JOURNAL OF ADVANCED MILITARY STUDIES

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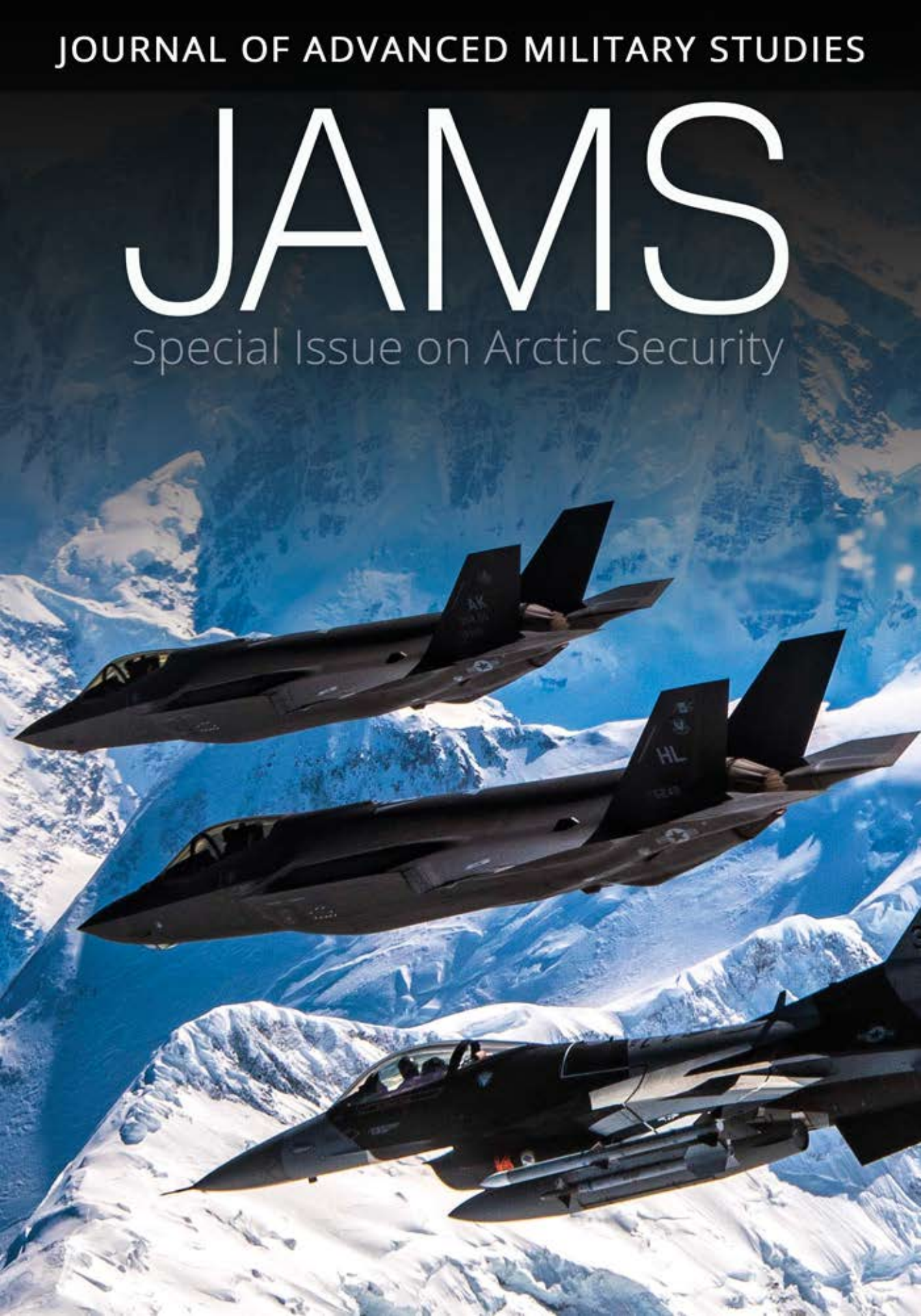

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# Contents

# The Russian Northern Fleet Bastion Revisited

Jonas Kjellén

**Abstract:** The Soviet bastion defense concept was likely among the most influential approximations of Soviet wartime strategy during the Cold War, and it has continued to shape Western perceptions of Russian naval strategy in the post–Cold War era. However, recent shifts in Russian military geography and technological advancements challenge the rationale for Moscow to pursue a bastion defense strategy during wartime. Climate change is altering the conditions for Russian military posturing in the Arctic, while new technologies are reshaping the Russian Navy's role in nuclear deterrence and the function of its naval general-purpose forces. This article contends that Western military planners must adapt their assessments of Russia's wartime strategies to reflect these evolving dynamics, ensuring sound and strategic responses in the high north.
**Keywords:** naval bastion, strategic ballistic missile submarines, SSBN, nuclear deterrence, Sergey G. Gorshkov, Arctic, Northern Fleet, Kola Peninsula, high north

During the Soviet era, Western thinking on Soviet naval strategy was dominated by the notion that the Soviet Union would prioritize protecting its strategic ballistic missile submarines (SSBN) in so-called "bastions." This meant that if war broke out, a considerable share of the Soviet Navy would have remained in proximity to home waters to safeguard the survival of the SSBNs, and thereby the capability of nuclear retaliation.

This bastion defense concept has remained central to the Western understanding of Russian naval strategy even after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It persisted throughout the years of economic hardship during the 1990s and

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continues to be the prevailing explanation for Russian naval and nuclear posturing in the European high north.

The bastion dominance in Western threat perceptions today—50 years after its conception—necessitates a review of its continued viability. This article examines whether it is feasible to assume that SSBN bastions may indeed persist in contemporary Russian naval wartime planning, particularly in the context of a Russian naval bastion in northern Europe. To that end, the factors that were foundational to initial hypotheses inferring a Soviet bastion concept in the early 1970s are employed.

The analysis shows that while Russia's military posture on the Kola Peninsula is still strong and holds a majority of Russia's SSBNs, compelling reasons exist to question whether the bastion defense concept remains a valid approximation of Russia's wartime strategy in the high north. Altered military-geographical conditions in combination with military-technological development have lessened the rationale for Russia to pursue such a strategy in northern Europe.

The article's structure has five sections. Following this introduction, the second section discusses methodological challenges. The third section outlines the bastion defense concept and its origins, with the purpose of producing an analytical framework to structure the analysis. Based on the resulting analytical framework, the fourth section discusses three aspects of Russia's current naval posture and force design where shifts or continuities either support or weaken an assumption of a contemporary Russian bastion defense strategy in the European high north. The fifth and final section presents the study's overall conclusions.

## Methodology

Studying wartime naval strategies based solely on open sources creates several challenges. In the study of the bastion defense concept, two challenges are particularly salient.

First, the bastion defense concept is a Western construct, merely inferred through the reading of a specific set of articles authored by the Soviet Navy commander in chief (CINC), Admiral Sergey G. Gorshkov, published during the first half of the 1970s. The concept's claim to reveal central tenets of Soviet wartime strategies merely from open-source material is part of its appeal but also a point of criticism, as its existence has not been confirmed in Soviet or Russian sources.[1] In addition, any attempt to replicate the analytical work done in the 1970s is likely an impractical undertaking, as no contemporary Russian naval leader can measure up to the prolific writings of Admiral Gorshkov.

Second, the bastion defense concept is an assumption of the Soviet Union's preferred operational approach to maintain a nuclear strategic reserve during war. While exercises generally aim at emulating wartime conditions, it is not

certain that the Russian Navy's peacetime naval posturing and activity in the high north reflect its wartime role. Further, obtaining current and reliable data on naval activity and operations is usually difficult to access outside intelligence services.

Considering the lack of certainty that the bastion defense concept has ever corresponded with actual Soviet strategy and the difficulty of obtaining evidence, it is remarkable how the bastion defense concept has influenced, and likely continues to influence, Western military planning. Therefore, examining whether it is a feasible approximation of Russia's wartime naval strategy in the high north is urgent and important.

For the purpose of this article, the author proposes a methodological approach based on the reasoning and justifications provided by Western, predominantly American, researchers that underpinned the assumption of a Soviet bastion defense concept in the 1970s. This article argues that the bastion defense concept rests on the following three assumptions:

- Russia's disadvantaged military geography makes SSBN operations close to home waters favorable.
- The role of the Russian SSBNs is to ensure the second or third nuclear-strike capability.[2]
- The main mission of the naval general-purpose forces is to ensure the survival of the SSBNs.

It is possible to examine these three assumptions due to their military-geographical and military-technological nature. For example, continuity or shifts in geography, as well as ship and submarine design, either weaken or strengthen the notion that the bastion defense concept is a valid estimate of Russia's current wartime strategy. The fourth section of this article discusses these three assumptions sequentially.

The literature on Soviet bastions sometimes uses different terminology. For example, while some writers use the term *SSBN bastions*, others use *SSBN sanctuaries*, but for the purposes of this discussion, they are essentially regarded as the same. Characterizing the Soviet bastion as a "strategy" is valid, but to underscore that it is a presumed strategy, *bastion defense concept* is the preferred term here. When contextually feasible, the terms *defense* and *concept* are omitted.

Regarding sources, it should be noted that ever since the Western, primarily U.S., debate on Soviet naval strategy intensified during the 1960s, the body of literature on the subject has grown correspondingly. Consequently, works that provide an overview of this long and eventful period, such as Jessica Huckabey's master's thesis "Sea Power Rivalry: The Influence of Admiral Gorshkov on American naval thought, 1963–1985," have been highly valuable. Nonetheless, original texts by participants in the early analyses of the Soviet Admiral Sergey

Gorshkov's articles (the Gorshkov series), such as Robert W. Herrick, Robert G. Weinland, and Bradford Dismukes, as well as the perhaps most vocal critic of a Soviet bastion defense concept, Jan S. Breemer, have been crucial for this analysis. Particularly foundational to this study is the 45-page analysis on this theme by James M. McConnell from September 1974.

## The Soviet Bastion Defense Concept

During the course of the 1960s, the Soviet fleet was strengthened both in numbers and quality, soon becoming a major concern for Western navies.[3] Lessons learned from World War II dominated the thinking of Western military planners, and the Soviet naval buildup was assumed to be geared toward offensive operations in the event of war.[4] Sharing similar military-geographical restraints on its naval operations as Nazi Germany, the Soviet shipbuilding programs similarly prioritized building submarines, producing them in numbers far surpassing American shipyards.[5] Moreover, early Cold War Soviet submarines were directly derived from late-war German submarine designs.[6] By extension, it was not a far-fetched assumption that the Soviet High Command had adopted an offensive strategy similar to that of the *Wehrmacht*; namely, denying the U.S. Navy access to sea lines of communication (SLOC) between North America and Europe in preparation for another battle of the Atlantic.[7]

The view that the Soviet naval buildup was intended to challenge U.S. seapower aligned well with the dawn of the nuclear age, which introduced both nuclear weapons and propulsion to the maritime domain. During the 1960s, deploying submarines armed with nuclear-tipped submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM) to linger along the American Eastern and Western seaboards was one of three methods to deliver nuclear warheads to targets on the North American continent.[8] Thus, the nuclear age reinforced the rationale for forward-deploying submarines into the Atlantic Ocean, initially to interdict adversary SLOCs but later extending to ensure nuclear deterrence.

## The Gorshkov Series

The expansion of the Soviet fleet during the 1960s, nonetheless, sparked a debate on whether the increasingly powerful Soviet Navy had either offensive or defensive purposes.[9] By the early 1970s, the debate was nurtured by an unexpected influx of primary source data, including 11 articles authored by then Navy CINC, Admiral Gorshkov. Published in 1972–73 under the headline "Navies in War and Peace" in the Soviet Navy's main journal for naval doctrinal debate, the *Morskoi Sbornik*, this massive body of text contained the CINC's thoughts by drawing historical parallels on why the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) needed a strong navy.[10] Thanks to the article's swift translation and publication by the U.S. Naval Institute's monthly magazine *Proceed-*

*ings*, the Gorshkov series became readily available for the participants in the Western debate on Soviet naval strategy.

Most initial efforts to interpret Gorshkov's texts focused on structure and the most obvious key concepts presented. One discussion centered on whether Gorshkov was speaking authoritatively when declaring new policy or merely airing his personal views in an attempt to gain popular support.[11] Other analyses stressed that Gorshkov's articles should be seen in the context of détente and the ongoing Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) negotiations, as limitations would likely hamper the development and employment of the Soviet Navy.[12] A topic that generated much interest was how Gorshkov advocated a strong navy to pursue peacetime Soviet state interests on a global level. This corresponded well with the expansion of the Soviet peacetime naval presence around the world from the mid-1960s and a simultaneous reduction of Western naval presence.[13] This in turn prompted a discussion about the evolution of Soviet naval diplomacy.[14]

While the translation of the Gorshkov series made the articles available to a large Western expert community, the greatest impact resulted from interpretations by specialists in Slavic studies and Soviet military affairs at the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA). Most notably, CNA researcher James M. McConnell paved the way for an alternative view on Soviet wartime naval strategy. By considering nuances in the Russian language and particular terminology used in Soviet doctrinal texts, he suggested that the Soviet Navy would pursue a defensive approach based on near-shore deployment. This view contrasted sharply to the prevailing image of an offensive Soviet naval disposition and was therefore met with skepticism and resistance.[15]

## The Assumptions Underpinning the Bastion Defense Concept

In an article from 1974, McConnell thoroughly explains his supposition that the Soviet Navy's wartime strategy rests on what has become known as a bastion defense concept.[16] While McConnell does not use the term *bastion*, three points emerge that this article argues constitute the essence of the bastion defense concept. The first concerns Gorshkov's notion of how the Soviet Union's disadvantaged military geography restricts wartime employment of its naval forces. The other two points pertain to the role and mission of the Soviet fleet in terms of deterrence and warfighting, based on how Gorshkov valued the utility of certain naval platforms and technological achievements.

According to McConnell, Gorshkov saw the geography of the Soviet Union as one of the primary dimensioning influences of its naval force structure and operations.[17] It shaped the Soviet naval force composition in such a way that its primary strike force relied on submarines and naval aviation instead of surface

combatants.[18] However, Gorshkov did not dismiss the utility of a surface fleet and acknowledged its role in peacetime diplomatic missions. He believed that it was necessary that surface ships continue to be the fleet's most numerous forces but advocated specialized warships over multirole vessels.[19] McConnell nevertheless believed that Gorshkov suggested a defensive wartime role for the Soviet Navy because, disadvantaged by its geography, its forces had to "run the gauntlet of forward-based Western [antisubmarine warfare] ASW forces" before reaching the open sea.[20]

During the early 1960s, the short range of ballistic missiles was an obstacle to carrying out a nuclear exchange between the two superpowers. One way for Moscow to sustain deterrence was to forward deploy its ballistic-missile submarines close to the North American continent. Despite the risks involved, these submarines were the most suitable platform for such missions, offering a reasonable chance of staying hidden and surviving until a nuclear exchange became inevitable.[21] In addition, Gorshkov did not consider that deploying ASW against them was cost-effective, as their ability to remain submerged for long periods provided them with significant survivability.[22] According to McConnell, this role changed with the introduction of SLBMs with intercontinental range.

When the *Delta*-class SSBNs equipped with SS-N-8 Sawfly SLBMs entered service in 1972, virtually coinciding with the publication of the Gorshkov series, Soviet strategic submarines no longer had to venture far from base to reach patrol areas and launch zones. This practically nullified the Soviet Union's military-geographical disadvantage for the naval branch of nuclear deterrence.[23] However, the increase in missile range not only affected the SLBMs of the navy. It also allowed silo-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) to reach their targets from Soviet territory, and with onshore ICBMs cheaper to produce, they soon made up for missile quantity.[24] At the same time, Gorshkov maintained the view that SLBMs were superior to ICBMs as "a more effective means of deterrence."[25] Given the exceptional survivability of SSBNs, the more costly and exclusive SLBMs were withheld for later use, unlike ICBMs. Thus, according to McConnell, the role of Soviet SSBNs was no longer to participate in an initial nuclear exchange but to conserve their SLBMs for second- or third-strike tasks. Because of this specific role, McConnell argued that Gorshkov drew a stark distinction between naval capabilities intended for deterrence and those intended for warfighting.[26]

With the shift in mission for the Soviet SSBNs toward maintaining intrawar deterrence, ensuring their survival during war became more important. By patrolling in waters adjoining their naval bases where the Soviet Navy enjoyed a higher degree of sea control, the Soviet SSBNs were less exposed to North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) ASW capabilities, and it was

easier to dispatch general-purpose forces to safeguard SSBNs out on patrol.[27] From Gorshkov's perspective, this was important, as he believed that submarines could only first reach their full potential when supported by surface ships and aircraft.[28] As noted earlier, Gorshkov did not believe that ASW operations against enemy SSBNs were effective.[29] However, scattering the ASW capabilities did not appeal to Gorshkov either, so he recommended that the total ASW capability of the general-purpose fleet be allocated for a pro-SSBN mission.[30]

While McConnell pioneered the interpretation of Admiral Gorshkov's work on Soviet wartime naval strategy, others followed who also made valuable contributions to the same line of thought. Although divergent views over the interpretation of the Gorshkov series continued to circulate, the overall tendency was nonetheless toward a convergence of opinion.[31] For example, Robert W. Herrick's warnings since the 1960s against overselling the threat of the Soviet Navy fit well with McConnell's analysis. He pointed at how the Soviet force structure, with its emphasis on submarines but lacking in aircraft carriers, indicated a defensive emphasis on sea denial rather than a sea-control strategy.[32] Another analyst who took part in the interpretation of the Gorshkov series was Michael MccGwire, a British professor and former Royal Navy officer. Although his conclusions on the Gorshkov series differed substantially from those of McConnell's, he also warned against inflating the Soviet threat and, according to Jessica Huckabey, saw the Soviet naval expansion as "a move forward in strategic defence."[33] Lastly, Bradford Dismukes, a colleague of McConnell's at CNA, explored the question of a pro-SSBN mission for the Soviet general-purpose forces and concluded that a pro-SSBN was likely more achievable for the Soviet ASW forces than pursuing enemy SSBNs in an anti-SSBN role.[34]

## Soviet Naval Bastions

While McConnell's view quickly gained traction among other researchers, its progress in the wider ranks of the U.S. naval and intelligence communities was slower. Perhaps the most important step in its path toward general acceptance was an alleged intelligence breakthrough in 1980, but both U.S. and NATO military planners had likely considered Soviet bastion scenarios long before this.[35] It is probable, for example, that naval planners had been considering why the U.S. Navy had not observed any passes south of the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom (GIUK) gap by the new Soviet *Delta*-class SSBN after 1975.[36]

There were still a few critics, however; during the 1980s, the most vocal among them was Jan S. Breemer.[37] His main objection was the uncritical general acceptance of the notion, despite the fact that it "depends heavily on logic,

inference, and circumstantial evidence."[38] Other critics, such as James J. Tritten, accepted the assumption of Soviet SSBN bastions, but were skeptical of Moscow relying solely on the navy for its strategic nuclear-weapons reserve.[39]

Rather than debating their existence, discussions on Soviet bastions shifted toward detailing their implementation, geographical extent, and tactics in practice. The assumption that Moscow maintained two naval bastions, with the Kola and Kamchatka Peninsulas as bases, became consensus.[40] Initially, the bastions envisioned were rather extensive, with the western bastion encompassing the Greenland and Barents Seas and the eastern in the Sea of Okhotsk with occasional deployment to the Bering Strait.[41] From the mid-1980s and the introduction of *Delta IV*- and *Typhoon*-class SSBNs into the Northern Fleet inventory, the area of operations contracted to encompass merely the Barents Sea.[42] Toward the end of the Cold War, the notion of geographically concentrated and smaller bastions grew stronger. In his thesis from 1988, Walter M. Kreitler argues that the Soviet Union would gain from operating in even more confined areas; such "close aboard bastions" would merely encompass Soviet territorial water.[43]

## Tracking a Contemporary Northern Fleet Naval Bastion

With the end of the Cold War, the threat of a nuclear war between the superpowers receded. Rather than rendering the concept of naval bastions obsolete, the opposite happened. In fact, the term bastion emerged in Russian military discussions in the late 1990s with the proposal to establish a northern strategic bastion (NSB) based on the Northern Fleet.[44] Ironically, while it is almost certain that this was inspired by Western discourse on the bastion defense concept, the underlying motive was somewhat different. The idea of an NSB was instead likely prompted by Russia's economic hardships, which severely limited defense spending, leading to a concentration of resources in one location, specifically the Kola Peninsula.[45] This in turn lowered the priority of the SSBN naval base on Kamchatka. However, these ideas never fully materialized, and the SSBN base on Kamchatka remained.

Because of the Russian NSB project in the 1990s, the notion of the bastion defense concept has remained strong in Nordic security considerations, and practically no text concerning, or even briefly touching on, geopolitics in the Western Arctic can avoid referencing the concept. In 2024, the Norwegian Intelligence Service's annual open threat and risk assessment highlighted the centrality of the bastion strategy in Russian security perceptions, a view later reaffirmed in the publication of the *Norwegian Defence Pledge* later that same year.[46] Similar wording appears in the Swedish Defence Commission's 2023 report on security policy, which refers to the significance of a Russian

bastion threat for Norway's military planning.[47] The report also independently states that naval bastions are crucial for Russia's preservation of its nuclear second-strike regime.[48]

This section examines whether it is feasible to assume that contemporary Russia is pursuing a bastion defense concept in the European high north. The analysis is structured around the three assumptions that form the essence of McConnell's interpretation of Admiral Gorskhov and thereby the basis of the bastion defense concept. The first of the three assumptions is that Russia's disadvantaged military geography makes SSBN operations close to home waters favorable. The second is the role of the Russian SSBNs in ensuring the second or third nuclear-strike capability. The third is that the main mission of the naval general-purpose forces is to ensure the survival of the SSBNs. Any evidence that either supports or contradicts these claims is the focus, as it either reinforces or refutes the hypothesis that contemporary Russia is pursuing a bastion defense strategy in northern Europe.

## A Disadvantaged Russian Military Geography

The dissolution of the Soviet Union changed Moscow's geography. From a naval perspective, significant geostrategic changes occurred exclusively in the Baltic and Black Seas. Similarly, recent Russian territorial expansion has primarily affected the Black Sea region, including control over Abkhazia since 2008, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and, since 2022, control over the Azov Sea. Hence, with practically no geographical changes in either northwest Russia or the Russian Far East, it is reasonable to assume the continuity of a Russian bastion strategy in the European high north and Russia's Far East.

However, beyond the redrawing of borders, this author argues that there are other military-geographical shifts of wider significance that require a reassessment of what a disadvantaged Russian military geography in the European high north really means. Most importantly, a more navigable Arctic Ocean will have an enormous geopolitical significance for Russia, but there are also other changes to consider, including Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO and the bleaker outlook of repeating the West's successful Cold War barrier strategy against Soviet submarines in the GIUK gap.

The effects of global warming on the circumpolar regions are proceeding faster than in any other region of the world.[49] A growing body of literature suggests that a warmer climate could soon radically alter the conditions for Arctic navigation at a pace much faster than suggested by earlier projections.[50] From a naval security perspective, an Arctic with ice-free summers would drastically change the geopolitical significance of the Arctic region. On the one hand, stretching more than one-half of the total Arctic Ocean's coastline and controlling several geopolitically important archipelagos, Russia has a unique

opportunity to shape future geopolitics in the Arctic, particularly along the Northern Sea Route (NSR). On the other, with a warmer climate, the natural shielding "barrier" of ice will offer less protection as the sea ice coverage recedes.[51] Thus, to Russia, a more navigable Arctic Ocean and its marginal seas will present opportunities and liabilities and consequently will affect its naval second-strike capabilities and its general-purpose naval forces.

If it is not in control of the NSR, Russia fears that adversaries could use the Arctic marginal seas to conduct a massive and unanticipated precision-strike campaign, as NATO's superior capabilities could potentially cripple Russia, politically and militarily, without having to resort to nuclear weapons. The former Russian Navy CINC accentuated this concern during an interview in 2024.[52] This is also habitually touched on in Russian doctrinal and strategic planning documents.[53] In an article from May 2023, the former Russian Navy CINC described how Western naval forces operating in waters close to Russia can quadruple at short notice. According to his assessment, NATO can amass more than 130 surface combatants and submarines, collectively carrying nearly 3,000 high-precision missiles in sea regions close to Russia, of which approximately 50 naval vessels, carrying 1,000–1,100 missiles, would appear in the Norwegian and Barents Seas.[54]

Another military-geographical change that certainly affects Russian considerations of its wartime strategies in the high north is Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO in 2023 and 2024, respectively. Russia reacted to Sweden joining NATO in 2024 by threatening that Moscow would adopt "military-technical" measures in response.[55] Besides being a threat, it was also a way of showing disapproval, as it increased the exposure of Russia's military assets on the Kola Peninsula. While it surely complicates the protection and support that Russian SSBNs can get from assets ashore on the Kola Peninsula, it does not necessarily mean that it renders a bastion strategy impossible. Throughout the Cold War, Moscow had to deal with the Norwegian border, which was less than 60 kilometers away from the closest Soviet nuclear submarine base. However, the common Cold War scenario of early Soviet offensive actions against Norway seems more unlikely. Moscow now has to consider the permanent forces of not one but three NATO states and occupy a much larger portion of northern Scandinavia to create a buffer zone between the Kola Peninsula and NATO territory.

A third theme, which relates not only to military-technological development but also has clear military-geographical implications, is the bleaker outlook of repeating the West's successful Cold War barrier strategy against Soviet submarines in the GIUK gap. From the 1960s until the end of the Cold War, the submarines of the U.S. Navy enjoyed a continuous advantage over Soviet submarines in the North Atlantic due to generally louder Soviet submarines

and the establishment of a sound surveillance system (SOSUS) for detecting submarines in choke points.[56] Indeed, this successful Western barrier strategy against Soviet forces might even have contributed to compelling the Soviet Navy to pursue a bastion defense strategy. However, toward the end of the Cold War, the Soviet Union had largely managed to achieve "acoustic parity" with the introduction of truly silent nuclear submarines. Thus, the NATO effort to maintain an ASW barrier was saved at the last moment when the Soviet Union collapsed.[57] Hence, modern Russian submarines might have a considerably better chance at evading detection in the GIUK than their Soviet predecessors.

In summary, considering the changing geopolitical situation for Russia in the high north, it is no longer obvious that operating close to home port offers the greatest chance of survival for Russian SSBNs. With two additional NATO allies on the Scandinavian Peninsula, it may not be possible to support wartime SSBN operations in the Barents Sea from ashore in the same way as before. In comparison to the Cold War, the military-geographical conditions for Russian circumpolar naval operations now seem more beneficial, while the Kola Peninsula is likely more vulnerable. Hence, given Russia's current situation in the high north, ensuring the survival of Russian SSBNs seems to be better served by dispersing into the world's oceans, particularly the marginal seas of the Arctic Ocean, than lingering in the waters close to the Kola Peninsula.

## Role of the Russian SSBN

A central assumption of the bastion defense concept is that during an initial nuclear exchange, the SLBMs of the SSBNs are withheld. This section examines the current standing of the SSBNs in Russian nuclear deterrence, with a particular emphasis on their role as a strategic nuclear reserve.

The number of SSBNs in Moscow's inventory has declined considerably since the Cold War. While the total has dropped from 48 in 1990 to 12 in 2024, SLBMs continue to constitute one-third of the strategic nuclear delivery vehicles in Russia's nuclear arsenal.[58] A smaller number of SSBNs could, indeed, influence tactical considerations, as it increases both the difficulty and the payoff of detection.[59] But the decline in the number of Russian SSBNs has stopped, and the rationale for pursuing the bastion defense concept likely does not ultimately depend on inventory size.

Russia began to modernize its inventory of SSBNs in the mid-1990s, but because of a lack of finances and problems with the development of the new RSM-56 Bulava SLBM, Russia finally commissioned the first hull of the *Borei*-class SSBNs in 2012—after 16 years of construction. Since then, the Sevmash shipyard has completed six more hulls, with another three in various stages of construction.[60] In November 2023, then-Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu presented a naval plan for the years 2019–25 in which he declared the moderniza-

tion of the SSBN inventory a priority.[61] Discussions about the fifth generation of Russian SSBNs have already begun. A concept called Arktur, presented at the Russian arms expo Armiia-2023, showcased a smaller platform with fewer ballistic missiles, instead allocating space for autonomous underwater vehicles.[62] Thus, SSBNs will most certainly continue to play a role in Russian nuclear deterrence into the 2040 and 2050s.

It should be noted, however, that it is the modernization of the Pacific Fleet SSBN inventory that has gone furthest, with five *Borei*-class SSBNs commissioned against the two that have so far been handed over to the Northern Fleet. It is nevertheless likely that the Northern Fleet SSBN inventory will reach parity in the coming five years, as the next three *Borei*-class hulls are destined to replace some of the older Northern Fleet *Delta IV*-class hulls.[63] This is unusual, as the Northern Fleet was habitually given priority during the Cold War and shows that the primacy of the Northern Fleet SSBNs should not be taken for granted.[64]

While Moscow's SSBN inventory has transformed substantially since the Cold War, technological advances have had the greatest impact on its role. The introduction of intercontinental delivery systems in the mid-1970s was a key technological enabler for the Soviet bastion, and since then there have been additional technological advances with the potential to reinforce, challenge, or modify the rationale for a strategy to withhold SSBNs. In their 1992 report, Tønne Huitfeldt, Tomas Ries, and Gunvald Øyna list 11 significant technological advancements affecting strategic nuclear-delivery vehicles, 2 of which directly concern SSBNs. These are the development of under-ice capabilities for submarines and the introduction in the late 1980s of mobile ICBMs.[65]

The commissioning of first the *Typhoon*- and then the *Delta IV*-class SSBNs, with substantial under-ice capabilities in the early 1980s, provided new opportunities for covert SSBN deployments in the Arctic. Consequently, Soviet SSBN operations shifted eastward, leaving the Greenland Sea where U.S. SOSUS arrays could easily detect and track them, and instead focused on Barents Sea deployments.[66] This shift both improved and reduced how general-purpose forces could support SSBN operations. While general-purpose forces could assist SSBNs in disappearing into the Barents Sea, SSBNs became unsupported during under-ice operations.

A technical innovation with the potential to challenge the bastion strategy was the introduction of mobile ICBMs—rail-based or wheeled—in the late 1980s.[67] This posed a challenge to the SSBN's withholding role. Even though their mobility does not provide the same level of survivability as SSBNs, mobile ICBMs are cheaper to build and operate while offering greater opportunity for dispersal over vast areas. By 2024, more than one-half of Russia's ICBMs were road-mobile systems.[68] As noted earlier, in terms of the number of stra-

tegic nuclear-delivery vehicles, the navy's SLBMs accounted for approximately one-third during the latter part of the Cold War (1975–90), which is roughly the same as in 2024.[69] Thus, the road-mobile ICBM systems have clearly not replaced SSBNs to this day, but rather serve as a complement. However, to mitigate risk, it is likely that a portion of Russia's road-mobile ICBMs are also considered part of the strategic reserve and withheld in an initial nuclear exchange.[70]

The rationality of Russia's adherence to the bastion defense concept does not solely rest on their technological developments but also on reactions to other events. Since the U.S. withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2002, Russia has loudly criticized the United States for potentially undermining the nuclear strategic balance.[71] The general view in the Kremlin seems to be that while Russia and the United States are currently on par in terms of nuclear arsenals, even the slightest doubt about Russia's capability to inflict unacceptable damage during a retaliatory strike could alter the balance. To counter this, Russia has striven to "increase its strike potential" by developing new strategic nuclear-capable weapons intended to overcome ABM defenses.[72] Hence, Russia's response to the U.S. missile-defense program has mainly been to develop new, asymmetrical capabilities for maintaining a credible deterrence regime, rather than pursuing a comprehensive ABM defense program of its own.

At the annual presidential address to the Federal Assembly in 2018, President Vladimir Putin displayed a range of new strategic weaponry developed for the sole purpose of countering American ABM capabilities.[73] The weapon systems included modern iterations of existing capabilities, such as the RS-28 Sarmat ICBM, and entirely new capabilities. Among them is the Poseidon, an intercontinental, nuclear-powered, nuclear-armed autonomous torpedo, launched from special-purpose nuclear submarines similar in size to SSBNs, one of which has been commissioned while another is in its final stage of construction.[74] This development of a new, strategic naval nuclear deterrent capability calls into question the feasibility of a contemporary bastion strategy. In comparison to SLBMs, which can be launched from practically any location, these torpedoes, despite their long range, are likely less versatile and require their carriers to reach launch areas situated closer to the target. With high-value naval groups or coastal infrastructure as their main targets, it is also likely that these nuclear-tipped torpedoes are intended for usage in the earlier stages of a nuclear conflict rather than being held in reserve. It should also be noted that the two submarines carrying the Poseidon torpedo are likely to be based in Kamchatka, which somewhat increases the peninsula's strategic importance relative to Kola in terms of nuclear deterrence.[75]

To sum up, while the SSBN remains an indispensable part of Russia's

nuclear deterrent, new military technology has been and continues to be reshaping the SLBM's standing among other nuclear weapons delivery systems. Under-ice capabilities had already expanded the patrol areas of SSBNs during the 1980s, but in a way that aligned reasonably well with the bastion concept. The shift in the Strategic Rocket Forces' inventory from predominantly silo-based to road-mobile ICBMs has also presented Russia with an alternative to SSBNs in its strategic nuclear reserve. Although road-mobile ICBMs lack the submarine's unique ability for covert deployment, they are at the same time cheaper to produce and operate and are more easily dispersed.[76] Particularly challenging to a bastion-centric role for Russian SSBNs is the introduction of strategic nuclear submarines with alternative means of delivering nuclear warheads for two reasons. First, positioning is likely more critical when firing a nuclear-tipped torpedo than when launching an SLBM. Thus, its tactics likely differ substantially from those of SSBNs and do not naturally align with the bastion defense concept. Second, and relatedly, more forward-leaning posturing and tactics likely makes these submarines more suitable for early participation during a nuclear exchange or for second-strike missions rather than for a third-strike role.

## The Role of the General-Purpose Forces

Two recurring themes in the portrayal of Russia's ongoing naval modernization are, first, Russia's emphasis on building predominantly small warships and, second, equipping them with long-range missile systems. Liv Karin Parnemo concludes that Russia is essentially building a coastal defense navy—primarily submarines and small ships with standoff capabilities.[77] Ina Holst-Pederson Kvam makes a similar argument when she contends that what characterizes Russian naval development is the emergence of a "mosquito-fleet" with long-range precision-strike missiles for coastal-defense purposes.[78] Michael Kofman agrees with this image and describes it as the emergence of a Russian "green-water" navy and, similar to the reasoning of Holst-Pedersen Kvam, emphasizes that standoff capabilities provide the general-purpose forces a new role in non-nuclear deterrence.[79]

How this novel fleet composition fits with the bastion defense concept presents a mixed picture.[80] On the one hand, with a naval force limited in number and ship size, concentrating forces to achieve sea control in the littoral region around the Kola Peninsula is in line with the bastion tradition, as it offers a relatively safe area of operations for its SSBNs. In addition, from there, the Northern Fleet could employ its sea denial capabilities, using long-range missiles to deter approaches by NATO warships.[81] On the other hand, there are indications that the operations of the general-purpose forces have become increasingly disconnected from SSBN operations. Two examples illustrate this:

first, the introduction of non-nuclear deterrence in Russian operational thinking, and second, the Northern Fleet's increasing Arctic orientation.

Western development and dominance in conventional precision-strike capabilities have long been a recurring theme in the Russian military debate. However, in contrast to Russia's asymmetrical response to U.S. ambitions in missile defense, Russia has sought to develop a non-nuclear deterrence capability based on long-range precision-guided missiles of its own.[82] With the recent commissioning of predominantly small platforms equipped with Kalibr land-attack systems, the navy now holds a substantial share of Russia's overall precision-strike capability. During his opening speech at the Moscow Conference on International Security in 2021, the Russian chief of the General Staff underscored the significance of non-nuclear deterrence in Russian strategy and stressed that the rapid development of precision weapons is blurring the lines between nuclear and non-nuclear weapons.[83] Also notable is that the 2010 and 2014 iterations of Russian military doctrine equate non-nuclear deterrence with nuclear deterrence.[84] Hence, the sharp distinction that, according to McConnell, Admiral Gorshkov made between naval forces for deterrence and warfighting is less relevant today, as general-purpose forces now also carry a substantial deterrence mission. The increased emphasis on long-range precision missile strikes has come at the expense of capabilities relevant to a pro-SSBN mission.[85]

Since 2012, Russia began to increase its permanent military presence in the Arctic region, primarily through the construction of permanent Arctic military bases and modernization of military airfields. At approximately the same time, the Russian Ministry of Defence also ordered a relatively large number of ships adapted for Arctic conditions. This included icebreakers, Arctic patrol ships, and logistics-support ships with ice-strengthened hulls.[86] During 2021–25, four new *Severodvinsk*-class nuclear-powered guided-missile submarines (SSGN) were commissioned. As the first Russian non-SSBN class of nuclear-powered submarines with under-ice capabilities, this opens up new possibilities for Russian under-ice operations.[87] In a September 2024 article, the Russian Navy CINC established that the navy needed to construct basing facilities for its ships in the central parts of the Arctic, along the NSR.[88] Thus, although the Soviet Union occasionally also had a military presence in the Arctic, a major shift is that its purpose is unprecedented in its ambition to not only project military power *from* but also *in* the Arctic.[89] This development is slowly shifting the center of gravity of the Northern Fleet eastward by dispersing its infrastructure across Russia's Arctic territories and designing capabilities for Arctic operations.

In sum, although recent trends in the composition of the Russian naval general-purpose forces are seemingly in line with the tradition of the bastion defense concept, there are also tendencies pointing in other directions. Considering the current emphasis in the Russian Navy on the non-nuclear deterrence

mission and the fleet's overall smaller size, Russia's naval general-purpose forces are likely less capable of pursuing a pro-SSBN mission. While the eastward dispersion of Northern Fleet capabilities supposedly does improve the conditions for supporting SSBN operations in the Arctic marginal seas, the process may dilute the concentration of capabilities on the Kola Peninsula to safeguard SSBN operations, as prescribed by Admiral Gorshkov.

## Conclusions

During the 1980s, there was near consensus that the bastion defense concept was an accurate approximation of the Soviet Union's wartime naval strategy. Although the Cold War ended in 1991, the need for military planners to anticipate adversaries' strategies has not diminished; rather, it has intensified. Given current geopolitical tensions, marked by nuclear sabre-rattling and Western-Russian relations at a historic low, the parallels to the Cold War are notable. Consequently, the bastion defense concept is once again being used to describe Russian naval strategy in the high north, but there is a risk that its continued reliance is driven more by analytical convenience than by analytical accuracy.

This article argues that it is becoming increasingly problematic to assume that the bastion defense concept remains a valid approximation of Moscow's wartime naval strategy in the high north. While the notion of a Russian bastion defense concept remains prominent in Western debates, Moscow is gradually adjusting its wartime naval strategies in response to evolving military-geographical and military-technological conditions. The gradual yet consistent nature of this shift becomes evident when examining how these changes contradict central assumptions underpinning the bastion defense concept.

A vital tenet of the bastion defense concept is that it represents a deliberate naval adaptation to Moscow's disadvantaged military-geographical situation. By concentrating forces in the proximity of the Kola Peninsula, Moscow's strategic nuclear reserve, in the form of Northern Fleet SSBNs, would benefit from dual protection from both land- and sea-based forces. While the outlook for safeguarding SSBN operations from the Kola Peninsula has worsened due to Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO, climate change is making Arctic waters increasingly accessible for navigation.

Indeed, a reasonable conclusion would be that a more accessible Arctic would merely shift the center of gravity of the bastion defense eastward. However, this overlooks the fact that the roles of the Russian Navy in strategic deterrence and warfighting are also evolving. While SSBNs still play a crucial role in Russia's nuclear deterrence, the naval leg of Russia's nuclear triad no longer constitutes the country's sole strategic nuclear reserve, and some new naval nuclear capabilities are likely designed for early participation in a nuclear conflict.

Similarly, emerging roles in non-nuclear deterrence are further disconnecting the wartime function of general-purpose forces from SSBN operations. Instead of concentrating forces to safeguard SSBN operations within a confined ocean region, the Russian Navy's increasing Arctic orientation is leading to a dispersion of forces across the Arctic marginal seas.

While naval bases on the northern side of the Kola Peninsula will remain the primary locations from which Russia projects peacetime naval power on a global scale, it is increasingly unlikely that the Kola Peninsula would serve as the hub of a wartime Russian bastion defense strategy. Military planners in Nordic countries should take this factor into account. Similarly, military planners in leading Western naval powers must increasingly consider wartime scenarios in which the Russia Navy enjoys wartime sea control across a substantial part of the Arctic Ocean.

## Endnotes

1. Jan S. Breemer, "The Soviet Navy's SSBN Bastions: Evidence, Inference, and Alternative Scenarios," *RUSI Journal* 130, no. 1 (1985): 18, https://doi.org/10.1080/03071848508522717; and Walter M. Kreitler, "The Close Aboard Bastion: A Soviet Ballistic Missile Submarine Deployment Strategy" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 1988), 16.
2. *Second strike* refers to the ability to conduct a retaliatory strike, while the *third strike* mission involves surviving both the initial nuclear exchange as well as a protracted period of war.
3. Jessica Montgomery Huckabey, "Sea Power Rivalry: The Influence of Admiral Gorshkov on American Naval Thought, 1963–1985" (PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 2018).
4. See, for example, N. Bradford Dismukes, *Hidden in Plain Sight: CNA and the Soviet Navy* (Arlington, VA: CNA, 2018), 11–16.
5. In 1948–50, the Soviet Union built more than 50 submarines per year. See Mark Carlson, "The Explosion that Built the Soviet Navy," *Naval History*, December 2023; in the 1960s, it annually built 15 nuclear submarines, whereas the United States built 8. Huckabey, "Sea Power Rivalry," 61.
6. Owen R. Cote, *The Third Battle: Innovation in the U.S. Navy's Silent Cold War Struggle with Soviet Submarines* (Newport, RI: Naval War College, 2003), 3.
7. Cote, *The Third Battle*, 1–12.
8. The other two were the deployment of land-based missiles within target range of the continental United States, exemplified by the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, and the forward deployment of long-range bombers to Arctic airbases from which they could reach their targets by flying over the North Pole. See Tønne Huitfeldt, Tomas Ries, Gunvald Øyna, *Strategic Interests in the Arctic* (Oslo: Institutt for forsvarsstudier, 1992), 80–82.
9. Huckabey, "Sea Power Rivalry," 19–45; and J. S. Breemer, "Rethinking the Soviet Navy," *Naval War College Review* 34, no. 1 (1981): 4.
10. "Navies in War and Peace" is also the headline under which the Soviet CINC published his article series.
11. Stephen M. Walt, *Analysts in War and Peace: MccGwire, McConnell, and Admiral Gorshkov*, Professional Paper 458 (Arlington, VA: CNA, 1987); and Robert G. Weinland et al., "Admiral Gorshkov's 'Navies in War and Peace'," *Survival* 17, no. 2 (1975): 54–63, https://doi.org/10.1080/00396337508441532; and Huckabey, "Sea Power Rivalry," 95.

12. James M. McConnell, "Gorshkov's Doctrine of Coercive Naval Diplomacy in both Peace and War," in Robert G. Weinland, Michael K. MccGwire, and James M. McConnell, *Admiral Gorshkov on "Navies in War and Peace"* (Arlington, VA: CNA, 1974), 108; Robert G. Weinland, " 'Navies in War and Peace': Content, Context, and Significance," in *Admiral Gorshkov on "Navies in War and Peace*," 15; and Weinland et al., "Admiral Gorshkov's 'Navies in War and Peace'," 62.
13. The United Kingdom, for example, sharply reduced its naval activity in 1967; see James M. McConnell, "Doctrine and Capabilities," in *Soviet Naval Diplomacy*, ed. Bradford Dismukes and James M. McConnell (New York: Pergamon Press, 1979), 1.
14. See, for example, McConnell, "Doctrine and Capabilities"; or Robert G. Weinland, *Soviet Strategy and the Objectives of Their Naval Presence in the Mediterranean*, Professional Paper 410 (Arlington, VA: CNA, 1982), 5.
15. In a light-hearted recollection, Bradford Dismukes, one of the active participants in the analysis of the Gorshkov series in the early 1970s, describes the skepticism and resistance that met CNA. See Dismukes, *Hidden in Plain Sight*, 20.
16. McConnell, "Gorshkov's Doctrine," 71–116.
17. McConnell uses military-geographical reasoning in numerous places to support his view. See McConnell, "Gorshkov's Doctrine," 72, 80, 83, 85, 89, 96, 106.
18. McConnell, "Gorshkov's Doctrine," 83.
19. McConnell, "Gorshkov's Doctrine," 105.
20. McConnell, "Gorshkov's Doctrine," 89.
21. McConnell, "Gorshkov's Doctrine," 82.
22. McConnell, "Gorshkov's Doctrine," 72–73.
23. See McConnell, "Gorshkov's Doctrine," 74; and Weinland et al., "Admiral Gorshkov's 'Navies in War and Peace'," 61.
24. The Soviet ICBM arsenal grew quickly during the 1960s, from nearly nonexistent in 1960 to encompassing 44 percent of its strategic nuclear delivery vehicles in 1965 and 74 percent in 1970. See Huitfeldt, Ries, and Oyna, *Strategic Interests in the Arctic*, 98–103.
25. McConnell, "Gorshkov's Doctrine," 81, 94.
26. McConnell, "Gorshkov's Doctrine," 94.
27. McConnell, "Gorshkov's Doctrine," 89.
28. McConnell, "Gorshkov's Doctrine," 73, 105.
29. McConnell, "Gorshkov's Doctrine," 80.
30. McConnell, "Gorshkov's Doctrine," 72, 86.
31. An essay by Stephen M. Walt thoroughly outlines the diverging opinions of James M. McConnell and Michael K. McGwire, both active participants in the debate on Soviet naval strategy in response to the Gorshkov series. See Walt, "Analysts in War and Peace," 1987.
32. Weinland et al., "Admiral Gorshkov's 'Navies in War and Peace'," 58.
33. Despite the fact that McConnell and MccGwire read the Gorshkov series two very different ways, they were in agreement on a Soviet withholding strategy; see Huckabey, "Sea Power Rivalry," 103.
34. Bradford Dismukes, *Roles and Missions of Soviet Naval General Purpose Forces in Wartime: Pro-SSBN Operations*, Professional Paper 130 (Arlington: CNA, 1974), 17. In later works, Dismukes is much less cautious in his conclusions on the existence of a Soviet pro-SSBN mission for its ASW forces; see Dismukes, *Hidden in Plain Sight*, 20, 25.
35. Dismukes, *Hidden in Plain Sight*, 25; Don Boroughs, *The Story of CNA: Civilian Scientists in War and Peace* (Arlington, VA: CNA, 2021), 38; and Kreitler, "The Close Aboard Bastion," 14.
36. Huitfeldt, Ries, and Oyna, *Strategic Interests in the Arctic*, 108.
37. See, for example, Breemer, "The Soviet Navy's SSBN Bastions: Evidence, Inference, and Alternative Scenarios"; and Jan S. Breemer, "The Soviet Navy's SSBN Bastions: New Questions Raised," *RUSI Journal* 132, no. 2 (1987): 39–44, https://doi.org/10.1080/03071848708523165.

38. Breemer, "The Soviet Navy's SSBN Bastions: Evidence, Inference, and Alternative Scenarios," 18.
39. James John Tritten, *Scenarios of Nuclear Escalation Dominance and Vulnerability* (Monterey: Naval Postgraduate School, 1988), 8–9.
40. Kristian Åtland, "The Introduction, Adoption, and Implementation of Russia's 'Northern Strategic Bastion' Concept, 1992–1999," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 20, no. 4 (2007): 499–528, https://doi.org/10.1080/13518040701703047.
41. Pavel Podvig et al., ed., *Russian Strategic Nuclear Weapons* [Strategicheskoe Iadernoe Vooruzhenie Rossii] (Moscow: IzdAT, 1998), 230–31.
42. Podvig et al., *Russian Strategic*, 231.
43. Kreitler, "The Close Aboard Bastion."
44. Aleksandr Golts, *Military Reform and Militarism in Russia* (Uppsala, Sweden: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2017), 57; and Atland, "The Introduction, Adoption, and Implementation," 505–9.
45. According to Aleksandr Golts, the "Northern Strategic Bastion" was primarily a way to direct budgetary cuts toward other parts of the navy, rather than an emphasis on the Northern Fleet. Golts, *Military Reform and Militarism*, 56–57.
46. *Fokus 2024—Etterretningstjenestens vurdering av aktuelle sikkerhetsutfordringar* (Oslo: Norwegian Intelligence Service, 2024), 10; and *Forsvarsløftet—for Norges trygghet* [The Norwegian Defence Pledge, 2025–2036] (Oslo: Norwegian Government, 2024), 14.
47. *Allvarstid:* Försvarsberedningens säkerhetspolitiska rapport 2023 (Stockholm: Swedish Government, 2023).
48. *Allvarstid*, 121, 128.
49. For a study that suggests that the Arctic has warmed nearly four times faster than the rest of the world since 1979, see Mika Rantanen et al., "The Arctic Has Warmed Nearly Four Times Faster than the Globe since 1979," *Communications Earth & Environment* 3, no. 168 (2022), https://doi.org/10.1038/s43247-022-00498-3.
50. Alexandra Jahn, Marika M. Holland, and Jennifer E. Kay, "Projections of an Ice-free Arctic Ocean," *Nature Reviews Earth & Environment* 5 (2024): 164–76, https://doi.org/10.1038/s43017-023-00515-9.
51. Mathieu Boulègue et al., *Up North: Confronting Arctic Insecurity* (Washington, DC: Center for European Policy Analysis, 2024), 5.
52. Yuliya Kozak, "Na zashchite natsionalnykh interesov strany v Mirovom okeane" [On the protection of national interests of the state in the world oceans], *Krasnaia Zvezda* 2 (January 2024): 1, 4.
53. See, for example, paragraph 12d in the 2014 Russian military doctrine (President of Russia, *Voennaia doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii* [Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation]), released on 26 December 2014; and paragraph 15 in the 2015 Russian Security Strategy (Presidential Decree, *O Strategii natsionalnoi bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii* [About the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation]), released on 31 December 2015; and paragraph 25b in the 2017 Russian Naval Doctrine (Presidential Decree, *Ob utverzhdenii Osnov gosudarstvennoi politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii v oblasi voenno-morskoi deiatelnosti na period do 2030 goda* [On approval of the Fundamentals of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of Naval Activities for the period up to 2030], released on 20 July 2017.
54. Nikolay Yevmenov et al., "Osnovnye tendentsii izmeneniia kharaktera i soderzhaniia voennykh ugroz Rossiiskoi Federatsii s okeanskikh i morskikh napravlenii" [The main trends in the change in the nature and content of military threats to the Russian Federation from ocean and sea directions], *Voennaia Mysl* 5 (2023): 19–25.
55. "Russia Says It Will Take Military-Technical Steps in Response to Sweden's NATO Accession," Reuters, 28 February 2024.
56. In the report *The Third Battle*, Owen R. Cote Jr. tells the story of the cat-and-mouse game of submarines and antisubmarine warfare played throughout the Cold War. See Cote, *The Third Battle*, 41–42, on the SOSUS arrays in the GIUK gap.
57. Cote, *The Third Battle*, 78.

58. Huitfeldt, Ries, and Øyna, *Strategic Interests in the Arctic*, 127; and Hans M. Kristensen et al., "Russian Nuclear Weapons, 2024," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 80, no. 2 (2024): 119, https://doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2024.2314437.
59. Kreitler, "The Close Aboard Bastion," 77.
60. Roman Volkov and Andrew Brichevsky, "Project 955 Borey," RussianShips.info, 29 January 2025.
61. "V Moskve sostoialos zasedanie Kollegii Minoborony Rossii" [A meeting of the Russian Defense Ministry Board was held in Moscow], Ministry of Defence, 21 November 2023.
62. "V konstruktorskom byuro nazvali sroki poiavleniia v VMF novykh atomykh podlodok" [The design bureau has named the timeframe for the appearance of new nuclear submarines in the Navy], *RIA Novosti*, 21 June 2023.
63. Volkov and Brichevsky, "Project 955 Borey."
64. Huitfeldt, Ries, and Øyna, *Strategic Interests in the Arctic*, 118–19, 127.
65. Huitfeldt, Ries, and Øyna, *Strategic Interests in the Arctic*, 83–84.
66. Pavel Podvig, ed., *Russian Strategic Nuclear Forces* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 231.
67. Huitfeldt, Ries, and Øyna, *Strategic Interests in the Arctic*, 83–84.
68. Kristensen et al., "Russian Nuclear Weapons, 2024," 119.
69. The data from the Cold War period, found in Huitfeldt, Ries, and Øyna, *Strategic Interests in the Arctic*, 86, includes not only intercontinental SLBMs but also SLBMs of shorter range that were phased out in the 1980s. The data from 2024 is from Kristensen et al., "Russian Nuclear Weapons, 2024," 119.
70. As early as 1988, Walter Kreitler had already described how road-mobile systems "might end the need of a bastion strategy" in Kreitler, "The Close Aboard Bastion," 21–22, 57; opinions vary on whether the introduction of mobile land-based systems have had this effect. Michael Kofman believes that Russia nonetheless pursues a bastion strategy, in "The Role of Nuclear Forces," 32–33, while Robert Dalsjö is more skeptical in "A Contrarian Perspective on the High North," in *Defence and Security: Festschrift in Honour of Tomas Ries*, ed. Magnus Christiansson (Stockholm: Swedish Defence University, 2022), 107–8.
71. Both Russian political and military leaders have expressed this on numerous occasions. For example, see statements by the chief of the General Staff and the commander of the Strategic Rocket Forces; see Yuriy Gavrilov, "Oboima Makarova," *Rossiiskaia Gazeta* 59 (2010); and "Minoborony RF uchityvaet vykhod SShA iz DRSMD pri planirovanii primineniia iadernykh sil" [Russian Defense Ministry takes into account U.S. withdrawal from INF Treaty when planning use of nuclear forces], Tass.com, 16 December 2018.
72. "V Moskve pod rukovodstvom Verkhovnogo Glavnokomandoiushchego Vooruzhennymi Silami Rossii Vladimir Putina proshlo rasshirennoe Kollegii Minoborony" [An expanded meeting of the Defense Ministry Board was held in Moscow under the leadership of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Armed Forces Vladimir Putin], Ministry of Defense, 18 December 2018.
73. "Poslanie Prezidenta Federalnomu Sobraniyu" [Message from the President to the Federal Assembly], President of Russia, 1 March 2018.
74. A. V. Yevsiukov, "Rol novykh sistem strategicheskikh vooruzhenii v obespechenii strategicheskogo sderzhivaniia" [The Role of New Strategic Weapons Systems in Ensuring Strategic Deterrence], *Voennaia Mysl* 12 (2020): 26–30.
75. Anton Lavrov and Aleksey Ramm, "Podrazdeleniia mogut nesti bespilotniki 'Poseidon' " [Units may carry Poseidon drones], *Izvestiia* (Moscow), 20 February 2023.
76. While 16 ballistic missiles are concentrated on one modern Russian SSBN, an equal number of road-mobile ICBMs can be dispersed to 16 different launch sites over a large territory.
77. Liv Karin Parnemo, "Russia's Naval Development—Grand Ambitions and Tactical Pragmatism," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 32, no. 1 (2019): 66, https://doi.org/10.1080/13518046.2019.1552678.

78. Ina Holst-Pedersen Kvam, "Nordflåtens evne til kystnær maktprojeksjon. Implikasjoner for Bastionforsvaret" [The Northern Fleet's ability for coastal power projection. Implications for the Bastion Defence], *Necesse* 5 (2020): 22–58.
79. Michael Kofman, "The Role of Nuclear Forces in Russian Maritime Strategy," in *The Future of the Undersea Deterrent: A Global Survey*, ed. Rory Medcalf et al. (Canberra: National Security College, Australian National University, 2020), 33–34; and Holst-Pedersen Kvam, "Nordflåtens evne," 28.
80. It should be noted that Holst-Pedersen Kvam takes a different stance from Parnemo and Kofman on the applicability of the bastion defense concept, though the difference is merely in their definition of *bastions*. While the former envisions a vast bastion with extensive sea-denial capabilities reaching far south into the Norwegian Sea and the GIUK gap, the latter two argue that a defensive posture within a confined littoral area remains consistent with the bastion defense concept.
81. In recent years, Russia's emphasis on equipping warships with long-range missiles has been perceived as a way to deny NATO access. This antiaccess/area-denial (A2/AD) strategy is often linked to the bastion defense concept. See Robert Dalsjö, Chistofer Berglund, and Michael Jonsson, *Bursting the Bubble: Russian A2/AD in the Baltic Sea Region: Capabilities, Countermeasures, and Implications* (Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency, 2019), 15, 26.
82. See Valeriy Akimenko, *Russia and Strategic Non-nuclear Deterrence: Capabilities, Limitations and Challenges* (London: Chatham House, 2021).
83. Marina Shcherbakova, "Segodnia trebuiutsia politicheskaia volia, mudrost i dalnovidnost" [Today, political will, wisdom and foresight are required], *Krasnaia Zvezda*, 25 June 2021.
84. Holst-Pedersen Kvam, "Nordflåtens evne," 27.
85. One telling example is that one of Russia's few remaining ASW destroyers, the *Udaloy*-class *Marshal Shaposhnikov*, was recently modernized and transformed into a missile-carrying frigate. See "Modernizirovannyi fregat 'Marshal Shaposhnikov' vyshel v more dlia zaversheniia zavodskikh khodovykh ispytanii" [The modernized frigate *Marshal Shaposhnikov* went to sea to complete factory sea trials], Russian Ministry of Defence,
86. For a more detailed overview of measures taken to strengthen Russia's military posture in the Arctic, see Jonas Kjellén, "The Russian Northern Fleet and the (Re)militarisation of the Arctic," *Arctic Review on Law and Politics* 13 (2022): 34–52, https://doi.org/10.23865/arctic.v13.3338.
87. Aleksey Ramm and Bogdan Stepovoi, "Rossiiskie udarnye APL gotovy vypolnit lyubye boevye zadachi v severnykh shirotakh" [Russian attack submarines are ready to carry out any combat missions in northern latitudes], *Izvestiia* (Moscow), 4 June 2020.
88. Aleksandr Moiseyev, "Strategicheskie trebovaniia k razvitiyu voenno-morskogo potentsiala Rossii s uchetom opyta spetsialnoi voennoi operatsii na Ukraine" [Strategic requirements for the development of Russia's naval potential, taking into account the experience of the special military operation in Ukraine], *Voennaia Mysl* 9 (2024): 8–21.
89. Kjellén, "The Russian Northern Fleet," 48.