**Admiral Gorshkov and Russia's naval heritage: A quest for strategic mobility**

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**Abstract**

This study examines Russia's age-old relationship with the sea and provides an historical framework for contemporary strategic discourse. Does Russia have a legitimate naval heritage? An objective evaluation of this still debated question, together with an analysis of the treatment accorded it by Admiral S. G. Gorshkov (Commander-in- Chief of the Soviet Navy, 1956-1985), is the central focus of this work. As demonstrated, Admiral Gorshkov needed to sell the notion of Russia's naval heritage to the Soviet leadership in order to sustain the Soviet naval buildup of the 1970s, and to legitimize the concept of sea power for purposes of Soviet strategic planning. Hence, he published "Navies in War and Peace" (1972-73) and Sea Power of the State (1976; rev. 1979).

The sea power themes contained in each work are compared against independent research utilizing a host of books and scholarly articles, including the major analytical reviews of Gorshkov's writings in English. An objective assessment of the development of the Russian Navy, and the place accorded sea power in the consolidation and expansion of the Russian Empire is, then, integrated with the historical presentation of Gorshkov's main themes for the purpose of the latter's validation. Thus, it is possible to characterize Gorshkov's program for Soviet sea power--and to determine what in it is truly novel, and what is derived largely from Russia's past experience. The hypothesis is tested that a quest for strategic mobility has been a persistent historical factor in Russia's security considerations from earliest times into the Soviet epoch. For this purpose, the relationship underlying the equation Sea Power = Fleet X Position is examined. Special attention is devoted to the role of naval strategic positions in the growth of sea power. Gorshkov's interpretation of Tsarist naval history during the various eras of naval propulsion provides the contextual setting for this examination.

It is concluded that Russia has a naval heritage--albeit, one that is periodically undistinguished. A quest for strategic mobility to overcome the natural limitations of strategic geography is confirmed as an underlying rationale for Russian/Soviet naval development. And, the eastern Mediterranean Sea is shown to be vital to any Russian sea power aspirations. As for Gorshkov's contribution to the Soviet sea power, the Admiral is viewed more as an enthusiastic naval advocate and administrator than as an original doctrinal thinker. For the development of Soviet naval power under his watch reflects the doctrinal formulations of the 1920s and 1930s. And, his own naval advocacy parallels the Tsarist naval advocacy of the 1840s.