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# Soviet Perceptions of US Naval Strategy

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# Soviet Perceptions of US Naval Strategy

A Research Paper

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July 1986

## Soviet Perceptions of US Naval Strategy

### Key Judgments

Information available  
as of 1 November 1985  
was used in this report.

The Soviets' open-source writings and the scenarios of their major naval exercises in the late 1970s and the 1980s suggest they perceive that US emphasis on seapower has markedly increased. They evidently see an increased threat from the sea, manifested in US plans to build a 600-ship Navy and in what they describe as a more aggressive naval strategy. They perceive US naval strategy as having both a strategic nuclear aspect, which they refer to as "the ocean strategy," and a conventional warfare aspect, which they often refer to as "the forward strategy."

The *ocean strategy* was described in Soviet open-source writings in the early 1970s as an effort to enhance the survivability of the US nuclear deterrent by moving most US strategic warheads to sea. According to recent writings, this strategy took a more ominous turn in the 1980s when its emphasis shifted to developing a sea-based "superior counterforce" capability, centered on:

- Ohio-class ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs), which will be quieter than previous SSBNs and, as the Soviets describe it, "imperceptible" to enemy ASW forces.
- Trident D-5 sea-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) and Tomahawk sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs), which the Soviets believe will be sufficiently accurate and powerful to destroy hardened targets.
- Wartime strategic ASW operations against Soviet SSBNs.

The Soviets say that the Trident D-5, unlike any previous SLBM, is designed to be a first-strike weapon. According to their open-source writings, it will have a 600-kiloton nuclear warhead and a circular error probable (CEP) of 90 to 100 meters, well within the 150-meter accuracy they claim would be necessary to destroy hardened ICBM silos. The Soviets also say that the range of both the Trident C-4 and the Trident D-5 SLBMs will substantially improve the survivability of the US SSBN force by allowing submarines armed with these missiles to conduct wartime patrols in waters off the east and west coasts of the United States.

The Soviets apparently view the Tomahawk SLCM primarily as a part of the US strategic nuclear arsenal aimed at targets in the USSR, rather than as a theater nuclear weapon. Open-source writings describe the Tomahawk as a part of the US strategic reserve, with sufficient accuracy (150 to 180 meters CEP) and a large enough warhead (150 to 200 kilotons) to destroy some hardened targets.

The combination of hard-target SLBMs and SLCMs and strategic anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capabilities, according to one prominent Soviet author, would give the US Navy the ability effectively to destroy Soviet intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) in their silos and Soviet SSBNs at sea. The USSR would be unable to retaliate in kind, according to this author, because most US strategic weapons would be deployed in "relatively invulnerable" submarines. Numerous other Soviet articles seem to reflect similar concern about the counterforce potential of US naval forces.

The *forward strategy*, according to Soviet writings, centers on US Navy plans to conduct intensive combat operations in the seas that border the USSR and to blockade the Soviet Navy in its home waters at the outset of a NATO-Warsaw Pact war. Soviet writings and naval exercises have for a long time portrayed US plans to fight in these areas, but in recent years these sources emphasize a rapidly developing threat. According to Soviet authors, the US Navy will attempt to accomplish the aims of the forward strategy by establishing ASW barriers with attack submarines in geographic choke points—such as the area between the North Cape of Norway, Bear Island, and Svalbard-Spitzbergen—and by operating multiple aircraft carrier battle groups in the Norwegian Sea and northwest Pacific. Soviet Northern and Pacific Fleet exercises regularly simulate these efforts, particularly carrier battle groups approaching the USSR.

Soviet open-source writings in the 1980s consistently describe aircraft carriers as the backbone of "US naval general purpose forces" and a "highly prepared reserve of strategic forces." These writings convey the clear impression that the Soviets view US aircraft carriers as increasingly capable and survivable systems. Writings that praise the "high combat stability" of American aircraft carriers—a Soviet formulation that measures the capability of a military unit to fight and survive under wartime conditions—suggest that the Soviets believe the US Navy has improved its capability to pursue the forward strategy in high-intensity combat areas such as the Norwegian Sea.

Soviet authors frequently extol the ability of US aircraft carriers to project power in distant areas, but few articles discuss in any detail US naval operations in support of ground force operations in the land theaters during a NATO-Warsaw Pact conventional war. The combined evidence from

open-source writings and naval exercises suggests, in fact, that the Soviets are most concerned about the US Navy's strategic nuclear capabilities. Recent writings place heavy emphasis on the increased number and accuracy of US sea-based warheads and US plans to attack Soviet SSBNs.

The Soviet propensity to view the US Navy primarily as a strategic threat probably reflects an overall attitude that combat at sea would not be decisive to the outcome of a NATO-Warsaw Pact war that remained purely conventional. There is substantial evidence that Soviet military planners do not believe that the US Navy has sufficient offensive power, using conventional weapons only, to have a decisive impact on the course of ground operations in Central Europe. The Soviets apparently regard Central Europe as the critical theater in a war with NATO. They do not seem to view the outcome of combat on the maritime flanks with the same degree of gravity. On the other hand, their open-source writings provide ample evidence that they believe US sea-based strategic forces would play a key role in deciding the outcome of a nuclear war.

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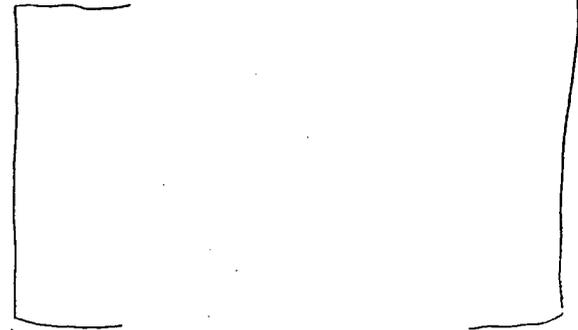
## Soviet Perceptions of US Naval Strategy

### Assumptions and Sources

Soviet open-source writings are by far our most abundant source of information regarding Soviet perceptions of the US Navy over the past 10 years. Soviet journals, both military and nonmilitary, regularly contain detailed and fairly straightforward articles describing US naval equipment, exercises, and the views of US leaders on naval strategy and doctrine. Some of these articles probably are intended to promote Soviet naval programs by extolling similar US systems. Articles praising US aircraft carriers, for example, may be intended, in part, to support the construction of Soviet aircraft carriers. Most of these articles, however, probably are intended to inform a domestic, professional military audience about new developments in Western navies and the official interpretations of these developments. While the Soviets engage regularly in disinformation practices about their armed forces and also disseminate propaganda on US forces, such practices do not appear to be used in professional journals published in Russian that are widely circulated within the Soviet military for instructive purposes on enemy forces.

The degree to which open-source statements about the US Navy actually reflect real Soviet views can be demonstrated by comparing them with more authoritative sources. We checked thoroughly for consistency with other source material, especially in those cases where it initially appeared that an open-source article might have overstated US capabilities. We found no clear indication in any of these cases, however, of significant differences between open-source statements [

] as manifested in actual exercises. Even those Soviet articles that, to Western observers, overstate the threat appear to reflect actual misperceptions rather than deliberate deception.



There are additional ways to weigh the relative validity of observations on US naval policy found in open-source Soviet writings. Many Soviet authors are prolific contributors to military journals and have established reputations. For example, Admirals K. A. Stalbo, N. P. V'yunenko, and A. S. Pushkin are generally regarded in the West as authoritative spokesmen of official Soviet views. Moreover, some open-source journals probably are more authoritative than others. [



*Morskoy Sbornik (Naval Digest)*, the official journal of the Soviet Navy, is also probably a more reliable barometer of official Soviet naval views than less prestigious publications.

On balance, [

] corroborate the observations on US naval strategy and systems found in open-source writings. Moreover, Soviet articles on the US Navy in open-source naval journals are similar to those in Soviet civilian and nonnaval military publications, [ ] This consistency suggests that these writings present a Soviet, rather than strictly the Soviet Navy, view of the perceived threat from the sea. To avoid confusion



between Soviet belief and our interpretation, this paper does not attempt to identify or correct Soviet statements that appear to us to overstate the capabilities of a US weapon system or to misrepresent US policy.

#### Soviet View: Tenets of US Naval Strategy

Soviet writings since the early 1950s have consistently described NATO as a coalition of seapowers, led by the United States, that would use the ocean areas surrounding the USSR as avenues of invasion and launch zones for strategic nuclear attacks. Over the years, Soviet authors have tended to depict a growing naval threat, and they continue to do so in writing about current US naval policy.

Both the volume and tone of open-source articles appearing in the 1980s suggest that the Soviets believe that US emphasis on naval power has markedly increased under the Reagan administration. Two common themes run through most recent Soviet writings on US naval policy:

- Both military and nonmilitary authors stress that US leaders regard the Navy as the most important component of US armed forces, particularly strategic forces, and that the current administration places more emphasis on naval power than any of its predecessors.
- These articles invariably cite statements by US defense officials that the United States rejects the concept of naval parity with the USSR, insisting instead on superiority at sea.

The buildup to a 600-ship Navy—centered on 15 carrier battle groups (CVBGs), 20 Ohio-class SSBNs, and 100 nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs) armed with Tomahawk cruise missiles—is frequently cited by Soviet authors as a visible manifestation of the US drive for naval superiority. A 1984 article by G. Suvorov in *Sovetskaya Rossiya* (*Soviet Russia*), for example, stated that:

*The 1980s have been marked by particular intensification of the activity of the US Navy on the oceans, and it is far from accidental that this has coincided with the coming to power of*

*the Reagan administration. I think it would be difficult to name any other administration of the entire postwar period that placed such strong reliance on the Navy in its military-political strategy. "We need naval superiority," warns Reagan. "We are after nothing less," Secretary of Defense Weinberger and Secretary of the Navy Lehman echo the President.*

The Soviets usually describe US naval strategy as having both a strategic nuclear aspect and a conventional warfare aspect. The strategic aspect, which the Soviets often refer to as the "ocean strategy," involves efforts to upgrade dramatically the nuclear warfighting capabilities of US sea-based weapons and to move most US strategic warheads to sea. US wartime plans, according to Soviet authors, also call for conventional naval forces to pursue a "forward strategy" of blockading the Soviet Navy in its home waters at the outset of a war in Europe.

#### The "Ocean Strategy"

Articles on the US "ocean strategy" began to appear in Soviet military journals in the early 1970s. At that time, prominent naval theoreticians such as Admirals K. A. Stalbo, N. P. V'yunenkov, and the former Commander in Chief of the Soviet Navy S. G. Gorshkov, [ ] described the ocean strategy as an effort to enhance the deterrent value of US strategic forces by moving most of them to sea, particularly in nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs). These authors appeared to share the belief of US proponents of the ocean strategy that the main advantage to SSBNs is their relative invulnerability, compared with land-based systems, to "disarming" nuclear strikes. According to a 1978 article in *Zarubezhnoye Voyennoye Obozreniye* (*Foreign Military Review*) by Capt. First Rank B. Gontarenko, moving strategic weapons to sea would have the additional advantage of helping solve the antiballistic missile (ABM) dilemma. By reducing the number of land-based missiles, the United States could reduce the number of ABM systems needed to protect them. Submarine-launched ballistic missiles

(SLBMs), which the Soviets say are capable of attacking the USSR from many directions, also would have a better capability to penetrate Soviet ABM defenses than would intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and bombers, which enter Soviet airspace through known corridors.

Soviet authors writing in the late 1970s and early 1980s advised their readers that, although the United States had not formally adopted the ocean strategy, many of its tenets were being implemented. These authors cited the US Navy's share of defense allocations and the Poseidon SLBM program as evidence of movement toward adoption of the ocean strategy. Almost all Soviet articles on the US Navy from this period pointed out that, beginning in 1972, the Navy received a greater share of the US defense budget than the Army or Air Force. Rearming SSBNs with Poseidon missiles, according to numerous articles at the time, would result in a more-than-threefold increase in the number of US strategic warheads carried by SLBMs. Several articles have since stated that, as a result of the Poseidon program, SLBMs would carry 50 percent of US strategic warheads by 1980, as compared with only 20 percent in 1970.

The Soviets have characterized the US ocean strategy as taking a new, and more ominous, turn in the early 1980s. US sea-based strategic forces have now been portrayed not only as having deterrent value but also as key elements in a new "counterforce" strategy. According to a 1982 article in *SShA: Ekonomika, Politika, Ideologiya (USA: Economics, Politics, and Ideology)* by G. M. Sturua, the leading naval specialist at the USSR Academy of Sciences' Institute for the United States and Canada, ongoing US SSBN and SLBM programs, "the mass-scale arming of the US Navy with strategic cruise missiles," and efforts to improve antisubmarine warfare capabilities are aimed at achieving such a "superior counterforce capability." Sturua asserts that US naval strategic forces will soon have two necessary characteristics for a successful counterforce strategy: Ohio-class SSBNs will be "imperceptible to antisubmarine warfare (ASW) forces" and Trident II SLBMs and Tomahawk sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs) will be sufficiently accurate to attack hard targets.

In addition to pursuing a hard-target kill capability, Sturua says, the United States is also pursuing a vigorous "strategic ASW" program aimed at attaining the capability to seek out and destroy Soviet SSBNs in the USSR's peripheral waters. The combination of hard-target SLBMs and strategic ASW capabilities, Sturua implies, would allow US naval forces to destroy Soviet ICBMs in their silos and sink Soviet SSBNs in their bastion areas. The USSR would be unable to retaliate in kind, according to Sturua, because most US strategic forces would be deployed in "invulnerable" SSBNs. Sturua's assessment that improvements in US strategic weapon systems and ASW forces support a "counterforce" strategy seems to be shared by other Soviet authors writing about the Trident and Tomahawk systems, US nuclear torpedo-attack submarines (SSNs), and ocean surveillance systems.

Sturua's article is particularly significant because it is the work of a civilian written for a prestigious political journal. His description of the US ocean strategy is fully consistent with articles written by Soviet Navy officers in naval and other military journals. This suggests that the Soviet leadership shares the Navy's concern over the perceived increase in US emphasis on seapower.

*Trident.* Throughout the 1970s, many Soviet authors pointed to the US SSBN force as the "main component" of America's strategic nuclear arsenal. They saw the Trident program—the Ohio-class SSBN and Trident C-4 and D-5 SLBMs—as the culmination of a US effort, begun in 1957, to concentrate its principal strategic nuclear punch in sea-based systems. In particular, Soviet writings stressed that the Trident program will improve the "combat stability"—a Soviet formulation for measuring the capability of a military unit to fight and survive under wartime conditions—of the US SSBN force and will afford US SSBNs, for the first time, sufficient accuracy and warhead yield to destroy hardened targets.

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*Soviet Comments on US "Ocean Strategy"*

In the United States, for example, [the increased offensive capability of naval forces] has evoked elaboration of the so-called ocean strategy, which essentially states that all future strategic systems should be naval, since this increases their mobility and invulnerability.

K. A. Stalbo, *Voyennaya Mysl'*  
(*Military Thought*), March 1971

The essence of the "ocean strategy" consists primarily of shifting the center of gravity of the [United States'] strategic nuclear forces from the land to the sea. . . . In the opinion of the apologists of the "ocean strategy," transferring the strategic nuclear weapons from the land to the sea will, in the first place . . . make it inexpedient to launch nuclear attacks directly at the United States and, in the second place, will reduce the vulnerability of these weapons.

N. P. V'yunenko, *Voyennaya Mysl'*,  
May 1973

In recent years the United States has proceeded with practical implementation of another, so-called oceanic version of strategy, the substance of which consists in the maximum concentration of strategic nuclear capabilities in the Navy.

S. G. Gorshkov, *Voyennaya Mysl'*,  
July 1974

. . . the Americans are making persistent and unflagging efforts to transform the world's oceans into a bridgehead for a concentration of the armed forces of the United States and NATO. . . . At first their foundation consisted of strike formations of aircraft carriers . . . and then the Polaris nuclear missile system was created and subsequently modified into the Poseidon system. And now, to supplement these, yet another oceangoing strategic weapon system—the

Trident—is being created at an accelerated tempo. Moreover, a whole family of cruise missiles is being created to transform numerous surface ships and multirole submarines and aircraft, including aircraft carried on the decks of ships, into carriers of strategic weapons designed primarily to destroy targets on the ground. . . .

S. G. Gorshkov, *Kommunist Vooruzhennykh Sil (Communist of the Armed Forces)*, February 1978

There was a new spirit of interest in the "ocean strategy" in the United States at the beginning of the 1980s. . . . The search for a way out of the "nuclear deadlock" in which the United States found itself in connection with the USSR's ability to deliver a retaliatory nuclear strike against the aggressor led to Washington's official approval of the notorious strategy of "counterforce" at the end of the 1970's. . . . This strategy completely justified the priority construction and modernization of one element of the "strategic triad," namely SSBNs . . . modern SSBNs that are imperceptible to antisubmarine forces will acquire another valuable feature that was absent in the 1960s and 1970s: the SLBMs installed on them will be accurate enough to destroy well-protected small targets. In other words, the strategic underwater weapon will combine two characteristics necessary for the aims of the strategy of "superior counterforce"—invulnerability and high accuracy.

G. M. Sturua, *SShA: Ekonomika, Politika, Ideologiya (USA Economics, Politics, and Ideology)*,  
November 1982

Several Soviet articles published in the late 1970s and early 1980s predicted that the Trident program would substantially strengthen the "combat stability" of US SSBNs in two ways:

- The increased range (7,400 km) of the Trident C-4 SLBM, which the United States began to employ in existing Poseidon-equipped SSBNs in 1978, would allow US SSBNs to conduct wartime patrols in waters adjacent to the east and west coasts of the United States. According to a 1982 article by Rear Adm. A. Rumyantsev in *Zarubezhnoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, conducting SSBN patrols in an area such as the West Atlantic "will raise the survivability of [the SSBN] in general (in view of the difficulties involved in the enemy's use of antisubmarine forces in the area) and will simplify the control of nuclear missile submarines." A 1976 article by Capt. Second Rank Ye. Rakitin in *Morskoy Sbornik* predicted that the Trident C-4 missile would enhance the combat stability of US SSBNs by "overcoming the shortcomings" of the Poseidon and Polaris systems. According to Rakitin, the "inadequate range" of Poseidon and Polaris SSBMs forced US SSBNs to conduct wartime patrols in areas far removed from the United States. The "remoteness" of these patrol areas from the United States, according to this author, placed US SSBNs equipped with Poseidon and Polaris missiles in a "poor defensive posture" (see figure 1).

- Soviet authors also say that new Ohio-class SSBNs will be significantly quieter and therefore far less vulnerable than previous US SSBNs. Numerous articles state that the "combat stability" of the Ohio-class will be substantially greater because of "reduced noise levels, improved maneuverability, and improved means of self-defense." These articles claim that the Ohio SSBNs will have a "considerably greater silent running speed on patrol" and will be able to make evasive maneuvers at "higher low-noise speeds." According to the Soviets, these improvements will provide greater survivability even in the face of future Soviet ASW improvements. For example, N. P. V'yunenko [ ] almost five years before the commissioning of the first Ohio-class SSBN, predicted that the new

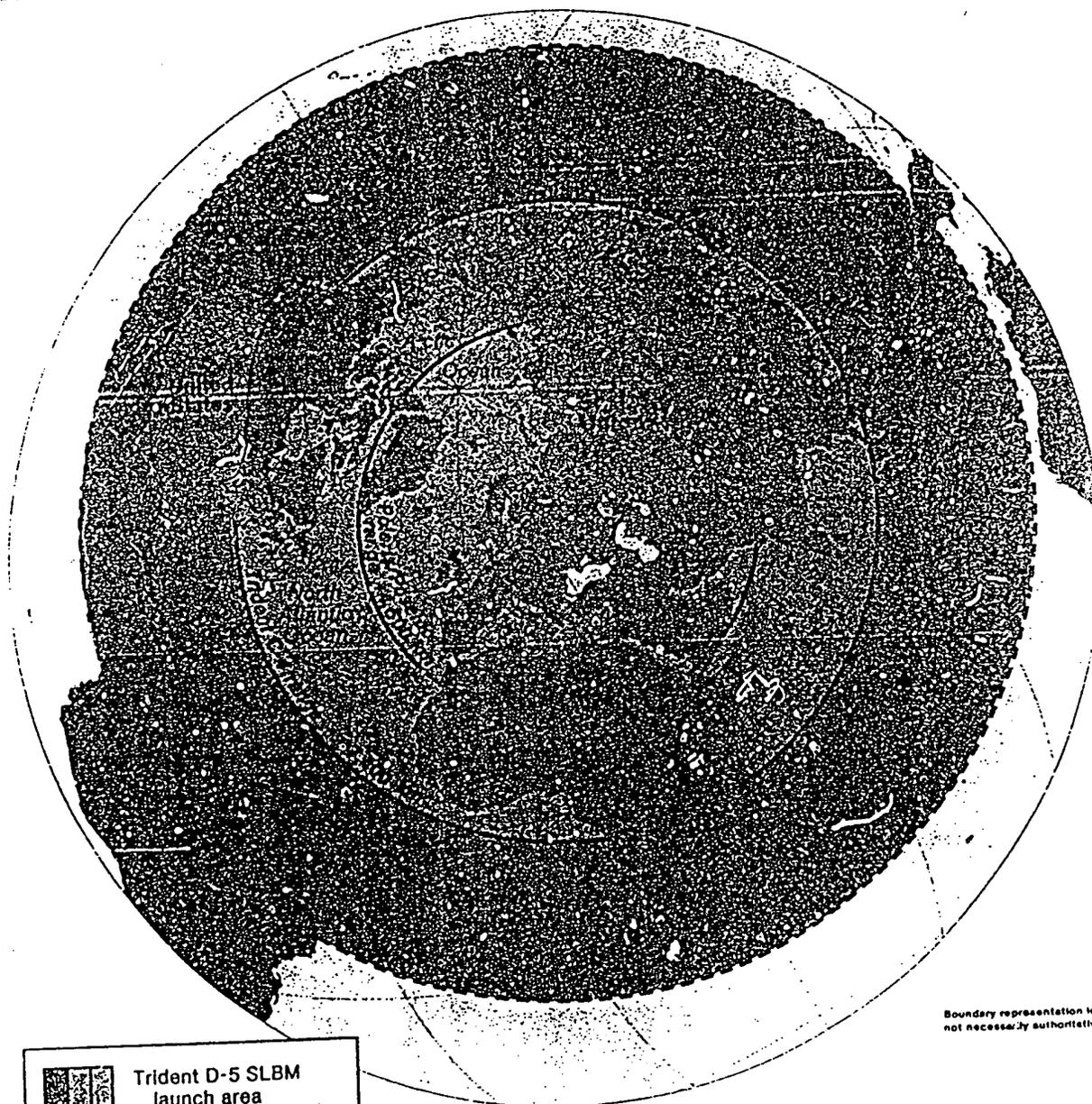
Trident submarine would generate "far less noise" than older SSBNs and therefore create a "counterbalance to any significant success in improving ASW weapons."

Writings from the late 1970s and early 1980s suggest that the Soviets are equally concerned about the increased offensive striking power of new US SLBMs. Soviet authors point out that the currently deployed Trident C-4 SLBM has "greater counterforce potential" than all previous US SLBMs. They expect the Trident D-5 SLBM, now under development, to have even greater counterforce capability.

The Soviets claim that the Trident D-5 missile, unlike any previous SLBM, is designed to be a first-strike weapon. This assertion is a standard feature of articles published in the 1980s in both military and nonmilitary journals. A 1980 *Literaturnaya Gazeta (Literary Magazine)* article, for example, said that the D-5 "will have tactical-technical parameters making it an intercontinental ballistic missile both in range of fire, yield of ammunition, and accuracy on target, which can turn it into a first-strike weapon." Lt. Gen. I. Perov, in a 1982 *Zarubezhnoye Voyennoye Obozreniye* article, said that the Trident D-5 "should possess almost the same combat capability for hitting highly protected installations as the MX, that is, a first-strike weapon." A September 1985 article in *Krasnaya Zvezda (Red Star)*, a daily newspaper published by the Soviet Ministry of Defense, claims that the newly commissioned USS Alabama, like other Ohio-class SSBNs, will carry "24 of the latest strategic nuclear rockets and is designed for delivering a nuclear first strike."

The Soviets support their assessment of the Trident D-5 missile as a first-strike weapon with US statements about its planned accuracy and warhead yield. Ye. Rakitin's 1980 *Morskoy Sbornik* article, citing the missile's producer, Lockheed Corporation, predicted that the Trident D-5 would have a circular error probable (CEP) of 180 meters. G. M. Sturua's 1982 *SShA* article gives the missile a CEP of 90 meters, well within the 150-meter accuracy he—and

Figure 1  
Soviet View of Ocean Areas  
From Which US SLBMs Could Reach Moscow



Boundary representation is not necessarily authoritative

-  Trident D-5 SLBM launch area
-  Trident C-4 SLBM launch area
-  Polaris/Poseldon SLBM launch area

• The Soviet estimated range for the Trident D-5 SLBM depicted here assumes a payload of 14 150-kiloton warheads. The Soviets probably believe that a Trident D-5 carrying a payload of seven 600-kiloton warheads would have a considerably shorter range capability, most likely close to that of the Trident C-4 SLBM.

other Soviet authors—claim would be necessary “to destroy” ICBM silos. A 1984 article by Capt. Third Rank A. Smirnov and Lt. A. Smirnov in *Zarubezhnoye Voyennoye Obozreniye* attributes similar capabilities to the Trident D-5, with a CEP of “up to 100 meters.” Smirnov and Smirnov also say that the Trident D-5 can carry up to seven 600-kiloton nuclear warheads, each six times the yield of the warhead carried by the Trident C-4 and 15 times that of the Poseidon SLBM.<sup>1</sup>

Their expectation that Trident D-5 missiles will be accurate enough to attack hardened targets apparently led the Soviets to reevaluate their assessment of the likely wartime missions of US SSBNs. Soviet authors writing in the 1970s generally listed “administrative and industrial centers,” military bases, ports, airfields, and troop groupings as the primary wartime targets for US SLBMs. In recent years Soviet authors usually have begun any listing of US Navy missions or likely wartime targets for SLBMs with a reference to their participation in a “neutralizing strike” against Soviet strategic forces. A 1981 two-part article in *Morskoy Sbornik* entitled “The US Navy by the Year 2000” cited a list of US Navy missions (borrowed from a 1974 US article by Adm. Stansfield Turner) that included “readiness to inflict a nuclear ‘counterstrike’ as part of assured destruction” as the primary US Navy mission. The article goes on to say that Turner’s list of missions is still good for the 1980s and beyond, except that there has been a change in the “sequence of their accomplishment.” The article says that “as the accuracy of missile firings by SSBNs has increased, it has been proposed to make them part of the forces intended not only for the first ‘counterstrike,’ but also for a ‘neutralizing strike.’” Similarly, Rear Adm. A. Rumyantsev’s 1982 article in *Zarubezhnoye Voyennoye Obozreniye* listed US SLBM

<sup>1</sup> To determine the basis for Soviet statements that the Trident D-5 will have the capability to destroy hardened targets, we applied Soviet performance data for this SLBM to a Soviet effectiveness model that measures the ability of a warhead impacting on the ground to destroy a missile silo. This analysis shows that the Trident D-5, in the Soviet view, would be 30 percent more effective than the improved Minuteman III ICBM, based on Soviet estimates for both missiles (350-kiloton warhead and 180 meter CEP for Minuteman, and 600-kiloton warhead and 90-meter CEP for Trident

capabilities; it placed “annihilating enemy strategic forces” first, ahead of “destroying industrial and administrative centers.”

*Tomahawk.* Numerous Soviet open-source writings in the late 1970s and the 1980s point to US plans to arm general purpose submarines and surface combatants with Tomahawk sea-launched cruise missiles as a key ingredient of the “ocean strategy.” These articles generally report that between 150 and 200 US surface ships and SSNs will eventually carry Tomahawks with nuclear warheads, substantially increasing the number of strategic platforms in the US Navy and severely complicating the Soviet Navy’s defense of the homeland mission. Describing US plans to deploy Tomahawk in  Rear Adm. N. P. V’yunenکو wrote:

*In connection with this, the composition of strategic nuclear forces will be significantly broadened. Essentially, each of the currently existing 65 nuclear-powered torpedo-firing submarines will become a potentially new strategic weapons launch platform. The advantage of the sea-launched cruise missiles, for example, is viewed in the fact that when they become operational it will become impossible to determine the number of potential firings from submarines, and it will be necessary to figure in all torpedo launchers aboard submarines and surface units.*

The Soviets apparently view the Tomahawk primarily as an integral part of the US strategic arsenal aimed at targets in the USSR, rather than as a theater nuclear weapon. Open-source writings from the later 1970s and the 1980s describe the Tomahawk as a part of the US strategic reserve that has considerable capability to destroy hardened targets. For example, Capt. First Rank V. Strelkov in a 1983 article in *Morskoy Sbornik* said that the deployment of Tomahawk SLCMs “will signify the appearance in the US Navy of one more, in addition to carrier forces,

reserve of strategic offensive forces capable of delivering devastating strikes against targets on the coast and deep within the interior of the Soviet Union."

Open-source writings also suggest that the Soviets believe that the United States intends to use some Tomahawk SLCMs in an initial nuclear exchange. Tomahawk SLCMs, according to Soviet open-source writings, will have a large enough warhead (150 to 200 kilotons) and sufficient accuracy to destroy some hardened targets during a counterforce strike. A 1979 article in *Voyenno-Istoricheskiy Zhurnal (Military Historical Journal)* by I. Chistyakov, for example, stated that US cruise missiles "thanks to their greater accuracy and their nuclear warheads will have greater strike probability than the existing intercontinental Minuteman and Polaris missiles."<sup>2</sup> In a 1983 *Morskoy Sbornik* article, Maj. M. Boystov gives Tomahawk a CEP of 160 meters and says it can reach "85 percent of the strategic targets" in the USSR. This attributes to the Tomahawk the accuracy—150 to 180 meters—that other open-source articles state is necessary for attacking hardened targets. Moreover, in his 1982 *SShA* article, G. M. Sturua supports his contention that Tomahawk is a counterforce weapon by quoting Secretary of Defense Weinberger's statement that the missile "will ensure some potential to destroy fortified targets" (see figure 2)

The Soviets also do not accept US statements that Tomahawk SLCMs are too slow to be first-strike weapons. For example, a 1982 article in *SShA* by V. V. Zhurkin stated that:

*The counterforce capabilities of cruise missiles stem from their exceptionally high degree of accuracy, powerful warheads, and concealed*

<sup>2</sup> To determine the basis for Soviet statements that the Tomahawk SLCM will be more effective against hardened targets than existing Minuteman III ICBMs, we applied Soviet performance data for these missiles to a Soviet effectiveness model based on a crater-kill of high-class missile silos. The results of this analysis show that Tomahawk does have a higher probability of destroying a hardened target than the Soviet estimate of a Minuteman III ICBM equipped with a late-1970s payload and guidance package. The analysis also shows that Tomahawk's hard-target capability would be roughly equivalent to that of the Soviet estimate of an improved Minuteman III. According to this analysis, in the Soviet view, only the Trident D-5 and the MX ICBM would be more effective than Tomahawk against hardened targets.

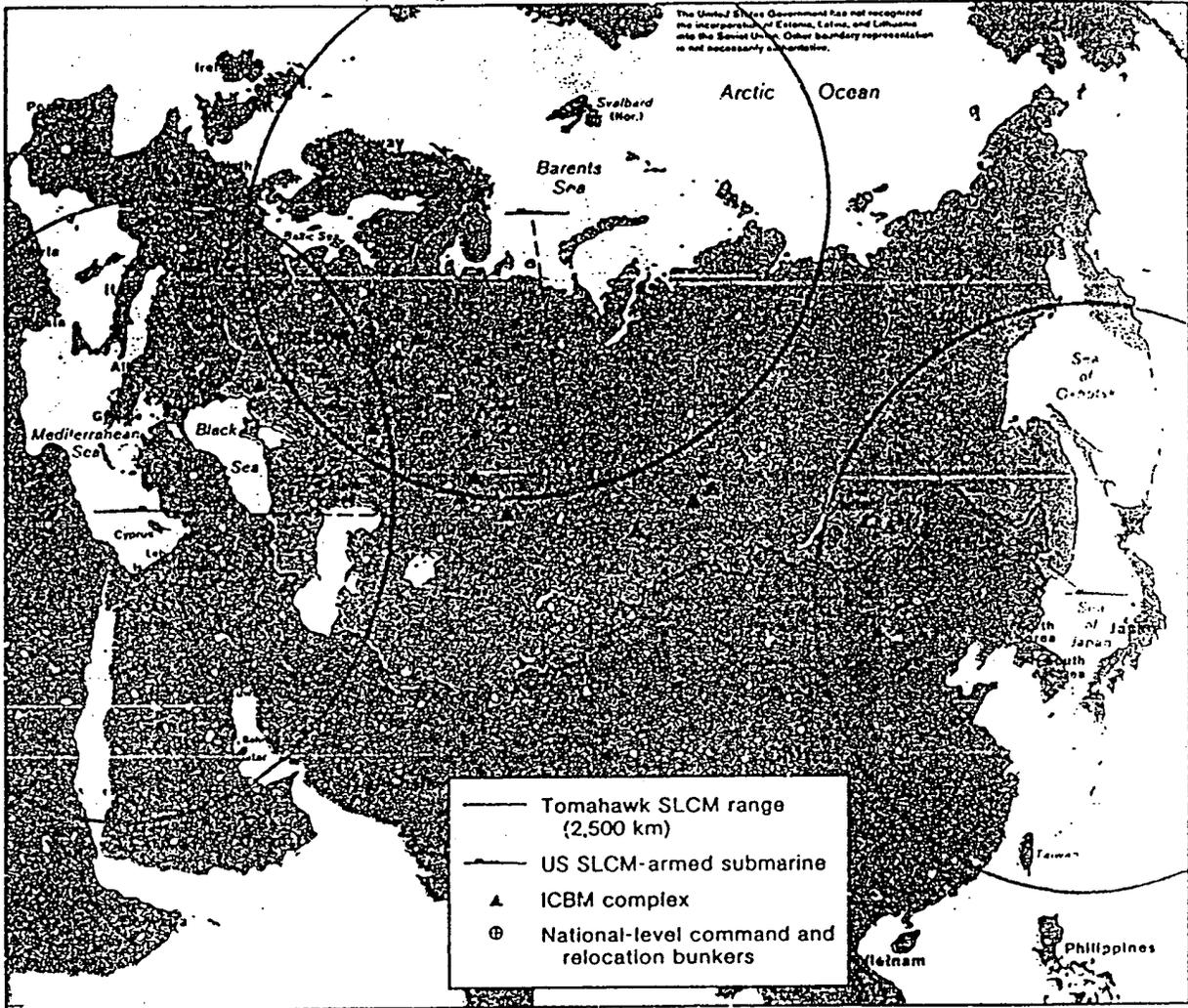
*approach. This makes the relatively low speed of cruise missiles an insignificant factor, although it is cited by American experts who call them "retaliatory weapons."*

Soviet authors are impressed with the ability of Tomahawk SLCMs to survive and penetrate Warsaw Pact air defenses. The Chistyakov article, as well as a 1980 article in *Morskoy Sbornik* by Capt. First Rank B. Rodionov and Senior Lt.-Engineer N. Novichkov, states that Soviet air defenses will be hard pressed to counter Tomahawk because of its small size and radar cross section and its ability to fly at extremely low altitudes. Chistyakov goes on to say that Tomahawk SLCMs can "oversaturate" Soviet air defenses, allowing "a great many" to reach targets "in the deep rear" of the Soviet Union

*US Strategic ASW.* Soviet writings frequently state that the United States has been planning since at least the early 1960s to conduct "strategic ASW" operations against Soviet SSBNs. Articles on Western submarines or ASW capabilities invariably place attacks on Soviet SSBNs high on any list of US SSN wartime missions. A 1978 article [ ] by Capt. First Rank V. A. Artamonov and Yu. A. Bystrov, for example, stated that "almost all US and British submarines" are assigned the mission of attacking Soviet SSBNs. Articles since the late 1970s stress that the US Navy's two most important missions are strategic nuclear strikes against the USSR and sinking Soviet SSBNs. Vice Adm. K. A. Stalbo wrote, in *Morskoy Sbornik* in 1983, that "American naval doctrine considers antisubmarine warfare, which it must be ready to wage in the interest of antimissile defense of the continent . . . as the next mission of the Navy in importance" after strategic strikes

The Soviets apparently expect that NATO will focus its efforts to sink Soviet SSBNs in forward zones such as the northern Norwegian and Barents Seas. They believe that NATO attack submarines, primarily US and British SSNs, will maintain continuous patrols in "the near approaches" to Soviet SSBN bases. Open-source articles throughout the 1970s and 1980s state

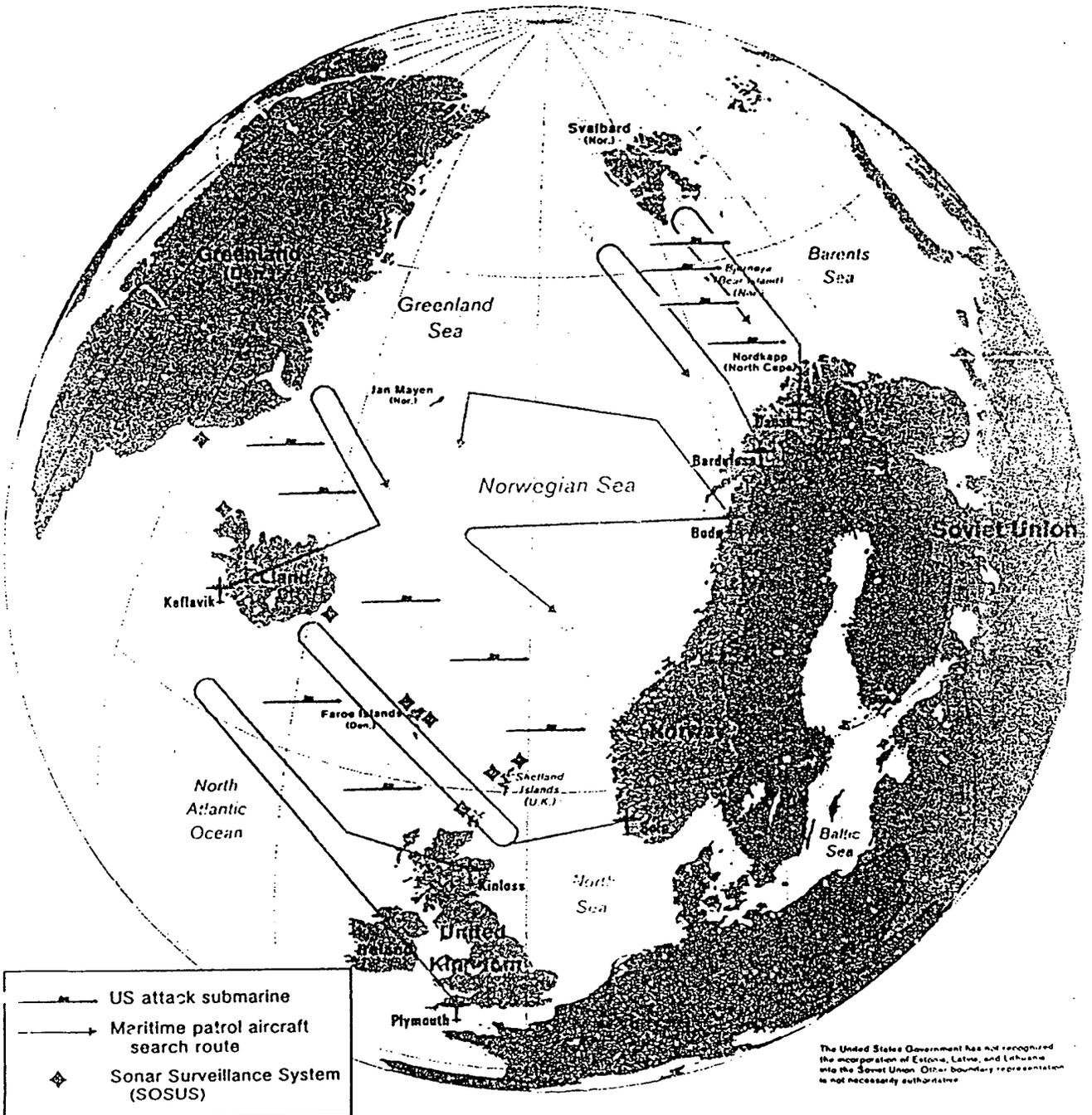
Figure 2  
Soviet View of US Tomahawk Coverage of Soviet Strategic Targets



that NATO will establish ASW barriers in geographically restricted areas through which Soviet SSBNs must pass to reach their wartime patrol areas. The most important of these, in the Soviets' view, are the area between the North Cape of Norway, Bear Island and Svalbard-Spitzbergen and the Greenland-Iceland-Faeroes-Norway gap (see figure 3).

The Soviets believe that the United States is planning to conduct ASW operations against their SSBNs, even if war were to begin at the conventional level. Open-source writings in the 1970s and 1980s consistently assert that US political and military leaders do not see the destruction of an enemy SSBN during

Figure 3  
Soviet View of US Wartime ASW Barrier Operations in the Norwegian Sea\*



\*Derived from a graphic in *Zarubezhnoye Voennoye Obozreniye*, 1, 1984.

conventional hostilities as an escalatory act. These writings tend to discount the relevance of warnings by Western academicians that sinking an enemy SSBN before nuclear weapons have been introduced would be a dangerous, destabilizing act. After citing such arguments, G. M. Sturua, in a fairly detailed 1985 article on strategic ASW in *SShA*, says that neither the US military command nor any US administration has ever supported the idea of limiting wartime ASW operations against Soviet SSBNs.

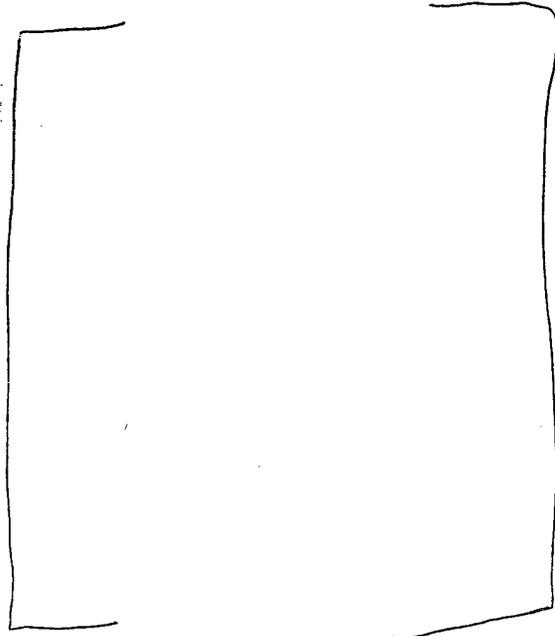
In the same article, Sturua lays out his view of the US rationale for conducting strategic ASW during conventional hostilities. Sturua states that the US naval authorities said that during conventional hostilities US forces would conduct intensive ASW operations against "nonstrategic submarines." However, he further quotes statements of two US Navy admirals before the US Congress that in a combat situation the Navy "would be unable to distinguish between conventional submarines and the SSBNs" and that "in conventional warfare all submarines are just submarines." Sturua concludes that the United States hopes to portray destruction of SSBNs as the "unpremeditated result of ASW in the sea lanes and thereby restrain the enemy from escalating the military conflict." If the Soviets did not accept US claims of unpremeditation, Sturua says that the United States would still calculate that the USSR would not escalate the conflict but instead would "take additional measures to defend its own SSBNs and start its own strategic ASW."

Many Soviet authors writing about US wartime strategic ASW apparently share this alleged US perception that sinking SSBNs is not necessarily an escalatory act. Soviet authors generally treat wartime destruction of SSBNs rather matter of factly. Conspicuously absent is a clear admonishment that such an act could lead to escalation. For example, [ ]

[ ] Rear Adm. N. P.

V'yunenکو reports that the United States routinely attempts to locate and continuously track Soviet SSBNs in peacetime. V'yunenکو then says that if war breaks out "these actions will culminate in use of various ASW weapons." To V'yunenکو, US wartime ASW operations against Soviet submarines, including SSBNs, is but the "continuation and culmination of

submarine search operations in peacetime." Similarly, Capt. First Rank V. G. Germanovich and B. I. Rodionov [ ] say that NATO will track all detected Soviet submarines "with the intent of destroying as much of the enemy's strategic naval forces as possible at the outbreak of war."



US SSNs. The Soviets' open-source writings identify US SSNs as the principal threat to their SSBNs. Rear Adm. A. Rummyantsev, in a 1982 article in *Zarubezhnoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, praises US SSNs for their "high speed," "low noise levels," and "sophisticated sonar observation systems." Rummyantsev says these characteristics "significantly hinder their detection by ASW forces and make them menacing weapons in war at sea."

The Los Angeles class, in particular, has been singled out for high praise. A 1982 article by S. Rudas in *Morskoy Sbornik*, for example, called the Los Angeles "the first of a third generation" of SSNs with

"combat capabilities substantially increased in comparison with boats of the previous generation." Rudas says that the Los Angeles, despite its much larger size, will be as quiet as the previous Sturgeon class and will have more powerful sonars, towed-array sonars, and improved maneuverability.

*SOSUS.* Soviet authors also seem to be impressed by the long-range detection capabilities of the US sound surveillance system (SOSUS) and believe it plays a major role in US plans to destroy Soviet SSBNS before they can launch their missiles. In a 1983 article in *Zarubezhnoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, Rear Adm. A. S. Pushkin and N. Naskanov credit SOSUS with the ability to "detect a submarine by the noise it emits on the background of ocean noises and the noises of other ships in the area" and locate it within a "100-square-mile area, when two or three receivers are used." According to a 1979 article in *Morskoy Sbornik* by I. Kuzmin, SOSUS can accomplish all but the last of the four classic ASW missions—detection, classification (identifying the contact as a submarine and establishing its nationality), location, and attack. Unlike other ASW surveillance means, SOSUS does its submarine tracking, according to Kuzmin, "secretly and not at severely restricted ranges, which is very important in providing guidance for attack forces."

Many Soviet articles discussing SOSUS also note the shortcomings in the system and US efforts to overcome them. In his 1979 article, I. Kuzmin notes that SOSUS does not provide operational coverage of all possible SSBNS deployment routes and patrol areas and that SOSUS's zone of coverage is "insular" rather than a "solid zone of effective observation." Kuzmin points out, however, that the United States is working on eliminating these weaknesses by modernizing the system, deploying new sonar arrays, and improving data-processing equipment and procedures. Other authors have mentioned that SOSUS cables are fragile and vulnerable during combat.

Other US programs to upgrade strategic ASW capabilities, as noted by Soviet authors, include:

- Maneuverable hydroacoustic systems to supplement SOSUS such as SURTASS (a towed-array system for surface ships) and RDSS (buoys that can be rapidly deployed by aircraft or submarines).

- Electromagnetic equipment to locate submarines by the local deviation they cause in the Earth's magnetic field.
- Infrared equipment to detect submarines by their heat patterns.
- Systems to detect submarines by their surface protrusion and turbulence patterns.
- Various nonacoustic ASW systems for installation in satellites

In the past, articles in Soviet open-source journals have quoted predictions by Western naval officers, politicians, and scientists that the United States, using one or more of these systems, would soon achieve an "ASW breakthrough," "turn the ocean transparent" or "completely solve the problem of combating enemy SSBNS." G. M. Sturua's 1985 *SShA* article notes, however, that US naval authorities now tend toward "extremely conservative estimates" of future US ASW capabilities. Sturua says that the United States probably encountered difficulties in its ASW research, but it is "also possible" that US leaders are trying to avoid "premature disclosure of all the cards in their hands." Sturua also says US naval leaders may be concerned that talk of ASW breakthroughs could alarm the US Congress and cause it to raise questions about the Trident program.

#### The "Forward Strategy"

The Soviets' open-source writings in the 1980s suggest that they are also concerned about what they perceive to be a turn in US policy toward a markedly more aggressive approach to conventional naval warfare. The Soviets generally refer to this new policy as the "forward strategy." The US Navy, according to these articles, plans to conduct offensive operations against Soviet naval forces in the USSR's territorial waters at the outset of a NATO-Warsaw Pact war. The ultimate aim of this strategy, as perceived by the Soviets, is to blockade their Navy in its home waters by controlling the seas and air space along key areas of the maritime periphery of the USSR.

Much of the forward strategy, as depicted in Soviet writings, overlaps the US ocean strategy. The Soviets apparently believe that the establishment of ASW

barriers by US SSNs in geographic choke points such as the area between the North Cape of Norway, Bear Island, and Svalbard-Spitzbergen will be a key element of the US Navy's plan to blockade the Soviet Navy. Such ASW barriers, according to other Soviet articles, will play a key role in strategic ASW against Soviet SSBNs—part of the ocean strategy.

The Soviets see US aircraft carrier battle groups as the other key element of the forward strategy. Recent open-source writings indicate that the Soviets expect that the United States will move aircraft carrier battle groups into the Norwegian and North Seas and the northwest Pacific Ocean off the Kuril Islands and Kamchatka Peninsula early in a NATO-Warsaw Pact war. In his 1982 article in *Zarubezhnoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, Rear Adm. A. Rummyantsev stated that NATO will attempt to control the Norwegian Sea by forming a "strike fleet—based on four or five aircraft carriers." Although open-source writings and Soviet naval exercise scenarios since the 1960s have consistently depicted a threat in these waters from US aircraft carriers and SSNs, recent writings seem to place more emphasis on a rapidly developing threat. The 1981 article entitled "The US Navy by the Year 2000" in *Morskoy Sbornik*, for example, described US plans for a "preemptive" attack to be made by carriers and SSNs on the Soviet Navy in its home waters and bases. Capt. V. Strelkov, writing in *Morskoy Sbornik* in 1983, echoed this point. Strelkov suggested that the United States would try to conduct "surprise" attacks on the Soviet Navy before it completed its deployment. A 1984 article by Capt. Third Rank A. Biryusov in *Zarubezhnoye Voyennoye Obozreniye* described how US plans to defend wartime shipping in the North Atlantic now include using aircraft carrier battle groups to attack Soviet forces at their bases and airfields and on deployment routes "during the first days of a war." Biryusov contrasts these new "offensive" tactics to the previous emphasis of passive defensive measures directly on the sea lines of communication (SLOCs)

*Control of the Seas.* Soviet military journals have long described recurring NATO exercises such as "Northern Wedding," "Team Work," and "Ocean Safari" as practice runs for US wartime plans to

control the Norwegian and North Seas. In a 1980 article in *Zarubezhnoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, Capt. Third Rank A. Orlov observed that "the main areas for maneuvering carrier groups (from the experience of the 'Ocean Safari' and 'Team Work' exercises) will be the Norwegian and North Seas." More recently, articles have begun to describe US exercise activity in the northwest Pacific as part of the forward strategy. A 1983 article in *Zarubezhnoye Voyennoye Obozreniye* by Capt. First Rank F. Gavrilov, for example, says that recent operations by US carrier battle groups—two in 1982 and three in 1983—in the vicinity of the Kamchatka Peninsula were intended to practice wartime sea control in this area. These operations, according to Gavrilov, were the first appearance by US aircraft carriers in that region since World War II.

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*Aircraft Carriers.* Open-source writings since 1980 suggest that the Soviets greatly admire US aircraft carriers. Articles praising the operational flexibility, endurance, and offensive striking power of US aircraft carrier battle groups are now common in Soviet military journals. This seemingly solid front of admiration is relatively new. As late as 1979, *Morskoy Sbornik* carried a debate between Adms. K. A. Stalbo and A. S. Pushkin on the relative merits of the aircraft carrier in the age of nuclear missiles. However, the admirers, represented by Stalbo, seem to have won; criticism in Soviet journals of the carrier's usefulness is now rare.

Soviet authors generally describe aircraft carriers as the "backbone of US general purpose naval forces" and a "highly prepared reserve of strategic forces." Although they recognize that US aircraft carriers relinquished their role as a dedicated part of the US strategic nuclear arsenal when Polaris SLBMs were introduced in the early 1960s, Soviet authors invariably claim that as many as half of the aircraft on a modern carrier are capable of delivering nuclear weapons. A typical Soviet list of missions assigned to US aircraft carriers usually includes:

- Winning and maintaining sea and air supremacy in a given area by annihilating Soviet naval forces at sea and in their bases.
- Delivering air strikes (with conventional or nuclear munitions) against Soviet land targets.
- Providing air support to amphibious forces or ground forces operating in a maritime area.
- Protecting shipping on the sea lines of communication.

Soviet authors do not always list the missions in the same order, but winning sea and air supremacy and conducting air strikes against the USSR almost always are listed first or second. The sea supremacy

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*Soviet Comments on the US "Forward Strategy"*

... The US Navy's main mission will now be preparation to carry out preventive offensive operations against the Soviet Navy in its basing and deployment areas. In particular, the Secretary of the Navy announced that American naval forces must "return" to the Greenland-Iceland area in order to threaten Soviet bases in the Kola Peninsula.

"The US Navy by the Year 2000,"  
*Morskoy Sbornik*, June 1981

The United States openly dreams of the possibility of shutting off all outlets to the seas and oceans for Soviet ships and naval aviation. They would like to "turn the Soviets into an isolated island." The so-called new strategy gives the American Navy the mission of delivering surprise strikes against the Soviet fleet even before the hypothetical completion of its deployment at sea.

V. Strelkov, *Morskoy Sbornik*,  
May 1983

The Pentagon is developing concepts for employment of the Navy to win supremacy in the ocean. Its latest version, stemming from the Reagan strategy of "direct opposition," is the so-called new US naval strategy envisaging creation of "forward sea lines" for the purpose of isolating countries of the socialist community from the rest of the world and assuring its "own free hand" for delivering attacks from ocean axes against important targets on the territory of the USSR and its allies. In fact, as Lehman declares frankly, it is a question of total blockade of the Soviet Navy in its bases and internal seas.

K. A. Stalbo, *Morskoy Sbornik*,  
October 1983

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task, moreover, is often described as a necessary precursor to attacking land targets. According to an unsigned 1981 *Morskoy Sbornik* article entitled "Operating Tactics of US Navy Aircraft Carriers," "the principal mission of carrier striking groups is to participate in establishing sea supremacy in their operating area, after which they are reoriented for operations against shore targets."

Some open-source articles imply that US aircraft carriers also have an ASW mission to seek out and destroy Soviet submarines. A [ ] article by Rear Adm. L. Ya. Vasyukov, for example, described how, in the 1970s, attack carriers were "refitted" as multirole carriers. Vasyukov says that a multirole carrier is "becoming capable of conducting effective combat actions both against submarines and surface units." Similarly, a 1984 *Morskoy Sbornik* article by A. Aleksandrov and N. Naskanov stated that "the most effective means of fighting submarines in remote regions of the world ocean outside the operating range of land-based aircraft remains . . . deck-based aviation." Both of these articles discuss ASW by carrier-based aircraft in the context of "hunter-killer" operations rather than as part of the effort to defend the carrier battle group from enemy submarines. This suggests, therefore, that the Soviets believe that US aircraft carriers have an offensive ASW mission, which probably includes attacking Soviet SSBNs.

The Soviets' open-source writings over the past five or six years clearly convey their view of US aircraft carriers as increasingly capable and survivable weapon systems. They think modern US aircraft carriers have greatly improved offensive punch, endurance, and seakeeping ability. Arming carrier-based aircraft with Harpoon and Tomahawk air-to-surface missiles, according to several articles, greatly enhances their ability to attack enemy surface ships and shore-based targets. Several authors point out that the nuclear-powered Nimitz class can carry 50 percent more aircraft munitions and 4,000 more metric tons of aviation fuel than earlier Forrestal-class carriers. These capabilities allow a Nimitz-class carrier, according to these articles, to sustain combat operations at the rate of two daily sorties per aircraft for 16 days, while a Forrestal-class carrier could sustain this operational tempo for only eight days

The Soviets seem to be even more impressed with what they see as the recent significant increase in the "combat stability" of US aircraft carriers. Beginning in the late 1970s and continuing with increased frequency since then, Soviet authors have described "high combat stability" as a principal strength of US aircraft carrier forces. This is an important judgment, because it implies that the Soviets believe that US naval forces would have an increased capability to pursue the forward strategy goal of gaining control of the USSR's peripheral waters. Increased combat stability for US carrier battle groups also implies that the Soviet Navy would have to apply considerably more force than previously planned to thwart the US forward strategy (see figure 5).

The increased combat stability of US carrier battle groups, according to the Soviets, is the result of improvements in both the design of the aircraft carrier itself and the defensive weapons and tactics of the entire battle group. A 1983 article by Capt. First Rank A. Ivanitsky in *Zarubezhnoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, for example, claimed that the design of the Nimitz class and, particularly, the location of its nuclear reactor "assure its rather high resistance to damage." Another 1983 article in that same journal by Vice Adm. A. S. Pushkin and N. Naskanov states that the "security forces" in a modern carrier battle group can monitor an area with a radius of 350 nautical miles and provide the carrier with "dependable defense against strike by heterogeneous enemy forces." These battle group "security forces," according to Pushkin and Naskanov, include several SSNs stationed 40 to 90 nautical miles ahead of the carrier that "can effectively hunt and kill enemy submarines" that threaten it. Other articles point to the introduction of the Aegis surface-to-air missile system on the Ticonderoga-class cruisers as a significant improvement in battle group air and antimissile defense capabilities. In a 1984 article in *Zarubezhnoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, Capt. First Rank Yu. Petrov described the Aegis phased-array radar system as capable of providing "an all-around scan and detection and tracking of more than 100 targets," discriminating "false targets by the nature of the reflected

signal." According to Petrov, Aegis also has a shorter reaction time and greater electronic countermeasures capability than any other naval radar.

The Soviets believe that the superior defensive capabilities of aircraft carriers enhance the survivability of other surface ships in the battle group. Adm. N. P. V'yunenkov's [ ] pointed out that, although aircraft carriers are "vulnerable to cruise missiles just as are all surface ships . . . without carriers and their aircraft, other surface ships would be even more vulnerable." Another [ ] by Rear Adm. L. Ya. Vasyukov said that the presence in an area of a US aircraft carrier would "substantially increase the combat stability of other surface ships."

Soviet naval authors have also cited the Royal Navy's experiences in the 1982 Falklands conflict as proof of the value of aircraft carriers. Adm. I. Kapitanets in the February 1983 edition of *Morskoy Sbornik*, for example, said that the two small British carriers participating in the operation "served as the basis of the grouping's combat might and on the whole gave it tactical stability." Other Soviet authors also have implied that the Royal Navy could have lost fewer ships if a US or similar carrier with early warning aircraft had been available. In a 1982 *Morskoy Sbornik* article, Rear Adm. I. Uskov said that the "lack of aircraft carriers with long-range radar detection and control aircraft in the English formations was the reason for large losses of ships and vessels." The Soviets frequently cite the presence of such aircraft on US carriers as one of the major factors giving US carrier battle groups high combat stability.

#### An Increased Strategic Threat

Soviet open-source writings on the US Navy's strategy and Soviet naval exercises since the late 1970s indicate that the Soviets perceive a greatly increased threat from the sea. Despite the Soviet Navy's impressive gains in the last 15 years—long-range SLBMs, quieter submarines, the introduction of fixed-wing aircraft aboard Kiev-class aircraft carriers, and the commissioning of the USSR's first

nuclear-powered surface combatants—these sources give the overall impression that the Soviets believe they have not appreciably improved their capability to protect the USSR from US SSBNs, SLCMs, and aircraft carrier battle groups.

With the exception of the Tomahawk SLCM, the composition of the perceived threat—nuclear strikes against the USSR by US SSBNs and aircraft carriers—remains basically unchanged from the one described in Soviet open-source writings in the 1960s and early-to-mid-1970s, but the tone of the recent writings indicates growing concern over what the Soviets see as increased US emphasis on naval power. Discussions of US SSBNs, ASW forces, and aircraft carrier battle groups still dominate Soviet articles on the maritime threat, but new US naval systems almost invariably are described as more capable and more difficult to counter than their predecessors. Trident C-4 and D-5 SLBMs and Tomahawk SLCMs, according to these writings, are transforming US sea-based strategic weapon systems from retaliatory, second-strike forces into counterforce, first-strike weapons. US Trident SSBNs and Nimitz-class carriers are described as having increased combat stability. [ ]

Soviet writings also suggest that the Soviets view the US Navy as primarily a strategic nuclear threat. Recent articles on US naval strategy place heavy emphasis on the increased number of strategic warheads stationed at sea, the enhanced accuracy and destructiveness of US SLBMs, and the new US emphasis on ASW operations against Soviet SSBNs. Even discussions of aircraft carrier battle groups, which are described as the backbone of US general purpose naval forces, stress the ability of carrier aircraft to deliver nuclear weapons and the carriers' role as a strategic reserve.

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*Soviet Comments on US Aircraft Carriers*

A second important component of the naval forces of the United States and its allies is the general purpose forces, the nucleus of which consists of attack carriers, which are being converted to multirole carriers. . . . These carriers are capable of carrying approximately 1,500 aircraft and a corresponding quantity of nuclear warheads and are viewed as the principal force for gaining ocean supremacy and an effective strategic forces reserve and naval striking power in local wars.

S. G. Gorshkov [ ]

The fleet has been equipped with new aircraft, helicopters, antiaircraft, and antisubmarine complexes, which are capable of adequately protecting the carriers. Modifications in the design of aircraft carriers in the last 30 years have made them more viable and unsinkable. The viability of this kind of ship is attested to by an accident on the carrier Enterprise in 1969, when nine bombs exploded on its deck. According to experts, it could have resumed flight operations just a few hours after the incident.

G. M. Sturua, *SShA: Ekonomika, Politika, Ideologiya*, August 1980

A very important role in the "new naval strategy" of President Reagan's administration is given to naval surface forces, and above all aircraft carriers, whose numbers the government intends to increase. From the standpoint of the American command, this type of ship, with broad combat capabilities and relatively high combat stability, will retain the importance of the backbone of general purpose naval forces in the future.

I. Beriyeu and N. Naskanov, *Morskoy Sbornik*, August 1981

[The surface fleet's] main striking power is aircraft carriers, which can execute a broad range of missions

because they carry nuclear and conventional weapons and airplanes and helicopters of different purposes and because they possess strong antisubmarine and antiaircraft defenses.

A. Rummyantsev, *Zarubezhnoye Voennoye Obozreniye*, June 1982

The role and significance of aircraft carriers are determined first of all by their mobility, broad range of fire capabilities, rather high combat stability, and considerable endurance. . . . They are the only universal weapons system at sea capable of operating effectively at any point of the world ocean and, employing conventional or nuclear weapons, destroying aerial, surface, or underwater targets and launching strikes against shore objectives. . . . Aircraft carriers are the main strike force at sea in conventional wars and a well-prepared reserve of strategic forces in nuclear war.

N. Naskanov, *Zarubezhnoye Voennoye Obozreniye*, March 1982

Multipurpose aircraft carriers continue to be the "backbone" of the general purpose forces. Because they have nuclear and conventional weapons, more sophisticated aircraft and helicopters for various purposes, high mobility, and improved antisub and air defense, American military specialists consider them the main striking force in naval warfare. . . . The new US naval strategy contemplates a further increase in the number of aircraft carriers so that by the beginning of the 1990s there will be 15, not 12, combat-ready carrier groups.

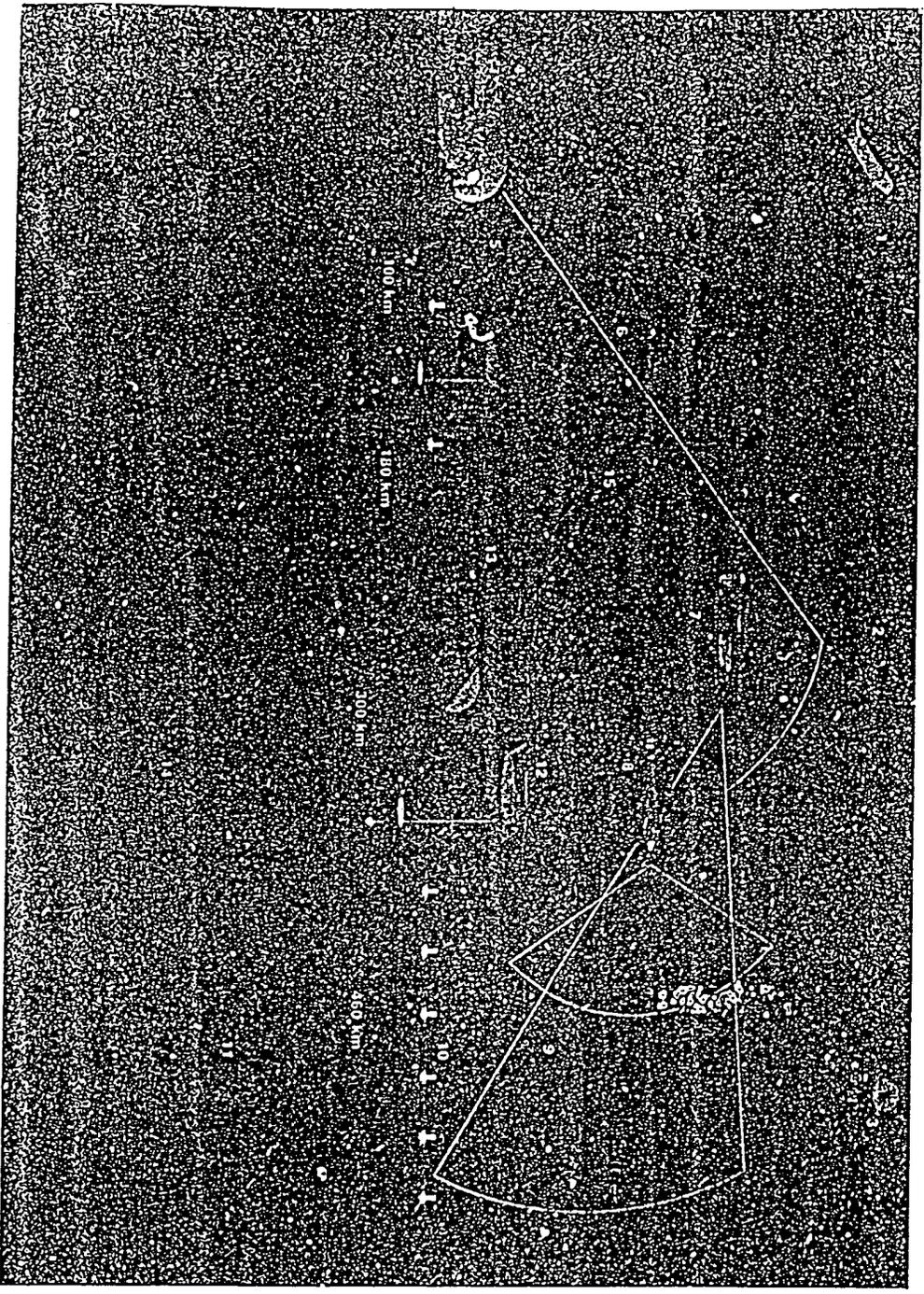
V. Strelkov, *Morskoy Sbornik*, May 1983

Although Soviet authors regularly extol the ability of US aircraft carriers to project power in distant areas, there is little discussion in Soviet open-source writings of the impact of US naval strategy on the course of ground force operations in the land theaters.<sup>3</sup> Support for ground force operations usually is included somewhere in the middle of Soviet lists of aircraft carrier missions and almost always follows those of gaining sea supremacy and strikes against strategic targets. Even US intentions to gain supremacy in the USSR's peripheral waters and blockade the Soviet Navy in its home ports are generally described as precursors to the more important mission of launching cruise-missile and carrier-based-aircraft strikes against important targets deep within the USSR.

The Soviet propensity to view the US Navy primarily as a strategic threat probably reflects an overall attitude that combat at sea would not be decisive to the outcome of a NATO-Warsaw Pact conventional war. We suspect that Soviet military planners do not believe the US Navy has sufficient offensive power, using only conventionally armed carrier-based aircraft, SLCMs, and amphibious forces, to have a decisive impact on the course of ground operations in Central Europe. The Soviets apparently regard Central Europe as the critical theater in a war with NATO. They do not seem to view the outcome of combat on the maritime flanks with the same degree of gravity. Their open-source writings provide ample evidence, however, that the Soviets believe US sea-based strategic forces would play a key role in deciding the outcome of a nuclear war.

<sup>3</sup> Soviet authors often quote statements by US naval officials that NATO reinforcement and resupply efforts on the North Atlantic sea lines of communication could prove to be "decisive" in a war in Europe. Soviet authors do not say, however, that successful US operations to defend the SLOCs would lead to a NATO victory on the ground in Europe. Rather, they usually say that US military leaders believe NATO would lose the war if efforts to protect the SLOCs were unsuccessful. Successful US naval operations to protect SLOCs would therefore, in Soviet eyes, have an indirect impact on ground operations.

Figure 5  
Soviet Perceptions of US Carrier Battle Group Defense\*



1. Reconnaissance satellites.
2. Communications satellites.
3. Submarine and missile detection satellites.
4. Carrier 12-to-15 km anti-aircraft self-defense zone (Sea Sparrow SAM and Vulcan/Phalant x-2 defense guns).
5. Area air defense. Tienderoga-class cruisers with Aegis SAM system (120-km range).
6. On-call deck-launched F-14 interceptors.
7. E-2C early warning aircraft (120-km detection range).
8. F-14 with Phoenix AAMs (110-km range) on distant combat patrol.
9. P-3 ASW aircraft.
10. Air-dropped sonobuoy.
11. Los Angeles-class SSN in direct support of carrier battle group (90-km detection range with passive sonar).
12. LAMPR ASW helicopters with dipping sonar.
13. Spruance destroyer on radar picket duty.
14. SOSUS long-range ASW detection system.
15. S-3 Viking ASW aircraft (110 km detection range).

\*Based on Soviet drawing in *World War*, Issue 1, November 1981.