1989

The Soviet Navy's SSBN Bastions: Why Explanations Matter

Breemer, Jan S.

Routledge Taylor & Francis Group

Jan S. Breemer (1989) The Soviet Navy's SSBN bastions: Why explanations matter, The RUSI Journal, 134:4, 33-39
http://hdl.handle.net/10945/63973

The Soviet Navy's SSBN Bastions: Why Explanations Matter

JAN S BREEMER

Since the early 1980s, the Western estimate of Soviet naval capabilities and intentions has been dominated by the expectation of a Soviet ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) 'bastion' strategy. According to this assessment, the Soviet Union's first and foremost naval priority, in time of war, is to ensure the survival of its SSBN force, so that it may continue to serve as a 'national strategic reserve'. The bastion estimate also holds that the Soviets will seek to guarantee this survival by deploying the SSBNs in near-home waters, where they would enjoy the protective benefit of 'virtually all available Northern and Pacific Ocean Fleet surface combatants/combat aircraft, and about 75 per cent of available attack submarines. . .'.[1]

In several earlier articles I have stressed the inferential (as opposed to evidentiary) contents of the bastion estimate, and urged that Western naval planners take a long and hard look before committing their strategy and forces to the expectation that the Soviet SSBN fleet and its 'pro-SSBN' forces will be 'dug in' in home waters.[2] One response was that the reason why the Soviet Union had chosen a bastion strategy mattered little; that what really counted was that it had made this choice in fact.

This article disagrees and proposes instead that the different rationales that have been advanced to 'explain' the bastions matter a great deal. At the 'analytical' level, different explanations carry different 'logical' weight. But far more important is the strategical logic of the different bastion 'models'. It matters for the substance, shape, and longevity of a Soviet SSBN bastion strategy whether the origins are (a) doctrinal, or (b) material and technical, or (c) bureaucratic.

Models of bastion strategy

This article reviews the different bastion explanations that have been advanced by analysts since the concept was first formulated, in the West, about 15 years ago. It shows that the broad consensus on the *de facto* authenticity of a Soviet SSBN bastion strategy conceals a wide diversity of opinions on Soviet motivations. It also shows that the passing of time has seriously undermined the plausibility of different ascribed motivations. Finally, and most important, this article shows that understanding why the Soviets would have adopted a bastion strategy matters greatly for the formulation of appropriate Western countermeasures. This article examines three 'models' of the bastion strategy:

- the **doctrinal** model;
- the **material-technical** model; and
- the **bureaucratic** model.

The doctrinal model

Two different doctrinal explanations have been advanced on behalf of the Soviet bastion decision. The older one, which is at the heart of the conception of the Soviet SSBN fleet as a 'strategic reserve', belongs to James M McConnell. The more recent one is the work of Michael MccGwire.

McConnell's thesis goes back to the early 1970s and Soviet Navy chief, Admiral Sergei G Gorshkov's publication of the *Morskoi Sbornik* series, 'Navies in War and Peace'.[3] Contrary to the opinion of most analysts, McConnell claimed that the articles constituted an authoritative, Party-approved statement of current Soviet Navy doctrine and strategic priorities. The key doctrinal innovation buried within the series, reported McConnell, was the de-cision, made at the 24th Party Congress, to convert the Soviet SSBN fleet into a strategic 'fleet in being.' McConnell explained that the implications were twofold: first, whereas it has been previous Soviet doctrine for the SSBNs to participate in the war-opening strategic nuclear strike, now they would be withheld for the purpose of intra-war deterrence and compellence.[4] The second, material implication was the construction of the *Delta* class SSBN with the SS-N-8. The missile's intercontinental range was proof, claimed McConnell, that the Soviets intended to ensure the integrity of their strategic 'leverage' in protected home waters. He wrote:

> No longer will Soviet SSBNs have to run the gauntlet of Western ASW forces through relatively narrow exits and then attempt to survive, precariously, on the World Ocean. (The SSBNs would be kept instead) in local waters, protected in a wartime environment over a protracted period by the main ASW and other forces of the Russian fleet.[5]

A few years later, Gorshkov published *The Sea*

The author is an Adjunct Professor at the US Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, where he lectures in maritime strategy and Soviet naval affairs. The views expressed are those of the author alone, and not necessarily those of the US Navy or any other US Government agency.

Power of the State.[6] The book's message, claimed McConnell, was the same:

> Gorshkov appears to be rationalizing a political decision to withhold a substantial portion of Soviet SLBMs from the strikes of the initial period in order to carry out 'deterrence' in war, conduct intra-war bargaining, and influence the peace talks at the end of the war.[7]

The 'basic' decision to set aside the SSBN fleet for intra-war withholding purposes, he stressed, was *doctrinal*; the decision to withhold in home waters was made possible by the technical features (i.e., long-range) of the SS-N-8. McConnell rejected the argument that the SS-N-8s might be withheld from the initial exchange, and that withholding was no more than a Soviet option that was inherent in the technical (read 'survivable') characteristics of the SSBN. He wrote:

> It is sometimes taken for granted that the Soviets have a withholding strategy, simply on the strength of the inherent capabilities of the SSBN in this role. I myself am reluctant to equate capabilities with intentions, especially when it is almost always necessarily a matter of adjusting our perceptions of Russian capabilities rather than Russian perceptions. The intentions themselves have to be demonstrated; and it seems to me the particular case before us provides an objective lesson of the truth of my contention, for whatever our perceptions of Soviet capabilities past and present, Soviet discussions before the 24th Congress indicated SLBMs were to be used in a first-strike role, whereas after the Congress the focus shifted from the initial to later stages of the war, with an especial emphasis on the value of the Navy in securing the war's 'political goal.[8]

Strategic Rocket Forces

An alternative doctrinal explanation for the Soviet bastion decision has been offered by Michael MccGwire in his book, *Military Objectives in Soviet Foreign Policy*.[9] In a rather startling reversal from his decade-long critique of McConnell's thesis, he concluded that a top level doctrinal decision and not a built-in technical immunity, was responsible, after all, for the Soviet SSBN withholding assignment. McConnell, MccGwire acknowledged, had been right—'his explanation and evidence were wrong'.[10]

MccGwire reports that the rededication of the Soviet SSBNs away from participation in the initial strategic strike to withholding, can be traced back to a Politburo decision, in 1966, to abjure the 'inevitability' of nuclear war with the United States and the corollary decision to give first priority to plans and capabilities for fighting and winning a protracted conventional conflict.[11] Soviet decision-makers also realised, claimed MccGwire, that the 'safe' pursuit of this kind of Superpower war also depended on the longevity of the countervailing deterrence of their strategic nuclear forces. Naturally, the task of deterring the United States from turning a losing conventional 'long war' into a mutually-devastating nuclear exchange was made the responsibility of the Soviet Union's most numerous and most capable strategic arm: the land-based missiles of the Strategic Rocket Forces (SRF).

The Soviet Union's calculation of the necessary 'correlation' of conventional and strategic forces, MccGwire has postulated, has been much more complex. While the Soviets could be reasonably certain that the SRF could enforce the existing strategic nuclear balance, they could not be certain that the credibility of their 'main branch' would not be 'outflanked' by American technological ingenuity. It followed, says MccGwire, that the Soviets decided to 'hedge' and 'insure' against the possibility of an American SRF-neutralising 'breakthrough': the Soviet SSBN fleet was turned into a strategic 'insurance force' that would be held back and protected in bastion waters against the eventuality that, 'in the event of war, the ICBM force could be rendered impotent in some way or other . . .'.[12] Were the latter to happen, he postulated, the SSBNs would revert to being a 'balancing force,' and be used immediately or later, depending on military exigiencies.[13]

MccGwire concluded that the SSBNs' insurance function may have outlived its usefulness, and may be in the process of being taken over by the Soviet Union's new land-mobile missiles, the SS-24 and SS-25. He did not suggest what the possible doctrinal implications for the *Typhoons* and *Deltas* might be.

The material-technical model

The material-technical explanation of the bastion concept has come in two parts. The first has sought to explain the Soviet failure to imitate the high-tempo oceanic patrols of the American SSBNs in terms of certain Soviet technical and operating weaknesses. The second part has proposed that a Soviet SSBN withholding option was made possible by technological opportunity, i.e. the arrival of the long-range SS-N-8, and not foreordained doctrine.

Technical and operational deficiencies were at the heart of official speculations, during the second half of the 1970s, why the Soviet SSBN fleet 'stayed at home'. The 1977 annual posture statement of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) proposed that the Soviet submarine fleet was saddled with a highly inefficient overhaul system.[14] Other analysts thought that the SSBN fleet was short of proficient crews, suffered from poor mechanical reliability, or was perhaps without the command and control arrangements necessary for 'positive' control at long distances from home.[15]

Benefits of new *Deltas*

Technical vulnerability was also cited as the Soviet reason for development of the SS-N-8. Defense Secretary Donald H Rumsfield thought, in 1977, that production of the *Yankee* class had stopped, 'in part, no doubt, because the boats would have to go on station within range of US and allied ASW forces in order to cover targets in the United States'.[16] The new *Deltas*, armed with SS-N-8s, he explained, benefited the Soviet Union in two ways :

- they could 'cover major targets in the United States from launchpoints as distant as the Barents Sea and the North Pacific'; and

- 'such deployments, relatively close to home ports, allow more time on station (the equivalent of having additional SSBNs) and provide a degree of sanctuary from anti-submarine warfare (ASW) forces.'[17]

Before he had come to the conclusion that a doctrinal shift underlay the creation of the bastions after all, MccGwire had been the staunchest defender of the technical rationale for Soviet SSBN withholding. Some or even all Soviet SLBMs, be they the (relatively) short-range *Yankee*-based SS-N-6 or the much longer-range SS-N-8, he argued, could and probably would be withheld from the initial exchange. But, he insisted, in 1976, that

> the evidence in the Gorshkov series will not support the conclusion that Gorshkov is advocating a doctrinal rationalisation for the political decision to withhold a substantial portion of Soviet SLBM in order to carry out 'deterrence' in war, conduct intra-war bargaining and influence the peace talks at the end of the war.[18]

SS-N-8 overcomes SS-N-6

Instead, come war, Soviet 'decisions on [the SSBNs'] use will depend on evolving operational requirements, the course and nature of the war, and the opportunities to influence its outcome.'[19] Naturally, explained MccGwire, all but the few forward-deployed *Yankees* would be withheld from the opening strategic salvo, for the simple reason that their movement to within SS-N-6 launch distance of continental US targets had to await the preliminary destruction of key Western ASW defences.[20] MccGwire conceded that the intercontinental-range *Delta*-carried SS-N-8 had overcome the *Yankee*-based SS-N-6 time-distance constraint. In this case, he averred, the option to withhold was no more than a function of the weapon's technical characteristics:

> The option of being withheld from the initial nuclear exchange is inherent in any weapon system which has a high chance of surviving that exchange . . . the way in which such systems are used will depend on the unforeseeable circumstances and requirements of the post-exchange period. It is unlikely that a military-political leadership would be prepared to tie their hands as to use or non-use, in advance.[21]

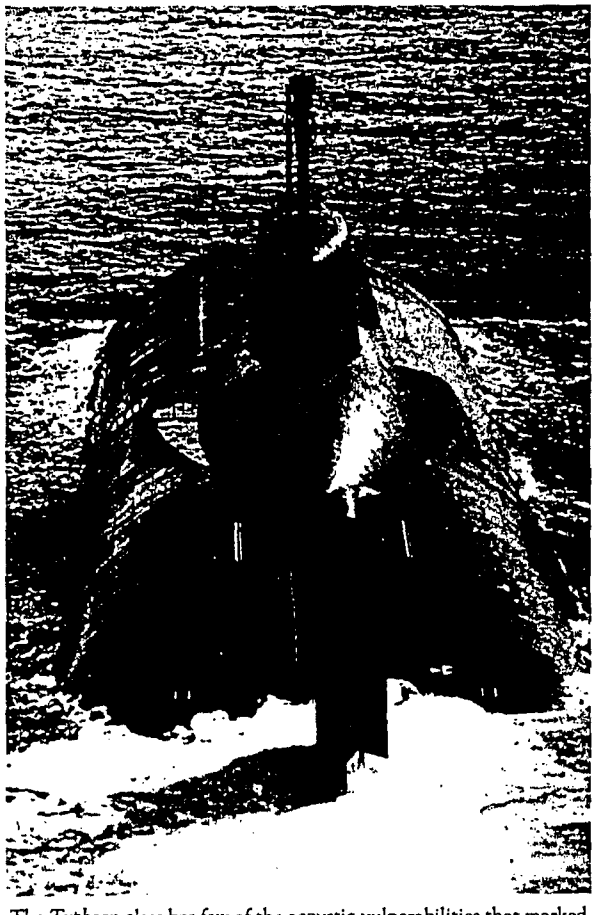
The bureaucratic model

The most intriguing explanation of the Soviet bastion choice is perhaps the one that has sought to link techno-strategic opportunities and constraints with what is held to be the Soviet Navy's perception of its 'organisational essence'. As defined by the term's originator, Morton H Kaplan, organisational essence is

> the view held by the dominant group in the organisation of what the missions and capabilities should be.[22]

Derived from the study of the behaviour of large organisations, the concept proposes that national defence choices are rarely, if ever, the product of pure 'rationality' in the service of the 'national' interest. Decisions on policy, military doctrine, or weapons are said instead to accommodate and mirror a mix of national and competing institutional interests. Political prudence dictates that the organisation craft its stand in a way that does not invite accusations of self-aggrandising parochialism; the 'solution' is to reformulate organisational preferences as national preferences, or to recast new capabilities or programmes that promote the organisation's essence as evolutionary continuities of organisational missions that already exist and have long been agreed upon. For example, during the 1950s, the US Army would justify its long-range ballistic missile programme as a natural extension of its artillery role, and the Air Force would claim responsibility for developing the intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) by portraying it as an unmanned strategic bomber. Similarly, the US Navy has found that costly shipbuilding programmes are likely to be funded more readily if they are justified in terms of international obligations and coalition warfare instead of unilateral US, or even worse, US Navy purposes.

The notion that the Soviet SSBN bastions are perhaps a creature of Soviet Navy institutional interests is implicit in the argument that the reassignment of Soviet naval general purposes forces from



The *Typhoon* class has few of the acoustic vulnerabilities that marked the first-generation Soviet SSBNs, yet is still widely expected to limit its wartime patrols to near-home bastion waters.
(Photo: US DoD)

the priority, in the 1960s, of combatting US SSBNs to protecting Soviet SSBNs was motivated by the realisation that the technical chances of carrying off the former were close to nil. It suggests that the pro-SSBN mission came about because of a fleet in search-of-a-mission.

McGruther's argument

The most compelling bureaucratic model of the bastion strategy is the work of Kenneth R McGruther in his book, *The Evolving Soviet Navy*.[23] Writing in 1978, McGruther reported that the new types of ships and weapons being fielded by the Soviet Navy were 'to a great extent only explainable in terms of economic pressures, bureaucratic politics, and institutional perspectives'.[24] He agreed that the 'first-generation' Soviet blue water fleet of the 1960s had truthfully been the 'rational' product of threat-responsive necessity and the technologies then at hand. Next however, 'possessed of new impressive looking ships and powerful weapon systems,' the naval leadership looked for 'the trick. . . to find a way to continue the existing trend by expanding the rationale—or finding a new one'.[25]

McGruther believes that the Soviet political leadership was initially sold on the Navy's vision of a 'dream fleet' with the full panoply of cruisers and aircraft carriers, when it 'bought' the promise that a 'balanced fleet' would join with other aerospace defence forces, and contribute to the national task of deflating the weight of an enemy ballistic missile attack. Once the 'new' Soviet Navy had put to sea however, its leadership reputedly discovered that the practicality of 'strategic' ASW fell far short of the promise, and that preservation of the organisation's essence called for a different rationale. The Navy's 'solution', claims McGruther, was the 'notion of designing (or at least justifying) other portions of the fleet in terms of protecting (the) SSBNs. . .'. Presumably, the Navy's reasoning turned on the awareness that a safe and secure strategic retaliatory force had become a national priority, and that it would therefore be

> much better to justify forces with arguments that are easily understood, that appeal to the general instincts of higher echelons, and that correspond closely with what others are doing.[26]

In short, the bureaucratic model interprets the SSBN bastions as evidence of a Soviet Navy 'militarism' that is largely irrelevant to military efficiency.[27]

Why explanations matter

What is striking about the foregoing discussion is that the small group of Western specialist who have made the study of Soviet naval matters their livelihood encompasses such a wide divergence of opinions about the 'whys' and 'wherefores'. Its members do, after all, read the same literature, publish in the same journals, and have equal access, more or less, to the same classified intelligence data. It is said that the 'facts' never speak for themselves, and it is therefore tempting to conclude that the reality of the bastions is very short on evidence, but very long on inference!

But does it really matter that inferences do not agree as long as the 'facts' do? How important is it to understand the potential opponent's motivations as long as one has deciphered his behaviour in practice? This article proposes that it does. At the broadest level of international behaviour, it clearly makes a difference for the kinds of policies that the West might pursue if Soviet goals are believed to be motivated by ideological aspirations and methods that reject conventional calculations of inter-state conduct. Clearly also, the 'right' military decision, be it doctrinal or hardware, depends, in part, on the expectation that it will make a difference for the opponent's calculations; a strategic force posture and doctrine built around the concept of 'assured destruction' would make little sense without the assumption of mutual rationality.

START

If this line of reasoning is accepted, it follows that understanding the Soviet SSBN bastion rationale is an important matter for Western defence planners. If a bastion strategy was forced upon the Soviet Union because of certain technical constraints, then the elimination of those constraints will presumably bring about a different SSBN patrol routine. As an example, if, as have been speculated by some analysts, the bulk of the Soviet strategic submarine fleet is kept in port due to a shortage of qualified crews, a Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) might just serve to solve this problem. It has been estimated that START could result in a 'high-quality' Soviet SSBN force of *Typhoons* and *Delta* IVs numbering no more than about 10. In that case, crew selection and training can be more rigorous, and the task of creating the command and control arrangements for keeping a large percentage of the fleet at sea more manageable.

Face-saving device

The bureaucratic explanation is the most intriguing of the three bastion models discussed. It is also the most volatile of the three, for the simple reason that it is self-negating. If it is true that Soviet naval declaratory doctrine bears little relationship to the forces actually being built, but mirrors instead what the Navy believes will 'sell' at the Politburo, then clearly, the West can afford few certain expectations about the Soviet Navy's 'real' wartime designs. If the bastions and the Soviet fleet's pro-SSBN defensive task are part and parcel, in fact, of an internal procurement strategy, no clue is given as to the actual war-fighting strategy of either the strategic or general purpose aspects of Soviet naval power.

The claim by McGruther and others that the pro-SSBN mission may have been 'invented' by the Soviet Navy as a face-saving device when the leadership had presumably come to recognise that the earlier anti-SSBN justification for its 'dream fleet' had

become untenable, is doubtful on at least two counts. In the first place, it confuses Soviet declarations of naval tasks with actual wartime functions. When Soviet naval writers cite the defeat of the opponent's SSBNs as a 'main' or 'national' task, they connote ambitions—not necessarily the war-fighting roles and missions of capabilities already in hand. Anti-SSBN operations and capabilities necessarily became a Soviet Navy requirement for the simple reason that only military organisations are responsible and can create the wherewithal for countering new external threats. It is quite certain that the Soviet Navy of the 1980s is incapable of carrying off a strategic ASW campaign with more than perhaps a 'token' measure of success; its prospects more than 15 years ago, when the alleged conversion to pro-SSBN was made, were even dimmer. This is not the same as saying, however, that the Soviets have given up on the ambition of neutralising the Western SSBN—recent Soviet writings point to a quite contrary conclusion.[28]

An easier strategy to perform

The second difficulty with the argument that the preservation of organisational essence prompted the Soviet Navy hierarchy to change the terms of the 'balanced fleet debate' and advocate the merits of a pro- instead of anti-SSBN strategy, is the implication that the first is, somehow, easier to perform. While no one has yet fought a strategic ASW campaign either against or in support of SSBNs, it is not clear at all that this is so. Indeed, a strong case can be made that the kind of Soviet SSBN 'bastion defence' that has been portrayed in Western writings may be much more difficult to carry off (and at considerable risk) than a strategic, damage-limiting offensive against the opponent's SSBNs. For example, can a Soviet command and control system that some analysts claim is incapable of 'managing' a US-style oceanic SSBN patrol routine, be realistically expected to efficiently orchestrate the wartime pro-SSBN patrols of many dozens of 'shotgun-riding' attack submarines, surface combatants, and maritime patrol aircraft? And if the assessment, since the early 1980s, is correct, that the Soviet Union plans to hide its *Typhoons* and *Deltas* underneath the north polar ice, then how did the Soviet Navy leadership go about persuading the General Staff and Politburo that *Kirov*-size battlecruisers and *Tbilisi* class aircraft carriers were mandatory prerequisites for an arctic bastion strategy? It has been proposed by some members of Mikhail Gorbachev's coterie of strategic academicians that pre-*glasnost* military programmes were decided upon in secrecy and without the benefit of responsible civilian oversight, but that, from now on, scrutinous calculations of cost and efficiency will dictate which and how Soviet national security objectives are to be achieved. Perhaps so. But if it is indeed true that the pre-*perestroika* military leadership had a, more or less, free hand in deciding how and in what programmes defence roubles would be invested, then there seems to have been little need for the Navy's convoluted balanced fleet rationale.

Finally, should one accept the hypothesis that it was a shortfall in capabilities that compelled the Soviet Navy to trade in its anti-SSBN role for a new pro-SSBN mission? Is the implication therefore that, assuming the fleet can 'fix' its strategic ASW potential, it will revert to the 'old' mission? And if so, does that mean that the bastions will cease to exist?

One-time gap will narrow

The material-technical model that holds that a bastion strategy was forced upon the Soviets due to their SSBNs' acoustic vulnerability, made good sense during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The *Yankees* and the early *Deltas* were noisy boats that stood little chance of escaping detection while in transit to their Atlantic and Pacific patrol stations. The hypothesis nevertheless raises a question: why should the Soviets have been particularly worried that their SSBNs were being detected and perhaps even tracked throughout their patrols in peacetime? If they were concerned (and this seems extremely unlikely) that Western ASW forces might strike-out-of-the-blue, they could hardly have seized upon a worse solution than a bastion strategy that evidently keeps most of the boats tied up in a few highly geographically concentrated ports and harbours.[29]

The problem with single-cause explanations of the Soviet Navy's bastion strategy is that when the alleged cause is removed, the explanation is necessarily falsified. This appears to be the fate of the material-technical model. If vulnerability to detection was indeed the original rationale for the bastions, then the Western solution for maintaining this state of affairs (if this is indeed desirable) is obvious: 'push' technology to maintain the West's detection advantage. Unfortunately, a series of widely-publicised reports and testimony by Western ASW experts and high-level naval officials in recent years have left little doubt that the one-time 'gap' will probably continue to narrow instead.[30] In 1987, the former Supreme Allied Commander, Atlantic (SACLANT), Admiral Wesley L McDonald, described the *Typhoon* class SSBN as the 'quietest submarine yet to be built anywhere', yet, as far as publicly known, the *Typhoon*'s acoustic superiority has not brought about a change in the Soviet Navy's peacetime SSBN patrol routine.[31] The material-technical explanation of the bastions says otherwise.

Declared policy of no first-use

The authority of the bastions' doctrinal model hinges on the longevity of the inferred Soviet calculation of the purpose and conduct of a future general war. McConnell's 'intra-war bargaining' and MccGwire's 'insurance' models for Soviet SSBN withholding incorporate rather different appreciations of that calculation. McConnell interpreted the withholding of Soviet SSBN fire as part and parcel of a Soviet doctrinal presupposition that a war between the two Superpowers would probably be general, intercontinental, and nuclear. MccGwire drew quite the opposite conclusion, namely that SSBN withholding was the logical corollary to a new (since the mid-1960s) Soviet doctrinal presumption against

general nuclear war.

It is fair to say that most Western students of Soviet military affairs agree that the Soviet Union has rejected nuclear war as the 'inevitable' or even the most likely form of large-scale East-West hostilities. Many believe that the Soviets are serious about their declared policy of no first-use, and that the General Staff's contingency planning has placed priority on conventional weapons for war-fighting and on nuclear weapons for deterring the West's first-use of atomic force.

Permanent solution with SS-24s and SS-25s

If this assessment is correct, important questions are raised for the intra- and post-war bargaining utility of a withheld Soviet SSBN fleet. If the Soviet Union has indeed come to the conclusion that not even the 'cause' of a war with the United States warrants the use of nuclear force, it is difficult to see why it would then take the risk and try to influence the course of (conventional) hostilities by way of strategic nuclear blackmail. Furthermore, the intra- or post-war coercive promise of the withheld SSBNs would presumably depend on the prevalence of an overall favourable correlation of strategic nuclear forces. That is to say, the withheld SSBNs would (and could) come into their own as a war-influencing lever only if and when the initial land-based strikes had produced a Soviet 'strategic advantage'.

But a conventional war will leave the strategic inventories on both sides intact, and therefore keep the Soviet Union from obtaining the favourable post first-exchange balance of strategic nuclear forces that would be the prerequisite for the SSBNs' war-terminating leverage. This being so, the question becomes what intra-conventional war deterrence/compellence purposes are served by a withheld Soviet SSBN fleet today?

MccGwire's insurance model solves this question, but it raises others. It proposes that the SSBNs' protected withholding assignment amounted to a (temporary) 'fix', designed to guard against the possibility of an American technological 'outflanking' manoeuvre against the SRF. MccGwire has also concluded that the rail- and road-mobile SS-24s and SS-25s are the Soviet Union's 'permanent' solution for land-based ICBM vulnerability, that consequently the SSBN insurance 'premium' will no longer need to be paid, and that therefore the requirement for a bastion strategy will become obsolete, and the bastions themselves de-established.

A familiar ring

The bastions' 'insurance' explanation is attractive because it has a familiar ring. It is appealing, in part because it faithfully echoes the long-standing American reasoning on behalf of a strategic triad, namely the argument that only a combination of manned bombers, ICBMs and SLBMs can ensure against the possibility that one all-out Soviet technological effort might neutralise a single-leg deterrent.

The drawback of the insurance rationale for the bastions is that it proposes to make the deterrence efficacy of the Soviet Union's land-based strategic forces dependent on the survival of an SSBN 'backstop' that is least likely, in fact, to survive a prolonged conventional war intact. No one knows how more or less successful (from a technical-operational point of view) a Western strategic ASW effort might be, but there is no doubt that some Soviet SSBNs would be sunk. In other words, the security of the Soviet SSBN fleets has, arguably, already been 'outflanked' by conventional Western ASW means. By contrast, the non-nuclear wherewithal does not exist today to 'dig out' the Soviet ICBM fields. If, as the bastions' insurance explanation claims, the ultimate purpose of the Soviet SSBN fleet is to guard against unwanted nuclear escalation, then how shall the Soviets react to the slow-moving cancellation of their insurance 'premium'?

If MccGwire's doctrinal model is the correct bastion explanation, and if it is true that the new generation of Soviet mobile land-based missiles has rendered the bastion 'interim solution' obsolete, it logically follows that the *Typhoons* and *Deltas* will assume a new withholding mission for a purpose other than insuring against an American technological breakthrough against the land-based strategic leg. What could this new mission be, and what are the implications for Western counter-strategies?

Finally, if the doctrinal *raison d'etre* of the Soviet SSBN fleet can indeed best be explained as the Soviet Union's way of insuring against the possible future vulnerability of its land-based strategic forces, then what might be the 'premium adjustments' that will follow if the American Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) comes to fruition, and 'outflanks' the Eurasian landmass? Is it possible that the SSBNs will 'resume' their 'insurance' function at dispersed equatorial latitudes?[32]

Conclusion

Understanding why the opposite side makes certain strategic choices, why it builds the kinds of weapons it does, and why its military manoeuvres and deployments are practised differently from one's own does matter (hence the contemporary popularity of so-called 'confidence-building measures'). It makes a great deal of difference for the efficacy of Western wartime counter-plans whether observed Soviet peacetime SSBN patrol practices are dictated by material constraints, doctrinal preferences, or institutional interests. Depending on the explanation, the likely wartime behaviour of the Soviet SSBN fleet and associated 'pro-SSBN' general purpose forces becomes more or less predictable, and so in consequence, the ability of Western naval power to (more or less) influence events. The Soviet Union has never acknowledged the existence of a wartime bastion strategy—it is strictly a Western construct! This construct has served as a powerful descriptive framework of Soviet naval behaviour, but it has failed at the explanatory level of analysis. Because of this, it can offer the analyst few 'plannable' clues to the future *modus operandi* of the Soviet SSBN fleet.

1 Statement of Rear Admiral William O Studeman, US Navy, Director of Naval Intelligence, Before the Seapower and Strategic and Critical Materials Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee on Intelligence Issues. Washington, DC, 1 March, 1988, p. 4.

2 See Jan Breemer, 'The Soviet Navy's SSBN Bastions: Evidence, Inference, and Alternative Scenarios,' *RUSI Journal*, June 1985; 'US Maritime Strategy: A Re-Appraisal,' *Naval Forces*, April 1987; and 'The Soviet Navy's SSBN Bastions: New Questions Raised,' *RUSI Journal*, June 1987.

3 The English language translation of 'Navies in War and Peace' was published in 11 successive installments of the US Naval Institute *Proceedings*, January through February 1974.

4 James M McConnell, 'Gorshkov's doctrine of Coercive Naval Diplomacy in Both War and Peace'; James M McConnell, Robert G D Weinland, and Michael K MccGwire, *Admiral Gorshkov on 'Navies in War and Peace'*, Report No. CRC 2757 (Arlington, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, 1974), p. 74.

5 *Ibid.*

6 S G Gorshkov, *Morskaya moshch gosudarstva*, 2nd rev. ed. Moscow: Military Publishing House of the Ministry of Defense of the USSR, 1976. Published in the English language as *The Sea Power of the State* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1979).

7 James M McConnell, 'The Gorshkov Articles, the New Gorshkov Book, and Their Relation to Policy' in Michael Mcc-Gwire and John McDonnell, Eds., *Soviet Naval Influence: Domestic and Foreign Dimensions* (New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1977), p. 577.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 585.

9 Michael MccGwire, *Military Objectives in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution), 1987.

10 This comment was footnoted in a draft to MccGwire's book, but deleted from the published version of *Military Objectives*.

11 *Military Objectives in Soviet Foreign Policy*, pp. 36-66.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 153

13 *Ibid*, pp. 98-102.

14 Joint Chiefs of Staff, *United States Military Posture for FY 1978* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1977), pp. 13-14.

15 See, for example, Ian Bellany, 'Sea Power and the Soviet Submarine Forces', *Survival* (London), January/February 1982, p. 5.

16 *Annual Department of Defense Report FY 1978* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1977), p. 62.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 63.

18 Michael MccGwire, 'Naval Power and Soviet Oceans Policy' in John Hardt and Herman Franssen, Eds., *Soviet Oceans Development*. Report prepared by the Congressional Research Service for the use of the US Senate, Committee on Commerce and National Ocean Policy Study, 94th Congress, 2nd session, 1976 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1976), p. 171.

19 *Ibid.*

20 Michael MccGwire, 'The Evolution of Soviet Naval Policy, 1960-74' in Michael MccGwire, Ken Booth, and John McDonnell, Eds. *Soviet Naval Policy: Objectives and Constraints* (New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1975), pp. 498-501.

21 Michael MccGwire, 'Naval Power and Soviet Oceans Policy', p. 182

22 Morton Halperin, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1974), p. 28

23 Kenneth R McGruther, *The Evolving Soviet Navy* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 1978).

24 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

27 On the distinction between 'militarism' and the 'military way,' see Alfred Vagts, *A History of Militarism—Civilian and Military*, revised edition (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1959), p. 13.

28 For example, the recently-published Soviet book, *The Navy: It's Role, Prospects for Development, and Employment* cites 'repulse of an enemy aerospace attack', including the 'hunting and destroying the principal strategic weapon platforms in sea and ocean theaters' as a naval mission 'of vital importance to the state'. The book in question was edited by S G Gorshkov, and included the contributions of Rear Admiral N P V'yunenko and Captains 1st Rank B N Makeyev and V D Skugarev (Moscow: Military Publishing House, 1988).

29 A graphic depiction of the geographical concentration of the Soviet Northern Fleet's submarine basing complex can be found in my *Soviet Submarines: Design, Development, and Tactics* (London: Jane's Information Group, 1989), p. 175.

30 See the *Report of the Advisory Panel on Submarine and Anti-submarine Warfare to the House Armed Services Committees on Research and Development and Seapower and Strategic and Critical Materials* (unclassified edition) (Washington, DC, March 21, 1989).

31 Wesley L McDonald, 'A Priority Shift from NATO Could Invite Disaster'. *The Almanac of Seapower 1987* (Arlington, VA: Navy League of the United States, 1987), p. 70.

32 The argument that Soviet SSBNs, deployed at equatorial latitudes, may be relatively safe from space-based SDI coverage has been advanced by, among others, Jeffrey R Cooper in 'SDI and the Sub Threat,' US Naval Institute *Proceedings*, December 1988, p. 22.