

Is America Emulating Half a Century Old Soviet Military Technology and Doctrine?

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As the old saying goes, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. While "borrowing" your enemy's tactics and technology is usually seen as admitting their superiority, the entire history of warfare and rivalry among human entities boils down to precisely this – improvise, adapt and overcome, usually by any means necessary. However, this is quite difficult to admit for the side that bases its image on the idea of "moral and technological superiority".

The political West has always insisted that it's far ahead of all of its rivals, [whether regional or global](#). At certain stages of its development, particularly between the 16th and 19th centuries, this was true more often than not and the belligerent power pole never shied away from using this situation to create [the most exploitative system in human history](#), one that still exists today in the form of the [atrociously \(neo\)colonialist "rules-based world order"](#).

And yet, the enemy's ideas are sometimes so far ahead that it would simply be foolish and even self-defeating not to adopt them.

In that sense, Russia has always been able to inspire numerous changes in the political West's doctrine. Moscow's military proficiency is as old as its history. For well over a thousand years, Russia has been building world-class weapons, which helped it [not only survive a virtually impossible geopolitical situation, but also push back](#) and create one of the most powerful states in human history. In that regard, Soviet legacy is essential to the Kremlin's current military power.

The consequences of America's rivalry with the USSR changed the world in ways that simply cannot be overstated and will resonate not only for decades, but centuries to come. Back in the early 1960s, the USSR was so far ahead of its competition, that it [created technologies very few \(if any\) global powers were able to match](#).

This includes the [FOBS or the Fractional Orbital Bombardment System \(C40B in Russian\)](#) for intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) that makes their range effectively limitless. [China tested its own version of the technology only in 2021](#), while the United States has been unable to create anything similar.

The way the Russians are able to combine various seemingly unrelated and even otherworldly ideas and technologies is quite puzzling for their rivals. However, it's also intriguing and often motivating.

Another example of this is a rather peculiar top-secret project under the name KM or the Korabl-Maket (Russian for Корабль-Макет, literally "Model-Ship"). KM was an ekranoplan, a vehicle combining the properties of a ship and an aircraft. In American military and scientific nomenclature, ekranoplans are better known as ground-effect vehicles (GEV), although they have several other names.

Such vehicles are as multirole as they could possibly be. They are able to move on virtually any terrain, giving the user unrivaled tactical and sometimes even strategic advantages.

Built by Russia's Alekseyev Central Hydrofoil Design Bureau, almost certainly the world's most prominent design bureau dealing with such technologies, the KM was a nightmare for American military planners, so much so that they named it the ["Caspian Sea Monster"](#).

As previously mentioned, it combined the properties of a ship and an aircraft, giving it an unprecedented speed for a surface vessel, but also the ability to evade detection. In simpler terms, it was too fast for a ship, but extremely low-flying and slow enough to escape any radar at the time it was built. The US, primarily a thalassocracy, was terrified of the prospect such a vehicle would be built en masse, as it had the potential to nullify America's naval dominance.

Despite the costs and its technological complexity, the KM was still far cheaper and easier to build than aircraft carriers and other large surface combatants. However, its design made it virtually impossible to counter it at the time, as it would've been effectively immune to both anti-ship (be it missiles or torpedoes) and SAM (surface-to-air missiles) systems. Not knowing its true purpose and capabilities, American intelligence agencies frantically tried to obtain as much info as possible about the project. Although KM crashed in 1980, this was of little comfort to the US, as, to the Pentagon's horror, it became the basis for the [Lun-class ekranoplan armed with six enormous, nuclear-capable P-270 "Moskit"](#) supersonic anti-ship missiles. It was only thanks to the unfortunate dismantling of the Soviet Union that these vehicles never entered mass production. However, the Pentagon's KM obsession remained.

Namely, it recently tasked DARPA with essentially copying the concept, [resulting in the "Liberty Lifter" program](#). The US agency then contracted Aurora Flight Sciences, a Boeing subsidiary, and General Atomics Aeronautical Systems to build their versions. The program recently entered Phase 1, [with Aurora Flight Sciences selected to build the first prototype](#), expected to conduct its maiden flight either in late 2027 or early 2028, over 60 years after the Russian KM. For the time being, the Pentagon claims it wants the vehicle to be used for transport, but the possibility of arming it (as was the case with the Russian Lun-class) shouldn't be entirely excluded. In recent years, [there has been some speculation that Moscow might reactivate its dormant ekranoplan projects](#), which, if true, might be the real reason behind the Pentagon's desire to finally match the Kremlin in terms of this unique and

remarkable technology.

Interestingly, the US military has been [unable to counter other Russian technologies](#), not only strategic ones, [such as hypersonic missiles](#), but even tactical systems, [such as coaxial-rotors helicopters](#). Namely, the Pentagon just announced [the cancelation of its \(over\)ambitious Future Attack Reconnaissance Aircraft \(FARA\) program](#), after wasting billions on the project. Launched in 2018, FARA resulted in two competing designs, selected in 2020 – Bell-Textron’s 360 “Invictus” and Sikorsky’s “Raider X”. The latter was essentially an extremely expensive and over-engineered American version of the Russian Ka-52 “Alligator”. Marred with reliability issues and cost overruns, the program was finally deemed “non-essential”. In other words, the US was simply unable to copy Soviet 1980s technologies. Perhaps the best way to illustrate [Russia’s conventional military superiority](#) is to quote Colonel Douglas McGregor, [who said](#):

“Russia today is stronger than it has been in 30 or 40 years. You have a Russian military establishment that is now more potent and more capable than the Russian military was in the mid-1980s. You can’t defeat what the Russians have built... ..They were the first back in the 1970s to understand the criticality of linking intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance [ISR] in space, as well as on land and at sea with strike weapons.”

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