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The Rise and Fall of the Singapore Naval Base

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Since the Sino-Soviet split, denunciations of Maoist deviations in foreign policy, nationality policy, and ideology have appeared in the Soviet press almost without interruption. Published sources, however, although setting forth Maoist oppression in lurid detail, have stopped short of suggesting any remedies.* So it is here that unofficial sources become our sole guide to Soviet intent. The Louis book is unique among these for its bluntness in a public forum.

Victor Louis' credentials are such that people familiar with them could easily neglect giving his book careful scrutiny. It is generally recognized that Louis is a skillful and visible agent of the KGB posing as a Soviet journalist. He has been accurate in the past; he was, for example, the first source to report Khrushchev's expulsion from power and the first of several in 1969 to report Soviet consideration of a preemptive strike against China's nuclear weapons facilities. Moreover, except for some tentativeness in minor details, his tourist's guide to the Soviet Union is reasonably objective. (Victor and Jennifer Louis, *The Complete Guide to the Soviet Union*; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976.) But Louis has also been the mouthpiece for KGB-concocted untruths about Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Svetlana Alliluyeva, among others.

Although he gives *The Coming Decline of the Chinese Empire* some credibility by referring frankly to Stalinist labor camps and purges (unusual in Soviet writers since the advent of re-Stalinization), the book only gains credibility to the extent that

it conforms to the overall pattern of Soviet behavior and throws new light on possible considerations in Soviet strategic and political planning. It is almost certainly an attempt by the Soviet Government to gauge Western reaction to public discussion of a number of highly radical solutions to its Chinese problem. It is intriguing that Louis tries to bolster his credibility by citing reputable Western sources such as *Far Eastern Economic Review* and Klaus Mehnert.

It is fair to say that Louis' book would not merit attention if it did not state so bluntly what appears to be implied in most current Soviet writings on China. His book is also corroborated by private and semipublic Soviet statements that date from even before the Sino-Soviet split. In view of the strong possibility that this work was written by the KGB, or other organ of the Soviet Government, and ostentatiously attributed to a shadowy "journalist" as a means of testing Western reaction, the question must be asked: "Why is the Soviet Union interested in having these views circulated in the English-speaking world?"

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McIntyre, W. David. *The Rise and Fall of the Singapore Naval Base*. Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1979. 289pp.

To make the two-decade history of a naval base the subject of a book seems risky, particularly when the base is associated in most peoples' minds with defeat in war and the still disturbing memories of Britain's (and the West's) feckless policies of the twenties and thirties. Mr. McIntyre, a professor at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand, slips the first association by giving but one chapter to the actual

*The Soviet Union has begun the work of compiling all of its recent press clippings on China into an ongoing series of volumes on Sino-Soviet problems. This series, entitled *Opasni Kuris*, concerns, as the title indicates, the "dangerous course" of the Chinese. It includes articles from *Pravda*, *Kommunist*, *Voprosy Istorii KPSS*, *Partinyaya Zbirn'* and other journals and newspapers. (*Opasni Kuris*, vols. 1-9; Moscow: Published by 1968. Naval War College Digital Commons, 1986.)

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defeat of 1942. The problem of why the Singapore base was never completed is hard to disentangle from the inconsistencies of British defense policies in the interwar years, but the author avoids much of the detail of this problem by concentrating on the strategic role of the base in Imperial (later to be called Commonwealth) defense. In this framework the author finds himself confronting at the outset the conclusion of the official historian of the Singapore campaign, Maj. Gen. Woodburn Kirby: "It can be truthfully said that the naval base was at least theoretically lost before the first sod had been turned. . . ." If this be true, something must have been very wrong with the strategy.

McIntyre finds many things wrong from the outset. The first, and not the least, of these was "the traditional tendency of naval planners to think in terms of supremacy of the seas." Next, he finds those same planners thought in the traditional terms of preparing "to match the strength of their largest rivals," the United States and Japan but particularly the latter, without much thought that rivals might not have been the correct term, especially after the Washington Conference of 1922. Then, that old bugaboo *prestige* was being raised continually as a strategic reason for the Singapore base; in most cases the word *prestige* was modified by a thinly veiled adjective "white." Hong Kong seemed to be key to the prestige theme, but so did Britain's place in the treaty port/extraterritoriality system in China. As late as 1974 a Canadian author was arguing that the prestige lost in the retrocession of British naval base rights at Weihaiwei in North China in 1930 was the beginning of the fall of the British Empire. A fourth factor was the illusion of the Royal Navy, prideful in its victory over the High Seas Fleet, that the empire would provide the money to support "the one navy" that would command "the one sea" under purely British strategic and

tactical leadership—nationalism, anti-imperialism or even the possibility of divergent national interests never occurred to the insouciant Victorian gentlemen in the Admiralty. Most importantly, there was not enough money and there was never to be enough money.

Here, indeed, were the ingredients for General Kirby's judgment. McIntyre details with fine research just how all these false assumptions worked out in history.

The single chance for a successful use of Singapore once Japanese hostility was clear would have been cooperation with the U.S. Navy. This possibility was always in the minds of British naval planners, most prominently after it had become clear that the Royal Navy would have to deal with one Axis partner in the North Atlantic and one in the Mediterranean, thus obviating the "main fleet to Singapore" strategy. By the time concrete measures could be suggested it had become clear that Plan Dog would call for the strategic defensive in the Pacific and that would rule out any substantial American force based on Singapore. Incidentally, McIntyre, unlike many writers on U.S. East Asian policy, notes that it was the State Department, not the Navy, that was pushing for forward deployment of U.S. naval resources in the Western Pacific and for joint use of the Singapore base.

In his summing up McIntyre stresses the point that in the event a major British fleet did go to the Pacific; it included 4 battleships, 10 cruisers, 17 carriers, and 40 destroyers. But it is hard to see this as belated vindication of the strategic concepts of the Singapore base. First, the Royal Navy's Pacific fleet did not use Singapore and second, of course, both Germany and Italy had been defeated by then.

A valuable part of this book is an annotated bibliography listed chronologically; many of the titles and subtitles

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are apt—"Someone Had Blundered," "You'll Die in Singapore," "Sinister Twilight," "The Worst Disaster," "Too Little, Too Late," "The Chain of Disaster," etc. McIntyre tells a good story of the reason why these are apt.

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Wells, John G., *Whaley: The Story of HMS Excellent 1830-1980*, Portsmouth, Hants, England: HMS Excellent, 1980. 247pp.

This short history of the Royal Navy's first gunnery school was written by a former Captain of HMS *Excellent* for the 150th anniversary of the school. It is a complete rewriting and updating of R.T. Young's *The House That Jack Built* (1955).

As a sesquicentennial history, it is very readable. The author traces the development of gunnery training from

1830 when the old 74-gun ship-of-the-line, HMS *Excellent*, became the home of the gunnery school. He discusses the development of Whale Island into a shore-based school and then follows its history through the 1970s when the function of Whale Island was changed from being a specialist school to a general naval training center. The story is told with verve and humor, spiced with delightful anecdotes, maps and photographs. The emphasis throughout is on the human drama cast with a backdrop of naval history.

Scholars of naval history will find the appendixes of documents and the lists of officers useful reference material.

This small volume is a worthy and most appropriate memento for those who have served on Whale Island and learned gunnery there.

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Selected Accessions of the Naval War College Library

Annotated by

Kathleen Ashook, Doris Baginski and Mary Ann Varoutsos

Antarctica: No Single Country, No Single Sea. New York: Mayflower Books, 1979. 175pp. \$27.50

Gorgeous photographs of the natural beauties of Antarctica and the Southern Ocean are so numerous and stunning that this could be enjoyed simply as a coffee table book, but there is also a substantial text that traces the history of political, commercial, and scientific explorations in this region. Maintaining that its resources belong to the whole world, the editors plead that Antarctica be safeguarded against exploitation by nations competing for its riches.

Balmforth, Edmund E. *A Chinese Military Strategist of the Warring States:*

Sun Pin. Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1979. 473pp. \$7.50

Since ancient times there had been legends in China about a brilliant strategist, Sun Pin, whose writings were lost, unlike those of another strategist, Sun Tzu, whose work became a classic. In 1972 ancient Chinese