

Issue Date: **May 10, 1975**

Soviet Union: Global Naval Exercises Held

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The largest and most extensive air and sea exercise in Soviet history ended April 27. The official Soviet news agency Tass had announced the maneuvers April 10 as "a military exercise on the high seas" and reported the conclusion with the statement that "the naval forces involved demonstrated high combat efficiency."

The maneuvers, known as "Okean 1975," were carried out over an area ranging from the Sea of Japan to the Caribbean and from Norway's North Cape to the Azores. They were the first global exercises since 1970. [See 1970 [Soviet Union: Naval Maneuvers Held](#)]

U.S. Navy Secretary J. William Middendorf 2nd said in a speech to the Navy League: "This Soviet naval exercise clearly demonstrates the fact that the Soviet navy is capable of operating effectively in all the oceans of the world," the New York Times reported April 28. Middendorf also noted the "disturbing fact" that the Soviet navy had "twice the number of major combatants and submarines as the U.S. Navy." [See 1974 [Military and Defense: Holloway Defends U.S. Naval Power; Other Developments](#); 1974 [East-West Relations: U.S. MIRV, Soviet Naval Superiority Seen](#)]

The exercise, which involved all four Soviet fleets--Northern, Baltic, Black Sea and Pacific--saw the participation of more than 220 of the Soviet navy's most powerful surface combat vessels and perhaps half as many submarines, according to U.S. Defense Department analysts cited in the New York Times April 28. Kara and Kresta II class cruisers were reported, plus a large number of destroyers armed with ship-to-ship and ship-to-air missiles, according to an article in the Times April 19.

Squadrons of the Soviet naval air force were involved on a scale far exceeding its role in the 1970 global exercise, Defense Department sources cited in the April 28 report said. The important role played by the air force, analysts believed, indicated particular attention being given to antisubmarine warfare in the maneuvers.

The exercise also incorporated merchant fleet convoys for the first time, raising questions in the U.S. and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) about the evolving role of Soviet sea power in relation to merchant marine activities.

According to a Pentagon analyst cited in the April 28 report, the presence of the merchant ship convoys in the North Atlantic and east of Japan indicated that "there's clearly been a change" in Soviet naval strategy to a policy in which the navy would become more active in carrying out Soviet overseas policy, dealing more intimately than in the past with military-political matters, rather than as a mere extension of the army. This view, it was noted, had recently been stressed in the writings of Admiral Sergei G. Gorshkov, commander in chief of the Soviet navy.

The more detailed deployment of the fleets was as follows, according to U.S. Defense Department and NATO analyses of preliminary reports from U.S. and other uninvited observers of the exercise, as reported by the New York Times April 19 and 28:

North Atlantic

A heavy concentration of submarines and surface ships drawn from the northern Baltic and Black Sea fleets was deployed. Between 50 and 60 surface vessels were deployed from the Norwegian Sea, northwest of Norway, to the Atlantic Ocean, west of Ireland. Another squadron held exercises south of Iceland. One squadron was observed in the Arctic Ocean, off the northernmost province of Norway, including landing and merchant ships. An April 28 article in the Washington Post reported that the newest Soviet missile-firing submarine, the nuclear-powered Delta, was deployed in the Barents Sea. (According to U.S. Naval experts, such deployment might indicate a new Soviet missile strategy, reflecting a decision to base more of its strategic missiles at sea, a move away from more traditional emphasis on land-based missiles.) Ilyushin-38 reconnaissance aircraft flew over the North Atlantic and Tupolov-95s exercised off the western coast of Africa, presumably from bases in Guinea.

Indian Ocean

Surface strength was reportedly higher than usual. Ilyushin-38s, based near Berbera in Somalia worked with the squadrons there and Tupolov-35s flew from bases in Soviet Central Asia over Iran to the Arabian Sea. The emphasis on the exercise in this area indicated to analysts that the Soviet Union was paying particular attention to the importance of tanker traffic originating in the Persian Gulf.

Mediterranean

A task force headed by two missile-armed cruisers and including several destroyers, support ships and submarines, conducted what was believed to be anti-aircraft carrier operations in the Tyrrhenian Sea, off the eastern and southern coasts of Sardinia. This region was regarded as one of the Mediterranean's "choke points," a narrow sea area in which the deployment of a superior naval force could halt the movement of hostile naval and merchant shipping.

Pacific

Four task forces were deployed in the western Pacific: southeast of the Kamchatka Peninsula, east of Japan, north-east of the Caroline Islands and south of Japan. Ilyushin-38 reconnaissance aircraft flew over north Pacific maneuvers.

Caribbean

Tupolov-95s from Cienfuegos in Cuba cooperated with surface ships and submarines in maneuvers.

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