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SOVIET MILITARY DOCTRINE: AN OVERVIEW

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This assessment, one of a series produced by the Directorate of Estimate's Strategic Studies Division, provides a general overview of Soviet military doctrine. It examines how Soviet doctrine is formulated, how it is structured, and what it tells us about the Soviet perceptions of a future war. What emerges from this discussion is the clearly offensively oriented war-fighting, warwinning nature of Soviet military doctrine and Soviet views of war and deterrence which differ fundamentally from our own. This assessment has avoided the pitfalls inherent in many Western studies which "mirror image" Soviet military doctrine with that of the US. It is published at the unclassified level to ensure the widest possible dissemination and discussion of the issues it raises. This publication should serve as a stimulus to further understanding and examination of the Soviet military threat.

Clayton
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HEADQUARTERS USAF INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENT

SOVIET MILITARY DOCTRINE: AN OVERVIEW

AUTHOR:

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SOVIET MILITARY DOCTRINE

Introduction

There is a great deal of confusion in the West about the Soviet Union's military capabilities and intentions. Much of that confusion is the result of the USSR's declaratory military policy. Over the course of the past few years, the Soviet political--and to a lesser extent, the Soviet military--leadership has made a concerted effort to refute Western charges concerning the offensive nature of Moscow's military doctrine. A number of Soviet political and military leaders have denied the Soviet Union has any thought of achieving military superiority, that Moscow's military doctrine is offensive in nature, or that Moscow has any hopes it could prevail in a nuclear war with the United States.

However, a reading of Soviet military literature presents a wholly different picture of Soviet intentions and Soviet military doctrine. This assessment examines the basic tenets of Soviet military thought in order to discern the outlines of a warfighting, warwinning military doctrine.

The Soviet World View

In order to understand Soviet military thought, it is necessary to understand how the Soviets perceive the current

global environment. Based upon the tenets of their Marxist-Leninist ideology, the Soviet leadership looks at the world in terms of a persistent, long-term struggle with the capitalist West in which the ultimate goal is the supplanting of capitalism by socialism. Although the Soviets no longer espouse the view that war between the two systems is inevitable, they continue to argue the "aggressive" nature of the West makes such a war a distinct possibility. The Soviets pursue a variety of political and military means designed to deflect the threat of war and expand the USSR's international influence.

From the Soviet ideological viewpoint, progress in the struggle to attain these goals is measured by shifts in what they call the "correlation of forces," roughly what the West would call the "balance of power." However, the Soviet concept is much broader, since it takes into consideration political, economic, and social as well as military factors. The Soviets continue to seek a permanent shift in the world correlation of forces in their favor. In 1980 one Soviet author argued such a shift had in fact taken place and wrote with assurance of the decline of the West, particularly the US.¹ Other Soviet commentators spoke with confidence of a shift in favor of the Soviet Union and its allies, although none publicly asserted the USSR enjoyed military superiority over the West. The hardening of

Krasnaya zvezda [Red Star], 15 January 1980, p. 2.

Western, particularly US, attitudes toward the USSR in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the onset of a serious Western effort at modernizing its military capabilities muted the tone of confidence in Soviet commentary somewhat, but the Soviets' goal of seeking a permanent global power shift in their favor has not changed.

The Soviets recognize military power as being necessary to sustain their regime and expand its influence abroad. In truth, military power has been Moscow's principal asset in its struggle with the West in the global power arena. In terms of political and economic competition, particularly the latter, the means at the Soviets' disposal have proved to be woefully inadequate. Events towards the close of the Brezhnev era--for example, Moscow's continued exclusion from the Middle East peace process--demonstrated the USSR's relative ineffectiveness when it came to resolving issues not directly involving the use or threat of the use of force by one of the superpowers. The major advances attained by Moscow in recent years in terms of the expansion of its overseas influence and presence principally have been the result of the application of military power, either directly or through the use of proxy forces, or by the extension of large amounts of military hardware to Third World countries.

The Soviets view their military needs in terms of the continuing and inevitable struggle between two irreconcilable political and economic systems. They continue to believe in the su-

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periority of their system and its eventual supplanting of Western capitalism, although they are understandably reluctant to specify a date for the final victory of communism. Because of this view of the forces at work in the world, the Soviets perceive the basic element of their foreign policy to be the continuing rivalry with the United States for global power and influence. The Soviet leadership views the US as its greatest strategic threat, as well as the greatest obstacle to its military activities and the attainment of its global objectives.

The Soviets have made it clear they believe the present US-Soviet strategic relationship is characterized by mutual possession of the capability to inflict unacceptable levels of damage upon the other side. However, whereas the US previously has been content to accept this situation through the concept of "mutual assured destruction" (MAD), the Soviets consistently have reflected their unhappiness over such a strategic balance. They have explicitly rejected MAD as an acceptable basis for the US-Soviet strategic relationship.² They view a favorable strategic balance not as one in which the status quo guarantees both sides' security, but as one in which superior military capabilities assure Soviet security and global freedom of action while curbing that of the West.

²See, for example, D. Proyektor, in P. P. Cherkassov, et al, European Security and Cooperation: Premises, Problems, Prospects (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978).

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This raises the issue of the Soviet view of deterrence. The US has sought to deter Soviet military attack through the perceived capability to inflict--through retaliation--an unacceptable level of damage upon the USSR. That is, we have sought to deter through the threat of punishment. Deterrence has formed the core of our doctrine for many years and has been a principal factor guiding our weapons acquisition decisions. The Soviets, on the other hand--although recognizing the deterrent value of their armed forces in this sense--view it as an inadequate guarantee of their security. They recognize deterrence through the threat of retaliation may well fail. Consequently, deterrence in the Western sense is a very "iffy" proposition and is a totally unacceptable basis for Soviet military doctrine.³ When deterrence fails, the USSR must be prepared to wage war successfully, since what is at stake is the very survival of its political system. Therefore, the Soviet Union must have military forces with warfighting, warwinning capabilities, and this has been the central theme in Soviet military writings for almost two decades.

Such capabilities provide the Soviets the form of deterrence which they prefer, and that can be described as deterrence through denial. Superior military power based upon a counterforce, damage limiting strategy is intended to deny the West the

³For a discussion of Western vs Soviet views of deterrence, see Keith Payne, Nuclear Deterrence in U.S.-Soviet Relations (Boulder: Westview Press, 1982), esp. chapters 6 and 7.

ability to inflict a crippling retaliatory blow upon the USSR. In the Soviet view, such overwhelming military power could well lead to Western political/diplomatic paralysis, thus giving the Soviets virtually free rein to pursue their global objectives without fear of Western military reprisals.

The Structure of Soviet Military Thought

The Soviets are, with few exceptions, very precise in their use of the terminology which makes up the lexicon of their military thought. Unlike the West, where doctrine, strategy, and theory are frequently used interchangeably, the Soviets attach definite meanings to each of these terms and expend considerable effort in perfecting what they in all earnestness view as military science. The Soviets, in fact, have commented more than once upon what they perceive to be the sloppy disorder which prevails in Western military thought. To them, military science is a noble pursuit with concrete application in the real world; it is not a realm of esoteric--and often meaningless and endless--discussions. Military science in the USSR is also an academic pursuit, one in which the brightest are awarded the equivalent of the PhD. Finally, military science is the virtually exclusive realm of the Soviet military officer. There are very few civilian military theorists in the USSR. The Soviet communist party leadership officially may elaborate the general military policy of the state--i.e., the USSR's military doctrine--but the Soviet military makes the most important contribution to the development

of that doctrine and has an almost exclusive monopoly over the technicalities of its implementation.

In developing the capabilities to achieve their global objectives, the Soviets are guided by their military doctrine-- a body of generalized views officially held by the Soviet Union's political and military leadership on the nature of, preparation for, and conduct of future war.⁴ Soviet military doctrine is predicated upon superior weapons technology and capabilities, the effective employment of all Soviet forces in the attainment of specified military objectives, strong centralized political and military command and control, economic recoverability, and firm social discipline. Although military doctrine deals with preparations prior to a conflict and military operations during that conflict on the assumption a war may well have to be fought, doctrine provides only broad guidance on the types of weapons required and on force employment concepts and operational planning.⁵

Soviet military doctrine requires the maintenance of strong general purpose and strategic nuclear forces and the employment of both offensive and defensive forces and active and passive defenses in order to preserve political control and limit damage

⁴S. N. Kozlov, The Officer's Handbook (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1977), USAF translation of Spravochnik ofitsera (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1971), p. 62.

⁵Ibid, p. 65.

to Soviet military capabilities and the Soviet homeland. The Soviets believe success in any type of combat will depend upon having superior forces and means at the point of attack; achieving surprise whenever possible; maintaining mobility and high rates of advance; preserving the combat effectiveness of friendly forces; ensuring the coordinated activity of all types of forces; and maintaining firm command and control. Offensive operations are the sine qua non of Soviet military doctrine and they are directed towards the early seizing and holding of the strategic initiative by the prompt, coordinated action of all the armed forces; that is, a combined arms concept of combat. In all types of combat, whether conventional or nuclear, Soviet doctrine calls for rapid and decisive offensive strikes and for defensive operations to repel enemy attacks.

The Soviet goal in a future war would be victory; anything less could run the risk of threatening the survival of the political system. There is very little difficulty in determining the Soviet definition of what would constitute victory in a nuclear war. It is necessary to point out the Soviets are quiet on such issues as the specific mechanics of war termination. However, rather than reflecting uncertainty over the possibility of attaining victory, such omissions simply reflect the great difficulty in predicting the exact contours of the geopolitical landscape in a post-nuclear war world. The primary wartime objective of the Soviet Armed Forces would be to preserve the

party and its control over society. Thus, the armed forces are to seek the destruction or neutralization of Western military power in order to guarantee Soviet military forces would survive and continue to operate to achieve the political and military objectives in Eurasia. The Soviet forces are to destroy the enemies' immediate warfighting capability, prevent the supportability and reconstitution of enemy forces over an extended period, support the attainment of theater-level political and military objectives, erode the enemies' national resolve, seize and occupy enemy territory as necessary, and make possible the unchallenged postwar assertion of Soviet power and influence.

In order to be able to achieve the victory outlined above, the Soviet Union seeks military forces capable of achieving several objectives. First, they must be able to destroy the enemy's military power--especially his nuclear delivery means--in counterforce strikes. They must be able to limit damage to the USSR through a combination of counterforce strikes and strategic defensive operations. They must be able to survive a large-scale nuclear attack by the US with sufficient strength to perform their assigned missions. Finally, they must be able to operate in any conflict scenario.

How is Soviet doctrine established? The Soviet military recognizes the formal role of the Soviet party leadership in developing and approving the USSR's military doctrine and the importance of Marxist-Leninist ideology in its content. It is the party which

officially promulgates the Soviet Union's military doctrine. But the party leadership cannot do this in isolation. It recognizes doctrine as something which is dynamic and must be altered when a changing global environment and rapidly advancing military technologies demand it. It also recognizes its own limitations in the area of military expertise. Therefore, the party receives a number of inputs from a variety of sources, principally the military (Figure 1).

Once Soviet doctrine is codified, it is implemented by the military through the application of the principles of military science. The Soviets hold military science to be a unified body of knowledge. As such, its truths and laws are discoverable and verifiable. Consequently, the Soviet military devotes considerable resources to the study of past conflict in an effort to "discover and study the objective laws of armed combat." Military science is geared to developing methods of warfare designed to attain victory; tackling and solving the problems of preparing the country and the armed forces for future war; determining the principles of troop organization, training, and education; and developing a viable methodology for determining the applicable laws of military science.⁶

The Soviets are fond of saying their military science differs from Western military thought because it is used in the

⁶Kozlov, op cit, pp. 47-48.

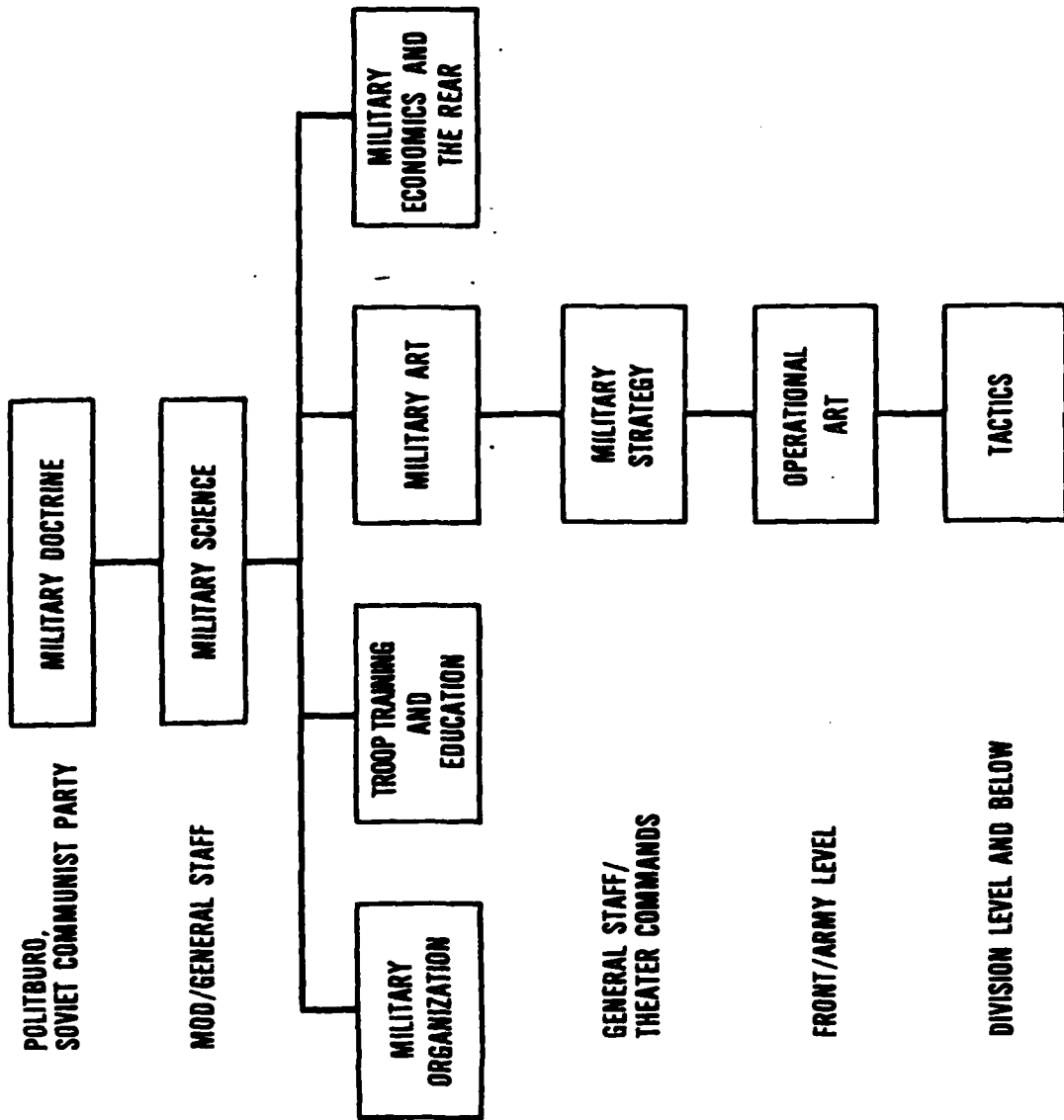
interests of the working class. No work on Soviet military science is complete without the obligatory references to Marx, Engels, and Lenin as the sources of the basic wisdom on virtually any military subject. Despite the sometimes heavy use of quotations from the communist classics, Soviet military writings are basically straightforward presentations of the problems of military science. For example, the notable work, The Offensive, which first appeared in 1970 and is still a basic text for the Soviet officer corps, contains remarkably few references to the communist "saints." It is by and large a no-nonsense exposition of how to conduct offensive warfare in all types of combat environments, from conventional to nuclear.⁷

Soviet military science has several components (Figure 2). The most important is military art, since it deals with the actual problems of engaging the enemy in combat. The Soviets perceive three different levels of military art, each of which they say constitutes an entire field of scientific knowledge.

The first level of Soviet military art is military strategy, and this is the level we are all most familiar with, largely because of Marshal Sokolovskiy's work on the subject. It is also the most incorrectly used of the Soviet military terms, because we in the West often use the term "strategy" to describe what the Soviets would define as either doctrine, military

⁷A. A. Sidorenko, Nastupleniye (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1970).

FIGURE 2 STRUCTURE OF SOVIET MILITARY THOUGHT



science, or operational art. Again, it must be emphasized: the Soviets strive to be quite precise in their use of these terms. To the Soviet military mind, strategy investigates the principles of preparing for and waging war as a whole. Strategy is also held to be a direct instrument of politics, and this is not surprising considering Lenin's notes on Clausewitz to the effect that war is a continuation of politics through violent means. The Soviets possess a unified strategy for all services of the country's armed forces, arguing war is waged not by one service but by all services in coordination--again, the combined arms concept.

The Soviets claim all levels of military thought have two aspects, the theoretical--or hypothetical side--and the applied--or operational side. Although the Soviets devote considerable effort to studying the hypothetical aspects of military thought, it is the applied side of that thought which forms the key to victory. The applied side of strategy is concerned with preparing and waging attack, defense, and other types of military operations on a strategic scale. To the Soviet military leader, "strategic scale" means campaigns in the theater of military operations or the theater of war, whether continental or intercontinental in scope. In Soviet terms, a nuclear weapon used in theater combat in Central Europe would be considered a strategic weapon; that is not the case with the US definition where theater weapons are frequently referred to as nonstrategic nuclear forces.

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The level below strategy is termed "operational art." It is concerned--not surprisingly--with preparing for and waging "operations involving operational formations." On the applied scale, operational art deals with combat at the front and army levels. The Soviets describe the front as the highest operational-strategic formation. Each of the five services is guided by its own operational art.

The bottom rung of the Soviet military art ladder consists of tactics, which are concerned with the preparations for and the waging of combat by "subunits, units, and formations" of all the branches and services of the Soviet Armed Forces. There are general tactics and tactics of the individual services of the armed forces; that is, there are tactics for motorized rifle troops, artillery, armored troops, engineers, signal troops, and so on. Applied tactics deal with the combat actions of units at the division level and below.

The Development of Soviet Doctrine and Strategy

The Soviets hold their military doctrine and science to be dynamic. Indeed, they have been adapted to what the Soviets believe to be the realities of fighting a future war. Soviet doctrine and strategy underwent a major overhaul in the late 1950s and early 1960s with the advent of the ICBM and large numbers of nuclear warheads. This period represented such a radical change in Soviet military thought it was dubbed the "revolution in military affairs."

From the end of World War II until Stalin's death in 1953, Soviet doctrine and military science were based primarily upon the potential use of Soviet conventional forces. There were few nuclear weapons available at that time and not very many effective means with which to deliver them.

EVEN SO
Stalin significantly expanded Soviet global influence from 1945-1953;

Stalin's death ended an era in which the leader of the Soviet Communist Party personally dominated the formulation of military doctrine. Beginning in 1953, a new period in the devel-

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opment of Soviet military doctrine and strategy occurred as a result of the rapid increase in Soviet military capabilities. However, Soviet spokesmen were well aware US force posture and doctrine were changing just as rapidly as their own. In spite of their high appraisal of US intercontinental capabilities, the Soviets chose not to copy US military forces or employment concepts. They described airpower as merely an "intermediate stage" in their ongoing revolution in military affairs, stressing the potential effectiveness of antiaircraft defenses in defeating the manned bomber and anticipating ICBMs would dominate any future war.

The immediate post-Stalin succession struggle did produce a significant doctrinal dispute between Malenkov and Khrushchev, a dispute which dominated the mid-1950s. Malenkov briefly argued nuclear war was unthinkable and unwinnable, arguing it would mean the end of civilization. He was soon forced to recant his views and claimed--together with orthodox military spokesmen--that nuclear war would not mean the end of socialism, although it would lead to the collapse of the capitalist system.

With Khrushchev's rise to preeminence, the Soviets moved farther and farther away from a deterrent strategy in the Western sense. Khrushchev personally commissioned a prolonged analysis of nuclear war, proceeding from the assumption such a conflict was not only thinkable, it was also fightable and winnable. A major difficulty in this research effort was the entirely hypo-

thetical nature of a warwinning strategy for the USSR, at least during Khrushchev's early years in power. Even by 1965, the Soviets still possessed only ^{A FEW HUNDRED} [REDACTED] nuclear weapons. Thus, the Soviets wrote their new doctrine and strategy long before they could even hope to carry them out.

The new Soviet military doctrine became operative in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Khrushchev announced it quite openly,⁸ informing the Supreme Soviet in 1960 the role of the USSR's ground forces, navy, and air forces had been largely replaced by nuclear-tipped missiles. This view of the paramount importance of the ICBM led Khrushchev to propose a 1.2 million-man cut in the size of the Soviet Armed Forces--a policy which almost certainly provoked the wrath of many Soviet officers and may well have contributed to Khrushchev's ouster in 1964. In retrospect, Khrushchev clearly was moving the USSR away from Stalin's concept of holding Western Europe hostage toward a far more sophisticated idea of deterring the West through the deployment of a much smaller force possessing much greater nuclear firepower. The immediate consequence of this strategy was a series of threats and bluffs, all of which were intended to erode the US willingness to use its superior military power for political ends. Under Khrushchev, the Soviets loudly declared a warwinning doctrine which was to a very great extent a deception. Yet, Khrushchev appeared to have

⁸Pravda, 15 January 1960.

had increasing confidence the Soviet deterrent was at least strong enough to allow increasing gains against the US global position with little fear of a nuclear response. Khrushchev apparently misjudged the success of his deception against the West. However, US actions during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis brought him sharply back to reality. Both his nuclear deterrent and his forces in Cuba proved inadequate for implementing his grandiose global schemes.

Khrushchev's successors worked hard to acquire the armed forces which he lacked and had only just started to acquire before his ouster in 1964. Nevertheless, they altered the military doctrine very little. As the Soviet military leadership itself conceded, the working out of a new military doctrine was largely completed in the early 1960s. This doctrine, extant today, can again best be summarized as advocating the establishment of military forces which can fight, survive, and win a future war.

During the period 1964-1971, the Soviets rapidly built towards strategic parity with the US. By 1970 they had approached near equality with the US in terms of deployed ICBMs and were rapidly building up their sea-based nuclear ballistic missile threat. Only two major changes in force posture and doctrine occurred during this period. After Khrushchev's fall, his effort to decrease the size of the armed forces--thereby deemphasizing the importance of the role of large standing armies in the nuclear age--was permanently abandoned. Indeed, Soviet mili-

tary theorists ever since the mid-1960s have stressed the importance of having large ground forces not only to wage successful conventional war but to seize and hold enemy territory during or after a nuclear war. Secondly, the Soviets modified a tenet of their doctrine on which both Stalin and Khrushchev had agreed; that is, any war between the US and the USSR would immediately involve the use of nuclear weapons. From 1964 to the present, the Soviets have maintained to the contrary that a US-Soviet conflict might begin with a conventional phase of uncertain duration. This change apparently reflected the increasing Soviet confidence in both the deterrent capabilities of their nuclear forces and the warfighting capabilities of their general purpose forces.

The most important element of Soviet military doctrine during the period 1964-1971 was the openly espoused goal of achieving military superiority over the US, thereby gaining the capability to emerge victorious in a future war. In 1969 Major General Sergey Kozlov noted the main objective of Soviet doctrine was to "assure supremacy over the probable enemy, guaranteeing certain and full defeat for him in the event of war."⁹ Similar sentiments were repeated regularly, leaving little doubt the Soviet concept of deterrence was diverging radically from US thinking in the late 1960s.

⁹S. Kozlov, "Voyenna doktrina i voyennaya nauka," Metodologicheskiye voprosy voyennoy teorii i praktiki (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1969), p. 33.

Another element of Soviet military thought which has emerged since the early 1970s has been the willingness of the USSR to employ military force to achieve its foreign policy goals. This appears to be in part an outgrowth of Soviet perceptions of the political advantage to be derived from even a marginal military superiority over one's opponent. In 1972, retired Soviet Army Colonel V. M. Kulish noted:

. . . it must be borne in mind that even a relatively small and brief superiority by the United States over the Soviet Union in the development of certain "old" or "new" types of weapons would increase significantly the strategic effectiveness of American military force¹⁰

Certainly, if the Soviets perceive even a marginal American superiority as giving the US greater clout in the conduct of its foreign affairs, they believe a similar margin of superiority for the USSR yields the same benefits. What emerges is a sharp difference of opinion between Washington and Moscow over the acceptability of using force to decide international questions.

The current period in Soviet military doctrine began in 1971 when the USSR achieved strategic parity. The Soviets viewed

¹⁰V. M. Kulish, et al, Voennaya sila i mezhdunarodnyye otnosheniya. Voyennyye aspekty vneshnepoliticheskikh kontsepsii SSHA [Military Power and International Relations. Military Aspects of Foreign Policy Concepts of the USA] (Moskva: "Mezhdunarodnyye otnosheniya," 1972), p. 226.

the SALT I agreements of 1972 as proof the growth of Soviet strategic power had forced a basic change in US policy and military doctrine.

This new confidence of the Soviet leadership in the USSR's military capabilities had immediate consequences. Since 1971, the Soviets have talked much less often and less stridently about their goal of attaining superiority over the US. Such reticence clearly was necessary in order to foster the acceptance of the idea of "detente" in the US and to dissuade the US from modernizing its own strategic forces. Yet, at the same time, the Soviets also outlined their willingness to assist "national liberation movements" more boldly than at any other time in Soviet history. The late Minister of Defense Grechko minced no words in this respect when he noted in 1971 the "historic function of the Soviet Armed Forces is not restricted merely to their function of defending our Motherland . . . the Soviet state . . . resolutely resists imperialist aggression in whatever distant region of our planet it may appear."¹¹ Soviet military spokesmen continually remind their listeners of the "international mission" of the armed forces. For example, the Soviet Armed Forces are said to be fulfilling their "international socialist duty" by rendering "fraternal assistance" to the peoples of Afghanistan.

¹¹A. Grechko, "Rukovodyashchaya rol' KPSS v voyennom stroitel'stve razvitogo sotsialisticheskogo obshchestva," Voprosy istorii KPSS [Problems of History of the CPSU], No. 5, May 1974.

At the same time, the theme of attaining victory in war has remained essentially unchanged, although the tone has been muted somewhat in recent years to avoid alarming the Western public. Nevertheless, there is ample evidence at least some Soviet leaders still entertain seriously the possibility of attaining victory, even in nuclear war. Chief of the Soviet General Staff Marshal Ogarkov's article on "Military Strategy" in the Soviet Military Encyclopedia, although denying the Soviets seek military superiority over the US, asserts the superiority of the socialist system creates "objective possibilities" for victory in a future war.¹² The victory goal has been even more emphatically stated in the recent Military-Technical Progress and the Armed Forces of the USSR. The author argues the high level of the USSR's economic and scientific-technical potential permits the effective resolution of all tasks associated with strengthening the country's defense capabilities and equipping the armed forces with everything necessary for achieving victory over any enemy.¹³

Other developments make it apparent the Soviets continue to pursue the capabilities necessary to implement a warfighting, warwinning military doctrine. By 1975, the Soviets had half again as many ICBMs as the United States and by the latter years

¹²N. V. Ogarkov, "Strategiya voyennaya," Sovetskaya Voyennaya Entsiklopediya, Vol. 7 (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1979), p. 564.

¹³M. M. Kir'yan, Voyenno-technicheskiy progress i Vooruzhennyye sily SSSR (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1982), p. 6.

of the decade had begun deploying their third-generation ICBMs with hard target kill capabilities. These developments continue today with the ongoing improvement and expansion of the MIRVed SS-18 heavy ICBM force possessing an even greater hard target, counterforce capability. The Soviets also maintain an active program of strategic defense with ongoing deployments of the SA-10 SAM and active research in follow-on ABM systems. They maintain an active civil defense program, which they assert is geared toward reducing as much as possible the destructive effects of nuclear weapons.¹⁴

Such concern for damage limiting measures has influenced Soviet views on strategic targeting. Historically, both Soviet doctrinal writings and force posture have reflected counterforce rather than countervalue concepts, although the distinction between these two categories from the Soviet standpoint is sometimes ambiguous. The Soviets seek three general targeting goals: 1) destruction of the enemy's military forces, especially those capable of attacking the USSR and its military forces, 2) neutralization of the enemy's logistical and industrial capabilities supporting the war effort, and 3) isolation of the US from other theaters of war and destruction of the US capability to resupply its overseas forces or those of its allies. Figure 3 represents

¹⁴Soviet Military Power 1983 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1983), esp. pages 18-20, 29-30.

a specific listing by category and priority of the various types of targets discussed in the Soviet literature. Both the rapid modernization of Soviet intercontinental attack forces and the Soviets' overriding interest in hard target kill capabilities testify to the impact of these targeting priorities on Soviet force posture.

The Soviet View of Future War

Soviet military writings suggest the Soviets perceive a future war with the West could progress through six relatively discrete phases. The first phase would be a preparatory one in which the forces are generated and brought to a full state of readiness for conflict. This most likely follows on the heels of mounting global political tension. The next phase would be the outbreak of actual hostilities in the form of front- or theater-level conventional warfare. The Soviets normally describe the outbreak of nuclear war as the result of the NATO "aggressor's" attempt to recoup his conventional losses. This third phase would constitute a tactical-operational phase involving the use of tactical nuclear weapons against frontal targets. The next step up, the fourth phase, represents the Soviet response to NATO use of nuclear weapons. This consists of a strategic-operational phase in which nuclear weapons are used against strategic targets in the theater of military operations (TVD). The fifth phase of a future war, the strategic-intercontinental phase, is portrayed by the Soviets as being precipitated by the

FIGURE 3

SOVIET TARGETING PRIORITIES

- † NUCLEAR DELIVERY MEANS
- † COMMAND AND CONTROL CENTERS
- † MILITARY BASES
- † COMMUNICATIONS CENTERS
- † LARGE TROOP FORMATIONS
- † TRANSPORTATION CENTERS
- † DEFENSE INDUSTRY

West. In fact, Soviet military literature is insistent on placing the blame for escalation on the "enemy." Even should the Soviets preempt, they would consider this a necessary "defensive" reaction to the "aggressive intentions" of the other side. In the fifth phase, nuclear attacks would be carried out against the respective Soviet-US landmasses. The final stage of a future war would be a follow-on phase in which victory over the enemy is finally attained.

The Soviets continue to stress that any use of nuclear weapons by the West will very quickly lead to their wholesale use by both sides. Soviet military literature continues to stress a great deal of pessimism over the prospects for limiting the use of nuclear weapons. Consequently, their doctrine continues to emphasize the belief victory probably will go to the side which gets in the first decisive nuclear blow.¹⁵

To the Soviets, the imperatives of the traditional battlefield--surprise, initiative, mass, maneuver, and so on--apply with equal validity to nuclear conflict. In fact, the Soviets frequently have stated their belief the destructive power of nuclear weapons makes these factors all the more important. For example, the entry on "Surprise" in the Soviet Military Encyclopedia states that the "significance of surprise with regard to the development of the means of armed combat is steadily

¹⁵Kir'yan, op cit, p. 314.

increasing. The role of surprise has especially increased with the introduction of nuclear-rocket weapons and other powerful means of destruction.¹⁶

This brings us to the question of nuclear weapons employment options. There has been considerable commentary in the Western media about the Soviets' adoption of a "launch on warning" capability in response to recent US defense programs. Given the Soviet early warning capabilities against ICBM attack--both land- and space-based--and their frequent references to "retaliation" in the face of a Western strike, there is no doubt launch-on-tactical-warning (that is, launching under indications an enemy attack has actually begun) is a scenario which the Soviets practice and for which they are seeking improved capabilities. However, from the standpoint of the Soviet military literature, it is plain this is not the preferred employment option, since it does not guarantee the seizing and maintaining of the "strategic initiative," which the Soviets hold "determines the course of events on the battlefield." Soviet military writings make it clear preemption remains the preferred and sought-after nuclear option since it would allow the Soviets a sharply enhanced ability to control the "course of events."

The Soviet military's views on the importance of preemption are well-documented. Colonel V. Chervonobab, writing in the

¹⁶Sovetskaya Voyennaya Entsiklopediya, Vol. 7, p. 162.

November 1971 issue of Voyennaya Mysl' [Military Thought] observed: "The experience of past wars indicates that all things being equal, success is achieved by he who acts more vigorously and resolutely, by he who persistently seizes the initiative, imposes his will on the enemy and beats him to the punch."¹⁷ An article in the January 1983 issue of the Soviet Ground Forces journal Military Herald argues that the "time factor is particularly acute. Preemption has always been crucially important, but today minutes and seconds can determine the fate of the battle."¹⁸

To the Soviet military leadership, preemption does not equate to first use of nuclear weapons. Preemption is meant as a supremely rational defensive action designed to "thwart" the aggressor's plans for unleashing an attack upon the Soviet homeland. On the other hand, Western "first use" of nuclear weapons would constitute an "unprovoked" surprise attack upon the USSR and its allies, an action the Soviets argue would be wholly consistent with the US' "aggressive" nature. Consequently, Soviet proposals to disavow first use of nuclear weapons--by Soviet definition--would in no way impose limits upon the flexibility

¹⁷Cited in Mark Miller, Soviet Strategic Power and Doctrine: The Quest for Superiority (Washington, DC: Advanced International Studies Institute, 1982), p. 212.

¹⁸Iu. Chumakov, "Stremitel'nost' i nepreryvnost' nastupleniya" [Rapidly and Continuity of the Offensive], Voyenny Vestnik, No. 1, January 1983.

of Soviet military doctrine regarding the use of nuclear weapons.
Soviet Views on the Acceptability of Nuclear War

The Soviet political and military leadership over the past few years has conducted an unprecedented propaganda campaign designed to convince the West the USSR views nuclear war as a totally unacceptable means for resolving disputes between states. In public, they have followed the Western lead in citing the destructive effects of nuclear weapons, even to the extent of allowing a group of Soviet doctors to discuss the subject on Soviet television. The effect of all this propaganda effort has been to create the impression it is the West, not the USSR, which stands in the way of reducing world tensions and the threat of nuclear holocaust. Do the Soviets, in fact, share the view held by some in the West that any use of nuclear weapons would be "immoral" and "unjust?"

Marxism-Leninism on War and the Army delivered an early and decisive answer which has been echoed in Soviet military writings ever since:

The new [nuclear] world war will be, on one side, the continuation, weapon, and instrument of criminal imperial policies being implemented with nuclear missiles. On the other [Soviet] side, it will be the lawful and just counteraction to aggression, the natural right and sacred duty of progressive mankind to destroy imperialism, the bitterest enemy, the source

of destructive wars.¹⁹

Conclusions

The Soviets take what they call military science very seriously, and they are precise in how they approach and describe the subject. If the West is to understand how the Soviets think about war, it is absolutely necessary to understand the terminology they use to discuss the subject and the ideological preconceptions with which they approach it. Many in the West have engaged in the dangerous habit of mirror imaging Soviet military doctrine and science with Western military theory. Soviet military science is seriously engaged in the pursuit of finding the most effective ways to carry out the dictates of Moscow's military doctrine. Those dictates require the development of the capabilities to fight and win any future conflict with the West.

¹⁹Marxism-Leninism on War and Army (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), published as Volume 2 in the USAF "Soviet Military Thought" series (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1976), p. 29.

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