

● A Korean Conflict. The most likely naval conflict in East Asia is one between the navies of North and South Korea. Relations between few pairs of states have been characterized by such intense and prolonged hostility, as between the two nations of the peninsula. Both Kim il-Sung or Park Chung-hee, leaders, respectively, in the north and the south, are capable of initiating (or provoking) a conflict, if they feel that the military balance is favorable, that the international situation is such that the great powers would not align themselves against him, and that the domestic situation is compelling enough to require a distraction.

Based on the behavior of China and the Soviet Union during the last two major incidents in Korea (the shoot-down of the EC-121 in 1969, and the tree-cutting incident in 1976), both of them would prefer to stay out of such a war. The United States could encourage such restraint by not participating directly itself, or at least by minimizing its overt military participation. Once the United States became involved, both the U.S.S.R. and China would probably feel compelled to assist their communist ally. Nonetheless, so long as the United States maintains a commitment to South Korea's defense, as is now the case, the U.S. would act to compensate for deficiencies in South Korean military capabilities. Indeed, imbalances in relative naval capabilities would be likely to lead to U.S. participation in naval operations.

South Korea maintains a sizable Marine Corps and more than twenty amphibious ships, presumably to take the war to the North. In the face of the large number (about 250) of patrol craft maintained by the North, the North's thirteen submarines, and its considerable, if aging, land-based tactical air power, such landings are not likely to succeed without the surface escorts and air cover that could only be provided by the U.S.

Seventh Fleet or Air Force units based in the South.

North Korea, on the other hand, could not attempt even moderately sized amphibious landings in the South. Until the Republic's own force of patrol craft is built-up in number and modernized, however (plans for which now exist, as Polmar points out in chapter V), the threat of commando-like infiltration would be a very real one and might necessitate patrols by U.S. surface vessels and surveillance by U.S. P-3s or carrier-based aircraft.

Finally, North Korea's diesel-powered submarines, apart from attacks on any attempted seaborne invasion of the North, could attempt to interdict ships carrying military supplies to the South. Both the South Korean Navy's destroyers and land-based ASW aircraft (S-2s) would have more difficulty detecting and sinking those submarines than would the modern systems on board Seventh Fleet's ships and aircraft. Hence, again, South Korea would probably need the U.S. Seventh Fleet to assist in the Republic's maritime defense, unless the South Korean Navy were to be extensively modernized.

- Threats to Taiwan. Despite the fact that it has by far the largest navy of East Asia, China's Navy is clearly not a blue-water force, and is technologically unimpressive. Nearly one-half of the fleet is comprised of patrol craft with poor sea-keeping qualities. There are no cruisers and only eighteen destroyers--less than the number maintained by Taiwan (PRC destroyers do tend to be more capable). There is a large number of amphibious ships, but these are mainly small and very old. The most capable component is probably the submarine force.

How could China threaten Taiwan with these forces? For one, it almost certainly could seize the offshore islands; but this is more the result of the islands' proximity to the mainland (hence their vulnerability to massed artillery barrages and the interdiction of their supply boats), than Chinese

other hostile military action against Taiwan.

● Japan in a major East-West Conflict. Japan is in an enviable position in that it is difficult to picture direct military threats against it. Certainly, things could change, but at present it is difficult to visualize either China or the Soviet Union attempting to invade Japan or otherwise militarily attacking Japanese assets, except in the context of an all-out East-West War. This situation is not the result of the deterrent value of Japan's Navy, however. For while the Japanese Navy is no doubt the most modern of the indigenous fleets of East Asia--the only one of near technological equality with the fleets of the great powers--it is simply too small to have a profound effect on the calculations of decision-makers.

Evaluations of Japanese naval capabilities, therefore, should be made in the context of a major East-West War. For argument's sake, we can assume that the only resources available to the Great Powers would be those deployed in the region prior to the outbreak of hostilities; the U.S. Third Fleet and the two sides' Atlantic Fleets will be assumed to be incapable (or too busy elsewhere) of reinforcing the Seventh and Pacific Fleets.

Western strategy would probably be to bottle up that portion of the Soviet Fleet which had not been deployed before the onset of fighting and to hunt and destroy those units that had been deployed beforehand. Until such a time that the major portion of the predeployed units had been destroyed, air and submarine defenses would have to be provided to escort Allied naval forces and merchant shipping.

Trapping the portions of the Soviet Fleet not predeployed would probably prove to be the least difficult of the three tasks. Seventh Fleet's four nuclear-powered, hunter/killer submarines might be best used near

Petropavlovsk, where the proximity of Soviet air bases would make operations by surface or air ASW units difficult. Farther south, barriers could be established across the three narrow straits that give access to the Sea of Japan by ASW aircraft and surface units. The new Captor antisubmarine mine would be useful in this role, particularly in the northernmost La Pérouse Strait; Japanese units should be capable of closing the Tsugaru Strait through the Japanese home islands relatively easily; and Tsushima could be monitored by a variety of units. Of course, none of these barriers would be 100 percent effective, but they should be able to impose a significant attrition rate against the relatively noisy Soviet submarine force.

Those Soviet surface units in port at the onset of the conflict are likely to remain there, because of their extreme vulnerability to Western air power. Predeployed Soviet surface units are also likely to be extremely vulnerable to U.S. carrier-based aircraft and, in some regions, to land-based aviation as well. The success rate against predeployed submarines is likely to be less. It would depend upon a variety of factors too numerous and complicated to assess here.

The most difficult task for Seventh Fleet and its allies, however, is likely to be keeping the number of hits suffered by its own forces to a minimum. If we assume that both sides would avoid attacking strategic submarines--perhaps a questionable assumption, the Soviets' first priority is likely to be given to the aircraft carriers. Primary vehicles for these attacks would be the nearly 100 strike aircraft armed with air-to-surface missiles, and the eighteen nuclear-powered, cruise missile-equipped submarines. The likely effectiveness of this force cannot be assessed here.

The thirteen nuclear-powered attack submarines assigned to Far East Fleet might be used for ASW, or for attacks on other highly valued naval units--such as Seventh Fleet's amphibious force--or to attack merchant shipping. The twenty Foxtrot/Zulu conventional submarines might also be effective in these last two roles.

How successful the Soviets might be in attempting to interdict shipping to Japan would depend upon several factors, among others: how many Soviet submarines were allocated to this mission; how effectively the forty-five Japanese destroyers and frigates performed, and to what extent shipping to Japan could be reduced--at least for a time--so as to permit a greater concentration of defensive resources around that shipping which had to be maintained.

#### The Political Balance

In one sense, the main purposes of navies are more political than military. A nation's investment of the considerable resources necessary to acquire and operate modern warships demonstrates a certain determination to defend one's interest and security that is taken seriously by foreign observers. The deployment of naval units to particular regions signals foreign policy intent and thus helps to make more credible and tangible the threats, warnings, promises, and commitments stated verbally by policy-makers. Thus, the navies of East Asia serve important national purposes even without the outbreak of military conflicts such as those just described; indeed, by their simple existence, the navies of East Asia may prevent the development of such military conflicts.

The effectiveness of navies in these political roles is tied only loosely to actual combat capabilities. For example, as William Durch points

out, the deployment by Taiwan of major warships on regular patrols in the Formosa Straits serves an important political function in that it helps to preserve the image of Taiwan's power, thereby helping to prevent the intimidation of those who are still willing to deal with the Nationalist government. In this sense, Taiwan's Navy seems to serve purposes in excess of its actual capabilities to fight wars. China's Navy, on the other hand, may serve purposes less than commensurate with its size because of its proclivity to stay at home. The Chinese Navy's considerable defensive capabilities close to home waters may, at times of Soviet-Chinese tension, help to deter greater Soviet aggressiveness. But the almost total absence of Chinese naval vessels outside of China's coastal waters weakens the extension and promotion of China's interests abroad. As was the case for the Soviet Navy before the mid-1960s--this lack of distant deployments causes the Chinese Navy to serve Chinese foreign policy less than might otherwise be the case.

The reasons for China's "stay-at-home" policy are not clear. Perhaps it is a reflection of the political turmoil which has plagued the nation; perhaps it reflects budgetary restrictions. More likely, it reflects recognition on the part of the Chinese that their units are largely either incapable of distant operations or obsolescent, and thus might suffer from comparison with other local navies--particularly that of Japan. The latter, while small, maintains well turned-out, technologically advanced ships on the whole. And increasingly, Japan has turned to its Navy to show-the-flag and otherwise promote Japanese interests.

From an American perspective, the most interesting political balance is that between the two external powers that maintain fleets in the region--the United States and the Soviet Union. Of late, perceptions of this

balance seem to have favored the U.S.S.R. But whether this perception reflects actual capabilities, or just the general atmosphere of doubt as to U.S. military capabilities and will which accompanied the fall of American-backed regimes in Southeast Asia, is hard to say. The two fleets are so dissimilar that static comparisons (numbers of ships, aggregate tonnage, etc.) do not mean very much. And detailed dynamic evaluations of capabilities to fight wars cannot be accomplished in a publication like this. In any case, the common perception of relative U.S. and Soviet naval capabilities does accurately reflect the trend over the past ten years or so: the U.S. naval presence in East Asia has become smaller, while the Soviet presence, and Soviet willingness to employ its Navy in political roles far from home, have increased. Still, the U.S. Navy would seem to have retained an edge. And even the recent past trend in the relative size of the two fleets now seems to have levelled off, and may soon reverse. The size of the U.S. Navy will increase in the future as the growth in U.S. shipbuilding appropriations initiated in the early 1970s begins to result in greater numbers of new ships, while the Soviet Navy, facing a worsening obsolescence problem in submarines and major warships, will become smaller. Thus, from the West's perspective, the political prospect is bright.