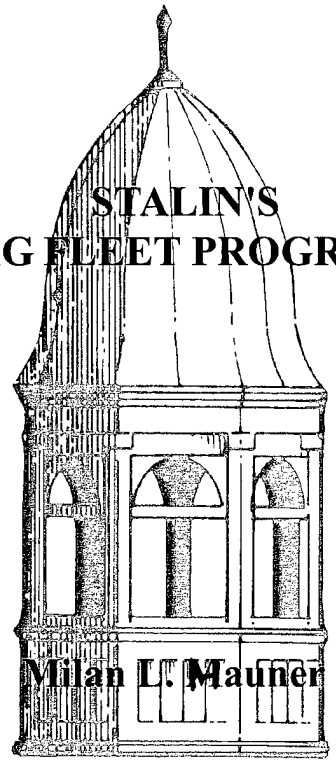
The Center for Naval Warfare Studies

STALIN'S BIG FLEET PROGRAM



Milan L. Mauner

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15.Abstract: Although Dr. Milan Hauner's study "Stalin's Big Fleet Program" has focused primarily on the formation of Big Fleets during the Tsarist and Soviet periods of Russia's naval history, there are important lessons to be learned that can be applied to other countries as well. For example, in recent years both India and China have adopted large-scale naval acquisitions and building programs. Unlike Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, modern-day India is a democratic country, with parliamentary controls over funding for military expansion; therefore, India may have little in common with the Russian and Soviet models. However, china does exhibit many striking systemic similarities with the former soviet union, including a Communist government, centralized controls over the economy, and a foreign policy that appears to include expansionist elements. Can any of the lessons learned about Stalin's "Big Fleet Program" be applied to China?

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STALIN'S
BIG FLEET PROGRAM

Milan L. Hauner

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION

> "The Party is in favor of small submarines with a short range. You can build three times as many submarines for your money as big ones. Both parties had valid technical arguments.... but the actual problem lay in a quite different sphere. Big submarines mean a policy of aggression, to further world revolution. Small submarines mean: coastal defense - that is, self-defense, and postponement of world revolution."
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> Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon* (1941)

Stalin's decision of 1936[1] to provide Soviet Russia within ten years with an ocean-going Big Fleet was aimed not only to defend the motherland but also to further World Revolution. But this was not the whole story. National prestige was also a factor. Looking from the vantage point of Russian history, Stalin's decision was not a unique one—other Russian leaders had used navy-building to solidify their rule. In fact, the founder of the Russian Navy, Peter the Great, had started from a clean slate, having founded St. Petersburg in 1703, "Russia's window to Europe," through which he also brought to Russia contemporary shipbuilding skills. For a long time Russia would have to rely on foreign expertise to expand her Navy. Within less than twenty years, nevertheless, at the end of Peter's reign, a Russian Baltic Fleet had emerged consisting of about 30 men-of-war, ranging from 100-gun to 54-gun ships-of-the-line, and perfectly capable of

[1] In fact Stalin first announced his determination to build a "Big Navy" at the end of December 1935 at a special meeting to which he invited his inner Cabinet and a group of young officers from the Pacific Fleet (see further chapter 4). For practical purposes, however, one should consider the year of 1936 as the proper beginning of the "Big Navy", as most of the plans were conceived and developed during that year.

defeating Sweden as the dominant Baltic naval power.[2] Stalin's Big Fleet Program was no less ambitious.

Periods of Russian naval expansion, however, were followed by long stretches of stagnation. Because of the relative slowness of maritime technology transfer from Western Europe, it took Tsarist Russia a considerable time, much longer than on land, to rebound as a sea power after her various defeats and lost wars. Such low watersheds for the Russian Navy were the consequences of the Crimean War, of the Russo-Japanese War (including in particular the fall of Port Arthur and the disastrous naval battle of Tsushima), and finally the outcome of the World War I and the subsequent Civil War, at the end of which whatever remained floating from the Tsarist Navy was hardly combat-worthy. It was this navy that the Bolsheviks inherited, and that Stalin hoped to reform.

After each disaster, nevertheless, Russian ambition to sail again seemed to have become stronger. It would take fifty years after the defeat at the Crimea to rebound. But rebound she did on the eve of the Russo-Japanese War into the third place among the sea powers—if one ignores her complex geography that forced her to maintain separate fleets in, first, two, then three, and finally four separate seas in different climatic zones, with a consequence that these fleets could not support each other in time of war.

A decade after Tsushima, Tsarist Russia found herself involved in the Great War from which the revolutions and the disastrous Civil War followed. Instead of learning from the crushing defeat at Tsushima to rethink her naval strategy, Imperial Russia instead plunged into the same uncharted waters, hoping to do better the next time. Most importantly, dreadnoughts were launched for the first time on the Baltic and Black Seas,

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[2] I.P.Spasskii et al., *Istoriya otechestvennogo sudostroieniya,(St.Petersburg: Sudostroienie, 1996) vol.I, 170-1.*

built mainly for reasons of Great Power pride and prestige, but with a limited tactical purpose that could have been better fulfilled by other means.

The main problem was geography: neither the Tsarist nor the Stalinist regime was able to solve the dilemma of utter isolation of the Baltic and Black Sea Fleets, or the geographic remoteness of the Pacific Fleet, or the climatic harshness of the Northern Fleet. Granted, there was some canal-building under the Tsarist regime to connect the Baltic and the White Sea, but these waterways were not for the use of warships. Further digging and widening was undertaken by the Bolsheviks, using slave labor. Eventually, the mighty Volga was linked to the system—but this still did not solve the basic dilemma of the isolated Black Sea, which was only partially solved after World War II, again using slave labor, with the construction of the Volga-Don Canal.

Given the prevalent Mahanite doctrine, deeply entrenched in the minds of Russian "navalists," that only dreadnoughts could fight dreadnoughts, not only was Russia obliged to build these giant and costly ironclads, but her flawed doctrine forced her to build many more than her potential enemies. While she did not succeed in the Baltic against an industrially much more powerful Germany, Russia managed in the Black Sea against a weaker Turkey to achieve a 4-to-1 superiority in dreadnoughts from 1915 onward. But elsewhere, in the Baltic, the White Sea, and especially in the Pacific, Russia could not maintain this ship-against-ship race without reliable naval allies. Reliable allies were the one thing the Soviet Union did not have.

Twenty years later, however, under Stalin's leadership, the Soviet Union was to aspire to possess at the end of a ten-year intensive building program the largest ocean-

going navy in the world, the so-called "Big Fleet Program." The origins, construction, and ultimate failure of this program will be the subject of this monograph.

In retrospect, it would seem that the most appropriate analogy to Stalin's Big Fleet Program would be Tsarist shipbuilding program launched under the dynamic Navy Minister Admiral Grigorevich in 1912. This example, neglected so far in the sparse literature on the subject, needs to be highlighted for several reasons. First, we now have access to most naval records of the last years of the Tsarist Navy, as well as to many private papers of Russian participants of the 1912 program who survived into the Soviet period. A great deal has been published since the inception of *Perestroika* and *Glasnost.*

Second, there appears to be a striking similarity between the two shipbuilding programs, which appear on the professional level to be guided by the same naval doctrine, to suffer under the same physical constraints of Russia's forbidding geography, and to be hampered by the same shortcomings of her shipbuilding industry. Moreover, both seemed to be guided by the same naval view emphasizing the irreplaceable role of the big capital ships. But, because of the extremely unfavorable geostrategic conditions that afflicted Russia—Tsarist as well as Soviet—capital ships were time and time to prove themselves inadequate for the task.

As a result of these limitations, in both World War I and II the main role of the Tsarist and Soviet navies remained the same: to assist the ground forces in every way possible. Russian ships rarely ventured on the open sea, but surface ships were instead extensively used as floating batteries. Even lend-lease supplies from the Anglo-Americans were not usually protected by Russian warships; the Allies provided their own convoy protection, which was both more effective and efficient.

Therefore, although the Soviet government was ready for strategic reasons to expand its shipbuilding industry, even into some of the most inaccessible regions of the vast Eurasian continent, the severe limitations imposed by climate, distance, and bad communications prevailed. Even the introduction of the Gulag system of slave labor—a very sinister but important factor in the process of rapid Soviet industrialization and re-militarization—could not overcome these problems.

These natural limitations help to explain one of the most important features of Stalin's Big Fleet Program: it was never completed during the dictator's lifetime. This happened for a number of reasons, discussed at greater length in the following chapters, but the major reason for abandoning the original program was, of course, Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941. The large warship projects, especially on the most threatened shipyards in Leningrad and Nikolaev, had to be stopped—with the significant exception of the Gulag realm in the Arctic and the Far East where shipbuilding continued, albeit at much slower pace.

Even though Stalin's Big Fleet Program was never realized, a historical reconstruction of this program is well worth the effort for several reasons. First, an understanding of Stalin's program fills an important gap in Russian as well as in comparative naval history; Stalin's Big Fleet Program has scarcely been mentioned, let alone studied, in Western naval colleges and institutions.[3]

Second, on the Soviet side, given the nature of Stalin's dictatorship—with its mania for foreign spies and military secrets—there was simply no information available on this

[3] A good example which illustrates this ignorance in the West is the commentary to Sergei Gorshkov's relevant chapter covering the reconstruction of the Soviet Navy 1928-41. Although Gorshkov refers explicitly to the Big Navy construction program of the late 1930s, his American commentator, Vice Admiral J.F.Calvert, has decided to bypass the reference completely. See Sergei G.Gorshkov, *Red Star Rising at Sea* , U.S.Naval Institute 1974: 65-75.

naval program. In fact, the Big Fleet Program coincided with the Great Purges in the Soviet Union, and the Soviet Navy suffered irreplaceable losses, especially among its senior officer corps. Therefore, there are few, if any, eyewitnesses left who understood the details of the Big Fleet Program. In addition, those few naval experts in the West, who followed naval matters in the USSR, were usually too narrowly specialized and concentrated only on the purely technical side of the program.

Third, Stalin's Big Navy Program offers useful lessons that can be compared with other similar naval building programs in Russia, or in other countries. Of course, Tsarist Russia's 1912 Naval program comes to mind, as does the Admiral Tirpitz's *Flottengesetze* of 1898 and 1900 to provide Germany with a *Hochseeflotte* to challenge the Royal Navy. Also, the great "White Fleet" of Theodore Roosevelt should be mentioned. Finally, Hitler's "*Z-Plan*" of January 1939 was an obvious equivalent to Stalin's Big Fleet Program; similar to Stalin's fleet, Hitler's was also a failure—though for different reasons. Realizing that the war was definitely keeping Germany on the dry land, Hitler discontinued the "Z-Plan" which was supposed to equip Germany with ten large and ten smaller battleships by 1945.

Perhaps most importantly, however, a study of Stalin's Big Fleet Program will give us a yardstick to examine those contemporary countries that have based their navies largely on Soviet platforms and equipment, and that are undergoing considerable growth within their even strictly regional naval capabilities. Among this number, the growing Indian Navy and especially the naval acquisitions program of the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) would appear to have some important elements in common with Stalin's Big Fleet Program.

2. HISTORIOGRAPHY

Until the arrival of *Glasnost* and *Perestroika,* research in Russian naval archives was seriously hampered by the widespread obsession with secrecy—even for periods dealing with the much-criticized pre-revolutionary Imperialist Russia. Because drawing parallels between situations in which similar war aims and naval doctrines were formulated, or specific ship constructions were carried out, could lead to obvious conclusions about the USSR's contemporary naval strategy, close historical research in naval archives was discouraged by the Soviet authorities.

This negative policy prevailed until the arrival of Mikhail Gorbachev and the beginning of *Glasnost* in the late 1980s. Almost over night production of articles and monographs on naval themes appeared. Since that time, there has been an incredible proliferation of publications on Soviet ship construction, including both popular and academic works, which provide detailed source references.[4] Memoirs of prominent sailors, naval architects and ship designers are also widely available.

Naval records abound, particularly for the last two decades of Tsarist Russia, when the discussion on naval doctrine or design problems of a particular warship could be pursued on an almost hour-by-hour basis. Since Tsarist times, however, the situation has not improved much in terms of archival organization. The fall of communism and the disintegration of the Soviet Union led to a radical but also a very chaotic reorganization

[4] One of the first monographs on Russian ship constructions, which is based on impressive research of naval records and personal reminiscences of the participants, is J.N.Westwood, *Russian Naval Construction, 1905-45* (Macmillan, 1994).

of the principal naval archives in St. Petersburg and Gatchina.[5] Numerous collections have changed status from classified to declassified and vice versa. Therefore, published sources have provided the bulk of the material for this work.

A short list of experts on the Soviet Navy must include Siegfried Breyer, who has published numerous works on the topic. He was one of the first to conduct basic research on Stalin's Big Fleet, and his results are still valid today. In particular, Breyer's charts, plans, and photographs of Soviet warships have no equal.

Robert W. Herrick's *Soviet Naval Strategy* (1968) remains still today by far the best account on the Soviet navy and its strategic thinking. This is due to the author's unmatched knowledge of Russian/Soviet secondary sources—at the time when primary sources remained out of range even for senior Soviet researchers and naval officers—and this book is especially sound from the point of view of its balanced judgment; Herrick maintains the view that Soviet Naval Strategy was basically defensive.

Among important witnesses of the Stalin era on sea was one of his admirals, N.G.Kuznetsov, who has left quite a few personal reminiscences, which he begun updating after Stalin's death..

I. D. Spasskij et al. have produced five volumes (1994-6) on Russian ship constructions. They are invaluable for their richness of reliable information. Spasskij collectively used primary documents from RGAVMF (Russian State Naval Archives), including files entitled "Morskii Generalnyi shtab; Glavnyi morskoi shtab, Glavnoe upravlenie korablestroeniya, Morskoj tekhnicheskij komitet; Moskoe ministerstvo; and private papers of such famous figures like K. G. Grigorevich, N. O. Essen, V. L. Klado, and many others. His works also include documentation from specific shipyards.

[5] Tsentralnyi Gosudarsvenyi Arkhiv Voenno-Morskogo Flota , St. Petersburg.

I. V. Kasatonov's *Tri veka* (1996) is best for a clear and balanced overview of how Stalin reached the decision to build his Big Fleet, while Admiral N. G. Kuznetsov's various accounts, including his private papers, are included in his posthumous publication (2000).

More recently, Jurgen Rohwer's and Mikhail S. Monakov's *Stalin's Ocean-Going Fleet* (2001) published the first detailed western survey on the subject of Stalin's Big Fleet Program of 1936-47. Although the technical data in this work is impressive, there is little useful interpretation of the complexities that led Stalin to launch his program. This book was based on an earlier article, published in *The International History Review* in 1996.

Finally, John Westwood's *Russian Naval Construction 1905-1945* (1994) is by far the best single account on Russian naval construction to appear in the West following *Glasnost*. For a non-Russian, Westwood had done a truly amazing amount of work with Russian primary and secondary sources. He also has a very full appreciation of Russian society and how it interacted with various naval programs, including Stalin's.

3. THE TSARIST HERITAGE

In 1905, two Russian fleets were virtually destroyed by the Japanese: the Pacific Fleet was gradually depleted in and around the siege of Port Arthur; the Baltic Fleet, after its epic journey round the world, was crushed at the Battle of Tsushima in May 1905. Having been so thoroughly annihilated by the Japanese, the Russian Navy found itself without a single battle fleet on her principal sea outlet, the Baltic, to protect access to the imperial capital St. Petersburg and the Baltic coastline. There were only two obsolete battleships available in the Baltic (and two more of the pre-dreadnought type under construction). The determination to restore Russia's naval power was made clear immediately after the Tsushima disaster by the Tsar himself. On 29 June 1905 Nicholas II issued a directive in which he stated that "the primary and sacred duty ... is to secure the defense of the coastline in all our waters, and subsequently, when resources permit, gradually to re-establish our battle squadrons."[6]

This directive seemed to underline the two strategic priorities Russia's naval strategy was facing in geopolitical terms—regardless of the political nature of the regime—the defense of its enormously long coastline and the need for an ocean-going fleet, which in the era of *Navalism* could be translated only as a balanced ocean-going battle fleet, aspiring to acquire the command of the sea. This latter doctrine was chiefly associated with the name of Admiral Alfred T. Mahan (1840–1914), who had a large following in Russia. In the absence of indigenous theory, Russian naval circles turned to foreign authors like P. H. Colomb, Julian Stafford Corbett, and especially to Mahan's

[6] After Mikhail A.Petrov, *Podgotovka Rossii k mirovoi voine na more* (Moscow, 1926) 96.

doctrine of sea power.[7] The most outspoken Russian Mahanist was Captain Nikolai L. Klado (1862-1919), responsible for the main strategy courses at the Nikolaevsky Naval Academy in St. Petersburg.[8]

In spite of the prevailing influence of Mahanism, the opposing theoretical concept, known as the "Young School" (after its French origin "*Jeune Ecole,*" developed in the 1880s in France by Admiral Aube), seemed to be better suited for Russia's strategic requirements because of her shallow waters and coastal defense requirements in both the Baltic and the Black Sea. Moreover, the Young School seemed to have been proven by the most recent experience of sea warfare against Japan. Although most sea powers interpreted the lessons of the 1904-5 War through the Japanese experience, which would overwhelmingly speak in favor of the Mahanists, the core of Japan's success lay in the efficient application of aggressive sea power through her battleships and cruisers. Japan's victory at Tsushima is perhaps the best example the Russians might have.

A. IMPACT OF TSUSHIMA

The Russo-Japanese War provided ample data for the competing schools. Ironically, the two visible successes of the Russian Pacific Fleet in the war against Japan were precisely those advocated by the supporters of the "Young School." Out of Admiral Togo's original six modern battleships two were lost due to Russian-laid minefields. The

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[7] The theory of sea power of the American admiral A.T.Mahan, exercised enormous influence at the turn of the century. His two books were translated into Russian: *Vliyanie morskoi sily na istoriyu*, (St.Petersburg 1894), and *Vliyanie morskoi sily na frantsuzskuyu revolyutsiyu i imperiyu* (St.Petersburg, 1898).

[8] Among his more than one hundred works on naval strategy and history, the most frequently quoted are: *Voenno-morskaya istoriya* (1901); *Sovremennaya morskaya voina: Morskie zametki o russko-yaponskoi voineI (* 1905); *Etyudy po strategii* (1914).

second proof of success in favor of the "Young School" teaching were a series of cruiser raids, carried out at the beginning of the war under the leadership of Captain Nikolai O. von Essen, commander of the fast cruiser *Novik*, attached to the Port Arthur squadron,[9] and Counter Admiral Karl Yessen's Vladivostok-based cruiser squadron, which was deployed in raiding operations disrupting the lines of communication between the Japanese Islands and the disembarked troops on the Asian mainland. Unfortunately, little attention was paid to these lessons.

Von Essen, one of the outstanding naval officers from the Pacific Fleet, who distinguished himself in the war with Japan, was in November 1908 appointed Commander of the Baltic Fleet. His radical war plan proposed that instead of waiting passively for the superior German naval forces to advance, the Russian Baltic Fleet should be concentrated close to the German border at the furthest advanced Russian ice-free base of Libava (in German, Libau). From here, after the outbreak of war, the Russians would initiate at night a series of offensive minelaying operations deep in enemy waters around the likely routes the German fleet would take from Kiel, Stettin, and Danzig.

The Naval General Staff did not like this plan, considering it too risky, and so suggested to von Essen that the fleet should be transferred from Libava to Kronstadt to meet its main task—to ensure the defense of the capital against an enemy sea attack. Von Essen had to submit a new plan, according to which the approach to St. Petersburg at the narrowest section of the Gulf of Finland, between Nargen (off Reval) and Porkkala,

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[9] In the early days of the war *Novik* , accompanied by destroyers, led sorties to harass the Japanese blockade around Port Arthur. After the loss of cruiser *Novik* in 1904 the name was transferred to the fast destroyer built in 1912 in the Baltic. Seea also Charles E.Adams, "Der Wiederaustieg der russischen Kriegsmarine in den Jahren 905-1914", *Marine-Rundschau*, 1(1964), 12-22.

would be protected by advanced minefields, for about half its length by coastal artillery on either shore, and with the Baltic battle fleet defending its central position east of the island of Hogland.[10] Thus the compromise plan of 1910 between the Naval General Staff and von Essen, the plan with which the Tsarist Navy entered the war in 1914, could be seen as a naval equivalent of the "positional warfare" so much loved by the dry land generals.[11]

In his critical review of the 1912 Naval Operational Plan, the naval historian Podsoblyaev rightly argues that, as during the Russo-Japanese War, the *Mahanist* view of conserving the battle fleet for its main purpose, i.e. the artillery dual with the adversary's fleet, prevailed over the idea of undertaking offensive operations against the enemy through aggressive minelaying. A Baltic Fleet operating from ice-free Libava, as von Essen proposed, would have been able to perform operations all-year round, while still retaining the option to carry out preventive strikes by laying minefields, whereas having retreated in the Gulf of Finland, the fleet was to be immobilized between December and March because of the ice.[12]

Critical questions, however, continued to linger: could the navy's vital task—i.e. the defense of the Baltic coast and of the capital—be achieved by a smaller and less expensive navy with a purely defensive role? On the other hand, should the German challenge, consisting of a superior number of battleships of the dreadnought type, mean that the Russians were expected to respond to it in kind by concentrating a matching

[10] Evgenii F. Podsoblyaev, „The Russian Naval General Staff and the Evolution of Naval Policy, 1905-1914",*The Journal of Military History* 66(January 2002) 57-69.
[11] J.N.Westwood, *Russian Naval Construction, 1905-1941*(London: Macmillan, 1994) 34.
[12] Podsoblyaev, 62.

strength in the Baltic? Did Russia really need dreadnoughts to fight enemy dreadnoughts?

The only Russian battle fleet available after Tsushima to demonstrate the validity of the Mahanite doctrine of sea power was on the Black Sea. It consisted of five old battleships (with two more being commissioned), whose crews, being in a state of semi-permanent mutiny,[13] were considered a greater threat to their officers than to the enemy. Moreover, the Black Sea Fleet was in the most strategically inconvenient position for power projection, since it was locked in a cul-de-sac location due to the Turkish Straits. Because the Russians could not take the straits without strong allies coming from the Mediterranean side, the fleet would be of no use for operations in other war theaters outside the Black Sea.

Under such circumstances, the costly introduction of the planned four dreadnoughts to the Russian Black Sea Fleet seemed to make little sense. The Turkish Navy also posed no threat. Despite earlier rumors, it failed to acquire dreadnoughts. However, due to a sheer coincidence, a German dreadnought, the battlecruiser *Goeben*, trying to escape from the pursuit of a British squadron in the Mediterranean, would join the Turkish Fleet with the small cruiser *Breslau* in the summer of 1914. Still, the presence of seven older battleships in the Black Sea would still make Russia superior to the combined Turko-German naval forces in that particular theater of war. Moreover, four new dreadnoughts were being built in Nikolaev.

The geopolitical characteristics of the Black Sea area presented different problems for the Russians. Superior forces were needed to protect sprawling coastal cities like

[13] The legendary mutiny took place on board of the then battleship. *Knyaz Potëmkin Tavritchesky*, glorified during the Soviet period by Sergei Eisenshtein's film masterpiece, made in 1925. After the mutineers surrendered the disgraced ship was re-baptized from *Potemkin* to *Panteleimon.*

Odessa and to support, conversely, landing operations along the coast. Moreover, one cannot underestimate the power of history and ideology, particularly in that part of the world. Since the fall of Constantinople in the mid-fifteenth century to the Turks, the reconquest of the "Navel of the Earth" became regarded as the noblest war aim for the Christian successor states of the Byzantine Empire, especially Russia. This was directly reflected in Danilevsky's prophetic book "*Russia and Europe,*" in which *Tsargrad* is being reclaimed as the future capital of the Russian Orthodox world empire.

From the navy's point of view, such conquest would open the Bosporus in both directions for Russian warships. The consequences would greatly benefit Russia's sea power status since it would not only allow the frequent interchange of war vessels between the Baltic and the Black Sea, which had been attempted with great difficulties since the 18th century, but would also introduce a Russian Mediterranean Squadron, which Stalin would love to have had some twenty years later when the Spanish Civil War presented him with new opportunities. Alas, it was not to be.

With regard to the Far East, after Tsushima popular press and literature emphasized the dominant feeling for revenge or reckoning, epitomized in the Russian word *Rasplata*, meaning "Retribution," which gave the name to one of the best-sellers of the era.[14] It generated the desire for reconquest as an act of self-defense to neutralize the irrational fear of "Yellow Peril," which a few Russians visualized in the form of a combined Sino-Japanese invasion of Siberia, probably as far as Irkutsk.[15]

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[14] A.P.Semenov, *Rasplata* (1906); see also by the same author: *O napravlenii v razvitii russkogo flota* (1907).

[15] M.Rimskii-Korsakov, "Threat from the East", *Morskoi Sbornik*, 1(1907) 61-73. * For the analysis of the propaganda slogan "Yellow Peril" see my *What is Asia to us*?(1990).

To offset this threat, huge sums had to be found for doubling the tracks of the Trans-Siberian Railway and for the completion of its new branch along the Amur, which was to provide an alternative route to Vladivostok after the Russian withdrawal from Manchuria. The crushing military disasters, epitomized in the very words "Port Arthur" and "Tsushima," remained deeply engraved on the hearts of Russian patriots.[16] They were echoed forty years later in Stalin's address, free of any notion of proletarian internationalism, welcoming the re-occupation of Port Arthur by Soviet ships after Japan's surrender.

B. NEW CONSTRUCTIONS

Changes in the post-Tsushima Russian navy were slow to come and painful to implement. When they were implemented, however, they were far-reaching and affected all levels: organizational, material, financial, doctrinal, and personnel issues. As far as the human factor was concerned, in spite of the military disaster in the Far East and the revolutionary chaos at home, Russia's educated classes were not crushed in spirit. On the contrary, they were analyzing what went wrong and looking forward to how to rebuild the disastrously damaged navy. The junior officers and the military intelligentsia in the Navy, in particular, wanted to correct the mistakes of the past and make a decisive contribution to a modern Russian Navy. With the advent of dreadnoughts these supporters thought that the Russian Navy would ride on the crest of societal modernization in the Empire. The young officers felt they were being propelled overnight

[16] See novels by Semonov and Novikov-Priboj...

into a new age. Since the demise of Russia's once numerous but obsolete Navy was so devastating, the young officers felt they could now start with a new slate.

Six Russian and twenty-one foreign companies entered the design competition for the first Russian dreadnought in early 1908. The priorities of the Naval General Staff were known to be, among others: four in-line turrets on the same level to avoid super-firing, with an original disposition of boilers and turbines to reach a top speed no less than 23 knots; thus, more powerful and faster than any of the known British and German dreadnoughts finished or under construction at the time. But given the notorious slowness of Russian shipyards (three years on average for a capital ship as against 18-20 months elsewhere), not much progress could be made.[17]

Although three foreign designs appeared on the short-list after the first round, German Blohm & Voss, British Vickers and the Italian naval designer Vittorio Cuniberti, with its original four in-line turrets on the centerline,[18] due to the complexity of the credit financing and strong government pressure, it was the Baltic Works of St. Petersburg which ended up as the favorite. A well-timed French loan proved decisive. Paris protested very strongly when the German firm Blohm & Voss seemed to have been winning the contract.

The final Russian design was largely based on that of the Italian Cuniberti, but had to add a number of improvements and special features, such as the eccentric

[17] Vickers had offered to build the first Russian dreadnought in 20 months, which, not surprisingly. Must have offended the Russian national pride...(See Spasskii, III, 131ff.).

[18] Cuniberti designed the first Italian dreadnought *Dante Alighieri* in 1907, which had its four triple-gun turrets on the centerline. Westwood (p.66) relishes in quoting the somewhat biased notorious paragraph , which used to appear, year after year until the 1950s, in the *Jane's Fighting Ships*: "The late Ge.Vittorio Cuniberti prepared the original design for this type. The Ministry of Marine afterwards altered the plans to include Russian ideas of armouring , ice-breaking bows and other features. Further, to obtain higher speed, hull design is relatively lighter than in contemporary battleships or other fleets. Said to be unhealthy, unsanitary and badly ventilated..."

icebreaking prow.[19] Eventually, three series of Russian dreadnoughts were designed: the 12-inch-gun *Gangut* class of four battleships for the Baltic, followed by the 12-inch-gun *Imperatritsa Maria* class of three sister ships for the Black Sea (the fourth one, *Imperator Nikolai I*, was launched but never completed); and the faster and bigger 14-inch-gun *Kinburn* class of four battlecruisers for the Baltic. Both battleship classes were completed between 1914 and 1916; the battlecruisers were launched but never completed.

If the Russian *Gangut* class were to fight other dreadnoughts anywhere in the world, as their proponents had intended, what would be the likely outcome? Taking the three main criteria—armor, guns and speed—while the Russian ships had somewhat thinner armor, compared with the American (*Michigan* and *Delaware*), British (*Dreadnought, Bellerophon, St. Vincent,* and *Hercules*), and German (*Nassau* and *Ostfriesland*) dreadnoughts then available, they could outgun and outrun them. Although after only five to seven years after completion they were already outclassed, one may agree with Westwood's balanced judgment that the first four Russian dreadnoughts could certainly be considered a match for any ship the Germans might send into the Baltic.[20]

However, it was not only in the category of dreadnoughts that the Russian Navy had scored a success. Even more spectacular innovation was achieved with the launching in 1911 of the *Novik,* the fastest and best-armed destroyer in the world.[21] It had many unique features, such as four quick-firing 4-inch guns of exceptional velocity, unmatched by any other navy. Its torpedo armament had a matchless arrangement of three triple

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[19] Thus, Adm.Gorshkov controversial judgment on the supposed low quality and "slavish imitation of foreigners in the types of ships often imperfect and obsolete" does not seem fair, especially as he praises on the same page A.N.Krylov, I.G.Bubnov and others, as "greatest Russian shipbuilders". Cf. Sergei G.Gorshkov, *The Sea Power of the State* (Annapolis: Naval Inst.Press, 1979), 91.

[20] Westwood, 65. One is tempted to add, until the completion in 1918 of the 15-inch-gun dreadnoughts of the *Baden* class.

[21] Westewood (p.78) calls her " the Dreadnought among destroyers".

launching tubes. She also carried mine-laying equipment, another special feature of Russian destroyers in the Baltic waters.

Although built in the Putilov yard in St. Petersburg, the *Novik's* large boilers were provided by the German Vulcan works in Stettin, giving the oil-fired turbines an output of almost 42,000 hp (about the same output as the dreadnought *Gangut*) and reached a record speed of 37.3 knots at her trials—a top speed unmatched by any other destroyer anywhere in the world at the time. She was paid through public subscription and gave her name to a whole class of larger Russian destroyers, subsequently built for the Baltic and Black Sea fleets, which were to last as the main work horse through the early Soviet period until the Second World War.

One can only agree with the enthusiastic assessment of Westwood, and others, that the *Novik* would have been a match for a light cruiser, in addition to being fast enough to escape from any ship. A flotilla of Noviks, capable of launching in one salvo just under one hundred torpedoes, would not be the kind of encounter a battle fleet commander would relish at night in narrow waters of the Baltic. Such a flotilla could have also laid a nocturnal minefield of about 600 mines in enemy waters. The Navy Ministry acquired with the Noviks virtually a new class of all-round ships ideally suited for the major naval task in the Baltic: the protection of the defensive mine barriers. The creators of the *Novik* thus provided an added heavy argument for the anti-dreadnought lobby that, at least for the defense of the Baltic coast, the four cherished dreadnoughts were unnecessary. However, nobody seemed to want to say this aloud.[22]

As a direct consequence of the Russian domestic crisis of 1905 and the disaster in the Far East there was considerable political and social shake-up, which in the realm of

[22] *Ibid.*, 78-89.

government was to be confined in the experimental framework of constitutional monarchy. Perhaps a more substantial proof of Russian social dynamism was the completion of the first comprehensive modern census (1897-1907) in Russian history, whose vital statistics placed the Russian Empire[23] in second place among the great powers after the United States.[24]

Using extensively both the contemporary press and the now accessible naval records for the period of 1905–1918, the Russian naval historian, Evgenii F. Podsoblyaev, has shown how wide-ranging was the discussion concerning the new ship constructions and the reorganization of the Russian Navy after Tsushima.[25] Not only was there constant infighting between the Russian *Mahanists* and their opponents, but the impression one gets is how colorful and varied, especially in terms of institutions, personalities, and informal discussion groups (*kruzhki*), this brief period of Russian constitutional monarchy must have been. Members of the Military-Naval Circle,[26] for instance, were discussing passionately in the leading naval journal *Morskoi Sbornik* and elsewhere in the uncensored specialized journals, the same questions, which were, twenty years later, present in the mind of Stalin and his subordinates in the mid-1930s: does Russia need an ocean-going Navy? What kind of units should it be composed of and how should it be distributed?

Extended to the other participants in the debate, such as the Naval General Staff,[27] the Navy Ministry, the War Ministry, the Army General Staff, the State Defense Council,

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[23] Here the geopolitical adjective "*Rossiiskii*" is identical with the Eurasian Empire, rather than the ethno-linguistic term "*Russkii*", which should be confined to European Russia.

[24] The results of the census are neatly summed up and discussed in terms of global impact by one of Russia's leading scientists , D. Mendeleev, in : *K poznaniyu Rossii* (St.Petersburg 1907).

[25] Podsoblyaev , 37-70. See also Westwood.

[26] Podsoblyaev. 42-48.

[27] Founded in 1906 as part of the reforms after war , it was known as *'genmor'*.

the Finance Ministry, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the various legislative groups and committees in the State *Duma*, the picture emerging from the late Russian imperial society is that of a bustling and intellectually very much active society. Furthermore, pressure groups like the "Navy Renewal League (*Liga obnovleniya flota*), following the models in other navies like the British "Navy League" and the German "Flottenverband," were founded to influence the public. There was also a Russian Navy League proper, the "Russian Naval Union," approved in 1906—a creation of forward-looking officers with connections to the naval general staff—with additional support from two grand dukes and successive navy ministers.[28]

There was also a typical capitalist institution regulating fund-raising: "The Special Committee for Strengthening the Fleet by Voluntary Donation," which had been set up just on the eve of war with Japan.[29] And the Naval Technical Committee [MTK], with its Chief Shipbuilding Inspector, A. N. Krylov, known as "the Master of Russian Hydrodynamics," whose long life extended from the ships sent to Tsushima to the plans for Stalin's big fleet on the eve of World War II, and I. G. Bubnov, A. I. Maslov, G. F. Schlesinger and others.[30]

Critical questions, however, continued to linger. Could the Navy's vital task, that is the defense of the Baltic coast and of the imperial capital, be achieved by a smaller navy with a purely defensive role? On the other hand, should the German threat, consisting of several high-sea dreadnought squadrons, be left unchallenged? Should Russia abstain from building dreadnoughts in the Baltic at all? Thus, the basic argument could be reduced to the three basic questions: What sort of navy does Russia need?

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[28] Westwood, 8.
[29] Its influential journal carried the title *More I Ego Zhizn* [The Sea and Its Life]. Westwood, 8,10,46..
[30] Westwood, 14-20; Spasskii, III, 144-172 passim.

Where and how should it be deployed? Do we have the resources for it? Some of these same questions were to haunt Stalin in the early 1930s.

C. THE 1912 NAVAL PROGRAM

Tsarist Russia, in theory at least, aspired to have three more or less balanced fleets in three parts of the world: in North-Eastern Europe (the newly founded Arctic Flotilla was seen at the time a mere extension of the Baltic Fleet), Southern Europe, and the Far East. Prior to the war with Japan, the Pacific Fleet was in fact an extended arm of the Baltic Fleet since most of its warships had been built there. In 1904 the Pacific Fleet became the strongest in the Russian Navy. However, after Tsushima it had lost most of its ships and its chief basing facility, the ice-free Port Arthur; only a small Cruiser Squadron based in Vladivostok was left behind. Each fleet, under ideal conditions, was supposed to possess an autonomous battle fleet squadron, which of course presupposed extensive basing facilities. Underlying the intensive discussions on the post-Tsushima naval programs was, of course, the central question whether Russia could afford to remain a great naval power on three oceans simultaneously. Geography never did favor Russia.[31]

In 1914, after the launching of the first Russian dreadnoughts, an enterprising, but unfortunately anonymous, naval enthusiast suggested building a canal system between the Baltic and the Black Sea, so as to unite all anticipated 12 Russian dreadnoughts if needed for a decisive sea action. Rather than digging another Panama Canal across

[31] To blame mother nature and the Tsarist regime, for the alleged lack of " inter-theatre manoeuvre by the naval forces," as Adm.Gorshkov does in his praised work (*The Sea Power of the State*, Annapolis 1979: 92) is farfetched.

Russia from the Baltic to the Black Sea, he recommended a canal only wide enough to accept huge floating pontoons about 120 ft. wide and requiring only 12 ft. draught, which could carry dreadnoughts like floating ducks in tow through the sluices, capable of moving a battleship by tugboats downstream to the Black Sea in about 25-30 days. The author may have been inspired by the successful widening of the Kiel Canal by the Germans and the construction of the Panama Canal by the Americans.[32]

But, not even the Soviets with their totalitarian system and almost unlimited supply of slave labor could take up such a challenge, although they used both the river canal system and the railways to move small naval craft or pieces of ships—like submarines transported to the Pacific by rail; or destroyers assembled in Kherson on the Black Sea during World War I from pieces railed and shipped from other parts of Russia.

Out of the remaining two fleets, the Baltic Fleet was to have priority. On 9 June 1907, the Tsar approved of the "Small Program," which was to provide the Baltic Fleet with 2 (increased to 4 the same year) battleships, two light cruisers, 18 destroyers, 72 torpedoboats and 36 submarines; but only 14 new destroyers and 3 submarines were earmarked for the Black Sea. The new battleships voted for after 1907 had to be dreadnoughts, which meant substantial increase in cost.[33]

Although recommended by the State Defense Council and endorsed by the Emperor, no new construction could begin in the shipyards because the State *Duma*, the imperial parliament, had not approved the new program until the next year. When it came, however, the reluctant approval—following an exhausting discussion—could be only incremental. Class instincts, reflecting the recent revolution and breakdown of law

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[32] "Soedinie flota", by "Sobolev 2", in: *Morskoi Sbornik 7(*1914), 207-212.
[33] Spaskii, III, 173-4.

and order, were reflected in the voting pattern rather than concern for regaining great power status internationally. The right-wing would intuitively support the strengthening of the army rather than the navy, because the former could be also used against internal uprisings, whereas the sailors were notorious for their revolutionary sympathies.

However, once the finance ministry made credits for the construction of the four dreadnoughts in the Baltic available, the moderate right, the *Oktobrists*, would support further ship constructions in accordance with the Tsar's wishes. The party of the center, the Constitutional Democrats (*Kadets*) opposed any increase for the Baltic Fleet, but voted for the money, that was directed to the expansion of the Black Sea Fleet. Their leader, a well-known Russian liberal historian Paul N. Milyukov, argued that the *Kadets* did not oppose the construction of a battle fleet, but opposed the one in the Baltic. It was a waste of Russia's precious resources since a European war was, in their view, highly unlikely. The Near East, on the other hand, was another matter. War there could break out any moment and Russia should be best prepared in the south. As for the political left in the *Duma*, the Social Democrats and the *Trudoviki* (*de facto*, the *"Esery,"* or the Social Revolutionaries), true to their antimilitarist ideology, they consistently voted against any allocations directed to the army or navy.[34]

Since the *Duma* was unable at first to coordinate voting on the naval construction program, and the Ministry of Finance could not give the necessary funds without a promise of another French loan, the truly remarkable expansion of the Russian Navy, which history as the "1912 (Small) Program," could proceed only incrementally. Even so, the Russian naval budget in 1913-14 came close to 250 million rubles, thereby outstripping—with the exception of Great Britain and the United States—the naval

[34] Podsoblyaev, 52.

budgets of all other navies, including the German Navy, by then the third largest in the world. In its final configuration, had the Russian Empire survived into the 1930 without the setbacks of the World War, Revolution, and Civil War, the Russian Navy according to the "Big Construction Program of 1912" would have consisted of 24 battleships, 12 battlecruisers, 24 small cruisers, 108 large destroyers, and 36 submarines.[35]

With regard to funding for new ship constructions, Russia occupied third place in 1914 with 194 million Deutschmark after Great Britain (343 mil. DM) and Germany (219 mil. DM).[36] Yet, in spite of all the progress done in the finance committees, on the drawing boards, and in the shipyards, the construction of modern warships in Russia went very slowly. At the outbreak of the First World War, the Russian Navy had only one truly modern unit completed from the new Naval Program, the "Dreadnought among Destroyers," *Novik*, which was paid for from voluntary public subscriptions.

These then were the paper figures—but by no means unrealistic given Russia's enormous potential and relatively fast rate of industrial growth, sustained over two decades and second only to the United States. Once the financial means had been voted by the *Duma*, a carefully calibrated expansion of Russia's shipbuilding capacity would have been the necessary prerequisite.[37]

On the whole, the peaceful interval of less than nine years Russia enjoyed between the two wars indeed proved too short, in spite of the fact that the targets set out in the 1912 Program seemed realistic. The outbreak of World War I did, of course, cause further delays because of the call-up of many shipyard workers, chaotic conditions

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[35] *Weyers Taschenbuch 1914*, p.515.
[36] *Weyers Taschenbuch* 1914, pp.420-23, 515-17; *Nauticus 1914*, p.534; see also René Greger : *The Russian Fleet 1914-1917* (London: Ian Allan, 1973), 9.
[37] Chapter 4.B. is devoted to a critical survey of Russia's shipbuilding capacity .

prevailing on railroads, mass industrial unrest, and other reasons. As a result, the completion of the four *Borodino* class battlecruisers in the Baltic had to be interrupted; out of four dreadnoughts for the Black Sea only three had been completed; out of 53 destroyers planned for the Baltic and Black Sea only 30 were commissioned; none of the planned first 8 light cruisers was completed during the war.[38]

Instead, the destructive First World War led into the even more devastating Revolution and Civil War, from which the Russia would re-emerge in its new imperial reincarnation under the ruthless dictator Joseph V. Stalin. The big question at the time for naval enthusiasts must have been: will Russia ever regain her lost position as a great sea power? During the first decade of the young Soviet State the answer was a resounding "No." Stalin, on the other hand, was to answer the same question in mid-1930s with an even more resounding "Yes."

But, even with Stalin's full support, it was still not clear why Stalin's Russia would have required super-dreadnoughts in the Baltic Sea. What for? The experience of World War I had shown that the Russian Baltic Fleet, although inferior in numbers when compared with the Germans, retained the edge not by following Mahan's theories, but by doing exactly the opposite, namely by its own ingenious devices in the application of mine warfare inside its own coastal waters, which incapacitated a relatively large proportion of German warships and, more importantly, served as a useful strategic deterrent. In effect, the Russians adopted a policy of "sea denial." By contrast, the availability of the four expensive dreadnoughts of the *Gangut* class, and the resources which went into the construction of four even more expensive battlecruisers of the *Borodino* class, in the end made no contribution whatsoever.

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[38] Spasskii, III, 527.

4. STALIN'S BIG FLEET PROGRAM

When the Civil War ended Soviet Russia possessed several old battleships, two modern and three old cruisers, and about two dozen destroyers and submarines and other smaller craft in various stages of mobility. One battleship was in the Arctic, four in the Baltic, and six in the Black Sea. When the Soviets decided after the Civil War to scrap all pre-dreadnought battleships, they were left with the four damaged dreadnoughts in the Baltic, three unfinished hulls of the *Borodino* class super-dreadnoughts, and one dreadnought under construction in the Black Sea.

Three out of four completed dreadnoughts of the *Gangut* class were in an advanced stage of disrepair in the Baltic; the fourth, *Poltava* (in 1918 renamed *Frunze),* having been damaged during the Civil War was to be cannibalized for spares and turned into a blockship. One dreadnought of the 1912 Program remained unfinished in the Black Sea main shipyard in Nikolaev (*Nikolai I,* renamed in 1917 *Demokratiya*); as the Soviets were unable to complete her, she was scrapped after 1922. Her sister ship *Imperator Alexander III* (renamed *Volya* in 1917 and again *General Alekseev* in 1919), was taken in 1920 by the White Russians to the French base Bizerte in the Mediterranean. Her fate was inglorious: taken over by France in 1924, she was briefly considered for recommission by visiting Soviet naval experts, but when found unseaworthy, she was scrapped in 1936.[39]

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[39] Greger, op.cit.; J.Meister, *Soviet Warships of theSecond World War* (London: Macdonald and Jane's: 1977), 15-19; Siegfreid Breyer, *Grosskampfschiffe 1905-1970* (Munich: Bernard & Graefe, 1979), vol.3, 119.

There were also three hulls of the launched *Borodino* class battlecruisers from the 1912 Program, which the Soviet government, having toyed for a while with the idea of completing at least one of them *(Izmail)*, decided to sell them all to Germany for scrap. The three remaining Baltic dreadnoughts were slowly modernized during the mid-1920s and recommissioned. One of them, the ex-*Sevastopol*, renamed *Parizhskaya Kommuna*, was transferred to the Black Sea during 1929-30, but she incurred such heavy weather damage en route in the Bay of Biscaya, that she had to be returned to the French shipyards at Brest for temporary repairs. A few gunboats were retained in the Caspian Sea for use against the British in Persia. The Soviets were too weak to maintain any significant defenses in the Arctic and in the Pacific, so that not until the early 1930s could the Arctic and Pacific flotillas be re-established, initially in a rather symbolic way.

The destruction and disintegration of the former Tsarist Russian Navy during the subsequent years of the Civil War had given Russia a double blow. The Navy was not merely physically destroyed, but the human component had suffered perhaps even more. With regard to the social component of modernization, the Navy, as opposed to the semi-literate Army, played a decisive role as the "Vanguard of the Working Class." It was the revolutionary sailors, in particular, from the main base of the Baltic Fleet at Kronstadt, who carried out the Bolshevik *coup* of 7 November 1917 (according to the pre-revolutionary Russian (Julian) calendar on 25 October—this proud epithet was later taken away from them after the March 1921 anti-Bolshevik Mutiny, during which the "Praetorian Guard" of the Bolshevik Revolution was crashed, massacred and dispersed). The false myth of sailor-equals-a-Bolshevik would, however, continue and led even to

some unquestionably fine feature films like *"My z Kronshtadu,"* (1936) and especially to Sergei Eisenshtein' masterpiece, *"Bronenosets Potëmkin"* (1925).

Thus, due to material and personnel losses, the Tsarist Navy reached the bottom rung, indeed the lowest in all Russian naval history. Furthermore, the Russian bases and former maritime frontier in the Baltic had substantially shrunk when the Bolsheviks lost all the advanced bases in Finland and along the Baltic coast; they were also compelled to recognize four new sovereign nations who were not in control of the former Tsarist basing facilities at Helsingfors and the islands. Libava (Lithuania), Riga (Latvia) and Reval (Estonia)—and with each of these bases also the coastal batteries, facilities, and dockyards—were all gone.

A. THE OLD SCHOOL VERSUS THE YOUNG SCHOOL

One of the little known paradoxes of the revolutionary period that followed immediately after the Civil War was the fact that the young Bolshevik cadets at the former Imperial Naval Academy (now called the Voroshilov Naval War College) and the Frunze Army Staff College continued to be exposed in matters of strategy to the same curriculum as their Tsarist predecessors. Ex-tsarist professor B. Gervais (Russian spelling 'Zhervé") and M. Petrov taught the Bolshevik midshipmen that in order to achieve effective command of the sea in the maritime approaches to Russia, the Socialist Motherland must aspire to possess the traditional high-sea fleet composed of battleships and cruisers. In other words, there was no short-cut, no way around a big fleet, even for a new proletarian power like Soviet Russia.

Gervais and Petrov became known as exponents of the Old School. They were soon challenged by the members of the Young School. Like their predecessors in the 1880s, the Young School would insist that the command of the sea was to be obtained not through idle battleships but through an aggressive warfare by cruisers and smaller craft against the enemy shipping. In 1925, the Navy Commissar V. Zof would attack the Old School professors as follows: "*you speak of aircraft carriers and of the construction of new types of ships.... At the same time completely ignoring the economic situation of our country and our technical means—completely ignoring that perhaps tomorrow or the day after we will be called on to fight. And with what shall we fight? We will fight with those ships and personnel that we have already.*"[40] One of the younger Bolshevik commanders, I. Ludri, offered even stricter condemnation of the Old School, criticizing them for being unable to abandon the close association of the battleship with an aircraft carrier.[41]

Eventually, Gervais, Petrov, and other professors of the Old School were to pay with their lives for having taught and believed in the primacy of the battleship over the submarine, and the need for building major warships to permit exercising command of the sea in Soviet maritime zones. Such was the fate of a theory passionately fought over in Communist Russia in the 1920s and 1930s. In fact, there was simply no money available for huge capital expenses, as Navy Commissar R. Muklevich was to remind his listeners at a 1927 talk.[42] The supreme irony behind the fate of the defenders of the Old School under the Stalin regime remind one of the vicissitudes of the mediaeval inquisition: Gervais and Petrov were executed even though the basic tenants of their

[40] *Morskoi Sbornik* 5(1925), 16.
[41] *Morskoi Sbornik,* 10(1927), 26.
[42] Ibid., 10(1927),5.

original beliefs in big ships—as shown by the Big Fleet Program—were soon embraced by Stalin himself.

Between 1921 and 1924 the Soviet Navy was so weak that it was forced to adopt an entirely passive strategy, based on nearly immobile ships and coastal fortifications, for which the U.S. expert on the Soviet Navy, Commander Robert W. Herricks, has rightly borrowed the Mahanite term "Fortress Fleet." The Communist naval strategists tried to improvise their defenses in the Baltic as best as they could, using offshore minefields, the remnants of coastal artillery, and six submarines, which were still available in the Baltic.

Yet, Petrov and Gervais, unable to preach the tenants of the Old School forever, underwent a remarkable metamorphosis between 1923 and 1924. Realizing the impracticability of advocating a high-sea fleet under Soviet conditions, they suggested replacing it with the so-called "Active Defense" Theory, which proposed using small naval craft within range of land-based naval aircraft.[43] This new, more flexible theory proved acceptable to the Soviet hierarchy. Interestingly, in recent years this theory has proven attractive to another large regional power with lengthy coastal defense concerns: China. More will be said on this topic later on.

B. THE FIVE-YEAR PLANS AND THE SHIPBUILDING INDUSTRY

Stalin's determination to go ahead full speed with his Big Navy Program must be measured against the infrastructural preparations, especially the availability of shipyards, material, naval architects, and skilled labor. This requires an evaluation of the Soviet Union's first five-year plans, as well as a look at the Soviet shipbuilding industry.

[43] M.Petrov:" Zametki o taktike malogo flota", *Morskoi Sbornik*, 9(1923) 48; Herrrick 14.

Administratively, an important Soviet decision was to liberate warship construction from the Ministry of Defense by an *ukaz* to create an independent Ministry of Shipbuilding with I. F. Tevosyan as its Commissar ("Narkom"), with over 25 shipyards and 27 repair facilities.[44] Shipbuilding became part of Stalin's promotion of heavy industry, therefore, not just a concern of the military.

During the First Five-Year Plan (1928-32) the existing shipyards in Leningrad and Nikolaev, some of them damaged and working at only half-capacity since World War I, were finally repaired. The most interesting initiative undertaken during the Second Five-Year Plan (1933-1937), was not only the further modernization of the old shipyards, but the construction of entirely new ones in remote areas of the Arctic, the Far East, but also in the Russian interior at important industrial centers that had a good inner water transportation: for example, at Komsomolsk along the Amur River, or at Krasnoe Sormovo near Gorkii on the Volga River.

A good example of a new Soviet shipyard was Molotovsk (No. 402 Yard–after 1957 renamed Severodvinsk), which was started in the 1930s on direct orders of Stalin. During the purges, an estimated 120,000 slave laborers were brought here in the 1930s to construct the shipyard. Stalin envisaged it becoming the largest shipyard in the world; the No. 402 hall, which measured some 1100 ft. in length and 450 in width, could accommodate two battleships of the *Sovetskii Soyuz* class side by side (in fact the keels of two ships of the same class, *Sovetskaya Rossiya* and *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*, were laid down inside the enormous hall between 1939 and 1940—but never finished.)

Molotovsk is the only major shipyard in the world located above the Arctic Circle, capable of building the largest warships (now mostly nuclear submarines).

[44] Spasskii, IV, 275-7.

During World War II the unfinished yard was used for the completion of submarines that had been built in Leningrad and Gorkii (actually the "Krasnoe Sormovo" shipyard No. 112") and brought to Severodvinsk through the canal-river system. After the war several of the *Sverdlov* class cruisers were built here.

Another Stalinist creation of this period is "Shipyard No. 199" at Komsomolsk, about 280 miles south of the mouth of the Amur River. The Amur River is not deep enough to allow the completion of the larger ships, which after launching must be towed down to be fitted out at coastal shipyards. Started in 1932 at this location, its primary geographic advantage was being out of range of Japanese aviation and penetration by warships. This shipyard would later become a major shipbuilding facility for the reinstated Pacific Fleet.

Originally, like the yard in Molotovsk, the Komsomolsk yard was supposed to be capable of constructing two battleships side by side in a covered building. Complete self-sufficiency was not regarded possible, so components were sent in from the European factories and shipyards. In 1935 a largest iron and steel mill known as "Amurstal" was begun about 5 miles from Komsomolsk. Although battleships were never laid down at Komsomolsk, in 1939 the keels of two heavy cruisers of the improved *Kirov* class (*Kaganovich* and *Kalinin)* were laid down to be launched in 1945 and completed thereafter. These were the first and last cruisers built and finished here; other surface ships built at Komsomolsk were mainly destroyers and frigates. During the war the shipyard reached a working force of 5,000, half of them were women, with a total of six

building-ways in two large covered halls. In the 1960s Komsomolsk became after Molotovsk the second Soviet shipyard to construct nuclear submarines.[45]

Although the Soviet Union has a longer coastline than any other nation (over 16000 n. miles—by comparison the U.S. coastlines without Alaska total just under 11,000 n. miles), naval facilities and shipbuilding industries have been historically confined only to a fraction of them. The St. Petersburg/Leningrad area and Nikolaev in the South are particularly important. However, the Black Sea shorelines (867 n. miles) and the Baltic coast (988 n. miles in pre-1991 borders) account only for a fraction of the total maritime shoreline of the USSR.

Therefore, the history of Russian shipyards on the Baltic Sea is inextricably linked with the history of St. Petersburg. The oldest shipyard, the Main Admiralty Yards, was founded in 1705, but closed in 1844; shipbuilding activities soon shifted to the New Admiralty Yards about a mile further downstream on the left bank of the Neva (during the Soviet period renamed "A. Marti" and referred to as "No. 194"). In 1908, the New Admiralty shipyard merged with the second largest shipyard, located on Galernyi Island. The New Admiralty Yard built two of the *Gangut* class dreadnoughts and two of the *Borodino* class (laid down in 19215 and 1916). In 1939 the keel was laid down here for the first of the *Kronshtadt* class cruiser of Stalin's Big Fleet Program (which were never finished).

Next in size were the Baltic Yards, founded in 1856 (Soviet name "Ordzhonikidze Yard" No. 189), also capable of building the largest warships, which was located across the Neva from the Galernyi Island shipyard. It was the Baltiiskii shipyard that launched two cruisers of the *Kirov* class (1935-39), and two of the Chapaev class (completed only

[45] Polmar, Norman: *The Naval Institute Guide to the Soviet Navy* (Annapolis, 1991) 429.

after the war); in 1938 it saw the laying down on keel of the first Soviet super-dreadnought, the *Sovetskii Soyuz*, the mainstay of Stalin's Big Fleet Program. After WWII it built six of the *Sverdlov* class cruisers.

The Putilov Works (renamed after "A. A. Zhdanov" in 1935, No. 190 Yard), divided into two separate plants, were the largest among the private firms; its original engine plant opened a second location as a shipyard 1911 by the leading German shipbuilder, Blohm & Voss of Hamburg. It was Putilov who was in charge of the construction of the innovative *Novik* class destroyer, whose engines were developed by Blohm & Voss. The Russian Navy ordered 57 of them, of which 44 were launched before the Revolution and 37 completed, including six by the Soviets in the mid-1920s.

Through 1917 the number of shipyards in the St. Petersburg areas grew to 13; nine of them also built steam engines, and two of them, the Izhora and Putilov works, also produced armor plate. Moreover, the Putilov and Obukhov Works produced heavy artillery pieces as well.[46]

When looking at the second major center of shipbuilding, the old port of Nikolaev on the Bug River and Black Sea, the Andre Marti Shipyard (No. 198), was the largest private Russian shipyard on the Black Sea. Before the Bolshevik Revolution it built two of four Russian Black Sea dreadnoughts and many warships before that. The Soviets initiated the construction of warships here in the 1930s: cruisers of the *Voroshilov* and *Frunze* class, which culminated in the keel laying in 1938 of the one battleship of the *Sovetskii Soyuz* class, known as *Sovetskaya Ukraina* and in 1939 of the battle cruiser

[46] Compiled from: Drashpil, Boris V. & Saint Hubert, Christian de: "Main Shipyards, Enginebuilders and Manufacturers of Guns and Armour Plate in the Saint Petersburg Area up to 1917," *Warship International*, 4(1985)333-361. Polmar, *Guide,* 413-428; Spasskij, IV,

Sevastopol. Work on the two capital ships stopped in October 1940 and never resumed thereafter.

The Nikolaev yard was to witness Stalin's last capital ship "swan song," when it started the only Soviet postwar battlecruiser project, the *Stalingrad*, under direct orders of Stalin in 1949. The ship was said to be about 60% complete and ready for launching in March 1953 when Stalin suddenly died and all work on the last Soviet dreadnought in history ceased.

The other large shipyard, "the 61 Communards"(No. 200 Yard), began in the 18th century as the major Admiralty facility on the Black Sea. It built most of the battleships for the Black Sea. In 1910 however, the government decided to close it, but it was reopened in the following year as a private French-owned "Russian Shipbuilding Corp." (RUSSUD). During the 1930s the yard built light cruisers, destroyers, and submarines.

With the exception of the Black Sea shipyards, in all other Russian naval yards all of the larger warships—not only battleships and cruisers but also destroyers—could not be constructed in the open air, as they could, for instance in England, France, and other countries, with warmer and more balanced climate. Owing to the severity of Russian winter, if the construction was to continue all year round work had to be done in a roofed shed with solid walls and ends, the front of which was pulled down when the vessel was launched; this included ships up to but not including the *Gangut* class and above, which were simply too large.

Larger warships, however, of the *Borodino* and *Sovetskii Soyuz* class, were too big to fit easily into a narrow pen closet, so that big cranes had to be used to lift heavy metal plates and segments. Thus, in the Soviet period all of the big ships of Stalin's Big

Fleet Program were laid down on open slipways—with the exception of the new shipyards at Komsomolsk on Amur (founded in 1936 as "No. 199 Yard") and Molotovsk near Archangel (founded 1939 as "No. 402 Yard"). It is mainly due to this reason that the Germans were able to photograph the hulls from the air during the first days of the war.

In spite of the extremely strenuous efforts to beef up domestic construction of larger warships, the Soviet Union actively tried to purchase the latest blueprints and even entire battleships from foreign, inevitably capitalist, shipyards. In particular, there were few Soviet experts conversant in the new technologies in the isolated Soviet Union. This would give Stalin's Big Fleet Program a bizarre twist, encountered hitherto mostly in the world of fiction (e.g., George Orwell's "Animal Farm"), as teams of Soviet diplomats went abroad in search of naval technology.

Because Japan was excluded and Britain disinterested, the choice was limited to the four remaining major naval powers. Already in 1934-5 negotiations were initiated with France to deliver plans for cruisers and flotilla leaders, but the French were reluctant to pursue the deal. Help, however, was found in fascist Italy. The firm Ansaldo of Genoa was approached during 1935 and they agreed to deliver blueprints for a battleship of 42,000 tons of displacement (Design "UP-41"). This design was used to make further improvements on the Soviet battleship "Project-25," which would eventually lead to a heavier version, the super-dreadnought *Sovetskii Soyuz* class ("Project 23") of over 60,000 tons displacement and equipped with nine 16in. guns. Ansaldo was also responsible for the first designs leading to the "*Kirov*" class cruisers, built in Leningrad and in Nikolaev. Another Italian firm, the Oderi-Terni-Orlando of Livorno, built and delivered (in the midst of Spanish Civil

War no less) to the Soviet Navy the "*Tashkent*"—the fastest destroyer in the world (it is difficult not to think of the destroyer *Novik* of WWI fame).[47]

Meanwhile, the U.S. was approached in 1937 about orders for battleships, armor, and artillery. Various blueprints were purchased from the firm Gibbs & Cox of Philadelphia, including three variants of a hybrid battleship-aircraft carrier of monstrous proportions and appearance. This amphibious hybrid was to carry 40 planes on a short flight deck built between the two gundecks. One modification was designed with four gundecks carrying 18in. guns, which no other navy in the world—save the Japanese battleship of the *Yamato* class—was carrying; other variants included the same number of planes with ten to twelve 16in. guns.[48]

Even Stalin considered the task of purchasing foreign technology so important that he unexpectedly walked in to negotiate personally with U.S. Ambassador Joseph Davies in Moscow in June 1938. Stalin's main preoccupation was getting battleship plans from the U.S. Stalin was prepared to expedite these purchases by any and all means, including the payment of old pre-revolutionary debts owned by Russia. A high-powered Soviet mission under Adm. Ivan S. Isakov was sent by Stalin during March 1939 to America, but these negotiations were broken off when the Soviet Union invaded Finland.[49]

Apart from the recognized naval powers, smaller countries were also drawn into Stalin's fantastic plan. In Czechoslovakia, the Soviets successfully engaged the Škoda works—prior to 1918 the major supplier of the Austro-Hungarian Navy—to deliver naval

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[47] Compiled from : R.Greger, "Sowjetischer Schalchtschaffbau", *Marine*-Rundschau 71(1974) 461- 479; S. Breyer, "Sowjetischer Schlachtschiffbau", *Marine-Rundschau* 72(1975) 141- 163; Rohwer/Monakov, 74f.

[48] Breyer (1975) 161-4; Rohwer/Monakov, 88-9.

[49] J.E.Davies, *Mission to Moscow* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1941), 208; *Foreign Relations of the United States: The Soviet Union 1933-1939*(USGPO, 1952) 457-91, 670-707, 869-903.

guns;[50] in Switzerland orders were placed with Brown-Boveri for a 70,000-HP turbine set, etc. But, paradoxically, some of the most useful help, both in terms of quantity and quality, came from Nazi Germany—even then the chief ideological foe of the Soviet Union until August 1939.

C: *ZACHEM STALIN STROIL OKEANSKIJ FLOT*?[51] ["WHY DID STALIN BUILD AN OCEAN-GOING FLEET?"]

One of the most important questions that this monograph has set out to ask was what were the circumstances under which the Soviet government, admittedly guided by an autocrat with certain psychological predispositions, arrived at such a watershed decision like the one of creating for the USSR a balanced ocean-going navy, literally from scratch: what were the underlying reasons? What was Stalin's own motivation? Of course, there were some Russian historical precedents about funding big naval programs, but it seems that Stalin, in making this important decision to adopt the Big Fleet Program, seemed to have been inspired by several motives: one was the Soviet Union's apparent success in the first five-year plan, the second was a world-wide naval arms race that increase his fear of attack, especially from Germany to the West and Japan to the East, while the third was Stalin's desire to increase the USSR's international prestige, especially vis-à-vis the other great powers.

The first of these reasons was a positive element, and was based on the practical results of the First Five-Year Plan of rapid industrialization of the USSR. Translated into

[50] A.Pokorná: "Czechoslovak-Soviet armaments cooperation in the second half of the 1`930s", *Historie a vojenství*(Prague) 5/1982, 56-77.
[51] M.Monakov : « *Zachem Stalin stroil okeanskii flot ?* » Morskoi Sbornik 12(1998) 74-79.

hard facts of improving the fighting potential of the Red Army and Red Air Force, Stalin and the Soviet leadership were genuinely pleased that the forced industrialization supplied the "armed vanguard of the World Proletariat" with the highest quantity of tanks and airplanes within less than five years. Most importantly, it seemed to meet the expected world-wide standards. It is highly likely that Stalin began thinking: why not build a modern Red Navy as well?

Stalin's second motivation was almost certainly a negative one: his gloomy assessment of the international situation, in which three particular "non-status-quo" powers—Japan, Germany, and Italy—were trying to bring about radical changes that might risk starting another major war. Stalin knew that the USSR was isolated, and chose two strategies to answer this challenge. First, was the "If you cannot beat them—join them" strategy, when he tried to adopt the strategy of Collective Security, culminating in the USSR joining the Leagues of Nation in 1934 and by signing mutual assistance pacts with France and Czechoslovakia during 1935. The second strategy was to rearm, even while disseminating an intensive antiwar propaganda for domestic and foreign consumption. After 1936, Soviet rearmament increasingly included the Big Fleet Program.

In analyzing the ulterior motivations of Stalin and the Soviet leadership in starting the Big Fleet Program, we must rely on the detailed and exhausting analysis provided by a retired Soviet naval officer and historian, Captain Mikhail S. Monakov, published in one of the leading Russian naval journals.[52] According to Monakov, the chronology of Stalin's decision is all-important. Monakov, along with most Russian authors, argues that the key decision was made by Stalin himself. But Monakov posits this decision at the

[52] M.Monakov, "Zachem Stalin stroil okenaskii flot?" *Morskoi Sbornik*, 12(1998) 74-79.

very end of 1935, thereby refuting speculations that Stalin might have made the decision six or ten months later, under the direct impact of the Spanish Civil War, which started only in mid-summer of 1936—although the appalling weakness of the Soviet Navy, incapable of assisting Republican Spain in any meaningful way must have certainly reinforced Stalin's determination to go ahead with his plan.

Yet, Stalin's decision did not come out of the blue. Monakov argues that it was preceded by a well-orchestrated and thoroughly prepared propaganda campaign, connecting the results of an earlier fleet reconstruction plan with the more recent campaign of political education (the latter more concerned with improving efficiency within the navy, by far the smallest and most neglected of the three services). The Soviet Union, as even a casual look into the newspapers would convey, was then in the grips of the Stakhanovite movement, and the quest for higher efficiency and productivity was pursued within the armed forces with even greater vigor than in the civilian sector.

Therefore, already in 1934 Stalin was increasingly becoming aware and confident of the Soviet heavy industry built during the first and second (still unfinished) five-year plan. In particular, the naval historian I. V. Kasatonov emphasized the Soviet achievements in the construction of tanks and warplanes. As usual, Stalin did not speak publicly on the Navy; he let others do it for him. One such proponent of the Big Fleet Program was Marshal of the Soviet Union and Commissar for Defense Kliment E. Voroshilov. At the XVIIth Congress of the CPSU in the same year of 1934, he linked the achievements in fast industrialization, with the expectation that "*on the basis of victorious industrialization we shall be able to create our shipbuilding industry and soon*

to produce our fleets, which will become the most powerful among workers-and-farmers navies."[53]

The *Pravda* edition of 24 December 1935 also reported that on the previous night over 270 sailors were decorated in the Kremlin by the Soviet leadership, represented by J. V. Stalin, V. M. Molotov, G. K. Ordzhonikidze, and K. E. Voroshilov. During the same evening the Soviet leadership received a large delegation of younger commanders of the recently re-established Pacific Fleet. Finally, at the end of the reception, the Soviet leaders invited the commanders of the Read Army and Navy to prepare and submit as soon as possible a draft proposal concerning the build-up of "great and ocean-going fleet."[54]

At this early stage, although Stalin and the leadership must have done some thinking along the lines of strength, composition, and distribution to the four fleets in question, the *Pravda* article could only confine itself to the usual propaganda salvo, justifying the decision as a defensive instrument against the imperialist powers who should no longer count on the Soviet Union as being deprived of sea power.

One of the first trespasses against the Arms Limitation Treaties was German experiment with the *Panzerschiff "Deutschland,"* completed in 1932. This vessel did not fit any category laid down by the special Naval Treaties of Washington and London. France responded by building her own fast battleship of the *Dunkerque* class. Italy in turn reacted by pushing the construction of her first 35.000-ton battleship of the *Vittorio Veneto* class. In 1935 France announced contracts for two super-battleships of the *Richelieu* class of 38,500 tons each. Italy responded further with two improved heavy

[53] *Tri veka Rossiiskogo Flota 1696-1996* , ed. by I.V.Kasatonov (St.Petersburg: Logos, 1996), vol.2, 339-340.

[54] The Russian phrase is « *bolshoi morskii i okeanskii flot,"* (Pravda , 24 December 1935).

battleships, while England began five battleships of the *King George V* class (38,000 tons each). The United States responded with two *North Carolinas* and fours *South Dakotas*, each of them exceeding 35,000 tons and armed with nine 16-in. guns. Last but not least, the Japanese started to build in 1937 the four *Yamatos*, the heaviest ironclad monster under steam, exceeding 60,000 tons and armed with the heaviest armament yet produced, nine 18-in.guns.[55]

The first draft of what would later become the Big Fleet Program, was, according to Monakov, submitted by V. M. Orlov, the Soviet Navy Commander, and was already completed in early February 1936. It called for the construction of 16 battleships and 12 heavy cruisers during the next two five-year plans. Kasatonov nevertheless quotes from a vivid exchange between Marshal Yegorov, Chief of the Red Army General Staff, and Orlov in which they claim that the first normative step was the Soviet Government decision (*STO USSR*) of 27 May 1936, followed a month later by another '*ukaz*' detailing the composition of the future Big Navy and its distribution to four fleets after the completion of the plan in 1947.

Only much later was the Soviet public told the details of this grandiose enterprise. This happened for the first time in the speech of naval minister (*nachalnik Morskikh Sil RKKAI)* V. M. Orlov, in his special oration at the Extraordinary All-Soviet Congress on 28 November 1936, in which he stressed that the official reason for building a "*genuine [nastoiashchij] Big Fleet" comprising all classes of warships, was* [due to] *the worsening of the international situation and imperialist encirclement.*"[56] In particular, Orlov referred directly to the threat the Soviet Union faced with her enormous unprotected maritime

[55] Juergen Rohwer:, *War at Sea 1939-1945*(Annapolis: Naval Inst.Press, 1996)p.9
[56] *Pravda* of 29 November 1936, p.3. It was also Orlov swan songs for he was to vanish next year in the purges.

borders, especially vis-à-vis the aggressor states like Germany, Italy and Japan, who had recently attacked Spain, Abyssinia, and Manchuria. It was, Orlov claimed, imperative to defend the Soviet Motherland.

We should bear in mind that the Soviet Union was even then engaged in a colossal venture of enforced industrialization. The public, facing its second five-year plan, was constantly bombarded with "outstanding achievements" in the construction of socialism. The years of the second Five-Year Plan were not only the years when the Big Fleet Program was ordered by Stalin, but when more visible projects like Dneprogres, a giant hydroelectric plant on the Dneper River, had already been completed (October 1932); the Baltic-White Sea Canal, built basically with slave labor from the gulag system, and which also had a strategic naval significance because it could be used for ferrying smaller naval crafts like submarines and torpedo boats, was declared completed in the summer of 1933; another canal which the navy used for transferring its smaller craft was the Moscow-Volga canal, completed in July 1937.

But other outstanding achievements of the Soviet Man (*Sovetskii chelovek*) included: the rescue mission to save the crew of icebreaker "Chelyuskin," the accomplishments of Soviet flyers like Valerii Chkalov or Mikhail Gromov, who since 1934 broke several times the world long-distance record for a non-stop flight and in the summer of 1937 flew non-stop from Moscow over the North Pole and landed in California, clearly with the objective of scoring a propaganda victory with the progress-loving Americans.

Therefore, Orlov was right: the naval race was almost certainly focused on navies regarded as Soviet adversaries, including Germany, Japan, and Italy, all of whom were

members of the anti-Comintern pact. Finally, Monakov gives perhaps the most sophisticated Soviet motive as their ambition to be recognized and re-established as a great power in the international arena; in other words, using the Big Fleet Program to increase the USSR's national prestige. Certainly, this goal would appear appropriate after the USSR was admitted to the League of Nations in 1934, and fits well with Foreign Minister Litvinov's overall diplomatic offensive to have the Soviet Union accepted as an equal to Europe's great powers.

D. WERE THE TARGETS OF STALIN'S BIG FLEET PROGRAM REALISTIC?

Monakov, and other authors who have written about the Big Fleet Program, leave little doubt that even had the Soviet involvement in the Second World War after June 1941 been avoided by some kind of miracle—since there cannot be the slightest doubt about Hitler's determination to attack the USSR—the targets set out in even the first half of Stalin's Big Fleet Program until 1942-3 were unrealistic and so could never have been fulfilled. None of the capital ships laid down in 1938 and 1939 would have been completed even under peace conditions. Even if the Soviet Union had been absorbed with "collecting every penny," as Stalin put it, this would have been of no help; the Soviets lacked much basic equipment: their gun factories could not yet produce and test the heavy artillery pieces of 16in. caliber; boilers for the powerful steam turbines were unavailable; there was no sophisticated optical equipment for fire control, etc.[57] To increase the size of the Red Navy eleven times within 7 to 10 years, given the USSR's

[57] Monakov, 76; Breyer in *Marine-Rundschau* 72(1975) and others; A.M.Petrov et al., *Oryzhie Rossiiskogo Flota* (St.Peterburg: Sudostroienie, 1996).

limited resources and capabilities, was impossible. According to the naval historian V. N. Krasnov, the cost of four giant battleships of the *Sovetskii Soyuz* class already laid on keel amount to almost one-third of the defense budge of the entire country in 1940.[58]

It still remains a puzzle, and so Kasatonov acknowledges that it was intriguing when Stalin became in the mid-1930s one of the last "navalists" or "mahanites"—i.e. followers of "Old School"—by identifying sea power with the construction of big ships. Kasatonov considers several arguments why, including the international situation, the naval armaments race, and Stalin's megalomania, demonstrated in his predilection to admire "big things," in this case his obsession with big Battleships (*linkory*). Only the last of these reasons, however, necessarily favors the construction of the Big Fleet.[59]

Other authors see it differently. For example, the American author Herrick regarded Stalin's reading and understanding of the results of the London Naval Conference as crucial. Apparently Stalin thought that Soviet diplomacy had no chance to be listened to because they had no big guns behind them. The other countries looked down on the Soviet Union, assuming that the Soviet Navy's deterrent potential consisted of small submarines exclusively.[60] Thus, augmenting the Soviet Union's national prestige was key to understanding Stalin's ambitions regarding the Big Fleet Program.

Kasatonov argues that, in the beginning of the 1930s, Stalin unquestionably supported the *jeune ecole* group. We are reminded that at this same time the last remnants of the Old Guard inherited from the Tsarist Navy, who supported big ships, were replaced; for many it was a one-way trip. But, according to Kasatonov, in July 1930 we

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[58] Krasnov, V. N.; "Linkory tipa 'Sovetskii Soyuz'," in *Morski Sbornik* 6 (1990), 63.
[59] Kasatonov, 337-9, see also Kuznetsov's testimony in *Admiral Kuznetsov* (Moscow: Mosgoarkhiv, 2000) 105, 255-6.
[60] Ibid.339. R.V.Herrick, *Soviet naval strategy - 50 years of theory and practice* (1968), viii – xxx, 9-28, 38-45.

can hear Stalin proclaiming: "*Where there is no Red Navy, we cannot be content since we can be hit by enemies and traitors.*"[61] Clearly there are inconsistencies either in our understanding of the events, or in Stalin's behavior, or both.

Interestingly, Kasatonov insists that the initiative to build the Big Fleet did NOT come from the military. The army leadership, including the department of the navy, were advocating a limited role for the navy to play in the overall strategy. And as far as the Navy leadership was concerned, its planning body, as Kasatonov stressed many times, consisted of members who believed in the limited role of Soviet naval forces, and who were not involved in any planning that exceeded the operational level.

At the end of 1935, however, following directives "*from the top .. and personally from Stalin*" the navy planners were requested to review their plans for the future development of the navy.[62] A special commission was appointed, consisting of deputy chairman of STO and SNK, and the chairman of Gosplan V. I. Mezhlauk, which in early 1936 reached negative conclusions regarding the fulfillment of the existing shipbuilding program of the Second 5-Year Plan. Out of eight light cruisers only two were laid down, and for those two the construction was moving only very slowly. The same delays applied to the three destroyer-leaders of the *Leningrad* class, being constructed under "Project 7" since 1932 (still under the First 5-Year Plan). Although the first ship was launched in November 1933, the program itself left much to be desired.

Already during the month of January there had been exchanges between the Chief of the General Staff Marshal A. I. Yegorov, and the navy chief (official title "Nachalnik VMS") Admiral ("Flagman 1st Rank) V. M. Orlov, the latter accepting on 19 January

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[61] *Ibid.*, 339.

[62] Summed up in Adm. Kuznetsov's personal note, w.d. Published in posthumous volume *Admiral Kuznetsov*(2000), 100-106.

1936 Yegorov's recommendations to upgrade the plan radically.[63] In the final version submitted to the defense commissar Marshal Voroshilov, however, the "Big Fleet" was to comprise 25 super battleships, 26 heavy (Battle) cruisers, 20 light cruisers, 175 leaders and destroyers, and finally 122 large, 222 medium, and 90 small submarines. When completed, over half of the fleet would be stationed in the Pacific, facing Japan.

Orlov was in an extremely optimistic mood, even adding that the naval construction program—based on the USSR's current industrial expansion—was feasible within 8 to 10 years, or sometime around 1945-47. But Orlov was visibly uneasy, since he lacked the executive power to know whether he could harness the relevant branches of industry to make the Big Fleet naval construction program a reality.

The Soviet Navy, however, recommended to Stalin that the Soviet government give priority until the end of 1940 to the construction of the smaller craft, submarines, destroyers, cruisers, and only about half of the heavy cruisers, and relegate the construction of all the battleships and the remaining heavy cruisers to the following stage. There were, of course, some divergences between the army and navy. Yegorov, for instance, insisted on building aircraft carriers (two for the Northern Fleet and four for the Pacific Fleet), whereas Orlov thought that only two carriers for the Far East would be sufficient.[64]

Both drafts were prepared with great haste and were not written by naval experts. Preparations were made in great secrecy, involving only top officials, without calling on the available pool of specialists and theoreticians. Such experts, Kasatonov stresses, like M. A. Petrov, had already been dismissed from the navy. Calling upon the testimony of

[63] Yegorov actually recommended an additional 8% increase up to 1,868.000 total tonnage (Ibid., 340).
[64] *Ibid.*, 341.

Admiral L. M. Galler, commander of the Baltic Fleet in 1936, one of the very few who survived the purges, Stalin apparently called the senior officers in during 1936 to ask them briskly: "What kind of ships with what kind of ordnance do we need?" Galler recalled that the fleet commanders unanimously recommended that priority should be given to the construction of submarines. This answer sealed their fate.

Regarding the need for surface vessels, opinions were divided. The commander of the Pacific Fleet, Flagman 1st Rank M. V. Viktorov, favored big ships for his vast spaces, whereas the commander of the Black Sea Fleet, Flagman 2nd Rank I. K. Kozhanov, advocated a fleet consisting mostly of destroyers and some cruisers. Witnessing such disparities, Stalin contemptuously released the admirals with a comment: "*Even you yourselves have little idea what you need*!"[65] Fearing the wrath of the mighty Stalin, the navy leadership timidly avoided internal debate on the issue. Kasatonov cites from Orlov's decision, dated 15 July 1936, the following underlined order: "*stop discussion between the industry and professors from the naval academy...* "[66]

D. THE IMPACT OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

Although the rearmament race, fear of invasion, and national prestige played the greatest role in Stalin's decision to adopt the Big Fleet Program, the Spanish Civil War played an interesting role as a catalyst for the Big Fleet. Earlier accounts often stated that it was because of Spain that Stalin felt the sudden urge to provide the Soviet Union with an ocean-going fleet. However, sufficient evidence has now been assembled to prove that

[65] N.G.Kuznetsov, Nakanune, (Moscow: Voienizdat, 1969) 282.
[66] Kasatonov. Op. cit., 342.

Stalin's decision preceded the outbreak of the Spanish Mutiny in mid-July 1936, and that Stalin already had this idea firmly fixed in his mind in 1935, the year in which the Soviet Union was forced by Japan to retreat completely from Manchuria. The negative experience of the Spanish Civil War did, nevertheless, reinforce the Soviet dictator's decision that the USSR ought to possess a strong ocean-going navy. The sequence of the decision-making chain can be easily established on the basis of chronology; the more important question seems to be the lessons learned by the Soviet participation in the Spanish Civil War and their impact upon the overall maritime policy of the Soviet Union.

Unlike most of the traditional naval powers, the Soviet Union had virtually no experience serving in foreign waters and in providing and protecting sea convoys. A fitting witness was N. G. Kuznetsov (1902-1974), the best known among Stalin's admirals, who was allowed to write a lively personal account of the War in Spain—and to die of natural causes. Together with A. G. Golovko, S. S. Ramishvili, N. P. Anin, V. A. Alafyzov, V. P. Drozd, I. A. Burmistrov, I. S. Yumashev, Kuznetsov served as one the senior naval advisers with the Spanish Republican Navy from the end of August 1936, when he arrived in Spain via France to be delegated to the main Republican fleet base on the Mediterranean, the ancient port of Cartagena, before he was called back in August 1937.[67]

Here, together with 76 fellow Soviet naval advisers plus submarine and motor torpedo boat commanders, Captain Kuznetsov was unable to transcend the self-limiting assumptions of Soviet strategy. They simply could not come to terms, writes Willard Frank, with the proper employment of a relatively powerful fleet of cruisers, destroyers

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[67] N.G.Kuznetsov, *Na dalekom meridiane* (Moscow: Nauka, 1988); *Nakanune* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1969) 115-84.

and submarines, which—when it was not escorting convoys—remained just sitting in port rather than taking action against the weaker enemy.[68]

Clearly, a more assertive strategy was needed. All the Soviet advisers could think of was to acquire the usual instrument of active Soviet defense: more naval aviation, motor torpedo boats, and submarines (but no mines), all to be commanded directly by Soviet personnel. Soviet naval aviators, despite scoring a few hits on the enemy targets (and the German pocket battleship "Deutschland"), because of their extremely poor capacity for identification, represented usually a greater danger for the Republican ships that they were supposed to protect.[69] Soviet manning of the Spanish submarines achieved little or nothing.

The maritime war, which taught the Soviets a few bitter lessons about contemporary naval warfare as inseparable from the exercise of air power, revolved around the vital flow of foreign arms to both sides; between 80-90% of it came by sea, and the Soviet Union provided the best fighter planes and tanks.[70] Germany had sent virtually her entire surface fleet and later a few submarines to participate directly and indirectly in the Spanish War. Meanwhile, Italy's naval forces were at home in the Mediterranean and roaming in Spanish territorial waters in huge numbers and her aircraft could reach Spanish territory within a few hours. By contrast, the Soviets were visibly disadvantaged at sea.

Whereas there was still no decision on the Soviet side whether to get directly involved in the waters around Spain, German and Italian navies were behaving more

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[68] Willard C.Frank, "Naval Operations in the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939," *Naval War College Review*, XXXVII (1984)24-55, here 39.
[69] Frank, 39-40.
[70] *Ibid.*

aggressively. They provided not only valuable intelligence to the Nationalists, who were at the beginning heavily outnumbered at sea, but later Italian destroyers and submarines were leased to the Nationalists; both Italian and German submarines were secretly targeting not only Republican warships, but cargo ships of other nationalities as well.

Unable to provide escort to its own cargo ships bringing in tanks, artillery, and planes, the Soviets depended on the Republican warships, still superior in numbers over the Nationalist Fleet. However, the Republican leadership proved clumsy and inefficient, which was compounded by the incompetent Soviet naval advisers. In late 1936 the Nationalists—aided by Italy and Germany—achieved superiority at sea and ran blockade of the Republican coast. An increasing number of Soviet merchant and neutral ships were intercepted and some of them were sunk. Although between October 1936 and November 1938, Soviet naval officers led by Kuznetsov remained in virtual control of the Republican Navy, their debilitating defensive strategy allowed a number of potentially winning chances, like the invasion of Mellorca, to escape. According to Willard Frank,[71] the Republican Navy had the material and geographical capability to carry the war to the enemy, but Kuznetsov preferred a strategy relegating the fleet to an escort service for Soviet supply ships as they were running on their last leg into Mediterranean ports.

After the sinking of the Soviet arms carrier *Komsomol* in December 1936, the increasingly alarmed Soviet government is said to have readied a naval force from the Black Sea to steam to the western Mediterranean to protect Soviet shipping and eventually to exercise nonintervention duties in the Bay of Biscay, as decided by the Non-Intervention Conference which met in London in April 1937. During 1937 the Germans and Italians switched tactics and took a calculated risk by using their own

[71] *Ibid.*, 32.

submarines, and occasionally even surface warships, against merchant ships—this time not only Soviet ones—running supplies for Republican Spain. Between November 1936 and September 1937 fifteen merchantmen were sunk, mostly by "unidentified" submarines, including—apart from Spanish vessels—two British and two Soviet ships.

To counter this, the French and British governments convened a conference at Nyon in Switzerland, at which the Soviet Union also participated. The conference adopted a British plan to establish special routes and accompany convoys with warships of the participating nations. This turned out to be the most efficient response so far to deal with the Axis (Italo-German) piracy. While Italy and Germany declined, and the British and French sent warships in, the Soviet Navy again was unable to protect her own supplies shipped to her client government in Spain.[72]

Pressed from London by Ambassador Maisky and his naval attaché, the Soviet leadership finally discussed the pros and cons for sending a small squadron to participate in the international naval force. This Soviet squadron was to consist of one or two cruisers, up two four destroyers, a few submarines with a depot ship, and a few patrol ships. The other factor, which spoke in favor of the Soviet interventionist lobby, had to do with the provisions of the recent international agreement concerning the control of the Dardanelles, a decision that was reached at the Montreux conference in July 1936, just as the Spanish Civil War broke out. According to the new Convention of Montreux, the USSR as a Black Sea power was authorized by Turkey to send her warships through the Straits into the Mediterranean in peacetime. Italy, significantly, did not ratify the new

[72] See Frank above, 44. Franco Bargoni, *L'impegno navale italiano durante la Guerra civile spagnola 1936-1939* (Roma: Ufficio Storico della Marina Militare, 1992).

convention.[73] Although the freedom to move in and out was limited to peacetime only, it was of great significance for the overall Soviet naval strategy and shipbuilding. Not only could the Soviets now refit and build warships from the other three fleets in the warmer waters of the Black Sea, but they could also send flotillas to the Mediterranean Sea and assert themselves as a "fleet in being."

The navy boss, Admiral V. M. Orlov, however, rejected the idea of the diplomats and propagandists favoring naval intervention. In his opinion the Soviet Navy, being so weak in numbers, could not spare a single combat ship for overseas duties. In any case, even if the Soviet government wanted to seize the unique opportunity to participate in international naval operations, the squadron to be sent would be so weak and composed of such obsolete units that the impact on the USSR's prestige would be utterly negative. Although Stalin seemed to have accepted Orlov's argument at the time, Soviet sources believe that he did not forgive him when the moment of reckoning arrived.[74] In July 1937, Orlov was relieved of his command, arrested and sentenced to be shot as a British spy.

One can only agree with the final summary by the naval historian of the Spanish Civil War, Willard Frank, when he enumerates the causes of the Republican defeat at sea: the imposition of the self-limiting Soviet strategy combined with the lack of capable leadership among the Republican Navy.[75] The gradual but steady decline of the Republic

[73] Christos L.Rozakis, *International Straits of the World* (Dordrecht: Nijhoff Publishers, 1987); Anthony R.Deluca, *Great Power Rivalry at the Turkish Straits: The Montreux Conference and Convention of 1936* (New York: Columbia Univ.Press, 1981) 53-4.
[74] Rohwer/Monakov (2001) 65-6.
[75] Frank, 48-49.

Navy, in spite of the initial clear advantage in numbers,[76] appears to be the logical consequence. Thus, concludes Frank, initiative and the use of the seas remained with the enemy without contest. Furthermore, the defection of most professional naval officers from the Republican Navy produced a gap the Soviets were simply unable to fill.

The Nationalists, on the other hand, not only enjoyed proficient leadership from the beginning, but collaboration with aggressive and effective allies, who kept the Frankists supplied with a steady stream of men and matériel. The Republic could have won the military contest had she received better strategic direction, which the dependence on Soviet advisers prevented. The final result seemed to have been a paradox—not unusual in military history: while Stalin's military aid kept the Republic alive, his advisers helped dig its grave. Frank sees in the Spanish Civil War a clear demonstration in favor of Napoleon's maxim that in war the mental is to the material as three is to one.[77] The Republic and its Soviet advisers did not lack the equipment, but the mind for victory.

Stalin therefore seems to have made his decision for the Big Fleet based on several contrasting reasons. He was adversely influenced by the earlier outbreak of the naval arms race on a world scale, but also stimulated by what he visualized as the main achievement of the first and second Five-Year Plan; the rapid militarization and industrialization of the country. Had Stalin not made the decision to adopt the Big Fleet Program prior to the Spanish Civil war, the Spanish situation—due to the defeat of the Republic backed by Moscow because the Soviets lacked adequate naval power—would have reinforced Stalin's determination that the first socialist land power needed to

[76] In September 1936 the Republicans disposed with following operational warships: 1 battleship, 3 cruisers, 14 destroyers, 12 submarines; the Nationalists: 1 battleship, one cruiser, 1 destroyer and no submarine (Frank,25,51).
[77] *Ibid.*

become the first socialist naval power as well. Clearly, the Soviet Union's national honor and prestige was at stake. For the Soviet Navy this was a serious challenge. In 1936, it was not ready to put together even a modest flotilla as a permanent Mediterranean Squadron to protect Soviet merchantmen bringing valuable cargo to Republican Spain.

E. ANGL0-SOVIET NAVAL AGREEMENT OF 17 JULY 1937

A final factor contributing not so much to the adoption of the Big Fleet Program, but to the speed and direction with which it was carried out, was the Anglo-Soviet naval agreement of 17 July 1937. This agreement with Great Britain—traditionally the leading sea power—provided Moscow with a cloak of respectability in the international maritime arena, in a manner similar to her membership in the League of Nations gave the USSR credibility in the international political arena. Once again, the deteriorating situation in the Far East played a role in Stalin's decision to come to terms with England, since this would allow the Soviet Navy to direct the bulk of its new Big Fleet warships against Japan. Soviet propaganda during the 1930s gave another reason, of course, blaming the great powers for ignoring Moscow's calls for universal and complete disarmament.

It is not always easy to judge correctly the dual role that the Soviet Union played on the international stage, first as the Motherland of a proletarian World Revolution, and only on the second—less important level—as an ordinary nation-state. The Annual Report of the British Embassy from Moscow for 1937, completed in May 1938, described the Soviet regime as the nucleus of a potential international organization rather than a traditional national state—although Soviet policy had lately tended to resemble

more and more closely that of an ordinary nation-state. Even though it signed international treaties with the newly created Japanese puppet state of Manchuria, or the new regime in Germany, Moscow never abandoned the cause of World Revolution.[78]

Instead, under the cover of its pacifist propaganda, the Soviet Union began to rearm soon after the victory of Nazism in Germany. In the field of naval rearmament, this began during 1935, when Great Britain tried to accommodate German aspirations and agreed—in a clear breach of the Versailles Peace Treaty—in June 1935 to a naval agreement with Nazi Germany that lifted restrictions on all ship categories, including submarines. The number of Germany ships, however, was restricted to 35% of the Royal Navy active list. In view of the rapid Anglo-German naval rearmament—marked especially by the construction of giant battleships—the Soviets were left with no option but to rearm rapidly, particularly at sea, which they had neglected to do for so long.[79]

One of the practical signs of the seriousness of Soviet aspirations to build the Big Fleet was their negotiation, and after a relatively brief period their signature, of the Anglo-Soviet Naval Agreement of 17 July 1937. During 1922, the Washington Naval Agreement set upper limits as 35,000 (45,000) tons of displacement and the caliber of heavy guns as not exceeding 16 in.(40.6 cm).[80] By contrast, the Anglo-Soviet agreement stipulated in its 3rd article that no capital ship[81] of over 10,000 or less than 17,500 tons carrying guns smaller than 10 in. shall be laid down before 1 January 1943; this meant

[78] FO 371/23699/N 2166.
[79] L.Ivanov, *Morskoe sopernichestvo imperialsticheskikh derzhav* (Moscow: Sotsekiiz, 1936), and article by the same author on the Anglo-Soviet Naval Agreement of 1937, in *Morskoj Sbornik* 9(1937) 114-125.
[80] Following a modification in the Anglo-Soviet Naval Agreement on 6 July 1938, the tonnage limit of capital ships was extended to 45,000 tons with the gun caliber remaining unchanged. See British Embassy Moscow to FO : dispatches of 17 Jan.1938, , 4 Feb, 8 July, 12 Sept. 12 Nov.1938 (PRO/FO 371/22820 and 22296)., and FO 371/23699 "Alliances and Treaties."
[81] The Washington Treaty definition of a "capital ship" was any naval vessel, including aircraft carriers, exceeding 10,000 tons of displacement.

the *Kirov* class cruisers. Article 6 extended this limit to cruisers, stating that no ships exceeding a tonnage of 8,000 with guns exceeding 6.1in. shall be laid down during the same period. Thus—whichever way one used to classify the new *Kirov* class heavy cruiser, the Soviet Union would not be allowed—following the strict clauses of the agreement—to lay down on keel this category of warships, which in fact she did even prior to the outbreak of war.

There had been altogether three international naval conferences during the interwar period limiting naval armaments, one in Washington 1921-22, and two in London in 1930 and 1936. The Soviet Union was invited to participate in none of them. By contrast, the Anglo-Soviet Naval Agreement represented certainly the first step toward achieving Moscow's ambition to join the other powers in the maritime arena. The Soviet Union— having been left out from the previous agreements—had joined, along with Germany, as a late signatory the London Naval Treaty of 1936, signed by France, the United States, and later Italy. The obvious absentee was Japan, of course, who had left the club in 1936.

The absence of Japan in international naval agreements since 1936 enabled the Soviet Union to push for a policy of no restrictions regarding the Pacific Ocean. Article 9 of the Anglo-Soviet Agreement did not impose any limitations of size and armament on the Soviet Far Eastern Fleet, nor was Moscow under any obligation to communicate to London any information of her new constructions in the Far East.[82] Although the Soviet Pacific Fleet consisted at the time of less than three obsolete destroyers, Stalin was looking ten years ahead when he hoped his Big Fleet Program would allow the Soviet Union to build a strong Pacific Fleet capable of challenging even Japan.

[82] This would directly apply to the *Chapaev* class cruisers built in the new shipyard at Komsomolsk.*

Entering the naval race so late, Stalin could not be squeamish about ignoring or bypassing some restrictions imposed by the naval agreements. Writing to the Foreign Office on 10 January 1939, the Admiralty complained that of the 26 ships laid on Russian shipyards in 1938, including one capital ship, the Soviets declined to communicate this news to London for six months, until 1 November 1938.[83] Their Lordships considered such wholesale evasion of the terms of the Naval Agreement deliberate.[84]

Molotov's speech on 15 January 1938, at the opening Session of the Supreme Soviet, announced the creation of a separate naval ministry (Commissariat) as a sign that the drive for a Big Fleet was seriously being pursued.[85] Molotov's exhortation that the Soviet Union needed a mighty oceangoing fleet had been subsequently used as the canonical reference in most of the rhetoric surrounding Soviet naval propaganda for the masses. This was the ultimate holy script to be referred to, besides other more prosaic arguments such as capitalist encirclement, length of sea border, naval rearmament started by the capitalist sea powers, etc.

The British Naval Attaché in Moscow, however, with his ear closer to the ground, was deeply skeptical about the Soviets being capable of accelerating their present naval construction plan during the next two years.[86] In July the British Naval Attaché noticed an extraordinary article in *Pravda* of 3 July 1938, reporting an unexpected visit of the

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[83] According to article 7 of the Agreement, each government was expected to furnish particulars of warships under construction within one month of the Treaty coming into force... which the Soviets obviously ignored.

[84] Admiralty to FO , 10 Jan.1939, FO 371/22820/A235/235/45.

[85] See the leading article in *Pravdal and Izvestiya* of 17 Jan. 1938: " ... the mighty socialist industrial potential is capable of fulfilling any and every order of the People's Navy Commissariate... The mighty specialized shipyards (Komsomolsk, Murmansk, Arkhangel, Vladivostok...) that are being rapidly completed at the present time will launch ships of all categories.... The vital interests of our mighty Soviet land demand that we should possess a powerful fleet capable not only of defending itself but, in case of need, of taking the offensive and destroying the enemy in his own territorial waters."

[86] In Lord Chilton's dispatch to FO, 17 Jan. 1938 (PRO/FO 371/22296/N 360 and N465

(formal) head of the Soviet Government to a Leningrad shipyard; President Mikhail Kalinin visited the Baltic Shipyard. Why, asks the Naval Attaché correctly, do we now need this exhortation? In fact, Kalinin mentioned that major technology was even then being transferred from the U.S. and the Soviet workers should be able to build now at home ships 'of the highest class and tonnage.' The Naval Attaché rightly concludes that this could be indication that the decision at a very high places had been taken to build battleships at the Baltic Shipyards.[87]

Having assailed the 'wreckers' and other 'enemies of the people' for any slowdown in the shipyard, Kalinin continued. "*I think that at the present time our engineers and technicians ... should set before themselves the task of catching up and surpassing Old England in the matter of shipbuilding. I tell you frankly that so far nobody has surpassed England in this respect, but it is up to us to do so. England is one of the mightiest of the capitalist states and we are the mightiest socialist State. We have profited from American technology and I think that somehow you will learn something from Americans about shipbuilding. It is essential to remember that the task of creating a mighty Soviet Fleet has been set up by the government... Rapid construction is a necessity. No one knows exactly when your ships will be required by your country...You must be best of all...You are entering into competition with powerful capitalist countries versed in the art of shipbuilding, such as England, USA., Japan, France, Germany and Italy. Each of these countries devotes considerable attention to naval armaments—but you must overtake them all! Your shipyard must be the first in the world... May I rely on you? —What could*

[87] Naval Attaché to Admiralty, Dispatch no.7 of 8 July 1938 (FO 371/22296/N).

the poor and confused workers answer? Of course we will, dear Mikhail Mikhailovich . . "[88]

Added to the exhortations of the workers, it was only logical that the naval discourse over tactics and strategy should also assume a more aggressive form. Rather than the more theoretical *Morskoj Sbornik*, popular naval periodicals were involved. The Naval Attaché was quick to notice the change of emphasis. Citing Commander Evseev, writing in the *Krasnoj Flot* on the subject of Soviet naval strategy, the Naval Attaché noticed how sharply the author denounced a purely defensive naval policy and (for whomever he was speaking) to denounce in pretty sharp tones the entire "Young School" (the Ludri School[89]) in the Soviet Navy: "*The Soviet Union is building and will build battleships,*[90] *that a defensive policy of sheltered behind minefields must be radically converted into an offensive one if the country is to be safeguarded from her enemies at sea. It is not only that we ourselves should be ready to meet a blockade but that our submarines and aviation should wage war in the enemies' waters. ... We now know from the experiences of the present Spanish War that blockade is still an effective weapon. The Ludri School not only maintained that it would be impossible for the Soviet Union to be blockaded, but they also considered that it would be equally out of the question for our submarines and aviation to exert pressure on our enemies. These enemies desired to render our submarines and aviation ineffective for offensive purposes and simultaneously to propagate throughout the fleet the fallacy that blockade of the Soviet Union was an impossibility. From the history of the Great War and today from the experience of the*

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[88] *Pravda* of 3 July 1938.

[89] After M.I. Ludri, who died in the Gulag. See *The Times* of 31 Aug. 1938, which lists some of the most prominent victims of the Navy. He perished together with profs. Zhervé and Petrov, and others.

[90] *Krasnoj Flot* of 16 August 1938.

Spanish conflict we can declare quite confidently that the large scale employment of planes and submarines has in no way weakened that powerful weapon which is known as Sea Power. On the contrary, these new auxiliaries have made it stronger as ever. The "Young School" thesis that naval pressure on the USSR could be met by light forces (submarines, MTBs and aviation) constitute in itself an open acknowledgement that battleships and battlecrusiers can be dispensed with by the Soviet Union. This attempt by our enemies to exclude our heavy naval artillery has not succeeded. Our country is building and will build large ships with the most powerful armaments. ... Every Soviet naval officer must understand that his duty is to engage the enemy with the object of destroying him. Both the "Old" and the "New" schools indulged in anti-Soviet activities, they taught false doctrines and attempted to undermine the might of the Soviet Union. They have failed and the NKVD has decapitated the reptiles. The Voroshilov Naval Staff College[91] *must become the forger of sound naval doctrine. In the past this establishment has been the home of our enemies.*[92] *Its leaders must now expose all the harmful theories, which have been spread about and ensure that in the future strong and healthy strategical, operational and tactical opinions will take their place.*" The Naval Attaché rightly concluded that the Soviet authorities must have decided in 1936 on a battleship

[91] The former Imperial Nikolaev Naval Academy in St.Petersburg, - the highest educational institution for education of naval officers - roughly equivalent to the Naval War College , Newport R.I.

[92] The purge of the professors of the Naval Academy was one of the widest in the ranks of the Soviet armed forces, and led to the destruction of practically the entire faculty on the pretext that they had taught the wrong doctrines. The Naval Academy did not recover until the 1960s.. See Memoirs by Kuznetsov and others. According to the Times of 31 Aug. 1938 the following naval officers perished in the purges: Adm. Orlov, C-in-C Navy; Ad.Zhivkov, C-in-C Baltic Fleet, Ad,Ludry, Head of the Naval Academy; Adm.Ivanov, Adm.Viktorov, Orlov's successor; Adm.Muklevich, Head of Naval Constructions; Adm.Kozhanov, C-in-C Black Sea Fleet; Adm.Kireev, C-in-C Pacific Fleet; Adm.Dishenov, C-in-C Northern Fleet; Adm. Kadatsky, C-in-C of the Far Eatsern Amur Flotilla. Among the few survivors from the former Tsarist Navy were Adm.Galler (chief of naval staff and his first deputy, Adm.Isakov - who went in 1938-9 to the US on a big shopping trip - without success.

program since they attached such considerable importance to this question when negotiating the Anglo-Russian naval agreement. [93]

F. GERMAN – SOVIET NAVAL CONTACTS

A final question that must be asked concerning the Big Fleet Program is: to what extent did Stalin's decision to cooperate with Germany impact the Big Fleet Program?[94] That Nazi Germany would turn overnight into the main arms provider of the Red Navy surprised many. Soviet attempts to purchase ship plans and even order warships from fascist Italy and capitalist United States were well known. However, it was not so clear how often or what kind of maritime negotiations were being conducted in secret by the Soviet Union and Germany. This issue became clear in 1939, when Germany agreed to sell naval equipment to the Soviet Union.

It is difficult to know exactly when, prior to August 1939 that is, the Soviet Union first requested that Germany provide it with naval armaments. Edward Erickson has calculated over seven arms negotiations carried out on both sides since 1933, but he was not been able to focus on just the naval component during these negotiations.[95] But, he was genuinely puzzled by its constant appearance on the Soviet wish list.[96] Likewise, Heinrich Schwendemann, who published the most detailed work on the Nazi-Soviet economic cooperation 1939-41, did not search documents from the earlier period in order

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[93] NA Moscow to Admiralty, Report # 10 about articles in the "Krasnoj Flot" of 28.8. and 12.11.1938, in: PRO: FO 371/22296/N4685. of 12.9. and

[94] It was in September 1939, according to *FRUS: Soviet Union 1933-1939,* pp.869-903. (See Schwendemann, 110).

[95] Edward Erickson, *Feeding the German Eagle: Soviet Economic Aid to Nazi Germany, 1933-1941* (Praeger, 1999) 10-56.

[96] *Ibid.,* 10.

to find out when the Soviet government officially, or semi-officially, requested to buy naval equipment from Germany.[97]

Therefore, what we do know is that on 26 October 1939, a Soviet delegation of over 60 experts arrived in Berlin. After they were subdivided into eight smaller groups, of which five belonged to armaments industries, the most numerous groups specialized in naval matters. The USSR's initial wish list, which the leader of the delegation the People's Commissar for Shipbuilding Ivan Tevosyan produced on the following day at the Foreign Ministry, revealed that the Soviets wanted to purchase mainly German technology, especially related to naval armaments.

Here is the shortlist: complete materials for the construction of four light cruisers; two hulls of heavy cruisers of the "Admiral Hipper" class; artillery pieces of all calibers for coastal and ship guns; further torpedoes, mines and other naval equipment like optical range-finders, fire-directors, hydro-acoustical devices; in addition to the entire set of blue-prints for the "*Hipper*" class of heavy cruisers, of the "*Scharnhorst*" class battleship and for the only, still unfinished, German aircraft carrier "*Graf Zeppelin.*"[98]

Some historians have suggested that Stalin was acting entirely on his own initiative by negotiating with Germany for naval equipment, without the input of his naval experts.[99] Erickson, probably not entirely satisfied with this explanation, borrows from Philbin when he asserts that the long Russian shopping list was probably "the result of Stalin's objective to learn as much as possible about his future enemy and, if possible,

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[97] Heinrich Schwendemann, *Die wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit zwischen dem Deutsche Reich und der Sowjetunion von 1939 bis 1941* (Berlin: Akademie , 1993).
Schwendemann, 102.(AA-PA: Handakten Wiehl"Russland 1.33-6.41, Bd.13. (new classification: R 106235.; Rohwer/Monakov, 113.

[99] Erickson (86) quotes here from Seweryn Baler's Sammelband, *Stalin and His Generals: Soviet Military Memoirs of World War II* (Westview, 1984) 173-5. Who else but the naval experts could have prepared the detailed shopping list that the Soviet delegation carried with them?

to hobble its expansion." [100] But, although the shopping lists for the other two services, the air force and the ground forces, were by comparison much more modest, it should be remembered that the needs of these services had received fuller attention during Stalin's first two Five-Year Plans.

During the summer of 1940, the Germans reluctantly agreed to tow to Leningrad the half-finished heavy cruiser *Luetzow* (renamed *Petropavlovsk)*, to be completed there by the Soviet Union. Stalin was hoping that by hard bargaining, Hitler would also sell him the precious equipment needed for the Big Fleet. These would be the "leftovers" from the third unfinished *Bismarck* that could be, hopefully, incorporated into the Soviet battleships already under construction. Stalin's dream did not come true, however, cut off by Germany's invasion.

[100] Tobias Philbin, *The Lure of NeptuneGerman-Soviet Naval Collaboration and Ambitions, 1919-1941*(Columbia 1994), 69.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Stalin's Big Fleet Program was driven by the slogan "*catch up and overtake" [dognat i peregnat]*, a common phrase during Soviet forced industrialization. Not once, but twice during this century, Russian leaders pursued their obsession about acquiring a large blue-water navy. What they wanted was a navy comparable with other powers, and in Stalin's case, even exceeding them. Both times they failed, with disastrous costs for Mother Russia.

Why did Russia need, or rather think it needed, big warships, battleships, and cruisers? As shown above, Russian naval experts had time after time shown that these big ships were ill-suited for the shallow waters and short distances of the Baltic and Black Seas. Furthermore, big fleets could not resolve Russia's most basic geographic and strategic problems. Therefore, how could a state with the largest landmass in the world, and with four vastly separated oceans and seas to defend, hope to deploy efficiently its naval forces so as to be able to protect its maritime frontiers and to exercise *Weltpolitik* at the same time? This was the question that both Tsar Nicholas II and Stalin tried and failed to answer.

As this monograph has tried to show, Stalin fell into much the same trap as his Tsarist predecessors when he attempted to build a fleet capable of defending simultaneously all of the USSR's extensive coastal zones. A variety of reasons led Stalin to adopt the Big Fleet, including the ongoing arms race, threats from abroad, and his ambition to prove to the world that the Soviet Union was a great power. Although Stalin's program failed, the main reason for abandoning the original Big Fleet Program was not

the enormous drain on Russia's scarce resources, or the technical infeasibility of the plan, but Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941, which opened the Great Patriotic War. Ironically, although devastating from the point-of-view of a land war, Hitler's attack may have saved Stalin from the shame of a second Tsushima, assuming the Big Fleet had ever been built and used to try to counter a rival at sea.

The underlying vision of the Big Fleet Program was marred by its lack of a clear strategic purpose, save for Stalin's omnipotent desire to use the Big Fleet as the ultimate military deterrent—prior to the arrival of the A-Bomb, large and impressive fleets often served in this role. Admiral Kuznetsov has testified that in late 1939 he tried to catch Stalin in a good mood to ask how he planned to use the big ships under construction—particularly in the shallow Baltic Sea, which could be easily mined, and especially when Germany had ceased to be the main adversary. Instead of giving him a reason, Stalin angrily replied: "*We shall build them even if we had to scramble the last penny!*" To this, Kuznetsov noted: "*Thus ended the conversation about battleships, whose construction was already going full speed ahead, while I as a Navy Minister was still not quite clear in my head why they were being built at all!*"[101]

During the war, of course, the Big Fleet Program was halted and the keels were left to rust in their slips. After the Soviet victory in 1945, however, Stalin resumed his dream of acquiring an ocean-going fleet, but found that the acquisition of giant battleships from abroad was even more troublesome than before the war. Instead of destroyers, Stalin had to settle for Heavy (Battle) Cruisers, which became the focus of his naval dream in the last three years of his life. The *Stalingrad* battlecruiser, however, was never completed. When Stalin died this class of cruisers died with him.

[101] The Kuznetsov Family Archives, original; published of the first time in Kuznetsov (2000) 105.

The construction of cruisers, however, pioneered by the launching of the *Kirov* class in 1936, went ahead under full steam, to which the *Chapaev* class was added after the war. It continued even after Stalin's death in 1953 through the *Sverdlov* class, the most accomplished Soviet cruiser, of which only about half out of originally 24 hulls planned were completed by 1960. Thereafter the Soviet Union took a different course as a naval power, relying more on nuclear submarines with fast missile boats—and within a matter of years she posed a direct challenge to the undisputed naval superpower of the day—the United States.

Strategically too, the world geopolitical map changed radically after World War II. The superpower rivalry between the U.S. and the USSR meant that a small and technologically inadequate Soviet Navy had to face global tasks on the world oceans while still facing the same limitations in her regional waters. Thanks to the war effort of the Anglo-Americans, however, all of the Soviet Navy's former rivals, including the Germans, the Italians, and above all the Japanese, were destroyed and were no longer a threat after 1945. The lack of aggressive enemies made the gradual resurgence of the Soviet Navy possible.

While the Soviet Union's strategic problems remained in the Black Sea, the USSR acquired two large ice-free naval bases—Kaliningrad (ex-Koenigsberg) in the Baltic and Port Arthur in the Far East. However, when measured against the unified NATO naval command and the deployment of the U.S. Sixth and the Seventh Fleets in the Mediterranean and the Pacific, these Soviet gains were only marginal improvements in its global strategic position. These limitations also meant that even the idea of a Big Fleet, which had closely followed Stalin's megalomaniac obsession with big battleships

(*linkory*) and corresponded to the Mahanite idea of using the battlefleet in a decisive sea battle between giant ironclads, had to be abandoned as well and replaced by a strategy based on smaller warships—such as cruisers, destroyers, and submarines—harassing the enemy shipping and securing command of the sea.

Thus, instead of having by 1947 a battlefleet, according to the original 1936 blueprint, of 24 new battleships and battlecrusiers to challenge the capitalist navies throughout the world's various seas and oceans, the Soviet Navy retained only the two old and several times refloated ex-Tsarist dreadnoughts in the Baltic, one leased Royal Navy battleship of the same age in the Northern Fleet, and two dreadnoughts—one ex-Tsarist and one ex-Italian in the Black Sea; after World War II, there were no Soviet capital ships in the Pacific Fleet.

Over time, Soviet numerical superiority in submarines would show that the USSR's naval planners had retained an alternative strategy, just in case Stalin and his Big Fleet failed. However, unlike Germany in both world wars, the Soviet Union was never able to apply her submarine advantage to achieve full mastery of the sea. We have therefore been left guessing what was the ultimate purpose of Soviet submarine superiority? A mere protection of the Socialist Motherland's shores, combined with a sea blockade of enemy ship lanes? This question has no clear answer.

There was, however, another important purpose for which the Big Fleet, rather than ground and air forces, was uniquely suited: to act as a potent symbol of Soviet strength and Communism's success. This purpose was ideal in that it could combine a vibrant navy with Stalin's ultimate goal of promoting worldwide revolution. In the post-World War II era, however, Stalin's successors wisely abandoned the urge to possess

huge and expensive capital ships just for showing the red flag abroad. They adopted "Gucci" style tactics, steaming around the world in beautiful Italian-designed cruisers instead.

Also, after the successful flight of *Sputnik* in 1957, the Soviet Navy was no longer required as a symbol of Soviet power. The USSR's new leaders looked to space, not the sea. Nikita Sergeevitch Khrushchev even denigrated his own flagship during a 1959 trip to the United States: "... *good only for state visits. From a military point out of fashion. Such ships have become obsolete. Now they are only a good target for missiles! Just this year we have permitted the scrapping of our cruisers which were almost completed.*"[102] This casual dismissal of his own Soviet flagship was indeed the death knell of Stalin's Big Fleet Program—but not yet the end of the Red Navy itself.

The Soviet Navy revived under the leadership of Admiral Sergei Gorshkov, Kuznetsov's successor, at which time the Soviet Navy undertook a radical modernization program. During the 1970s, it achieved a close parity with the U.S. Navy, and in some categories—like submarines and missile warfare—even gained the upper hand. In 1972, Norman Polmar, the foremost U.S. authority on the Soviet Navy, stated that "*today the Soviet Union can boast the world's largest and most modern surface navy; the largest and most modern ocean research and fishing fleets.*"[103]

By the early 1980s, while still finding it impossible to challenge the U.S. supremacy in large fleet carriers, the Soviet Navy for the first time outnumbered the Americans in submarines and smaller missile-equipped craft. Russia was still a power to be reckoned with. Less than ten years later, however, the once threatening Soviet Navy,

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[102] *Leningradskaya Pravda,* 23 March 1960.
[103] Norman Polmar, *Soviet Naval Power - Challenge for the 1970s* (1974).

together with the rest of the Soviet armed forces, began, with the withdrawal from Afghanistan and from East Germany, their incremental and yet irreversible decline. In a matter of years the collapse of the world's most powerful war machine was clear for all to see. The era of Russian "Big Fleets" may be over forever.

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Stalin's "Big Fleet Program" and China

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Although Dr. Milan Hauner's study "Stalin's Big Fleet Program" has focused primarily on the formation of Big Fleets during the Tsarist and Soviet periods of Russia's naval history, there are important lessons to be learned that can be applied to other countries as well. For example, in recent years both India and China have adopted large-scale naval acquisitions and building programs. Unlike Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, modern-day India is a democratic country, with parliamentary controls over funding for military expansion; therefore, India may have little in common with the Russian and Soviet models. However, China does exhibit many striking systemic similarities with the former Soviet Union, including a Communist government, centralized controls over the economy, and a foreign policy that appears to include expansionist elements. Can any of the lessons learned about Stalin's "Big Fleet Program" be applied to China?

The Chinese economy is currently booming, and the Chinese Navy is even now in the midst of an enormous naval acquisitions program, worth several billion dollars every year. In addition to its own indigenous shipbuilding programs, China has already purchased two *Sovremenny* class guided-missile destroyers, and it has ordered two others from Russia. China is rapidly expanding its submarine fleet, with a recent order in May 2002 for eight more *Kilos*. Finally, China has just purchased from the Ukraine the *Varyag*, an old Soviet-era aircraft carrier; in a clear parallel to Stalin's 1939 purchase of the *Luetzow/Petropavlovsk* from Germany, the Chinese may intend to either complete the

Varyag, or more likely study this Soviet-era aircraft carrier in order to begin to reverse engineer an aircraft carrier of their own. Do these purchases suggest a Big Fleet Program comparable to Stalin's 1936 plan? If so, what might be motivating China's naval acquisitions and building program?

As discussed in great detail by Hauner, the early 1930s arms race in both Europe and Asia was an important motivating factor for Stalin's decision to adopt the "Big Fleet Program." Similarly, some have argued East Asia is even now in the midst of such a naval arms race, with Taiwan, and to a lesser degree Japan, rapidly increasing the size of their navies.[1] Like Stalin, the People's Republic of China portrays its own policies as responding to these other countries. In particular, China has accused the United States of tipping the balance-of-power in Taiwan's favor, by agreeing to sell Taiwan advanced naval platforms, including diesel submarines and perhaps even AEGIS destroyers. China's response has been to increase its own naval purchases, mainly from the former Soviet Union. Could the current arms race in East Asia, therefore, be a direct parallel to the arms race in the 1930s that helped convince Stalin to adopt the Big Fleet Program?

Also, in another striking parallel, China faces numerous military challenges from abroad, as the Soviet Union did in the mid-1930s. Is it buying new ships in order to face this threat? Here too, the answer is probably "Yes," as tensions over the Taiwan Strait have increased;[2] Chinese ships have been accused of broaching Japanese sovereign

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[1] David Lague, "Buying Some Major Muscle," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (January 24, 2002); The lead on this article states: "The People's Liberation Army is shopping for foreign arms and the latest military technology with a vengeance. Costing tens of billions of dollars a year, this drive will change the face of its forces at war and is unsettling some foreign government."

[2] Hsia Wen-szu, "Changes in Sino-US-Taiwan Relations Shock CPC Hierarchy; Military Brass Threaten Not To Support Jiang's Reelection as CMC Chairman," *Hong Kong Kai Fang* in Chinese 01 April 2002.

waters;[3] and various Southeast Asian countries have challenged Chinese claims to sovereignty over the South China Sea.[4] Some Chinese authors see the PRC as literally surrounded by threats.[5] Chinese fear of attack would therefore also appear to parallel the model presented by Hauner in "Stalin's Big Fleet Program."

Finally, is China striving to use its naval growth to "show the flag"? In other words, is the Chinese Navy being used as a symbol of China's growing regional and global power? Here also, the answer is "Yes." Recently, the Chinese Navy embarked on a round-the-world expedition, the first of its kind in Chinese history, during which the domestically-produced Chinese warships will be stopping in a large number of foreign ports. According to the Chinese press: "Experts say that the naval vessels, symbolizing a nation's naval power and industrial strength, are increasingly shouldering the task of promoting contact with the military of other nations."[6] Clearly, China is using this occasion to prove to the world that it has a capable home-grown naval force.

Of course, there may have been other reasons underlying Stalin's decision to adopt the Big Fleet Program, but those emphasized in Hauner's "Stalin's Big Fleet Program" would appear to be among the most influential. If one applies these issues to the recent naval acquisitions and building program of the People's Republic of China, there would appear to be distinct parallels. This leads to another important question: if

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[3] Yi Jan, "Be Vigilant over Japan's Future Role in the Taiwan Strait," *Hong Kong Ching Pao* in Chinese 01 June 2002.

[4] "Joker: How about war games in Mischief?" *Manila The Philippine Star*, 08 February 2002.

[5] Wang Hui, "China Must Immediately Make Military Preparations for National Reunification -- China Is Facing Urgent National Security Situation in its East Region and Serious National Security Situation in its West Region," *Hong Kong Kuang Chiao Ching* in Chinese, 16 April 2002.

[6] "China's Navy Sails Off To Meet The World," Beijing Xinhua in English, 15 May 2002.

the underlying motivations for the PRC's naval development are similar to Stalin's Big Fleet Program, could the outcomes also be similar?

What is perhaps most intriguing about comparing China's recent naval growth with its Soviet predecessor is that—as Hauner shows—Stalin's Big Fleet Program would most likely have been a resounding failure. Even if Stalin had succeeded in building the enormous fleet as planned, there would have been no use for the resulting large ships in the shallow and highly constrained waters of the Baltic Sea. In the Black Sea, passage through the Straits would be limited during times of war. Finally, in East Asia, Japan dominated all of the major straits and SLOCs, making the effectiveness of a Soviet Pacific fleet dubious at best.

China today faces many of the same geographical limitations. Assuming the PRC builds up its Navy by adding large ships—such as, for example, an aircraft carrier—what can it do with it? To the North and East, the Japanese islands, and to the Southeast, the island of Taiwan, effectively block Chinese naval projection into the Pacific Ocean. In times of war, China's fleet might easily be cut off, and forced to operate in China's lengthy, and in most places shallow, coastal waters, where large ships might actually be at a disadvantage when compared to smaller, more mobile craft; the same argument applies to the shallow waters of the South China Sea. Therefore, the potential dilemma that China's Navy faces as it builds up its fleet appears in some ways eerily similar to the difficulties that Stalin would have faced if his Big Fleet Program had become a reality: how will China be able to use its big fleet once it acquires it?

In conclusion, the recent growth of the Chinese navy has many elements in common with Stalin's Big Fleet Program. Like Stalin's, will the Chinese program prove

to be merely an enormous waste of both human labor and capital? Will the resulting fleet have any real purpose? Or, also like Stalin, is the growth of the Chinese Navy more a reflection of the Chinese leaders' desire to gain greater regional and international prestige—in short, to be treated as a Great Power? If so, and if the modern-day Chinese naval program is, in fact, simply a Chinese version of Stalin's original Big Fleet Program, only time will tell whether China's ambition to build a truly effective world-class blue-water navy will come to fruition.