as regards amphibious warfare, each country has a

Lieutenant Commander Papworth holds an M.A. in National Security Affairs from the Naval Postgraduate School. He headed an intelligence analysis team charged with briefing the CNO, SECNAV and intelligence community on the Falklands War, and subsequently assigned as intelligence officer to Carrier Air Wing Six.

small, elite force of marines (British) or naval infantry (Soviet) with a mission of seizing and holding an initial beachhead until they can be reinforced by army troops.

It should be noted from the outset that the Soviet military press, specifically *Morskoy Sbornik* (*Naval Digest*) in which most of the articles quoted in this paper appeared, is quite different from the US military press. Articles in the Soviet military press are written primarily by military "scientists." Moreover, they are very much in line with official thinking, and usually are not used to float straw men or to express the personal viewpoint of the author as often occurs in the US military press. Thus, it is highly likely that the views expressed in the articles—quoted in this paper—are representative of the attitudes of the Soviet naval leadership regarding the Falklands conflict. It should be noted that all of the articles quoted in this paper were written by Soviet naval commentators. It is therefore uncertain whether the Soviet Navy's attitudes regarding the Falklands conflict are those of the Soviet military in general or whether the other Soviet military services hold views different from those of the Navy. In most instances, Soviet writers have ascribed the views expressed in their articles to the Western press or to "Western military specialists." It is the contention of the author that uncritical references to Western commentary by a Soviet military writer implies that the writer agrees with the Western views (in essence, is using the Western specialist as a surrogate). Therefore, in the interest of brevity, most of the references to Western specialists will not be included in the quotations utilized in this paper.

Aviation in Naval Warfare

Reactions to the Falklands campaign suggest that the war is viewed by many Soviet commentators as confirming the need for air support in order to conduct successful uaval operations. Rear Admiral I.F. Uskov[3] states, "the conflict showed with full clarity . . . that under modern conditions no ship formation (including an amphibious assault formation) is capable of effectively carrying out assigned missions without reliable air cover."[4] Another article states that the conflict "showed with full clarity" the growing role of aircraft in combat at sea. It further notes, "The necessity of winning supremacy in the air and maintaining it for a prolonged time both on an operational as well as a tactical scale remained a problem which had to be solved before one could count on the success of combat actions."[5] Admiral I.M. Kapitanets (Commander in Chief Baltic Fleet) later paraphrased these comments, stating that " . . . there is a continuing increase in the role of aircraft in combat actions at sea. Without winning and holding air supremacy on an operational and tactical scale, it is impossible to count on success of an action or an operation as a whole."[6]

Soviet naval commentators concede that air support for naval forces does not necessarily have to be provided by sea-based aviation. One article states that the Falklands conflict confirmed the importance of strikes against naval targets by land-based aircraft. It also argues that the conflict demonstrated the need for aircrews to be trained for such operations, and points out that the large number of Argentine aircraft losses during the conflict were at least partially due to the "low level of training of pilots of the naval air force to carry out combined-arms missions, and of Air Force pilots to carry out strikes against ships."[7] Admiral Kapitanets adds further weight to the arguments regarding the role of land-based aircraft in naval combat by stating, "[T]he conflict confirms one other essential factor of naval warfare—the need for preparing land-based aviation for interaction with combatants and with deck-based multimission flying craft, as well as for independent actions against enemy combatants at sea and in bases."[8]

Soviet statements about the importance of land-based air support for naval operations apply primarily to the Argentine side of the Falklands conflict, since the Soviets recognize that British land-based aviation played a less significant role in determining the outcome of the conflict than did British sea-based aircraft. In fact, one article notes, "The basic tasks were carried out by the English side by the forces of carrier-based aviation. Its effective use had a significant influence on the nature and specific results of the military operations."[9] Other commentators also stressed the importance of the British aircraft carriers. Rear Admiral Uskov states that the British "aircraft carrier force served as the main combat might and on the whole gave the formation combat stability."[10] He also notes that the British amphibious landing operations would have been impossible without the necessary aviation complement having been embarked with the fleet. Another Soviet commentator notes that the use of "aircraft carriers in an offensive operation at a great distance from the parent state increases the combat stability of the entire complex of the invasion forces."[11]

Even in references to Argentine combat operations Soviet writers make reference to the importance of aircraft carriers. Two commentators note that in operations against British forces around the Falklands, the Argentines were forced to operate heavily loaded attack aircraft at their maximum range, thus limiting the amount of time they could spend in the target area as well as the type of tactics which they could employ. One of these commentators specifically states that many of the Argentine aircraft losses which were caused by these limitations probably would not have occurred if the Argentines had been able to use aircraft carriers to increase the combat radius of their aircraft.[12]

As mentioned, the British Sea Harrier VSTOL aircraft is somewhat similar to the Soviet Forger VTOL aircraft, and one Soviet article noted that although "[v]ertical take-off aircraft showed relatively high tactical qualities"

Naval War College Review, Vol. 38 [1985], No. 2, Art. 7

during the conflict, there is "no basis for overestimating their combat capabilities."[13] This article criticizes the capability of current VSTOL aircraft to detect and intercept long-range and/or low-altitude targets, and states that during the Falklands conflict the Sea Harrier confirmed its effectiveness only in the close-in air defense zone against heavily loaded attack aircraft. Moreover, the article notes that the British "did not achieve supremacy in the air."[14] Rear Admiral Uskov mentions another limitation of current VSTOL aircraft, noting that partly because "the intercept limits of the VTOL Sea Harriers coincided with the limits at which enemy aircraft could employ their missiles against surface ships," the British aircraft carrier groups were forced to operate well to the east of the Falklands "at the limit of the range of land-based airplanes."[15] Other Soviet writers picked up on this idea. One pointed out that ". . . it is necessary to insure air supremacy and possess a long range PVO [air defense force] system for [the protection of surface ships] from anti-ship and air-to-surface missiles."[16] Another said, "Deck-based aircraft performing air defense missions should have a greater range of action in comparison with the Sea Harrier . . . ."[17]

Soviet naval commentators did make some positive comments regarding VSTOL aircraft. One commentator extolled, "The Sea Harrier and Harrier gave a good account of themselves in the combat actions. They had a higher maneuverability than the Argentine Skyhawks and had advantages in speed and weaponry."[18] Another writer commented further on the maneuverability and weaponry advantages which the British aircraft possessed: ". . . for the first time in close aerial combat, English pilots made broad use of thrust vectoring in forward flight . . . . Because the Argentine aircraft were armed with obsolete Sidewinder AIM-9B missiles . . . the pilots had to approach the Sea Harriers from the rear and fire from there. But as soon as the English detected a Mirage or a launched missile behind them, they immediately reversed the force of the engines' thrust by turning the stream of their exhaust gases. The VTOL aircraft would brake sharply, significantly changing its angular position in space. The enemy plane or missile would dart by and now the Harrier would be in an advantageous position for an attack.[19]

Although this statement points out a potential maneuverability advantage of advanced VSTOL aircraft, it should be noted that the Forger does not possess a vectoring in forward flight capability such as that described above. In fact, at least in the area of air defense, the Soviet Navy's only aircraft carrier-based, fixed-wing aircraft seems to have all of the disadvantages of VSTOL aircraft noted in Soviet commentary on the Falklands conflict and few, if any, of the advantages which Soviet commentators ascribe to the Harrier.

Soviet statements regarding the use of VSTOL aircraft during the air battle around the Falklands imply that at least some Soviet naval officers realize that the combat capabilities of aircraft such as the Forger are limited and; further, in order to achieve air supremacy at sea in areas where land-based air support is infeasible, the deployment of more capable aircraft at sea is necessary. Lending further credence to this supposition, one article notes that the British fleet was deficient because of its lack of aircraft capable of conducting electronic warfare as well as its lack of long-range supersonic fighter-interceptors.[20] Moreover, many Soviet naval commentators noted that the lack of airborne early warning aircraft aboard the British aircraft carriers caused considerable losses to British surface ships, since many Argentine air raids were not detected in sufficient time for the British to take effective countermeasures.

Soviet reactions to the air war around the Falkland Islands suggest a certain amount of satisfaction with their current capabilities for conducting air warfare at sea, but also indicate that the Soviets realize that these capabilities remain limited in certain arenas (specifically, outside the combat radius of land-based aircraft) and that further improvements are necessary. References to the utility of land-based aircraft against naval targets indicate that the Soviets feel that their long-standing stress on the use of land-based naval aviation strike aircraft against Western naval units approaching the Soviet Union has been further justified by the Falklands conflict. On the other hand, Soviet statements suggest that they realize the Falklands conflict demonstrates the severe limitations of Soviet sea-based aviation. Their emphasis on the need for air superiority combined with the statement that the British Sea Harriers were unable to achieve such superiority suggest that at least some commentators believe current VSTOL aircraft would be unable to accomplish this mission against any determined opposition. This indicates that the Soviets recognize the need to develop a vastly improved VSTOL aircraft to operate from *Kiev*-class units. The need for this type of aircraft probably was recognized prior to the Falklands conflict, but the conflict more than likely confirmed it and may have added urgency to any program for the development of an improved Forger or follow-on aircraft.

Of even greater significance are Soviet statements which imply that the Falklands conflict demonstrated the need for aircraft carriers capable of conducting CTOL aircraft operations. The statement that the British force was deficient because it lacked long-range supersonic fighter-interceptors seems particularly significant in that it is unlikely that a VSTOL aircraft with such capabilities will be developed in the near future. To a lesser extent, the same could be said of the prospects for developing VSTOL aircraft with significant airborne early warning or electronic warfare capabilities, although limited capabilities in these areas can be incorporated

into helicopters. Overall, by pointing out the aviation capabilities which were lacking in the British task force, Soviet naval writers appear to be using the Falklands conflict as a further justification for the development of a CTOL aircraft carrier, particularly for use in areas where land-based aircraft operations would be limited or impossible.

Naval Surface Forces/Air Defense of Naval Forces

Soviet commentary on the Falklands conflict implies that they believe naval surface forces remain a very important aspect of a nation's overall military capabilities. While not questioning the continued viability of naval surface forces, Soviet commentators do point out that the defensive features of such vessels must be enhanced. Admiral Uskov notes, "In combat actions at sea and in the seizure of the Malvinas Islands as a whole, the main role was allotted to surface ships. Only because of them did the British accomplish their assigned missions." In the conclusions to his article, Uskov again highlights this theme, ". . . [A]ll the basic missions in blockading and seizing the Malvinas Islands were carried out by the British by means of surface ships. This . . . with full clarity confirms the growth of their role in conflict at sea." Of particular importance from a power projection perspective, Uskov notes that the conflict confirmed, ". . . [W]ithout the deployment of a major grouping of surface ships with the necessary complement of aircraft, it is impossible to carry out an amphibious assault landing operation." Thus, Admiral Uskov obviously believes that surface ships remain a valuable asset.[21]

Despite Admiral Uskov's positive statements, several Soviet commentators note that the experience of the Royal Navy demonstrated a potential major deficiency with naval surface forces under modern combat conditions. Admiral Kapitanets states, ". . . [E]ven so-called general-purpose combatants demonstrated a relatively low tactical stability under pressure from air attack means, especially cruise missiles with a low flight trajectory."[22] Overall, with the exception of the Sea Wolf surface-to-air missile system and the positive characteristics attributed to the Harrier, Soviet naval writers seem to be unimpressed with the air defense capabilities of the British task force. Rear Admiral Uskov notes, "The British . . . underestimated the threat from the air; their ships turned out to be insufficiently prepared to repulse antiship missiles."[23] Another writer noted that the main reason for the naval losses suffered by the British around the Falklands was "the insufficient reliability of the air defenses of the expeditionary forces sent there."[24] Finally, Admiral Kapitanets remarked "Anti-aircraft missiles (except for the Sea Wolf) and gunnery means for 'last ditch' self defense against antiship missiles proved ineffective."[25]

Several Soviet commentators point out that British forces lacked the capability to detect Argentine air raids in sufficient time to fully utilize the capabilities of the antiair warfare weapon systems with which the fleet was equipped. Although part of this shortcoming was attributed to the British fleet's lack of airborne early warning aircraft, the lack of shipborne radars capable of detecting low-flying aircraft and missiles also was often cited. Rear Admiral Uskov notes: "British destroyers and frigates, equipped with short-range and long-range surface-to-air missile systems, turned out to be unable to repulse the strikes of air-to-surface antiship missiles at very low altitudes . . .. The operational capabilities of the ships' SAM systems were not fully realized because of the lack of long-range radar detection aircraft and modern radars for detecting air targets. Because of this, most detections turned out to be belated . . . ."[26]

Soviet writers state that these deficiencies forced the British to use insufficiently armed ships (i.e., not armed with Sea Wolf) as radar pickets without providing them with adequate air cover. One commentator points out: ". . . a weak spot in air defense organization was the fact that ships on radar picket were themselves vulnerable to air attacks. The fact that two out of four sunken destroyers and frigates were lost while they were performing picket duty is confirmation of this."[27]

These comments, a reference to HMS *Sheffield* and HMS *Coventry*,[28] are interesting in that they tend to rationalize the sinking of *Sheffield* by an antiship missile, implying that the ship would not have been lost if British early warning and air defense weapons capabilities had been sufficient. Thus, the implication is that *Sheffield* was sunk not because of any increased vulnerability of surface ships to antiship missiles, but because of insufficient early warning and weaponry. These comments also may be seen as a warning to the Soviet Navy that it must continue to develop and deploy improved early warning radar and air defense weapon systems for its surface ships.

In their discussions regarding antiair warfare, Soviet commentators also turn to an area which is of great importance in Soviet doctrine—electronic warfare. Admiral Kapitanets states: "It is noted that active and passive means of electronic countermeasures demonstrated high effectiveness in combating homing missiles. In the combat actions in the South Atlantic, electronic warfare acted not so much as a form of support as a form of combat actions directly interconnected with air defense."[29]

In the same vein, Rear Admiral Uskov notes: "The combat operations showed the high effectiveness of electronic warfare facilities in increasing the combat stability of surface ships and their anti-missile defense. In all cases when English ship captains promptly used passive jamming, the attacks of Argentine antiship missiles were unsuccessful, as a rule (sic)."[30]

Another article, which goes into great detail explaining the British use of electronic warfare during the Falklands conflict, notes that in several instances the British fleet was able to successfully utilize electronic warfare measures (primarily chaff) against Argentine Exocet antiship cruise missiles. This article also cites foreign evaluations of the sort of improvements that should be made in electronic warfare capabilities; all of these Western recommendations probably are also applicable to Soviet forces. The recommendations include increasing the sensitivity and precision of passive electronic equipment, particularly in order to increase the chance of detecting low-flying aircraft and missiles; increasing the power and spectrum of jamming transmitters; increasing the size and range capabilities of chaff dispensing equipment; and the development and improvement of aircraft electronic warfare capabilities. The article sums up these recommendations by noting: "It is considered necessary to create comprehensive countermeasures that would provide protection not only against radar homing heads, but also infrared and laser homing heads; to equip ships with automatic systems that provide rapid switching from one type of protection to another and placing chaff clouds in various directions relative to the central shipboard fire control radar; to increase the range of placement of chaff and the capacity of shells filled with passive radio reflectors so that each chaff cloud would cover the largest possible area and remain effective for a significant amount of time."[31]

Soviet commentary regarding antiair warfare also revealed the types of weapon systems which they believe would be effective in countering antiship missiles. One writer points out, " . . . under present-day conditions the mission of destroying antiship missiles with deck-level trajectories can only be carried out by fully automated air defense missile-gun systems with a high density of fire." He also comments that British sources believe that the Falklands conflict demonstrated the need for more effective long-range surface-to-air missiles.[32] Admiral Uskov concludes that "low-flying antiship missiles may be successfully combatted if ships are armed with short-range surface-to-air missile systems with minimal reaction times and automated anti-aircraft gun systems."[33] Finally, Admiral Kapitanets notes: " . . . under present day conditions, the mission of anti-aircraft and anti-missile defense can be accomplished successfully only through the comprehensive employment of various means of electronic warfare and fully automated air defense, missile, and gun systems with a short 'reaction time' and high fire density."[34] All of these comments probably represent recommendations as to the type of antiair warfare systems which the Soviet Navy should be developing.

Admiral Kapitanets seems to sum up the Soviet view of the Falklands conflict in the area of air defense when he concludes his article by noting,

"Combat actions at sea confirmed the importance of . . . above all the problem of increasing [the] combat stability [of all types of ships] against the pressure of enemy air attack means."[35] Finally, Rear Admiral Uskov may be stating the principal lesson learned by the Soviets regarding antiair warfare from the Falklands conflict when he concludes his article by commenting: "In the estimation of Western specialists, a great threat for surface ships will be presented primarily by antiship missiles of the Harpoon, Exocet, and Gabriel types, which in turn move to the forefront the necessity of improving all elements of systems of antimissile defense."[36] Rear Admiral Uskov's use of a Western statement which refers exclusively to non-Soviet missiles seems to be a reminder to his colleagues in the Soviet Navy of the proliferation of highly capable antiship missiles in the West, and of the need to continue to take all possible measures to counter this growing threat to the Soviet fleet.

Finally in the area of naval surface forces, some Soviet commentators noted the damage control deficiencies of the British fleet. These views were best summed up in one article: "As a result of the combat actions it was established that series-produced warships of the British fleet possess poor survivability; this applies especially to resistance to explosion and fire. The outbreak of fires during missile or bomb hits in ships' machine rooms was promoted by the presence there of large amounts of easily inflammable fuels and lubricants. The flames spread rapidly through bulkheads along cables with polyvinylchloride insulation, and various foam materials aboard formed a toxic smoke mixture during combustion, which hampered extinguishing the fire. Some ships, for example *Ardent* and *Antelope*, had superstructures made of aluminum alloys which burned up completely. Frequently the fire reached magazines and other places for storing ammunition, which led to the explosion of a ship that was still capable of staying afloat."[37]

Many of these damage control deficiencies, with the exception of aluminum superstructures, also may exist on Soviet ships, and it is possible that Soviet commentators cite them in order to increase the Soviet naval awareness of problems which need to be corrected (the Soviets have not emphasized damage control in the design and operation of their warships to the same extent as the US Navy).

Antiship Missiles

Despite the large amount of space they devote in their articles to describing measures to counter antiship missiles, Soviet commentators still express confidence in the utility of such weapons. Admiral Uskov notes, "On the whole, the high effectiveness of cruise missiles in destroying surface ships has been confirmed."[38] Another article notes that the conflict showed the growing role of guided missiles in battle at sea. Further, "The expediency of attacking heavily defended naval targets from low altitudes was

Naval War College Review, Vol. 38 [1985], No. 2, Art. 7

confirmed."[39] Although aircraft are capable of utilizing such tactics (as was demonstrated by the Argentines during the conflict), sea-skimming cruise missiles are especially adept at fully employing this method of attack. Finally, a third article points out another potential benefit of the use of antiship missiles, that of economical lethality. This article notes that a $250 million *Sheffield* was sunk by a $200 thousand missile. Soviet comments regarding the continued utility of cruise missiles are not surprising in that such weapons are the centerpiece of their antiship strike capabilities. Nonetheless, their descriptions of antiship missile countermeasures may serve as a reminder to Soviet weapon designers that cruise missiles are vulnerable and that they must be continually refined to ensure that they will be capable of penetrating antiair defenses.

Amphibious Warfare

Soviet reactions to the amphibious warfare aspects of the Falklands conflict indicate that they believe the British campaign demonstrated the continued utility of amphibious operations in modern warfare. Rear Admiral Uskov notes: "[T]he conflict showed the increased significance of amphibious assault forces and the necessity for the Navy to have modern landing ships and vessels and assault-landing craft and to provide high-quality training of Army units and Marines for operations as part of amphibious assault forces. The combat actions of the English landing force determined the outcome of the conflict."[40] These statements may represent an effort to justify the continued allocation of resources to the procurement of amphibious warfare forces for the Soviet Navy.

Rear Admiral Uskov's statement regarding the training of Army units for amphibious landings suggests that he believes the Falklands conflict confirmed the effectiveness of an important aspect of Soviet amphibious warfare doctrine. This doctrine calls for the Soviet Naval Infantry to conduct the initial amphibious assault, followed by Soviet Army units which are trained in amphibious operations. Uskov apparently is implying that the Soviet Army should continue to train its forces in this role.

Also of interest, several commentators discuss the use of British helicopters, both during the actual amphibious assault and later in support of the ground forces fighting on East Falkland Island. One article notes, "The decisive [factor] in combat operations to take possession of the Falkland Islands turned out to be conducting the assault operation using a large number of helicopters,"[41] while another states, ". . . without the support of these helicopters, the combat operations ashore would not have been so successful and so promptly executed."[42] Other articles make similar points. During the past few years, MI-8/Hip troop-carrying helicopters with Soviet Naval Aviation markings have begun to be employed in Soviet amphibious assault

exercises. Nonetheless, the two *Ivan Rogov*-class LPDs, which can each carry four Ka-25/Hormone C (or equivalent) utility helicopters, are the only Soviet amphibious warfare ships with a helicopter hangar (although a few of the smaller *Polnocny*-class LSMs have helicopter platforms, but no hangar or support facilities).[43] Thus, complimentary Soviet statements regarding the British use of helicopters may be intended to highlight a Soviet need for improved naval helicopter assault capabilities, especially in support of amphibious operations at some distance from the Soviet Union where shore-based helicopter support may be unavailable.

Finally, Soviet commentators have made a number of interesting comments regarding the tactics employed by the British during their amphibious operations. Several of them noted the importance of surprise in the success of the British landing. Admiral Uskov states, "A decisive factor in the combat actions of the amphibious assault forces was the achievement of tactical surprise for a landing on an unequipped or weakly defended shore with a rapid build-up of reinforcements on the beachhead."[44] According to Soviet doctrine, surprise is one of the major principles of military art.

In its discussion on surprise, the *Soviet Military Encyclopedia* also notes, "The conduct of feints and disinformation by the troops and other cover and deception measures have also acquired important meaning." In discussing the Falklands conflict, Soviet writers commented extensively on the British use of deception and diversion to achieve surprise during their amphibious landing. One article states that the British "achieved [surprise] by the carrying out of operational camouflage and deception measures."[45] Admiral Uskov states: ". . . the landing was preceded by intensive air and gunnery bombardment of the sectors of the decoy landings while no strikes were made against the area of the main landing. Therefore, the landing of the main force was a complete surprise to the Argentine garrison . . . ."[46] These comments also seem to imply that, while surprise is important in all facets of military art, naval planners should pay particular attention to the decisive nature of surprise in amphibious warfare and that amphibious forces should receive training which will enable them to achieve surprise. The latter point is supported by Uskov's comment that the British amphibious landing "confirms the necessity of preparing assault landing forces for operations under night conditions."[47]

Submarine Warfare

Soviet comments regarding submarine operations indicate that they believe the Falklands conflict confirmed most of their previously held views concerning submarine warfare. One commentator points out, "For the first time in the postwar history of local wars, nuclear submarines were involved to carry out combat missions."[48] Admiral Uskov notes: ". . . the conflict

Naval War College Review, Vol. 38 [1985], No. 2, Art. 7

confirmed the high combat capabilities of nuclear submarines, whose use the British coordinated closely with the actions of surface ships. Nuclear powered submarines permitted England's Navy to successfully effect a sea blockade of the area west of the Malvinas . . . . In the estimation of Argentine specialists, the British nuclear submarines presented the main threat for their surface ships and submarines."[49]

These sentiments were closely echoed by Admiral Kapitanets who also notes that the sinking of the Argentine cruiser *General Belgrano* on 2 May 1982 "subsequently left an imprint on the activity of the Argentine Navy's ships forces, which practically ceased combat sorties to sea beyond their territorial waters."[50] The comments regarding the capabilities of nuclear submarines are not surprising since the Soviets have long been proponents of the usefulness of submarines during wartime. Fleet Admiral Gorshkov has stated, ". . . in atomic-powered submarines are concentrated all the main factors characterizing the power of a navy" and that since World War II "[submarines] became the main combat power of the fleet." The comment about submarine operations being closely coordinated with surface ship operations is of greater interest, however, in that it is consistent with Admiral Gorshkov's view that submarines should be protected from opposition ASW forces. Gorshkov believes that the main reason for the defeat of German submarine forces in the Atlantic during World War II was that air and surface forces were not used to support them, specifically to attack Allied antisubmarine forces, and that in modern times "the possibility has appeared of achieving the close interaction in combat and operation of submarines and surface ships, which greatly enhances their combat effectiveness."[51] Admiral Uskov apparently is using the Falklands conflict to demonstrate that Admiral Gorshkov's beliefs are correct and have been confirmed.[52]

The Soviet writers also make several comments regarding antisubmarine warfare. The gist of the comments is that "[t]he [Argentine] Navy had poor ASW capabilities" in that it was "not ready to fight nuclear-powered submarines."[53] Admiral Kapitanets notes that British "ASW forces were capable of neutralizing submarines in the Argentine Navy" and that when the *Belgrano* was sunk by a British submarine, the cruiser "was proceeding without proper escort."[54] All of these statements seem to imply a certain confidence on the part of the Soviets that there is some attainable level of ASW capability which will neutralize the enemy's submarines. The British possessed an adequate level of ASW capability and were able to neutralize the Argentine submarine threat, while, by implication, if the *Belgrano* had had a "proper escort," it may not have been vulnerable to a British submarine. A Soviet belief that submarines may be neutralized seems contradictory to the vast amount of resources the Soviet Navy has devoted to submarines. It would also be inconsistent with the limited open-ocean ASW capabilities which the Soviets currently are estimated to possess.[55]

In one other interesting comment regarding antisubmarine warfare, Admiral Uskov notes: "The British were fully confident that their nuclear submarines could not be subjected to strikes by aircraft or surface ships because the Argentines lacked fixed sonar systems for detecting submarines and modern search equipment on the ships of the maneuvering forces."[56] Besides representing a further indictment of the ASW suites aboard Argentine ships, this comment suggests that the Soviets consider permanent acoustic arrays, such as SOSUS, to be a very important factor in acquiring the capability to detect and localize submarines with sufficient accuracy to conduct attacks. If so, it is suggestive of a possible Soviet intention to develop and deploy such a system.

Logistics Support

Soviet commentators made several statements regarding the level of logistics support received by both fleets during the Falklands conflict. One article states, "The material and technical support system that was created, although complex, all the same permitted the [British] Navy to operate effectively in a remote region (the ratio of 'combat ship to auxiliary vessel' was approximately 1:1)."[57] Several commentators pointed out the 1:1 ratio of combatants to auxiliaries in the British task force. Along the same lines, Admiral Uskov notes, "Enlisting the services of a large number of auxiliary vessels permitted the grouping of the English Navy to operate continuously in the area of the Malvinas Islands throughout the entire conflict."[58] These comments seem to imply a recognition of the fact that considerable logistic support is required to support fleet, particularly fleet combat, operations at extended distances from home ports. Such recognition seems dichotomous with the limited number of large logistics support ships currently existing in the Soviet Navy, as well as the Soviet Navy's limited underway replenishment capabilities. (As of early 1983, the Soviet Navy had only 11 ships of the *Berezina, Dubna*, and *Boris Chilikin* classes; these are the only classes of Soviet auxiliaries which can be described as modern (completed in the last ten years) specialized underway replenishment ships. The Soviet Navy has been slow in developing underway replenishment capabilities and techniques; it has almost exclusively concentrated on refueling. The movement of solid stores (including ammunition) between ships underway, and helicopter delivery techniques, have not been practiced to a great extent.)

Soviet writers also made several comments regarding the British use of civilian shipping during the conflict. For example, Admiral Uskov notes: "The actions taken by the British government bear a mobilization character . . . . [T]he British created mobile rear services which included practically all modern classes of ships of the Navy and civilian departments—tankers, dry cargo freighters, liners, ferries, container haulers and hospital ships . . . . The

Naval War College Review, Vol. 38 [1985], No. 2, Art. 7

significance of the constant readiness to transfer vessels of civilian departments to Navy control was underlined."[59]

Soviet comments regarding the effectiveness of merchant shipping in supporting combat operations (and Admiral Uskov's sentiments were echoed by a number of other commentators) indicate that they believe the Falklands conflict vindicates Admiral Gorshkov's definition of seapower as encompassing more than just traditional combat ships. Specifically, Admiral Gorshkov states: "The merchant fleet is considered by many countries not only as an important means of economics but also an important reserve of the navy in the event of war . . . . [M]erchant ships are widely used for material and technical supply of fighting ships at sea . . . . [T]he merchant fleet must be regarded as a universal component of the sea power of a country which has a most important role in war and peacetime."[60]

The Soviets currently possess one of the few major merchant fleets which can perform either a peacetime commercial mission or satisfy military logistics requirements effectively and efficiently should a conflict arise. The merchant marine currently provides a significant amount of the logistics support required by the Soviet Navy.[61]

Soviet commentators also discussed several specific aspects of the use of the merchant fleet in the Falklands conflict. One article notes: "Modern passenger ships were first used to transfer a sizable contingent of forces over large distances, while the reequipped container ship *Atlantic Conveyor* was used to transport aircraft equipment (it took on board up to 20 Harriers, as well as helicopters)."[62]

While most nations have reduced their passenger-carrying fleets, the Soviets have continued to expand theirs and today have the largest passenger fleet in the world. The Soviet merchant fleet also includes about 125 container ships.[63] Thus, Soviet commentary on the Falklands conflict has pointed out two very important potential combat missions of the Soviet merchant fleet. Moreover, one article states that as a result of the Falklands conflict: "[I]t has been proposed that [in the building of the merchant and passenger ships] they strictly observe the demand of designing considering their possible reequipping in a brief period of time and use as military transports and support vessels . . . ."[64]

Soviet merchant ships are designed with military requirements in mind. Merchant and naval ships use standardized parts (which simplifies maintenance and supply problems); decks and ramps of merchant ships are strengthened to accommodate armored vehicles; protection against radiological, chemical, and biological hazards are designed into Soviet merchant ships; and communications systems compatible with those of the military are installed.[65] Overall, then, Soviet commentary seems to imply that the Falklands conflict has validated, under modern combat conditions, the Soviet view that the merchant fleet should serve as an important reserve

of the navy in the event of war. One article makes this point very clearly, "[I]t [is] advisable to have as part of the merchant fleet reserve supply vessels which in the event of necessity could also be used for Navy interests."[66]

Soviet commentary on the Falklands discussed one other area of interest relating to logistics support, that of forward bases. Admiral Kapitanets notes, "In the actions of forces and individual combatants of the fleet under present-day conditions there is great significance in their comprehensive support with the use of forward bases and the floating rear."[67] Another article states, "An important conclusion reached by American specialists is that without the creation of an intermediate base on Ascension Island, Great Britain 'could never have been victorious in the Falkland Operation.'"[68] These apparently positive comments regarding forward bases seem to be at variance with statements by Admiral Gorshkov: "The reports periodically appearing in the Western press on the presence of certain naval bases belonging to the USSR on the territories of countries friendly to us are patently defamatory . . . . It must be emphasized that the USSR, conducting a Leninist peace-loving foreign policy, is not after such acquisitions."[69]

Despite Gorshkov's denials, however, the Soviet presence in Angola, Libya, Syria, Ethiopia, South Yemen, and Vietnam indicates that forward basing has become very important to the Soviet Navy. In any case, Soviet commentary on the Falklands conflict implies that in order for a navy (especially one with the limited at-sea logistics capabilities of the Soviet Navy) to successfully conduct power projection operations at any distance from the homeland, it very likely is going to require intermediate or forward bases. At a minimum, the Soviet Navy seems to be justifying its current overseas bases; however, it also may be attempting to demonstrate the need for additional bases, especially in areas where such bases do not currently exist.

Correlation of Forces

Several Soviet commentators discuss the correlation of forces between the British and Argentine forces engaged in the Falklands conflict. Admiral Kapitanets states: ". . . the overall relative strength in the area as of the beginning of combat actions [was] approximately equal in combatants; 1:7 in aircraft and 1:1.5 in ground forces in favor of Argentina; 1.5:1 in antiship missile launchers and 7:1 in antiaircraft missiles aboard ship in favor of Great Britain."[70]

Rear Admiral Uskov notes, "The [British] formation possessed a number of advantages in comparison with the Argentine Navy." These included more modern ships, sufficient balance, the aircraft carriers, nuclear-powered

submarines, the newest weapons systems, modern ASW equipment, and "automated systems for control of forces." On the other hand, Uskov notes: "The Argentine Navy . . . possessed a number of advantages: the availability to shipboard aviation of . . . attack aircraft with operating ranges up to 1,200 km, which is approximately three times the radius of action of the Sea Harrier; the closeness of the combat area to the basing system of their forces; the relative simplicity of supplying navy forces and the troops on the Malvinas Islands both by sea and by air."[71]

Of greater interest than these purely quantitative comparisons, however, are the more qualitative explanations of Soviet commentators as to why the conflict developed as it did. Admiral Kapitanets states, "The actions by the Argentine Armed Forces . . . were of a limited nature, were planned with insufficient precision, and lacked initiative . . . ."[72] Another article notes: "The English forces' success was ensured by more modern weapons and military equipment, the high quality of the personnel's readiness . . ., and the retention of an operational initiative at all stages of military operations . . . . [T]he principal reason for Argentina's defeat in the conflict was its unpreparedness for war, the poor professional training of soldiers of all ranks . . . and the leadership's major political and military miscalculation. According to many indexes, the correlation of forces was in Argentina's favor, however, this advantage was not exploited because of a lack of resoluteness and clearness of purpose in troop command and control."[73]

The final sentence above suggests that even when several of the factors used in calculating the correlation of forces are in favor of a particular nation, victory for that nation is not guaranteed. Rather than demonstrating that the correlation of forces is insignificant, however, this statement seems to imply that the Falklands conflict demonstrated that an advantage in most of the factors which make up the correlation of forces can be overcome by a large disadvantage in the other factors.

Of particular importance along these lines is the fact that the Argentines' command and control capabilities were insufficient to allow them to exploit their correlation of forces advantage. In addition to the comment noted above, another article notes that the large losses suffered by Argentine forces was partly due to "the low level of organization of the command and control system."[74] Moreover, as noted above, Admiral Uskov points out that one of the advantages of the British task force was that it possessed "automated systems for control of forces." The Soviets place a great deal of emphasis on command and control. According to Admiral Gorshkov: "The importance of control has now grown so much that it determines not only the degree of effectiveness and the outcome of the activity of society but the very possibility of this activity. In armed struggle at sea this is clearly manifested."[75]

Soviet comments regarding Argentina's command and control deficiencies are consistent with Admiral Gorshkov's views, and indicate that such

deficiencies can lead to defeat even when other factors are favorable. Conversely, "automated" control systems, such as those possessed by the British, can assist a military force in overcoming other deficiencies.

Another interesting facet of the Soviet discussion of the correlation of forces is that of the seizure of the initiative. As noted above, one article notes that British success during the conflict was due largely to "the retention of an operational initiative at all stages of the military operations," while Admiral Kapitanets points out that the actions of the Argentine armed forces "lacked initiative." These comments are consistent with previously held Soviet views. According to Vice Admiral Stalbo: "One of the important characteristics of the Soviet theory of military and naval strategy is its recognition of the dominance of the offensive, aggressive principle in combat operations; and this is impossible to achieve without seizing and holding the initiative in battle and operations and in the strategic employment of the fleet."[76] Thus, Soviet commentators apparently have discovered yet another aspect of the Falklands conflict which they believe validates the Soviet view of naval warfare.

Overall, Soviet commentators seem to believe that the Falklands conflict confirmed many of the Soviet Union's previously held notions regarding naval warfare. These include the utility of land-based aircraft in conducting naval strikes, the continued utility of surface ships in modern warfare, the extreme importance of electronic warfare, the utility of antiship missiles, the continued importance of amphibious warfare capabilities, the utility of nuclear submarines, and the importance of possessing a merchant fleet capable of supporting combat operations. These commentators also seem to believe that several elements of Soviet warfighting doctrine were confirmed by the conflict, including the decisiveness of achieving surprise (which includes the use of deception), the requirement for extremely capable command and control systems, and the importance of seizing the initiative.

In addition, Soviet commentators also pointed out several aspects of the Falklands conflict which imply a need for improvement in Soviet naval warfare capabilities. These modifications, if implemented, would make the Soviet Navy more similar to the US fleet. Of greatest significance is the suggestion that the capabilities of VSTOL aviation are limited, and the implication that much-improved VSTOL or preferably CTOL sea-based aviation capabilities are required in order to achieve air superiority over naval forces operating outside the range of land-based aviation. Soviet commentaries on the conflict also seemed to highlight the limited number of large logistics support ships in the Soviet fleet with the implication that improvements in this area are necessary if credible power projection capabilities are to be developed. Moreover, the Soviet comments regarding the increased threat posed by Western antiship missiles seem to imply that further improvements in the antiair warfare capabilities of the Soviet fleet are required. Finally, comments concerning permanent acoustic arrays may imply a Soviet perception of a requirement to develop and deploy such systems.

Naval War College Review, Vol. 38 [1985], No. 2, Art. 7

One Soviet commentator noted of the Falklands conflict that in terms of its scope, this conflict was the most significant military conflict at sea since the end of World War II. Admiral Kapitanets notes, "For the first time in the last 40 years military actions were characterized by the significant scope of employment of naval forces with accomplishment of the primary missions of war by fleet forces." Moreover, Kapitanets points out near the conclusion of his article: "Inasmuch as naval forces played the primary role in the conflict, foreign specialists in various areas of naval art are carefully studying the experience of employing the arms of naval forces and are drawing practical conclusions on an improvement in their organizational structure and in the effectiveness of weaponry."[77] It seems highly likely that the Soviet naval leadership also is closely studying the Falklands conflict, and will attempt to apply any lessons they may be able to learn from the war to their own force structure and doctrine.

The author would like to gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Professor Jiri Valenta of the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, in the preparation of this article.

Notes

1. K.A. Stalbo, "Naval Forces in Local Wars," *Morskoy Sbornik*, No. 9, 1976 (NISC translation), p. 29.
2. More accurately, the British lacked airborne early warning capabilities during the Falklands conflict. Since that time, they have installed an airborne early warning radar on a few Sea King helicopters.
3. Uskov is the deputy to the Deputy Commander in Chief of the Soviet Navy for Combat Training, and is on the editorial board of *Morskoy Sbornik*.
4. I. Uskov, "Lessons of the Anglo-Argentine Conflict and the Role of Surface Ships in Conflict at Sea," *Morskoy Sbornik*, No. 11, 1982 (NISC translation), p. 110.
5. Ye. Nikitin, "A Colonial Adventure in the South Atlantic," *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 11, 14, p. 3 and 15, p. 5, January 1983 (English translation of 15 January portion: Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *USSR Report: Military Affairs*, No. 1773 [JPRS 83625], 13 June 1983), p. 75.
6. I. Kapitanets, "The Navy's Role in the Anglo-Argentine Conflict," *Morskoy Sbornik*, No. 2, 1983 (NISC translation), p. 17.
7. B. Rodinov, Ye. Nikitin, and N. Novichkov, "Electronic Warfare in the South Atlantic," *Morskoy Sbornik*, No. 1, 1983 (NISC translation), p. 74.
8. Kapitanets, p. 15.
9. A. Usikov, "Certain Lessons and Conclusions from the Anglo-Argentine Military Conflict," *Voyenno-Istoricheskiy Zhurnal*, No. 4, 1983, pp. 67-73 (English translation: Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *USSR Report: Military Affairs*, No. 1783 [JPRS 83996], 28 July 1983), p. 46.
10. Uskov, p. 104.
11. Nikitin.
12. Rodinov, Nikitin, and Novichkov, p. 74.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Uskov, p. 108.
16. Nikitin.
17. The Soviet VTOL aireraft is optimistically credited with a 175-mile combat radius in an air defense role while the Sea Harrier has a combat radius of about 250 miles in a similar role. See Yu. Galkin, "Air Defense of British Expeditionary Forces (During the Anglo-Argentine Conflict)," *Zarubezhnoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, No. 3, 1983 (English translation: Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *USSR Report: Military Affairs*, No. 1770 [JPRS 83591], 2 June 1983), p. 77.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

19. B. Rodinov and N. Novichkov, "The Tactics of Air Operations against Ships," *Morskoy Sbornik*, No. 12, 1983 (NISC translation), pp. 65-66.
20. Rodinov, Nikitin, and Novichkov, p. 74.
21. Uskov, pp. 103-113.
22. Kapitanets, p. 15.
23. Uskov, p. 111.
24. Galkin, p. 74.
25. Kapitanets, p. 14.
26. Uskov, p. 111.
27. Charles W. Koburger, *Sea Power in the Falklands* (New York: Praeger, 1983), p. 76.
28. *Sheffield* was on radar picket duty at the southwest corner of the British task force, which was operating southeast of the Falklands, when she was mortally damaged by an Exocet on 4 May 1982. *Coventry* and HMS *Broadsword* were on radar picket and "missile trap" (i.e., using the Sea Wolf point defense SAM system on *Broadsword* to cover the lack of capability against low-altitude targets of the Sea Dart SAMS on *Coventry*) duty north-northwest of the Falklands on 24 May 1982, when *Coventry* was sunk by three 1,000-pound bombs dropped by Argentine A-4s.
29. Kapitanets, p. 14.
30. Uskov, p. 112.
31. Rodinov, Nikitin, and Novichkov, p. 72.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 73-77.
33. Uskov, p. 112.
34. Kapitanets, p. 14.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
36. Uskov, p. 113.
37. Rodinov, Nikitin, and Novichkov, p. 73.
38. Uskov, p. 111.
39. Rodinov, Nikitin, and Novichkov, pp. 74-75.
40. Uskov, p. 109.
41. A. Aleksandrov and S. Grechin, "The Falklands: A Relapse of British Colonialism," *Zarubezhnoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, No. 10, 1982 (English translation: Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *USSR Report: Military Affairs*, No. 1739 [JPRS 82777], 1 February 1983), p. 15.
42. Ye. Rakitin, "Gambling on Surprise (The Amphibious Landing on the Falkland [Malvinas] Islands)," *Morskoy Sbornik*, No. 3, 1983 (NISC translation), p. 107.
43. Norman Polmar, *Guide to the Soviet Navy*, 3rd ed. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1983), p. 35.
44. Uskov, pp. 109-110.
45. Usikov, p. 48.
46. Uskov, p. 109.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 110.
48. Usikov, p. 49.
49. Uskov, p. 113.
50. Kapitanets, pp. 10-14.
51. S.G. Gorshkov, *The Sea Power of the State* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1979), pp. 120-121, 190-195.
52. Uskov, p. 106.
53. Rodinov and Novichkov, p. 56.
54. Kapitanets, pp. 10, 13.
55. Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, *Understanding Soviet Naval Developments*, 4th ed. (Washington: US Govt. Print. Off., 1981), p. 26.
56. Uskov, p. 113.
57. Aleksandrov and Grechin, p. 12.
58. Uskov, p. 105.
59. *Ibid.*, pp. 105-106.
60. Gorshkov, pp. 28-29.
61. Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, pp. 61-62.
62. Aleksandrov and Grechin, p. 15.
63. Robert E. McKeown, "Their Merchant Fleet," US Naval Institute *Proceedings*, October 1982, p. 162.
64. Usikov, p. 49.
65. McKeown, p. 167.
66. Usikov, p. 46.
67. Kapitanets, p. 20.
68. Usikov, p. 49.
69. Uskov, p. 130.

70. Kapitanets, p. 11.
71. Uskov, pp. 104-106.
72. Kapitanets, p. 16.
73. Aleksandrov and Grechin, pp. 15-16.
74. Rodinov, Nikitin and Novichkov, p. 74.
75. Gorshkov, p. 209.
76. K. Stalbo, "Some Issues of the Theory of the Development and Deployment of the Navy," *Morskoy Sbornik*, No. 5, 1981 (NISC translation), p. 24.
77. Kapitanets, pp. 9, 20.

The Naval Historical Center and the Naval Historical Foundation take pleasure in announcing the establishment of the United States Navy Prize in Naval History. This will be an annual award of $500 and a certificate to the author of the best article on United States naval history published in a scholarly journal. This prize will be first awarded on or about 1 October 1985 for an article published during the preceding year, ending 31 December 1984. Authors and journal editors are encouraged to submit copies of nominated articles for consideration prior to 1 June 1985 to the following address: Naval Historical Center (RE), Building 57, Washington, D.C. 20374-0571.