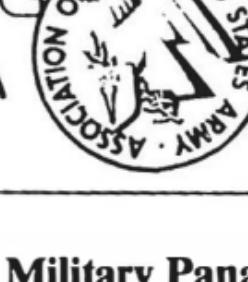


Defense Report

AUSA



Maritime Strategy—A Military Panacea That Promises More Than It Can Deliver.

There is a military concept being voiced in Washington today that, at first blush, seems to offer an easy solution to the problem of what we might do in response to a hostile act by a superior enemy force. It says, in essence, that if an enemy attacks your vital interests in an area where you cannot match his combat power, you should use mobile forces to attack his own vital interests, wherever elsewhere they may be. This is sometimes called a "horizontal" or "war-widening" strategy, but, because naval forces are ideally suited to carry out this kind of countervailing action, it is more often called a "maritime strategy."

This theory holds that if the Soviet Union were to attack the vital interests of the United States, for example, by aggression in Western Europe or the Middle East, we would retaliate against a target in the Soviet homeland, ideally one against which we could attain at least temporary superiority. Such a target might be the submarine bases on the Kola Peninsula or the Soviet Pacific Fleet headquarters at Vladivostok, both suitable targets for naval action. It is an option so attractive that it has captured a supportive audience among the White House budgeteers and, to a degree, within Congress.

But in spite of its attractiveness we cannot escape the fact that the exercise of this countervailing strategy would immediately widen the war rather than confine it to the initial problem area where we were already deficient in combat power. At the same time, with vital interests on every major land mass, the United States must also face the fact that the basic crisis could be fomented by a Soviet surrogate, as is now the case with Cuban action in Latin America. This happenstance is by far the most likely, just as the likelihood of conventional confrontation is greater than that of a strategic nuclear exchange. Yet the "horizontal" strategy ignores this reality.

It would be far better to turn our attention to the development of balanced forces that would permit us to meet threats where they occur and in appropriate strength. The pursuit of war-widening "horizontal" strategy would create a whole new spectrum of risks.