

Soviet Military Power: The Pentagon's Propaganda Document, Annotated and Corrected. - book reviews  
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Tom GERVASI'S stated purpose in this book is to subject the 1987 edition of the DOD's annual "Soviet Military Power" report to what he calls annotations and corrections. While it might be valuable for somebody really to do that (and for the Pentagon to know that it will be done), Gervasi is the wrong man for the job. It's impossible to analyze all of the thousands of annotations, so a review should look at the most important numbers.

Total nuclear warheads is one gross measure of military might, and when the DOD wrote that "The Soviet Union now has about ten thousand deployed intercontinental strategic nuclear weapons," Gervasi objected: "Wrong. They currently can deliver 8,360 strategic warheads and bombs," adding that by 1988 they would have 8,856. Inconveniently for Gervasi, the Soviets publicly agree with the Pentagon: Defense Minister Yazov (Pravda, February 8, 1988) gave as the "total charges on strategic carriers" the figure of "approximately ten thousand."

A second example of Gervasi's errors involves the issue of main battle tanks in NATO and the Warsaw Pact. For years the Soviets denied any disparity, and Gervasi echoes them. On page 93 the DOD lists 24,250 NATO tanks facing 52,000 Soviet-bloc tanks, and Gervasi disagrees: "NATO could place only 18,700 tanks in combat, the Warsaw Pact 24,500." Gervasi's figure for the imbalance is thus around six thousand. Yazov has also confirmed DOD claims of a gross imbalance, admitting that Moscow had twenty thousand more tanks available than NATO.

Gervasi frequently fantasizes non-existent U.S. capabilities in order to downplay Soviet advantages. As part of his "proof" that the 1983 KAL-007 tragedy was a U.S. plot, he writes: "An over-the-horizon backscatter (OTH-B) radar called Cobra Talon, located on the island of Shemya in the Aleutians, was able to track Flight 7 through its entire journey into Soviet airspace."

But there is no OTH-B radar of any name on Shemya or anywhere else in Alaska, and "Cobra Talon" was the name of a radar in the Philippines used to track Soviet and Chinese missile activity. As recently as February 16, 1988, the Soviet analyst D. Belsky in Red Star was attacking Cobra Talon "at San Miguel, Luzon," as part of Reagan's "Star Wars" -- he, unlike Gervasi, had the location and tracking targets correct. Gervasi seems to have simply made up the Alaskan location and the mission. It's not hard to see why he is one of Moscow's favorite defense commentators.

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