

## Naval War College Review

---

Volume 36  
Number 3 *May-June*

Article 29

---

1983

# Soviet Perception of Military Power

Bruce W. Watson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

---

### Recommended Citation

Watson, Bruce W. (1983) "Soviet Perception of Military Power," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 36 : No. 3 , Article 29.  
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol36/iss3/29>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu](mailto:repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu).

that deals with the foreign policy of either the United States or the Soviet Union, there is relatively little that deals with the foreign policies of both superpowers. In particular there seem to be very few studies that compare those policies in any kind of a systematic manner. *Foreign Policy USA/USSR* is an attempt by the editors to correct that imbalance by providing a systematic comparative study of the foreign policies of the United States and the Soviet Union. As one who teaches a graduate course in comparative US and Soviet foreign policy, I welcomed this approach and rejoiced at the prospects of a study that might serve as a single-volume text for the course.

Unfortunately, this book falls short of the mark and is far too limited in both breadth and depth. With few exceptions, the articles and essays that make up the book concentrate more on the methodology of analysis and too little on its substance. Much of that methodology is of the behavioral scientific or statistical analytical variety, forcing those of us who cling to the traditionalist school of political interpretation into mild cases of migraine as we sort through "central tendencies" and "deviations from central tendency" in order to learn that in the United States there is a relationship between presidential party and defense spending, and that in the Soviet Union there is a relationship between aggregate economic performance and defense spending. Indeed!

For those, however, who prefer a quantifiable framework for political analysis and are properly attuned to the value of computer simulations and complex model building, this book does provide some interesting theoretical bases for comparing certain aspects of US and Soviet foreign policies. But those aspects are rather limited in scope and

while the book is divided into three parts which on the surface seem to be sufficiently comprehensive (Relationships Between the Superpowers, Ideological Orientation and Policy Consequences, and Responses to Common Problems), the individual chapters that make up those parts remain too narrowly focused. One refreshing exception is an excellent chapter titled "Perceiving the Other's Intentions," which categorizes the major schools of analyses in both the United States and the Soviet Union in terms of how those analysts perceive the global intentions of the other superpower.

The twelve "chapters" aren't really chapters at all, but rather individually prepared articles or studies (all by different authors) that do not necessarily relate to one another except in the sense that they were selected by the editors for inclusion in one or another of the three main parts of the book, and tied together in the introduction which is an overview of each of the articles. In fact, it is in this introduction that the editors make a valuable contribution to the book. Many readers will find the introduction the most rewarding section of all.

DALLACE L. MEEHAN  
Lieutenant Colonel, US Air Force  
Air Command and Staff College

Dziak, John. *Soviet Perceptions of Military Power: The Interaction of Theory and Practice*. New York: Crane, Russak, 1981. 72pp. \$5.95

Vernon, Graham D., ed. *Soviet Perceptions of War and Peace*. Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1981. 185pp. \$6.00

Several years ago the US Navy virtually abandoned its research on strategic thinking, leaving the field to academics. Nowhere is this more the

case than in the study of Soviet naval strategy. This has led to the ascendancy of an academic view which deemphasizes the importance of examining Soviet strategic postulations, substituting an analytical strategy which involves application of statistical and behavioral formulae to analysis of Soviet naval strategy and operations. Naval intelligence, which questions this approach, has stressed the concrete—construction and operations—in achieving an understanding of Soviet strategic postulations actually formulated several years before. As a result, our understanding of Soviet strategic concepts is usually several years behind the times.

This situation is not as bleak as it may seem; because much has been done in both government and academia in analyzing Soviet military strategy. Since Soviet naval strategy is a subset of its overall posture, an accurate analysis of Soviet strategy is an indispensable prerequisite for understanding their naval strategy. Nowhere else are these efforts integrated more succinctly or cogently than in two recent works: *Soviet Perceptions of Military Power* by John Dziak and *Soviet Perceptions of War and Peace*, edited by Graham Vernon.

In *Soviet Perceptions of Military Power*, Dziak integrates several major analyses of Soviet strategic writings with the research on long-range Soviet strategy under the sponsorship of Professor Joseph Schiebel of Georgetown University in the 1970s. In doing so, Dziak makes a unique and valuable contribution. However, he uses these postulations and relies on extensive Soviet sources to progress far beyond other analysts, giving us new insight into Soviet perceptions.

Dziak begins by noting that many of the liberalizing trends in Russia were reversed by the Revolution of 1917, and

that a much older Asiatic system was restored. He demonstrates the basic continuity of this system since 1917 and shows that fundamental harmony between military and political goals characterizes the current system. He concludes that "the Party, military, security, industrial and selected State elites" are totally integrated. This results in a degree of unity in the Soviet system which is often underestimated in the West.

Dziak offers a detailed discussion of strategic concepts and military organization to prove his case, making several important points in the process. First, Soviet politics both overlies and drives the acquisition of military power. Second, Dziak notes that comprehensive planning is an academic feature of the Soviet system—not only for the economy, but for the military as well. Integrating military and political forces in order to fulfill Party objectives reflects an approach that engineers military doctrine into operational reality. Thus, action flows from plan. The "buildup" of the 1970s and 1980s results from this approach, rather than being some kind of presumably reflexive response to US provocation. Finally, Dziak refutes the myth that the Party and the military are institutions in conflict and demonstrates convincingly that the Soviet system is not one of diffuse, contending power centers.

In demonstrating the validity of the above points, Dziak provides us with one of the most concise, cogent introductions, available on the subject of the Soviet military system and its perceptions. His book ranks among the best in this area; it is mandatory reading for anyone concerned with Soviet military and naval strategy.

Dziak's book serves as an introduction to Graham Vernon's *Soviet Perceptions of*

*War and Peace*, a collection of eight articles dealing with the Soviet view of conflict. This book illuminates Soviet perceptions of several relevant political and military issues based on examinations of Soviet sources, and to demonstrate, from the Soviet view, how their military and political policies interrelate.

All of the contributors are established experts on the subject. John Dziak's lead essay focuses on military doctrine. Dziak shows that doctrine is the Party's guide for the military's strategic structure and future direction. Reiterating his view that the Soviet Union is a totally integrated political-military system, Dziak sees doctrine and the resulting force structure as the implementation of the Party's method for pursuing its political objectives.

Dziak's chapter provides a framework for the remainder of the book, which focuses on Soviet perceptions of seven specific issues: the laws of war; the origins of the cold war; war in the nuclear age; Soviet military capabilities; military strategies and forces; peaceful coexistence; and the emergence of multipolarity in international affairs. All of the articles are comprehensive and well written, providing the reader with a good introduction to Soviet perceptions of several major issues.

Two articles are truly noteworthy. The first, by William and Harriet Scott, assesses Soviet perceptions of American military strategy and strength. The Scotts note that Soviet perceptions change in order to continue to accurately reflect US strategy and military strength. The Scotts are the only contributors who explicitly address the Soviet Navy. In discussing the postulations contained in Admiral Gorshkov's *Sea Power of the State*, they emphasize that, although he views US strategy and

forces from a somewhat different perspective than other Soviet leaders, this is merely a difference in emphasis; there are no basic differences between Gorshkov's views and those of other Soviet military leaders. This important observation conflicts with the view commonly held in the US Navy that there is a significant divergence of views between Gorshkov and his counterparts.

Colonel Vernon's excellent article traces the concept of "peaceful coexistence" from its inception and concludes that there is considerable consistency in Soviet policy. He believes that for the USSR, peaceful coexistence is a currently operative but not necessarily permanent concept. Vernon warns that it is essential for the West to maintain the balance of power so that the Soviets do not achieve a "position of strength." The implications of this for the US Navy are obvious.

As both editor and contributor, Vernon has provided us with valuable insight into the Soviet view of several major military and foreign policy issues. A concise, readable, and comprehensive volume, *Soviet Perceptions of War and Peace* is a valuable aid for understanding current Soviet military and naval strategy.

BRUCE W. WATSON  
Commander, US Navy  
Defense Intelligence School

Miller, Mark E. *Soviet Strategic Power and Doctrine: The Quest for Superiority.*

Washington, D.C.: Advanced International Studies Institute, 1982. 298pp.  
\$14.95, paper \$9.95

Deciphering Soviet political/military intentions, and matching those intentions to the raw military capabilities that the USSR commands, is a most hazardous undertaking. Compounding the difficulty of access to information is the paucity of analysts who are not only able