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Moscow's Special Forces

There is now a fair body of evidence—in the form of reliable sightings of frogmen and the tracks of mini-submarines—to suggest that the Soviets have been using Sweden coastal waters (including the approaches to its most sensitive naval installations) for dress rehearsals by their naval "diversionary brigades." These are the maritime counterpart of the Soviet Union's *Spetsnaz* forces, Moscow's equivalent of Britain's Special Air Service or America's Green Berets. Some first-hand insights into the structure and operations of Soviet special forces have recently been offered by a former Soviet army officer who uses the pen-name Viktor Suvorov. We are able to provide additional details.

Spetsnaz is the acronym for a Russian phrase meaning "Special Detachments." The total strength of the *Spetsnaz* forces, organized as independent companies and brigades attached to the headquarters of Military Districts, army groups in satellite countries and Afghanistan, and the four Soviet fleets, is about 30,000. They constitute an elite arm of the Soviet armed forces. The men are predominantly Russians, Byelorussians and Ukrainians (Jews and Central Asians, with the exception of a few Tatars, are excluded) and they are chosen for superior intelligence and physical strength. They are also screened carefully for political loyalty; all *Spetsnaz* officers are required to be members of the Communist Party.

In time of war, the role of *Spetsnaz* is to go behind enemy lines, destroy command centers, communications and strategic bases, and to liquidate key political and military leaders. To prepare for that role, *Spetsnaz* recruits receive extensive training in foreign languages and covers, and in methods of infiltration. They would be able to count on networks of " sleeper agents", including members of Soviet-controlled terrorist cells in the West, in order to carry out their functions.

Their prowess has been demonstrated in two situations in recent years: in Prague in 1968, where *Spetsnaz* troopers were used to capture airfields and arrest political leaders in advance of the Soviet invasion, and in Afghanistan since 1979. *Spetsnaz* troops took part in the assault on the Darulaman palace, spearheaded by a KGB hit-team directed by Colonel Bayerenov (who was killed by his own men in the confusion) in which President Hafizollah Amin was murdered. More recently, they have been involved in cross-border strikes against Mu-

jahideen sanctuaries inside Iran, and in counter-insurgency operations in rebel-held territory. Their fighting record has been notably superior to that of the remainder of the Soviet expeditionary forces—officially described by Moscow as the "Limited Contingent."

Mini-subs

The incursions into Swedish waters since 1981, a recent embarrassment to the left-wing government of Olof Palme, indicate the role *Spetsnaz* units might play in the event of military hostilities between the Warsaw Pact and NATO, as well as their commanders' attention to realism in training exercises.

Each Soviet fleet has a *Spetsnaz* brigade which includes a battalion of paratroops, two or three frogmen battalions, and a squadron of mini-submarines; each mini-sub has a crew of between five and seven men. Their major task, in wartime, is to infiltrate enemy territory and knock out nuclear bases—including nuclear submarines, before they could put to sea—and other strategic targets. Their rehearsals include maritime infiltration of the United States, and they are believed to have conducted exercises in the Caribbean and along the coastline of Cuba.

According to recent military defectors, the Soviet navy has been keenly interested in developing mini-subs for in-shore operations against NATO ports and naval bases since World War II. The midget submarine that is most widely used at present weighs about 100 tons, and essential parts are manufactured at the Krasnoye Sormovo plant in Gorky. Recently the Soviets have started producing an improved model, which may be nuclear-powered. The standard mini-sub can carry two torpedoes or anti-ship missiles, or six mines, or several frogmen in addition to the crew. The original design was stolen from the Italians. Today the Soviet military intelligence service, the GRU, has standing orders to seek to obtain any new technology relating to the miniaturization of underwater craft. This ranks high on the list of priorities in its annual requirements book. The mini-subs that had been intruding deep inside Swedish waters are from the Diversionary Brigade of the Baltic Fleet, whose targets are West Germany and Scandinavia.

Since the range of mini-subs is not great, they are