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**THE NATURE AND CONTEMPORARY IMPLICATIONS OF  
SOVIET MILITARY STRATEGY IN THE  
SECOND WORLD WAR**

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### Terminology

Military strategy [voennaia strategiia] occupies a dominant position in the intellectual framework the Soviets use to explain the nature and content of war. The Soviets define military strategy as the highest realm of military art [voennaia iskusstva] "encompassing the theory and practice of preparing a country and its armed forces for war and of planning for and conducting war and strategic operations."<sup>1</sup> As a system of scientific knowledge, the theory of military strategy investigates the laws, mechanisms, and the strategic nature of war and the methods used to conduct it, and works out the theoretical basis for planning, preparing for, and conducting war and strategic operations. In a practical sense, military strategy:

- determines the strategic missions of the armed forces and the manpower and resources necessary to accomplish these missions;
- formulates and implements measures to prepare the armed forces, theaters of military operations, national economy, and civilian population for war;
- plans war and strategic operations;
- organizes the deployment of the armed forces and their guidance during the conduct of strategic scale operations; and
- studies the capabilities of probable enemies to wage war and conduct strategic operations.<sup>2</sup>

The Western concept of national strategy approximates what the Soviets refer to as policy [politika], which they define as a class-derived, party-oriented, and historically predetermined concept related to the organic evolution of class and, hence, state relations. The Soviets recognize the unique realm of military policy [voennaia politika] as "the relations and activities of classes, governments, parties, and other social-political institutions, directly connected with the creation of military organizations and the use of means of armed force for the achievement of political ends."<sup>3</sup> Military policy "by its essence and content represents a distinct limited component of the general policy of classes and governments."<sup>4</sup> Military policy receives concrete definition in military doctrine and military strategy. The Soviets claim their military policy and the derivative fields of military doctrine and military strategy reflect the unique policy of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

While policy determines the goals and means of statecraft, military policy governs the use of the nation's armed forces within the context of general state policy. In its turn:

military strategy is closely interlinked with policy, emanating from it and serving it. . . . This interdependence is produced by the nature of war as a continuation of the policy of classes and states by forceful means. The chief role of policy with respect to military strategy lies in the fact that policy elaborates the objectives of war, defines the methods to be used to conduct it, assigns military strategy its tasks, and creates the conditions required for their accomplishment, mobilizing the materiels and human resources necessary to meet the needs of war."<sup>5</sup>

Thus, military strategy reflects the political aims and policies of the state as well as its economic and socio-political character. Conversely, military strategy in peacetime and wartime "exerts an inverse influence on policy."<sup>6</sup> As such, strategy also reflects military doctrine, whose tenets guide strategy in the fulfillment of practical tasks and are grounded upon the data of military science. Military strategy provides a framework for operational art and tactics, the other components of military art, and it exploits the capabilities of operational art and tactics to convert operational and tactical successes into strategic success--the achievement of strategic aims.

The Soviets have embraced this conceptual framework for military strategy since the formation of the Soviet state. Quite naturally, since 1917 the Soviets have formulated their military strategy within the context of specific political aims, as developed and articulated by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Since these aims have had both a public and a private face, Soviet military strategy, which has been clearly enunciated in contemporary and ex post facto fashion, is also subject to speculation and interpretation. We can recount the open declaratory aspects of that strategy by quoting Soviet sources. Only the record of Soviet actions, however, can substantiate the less visible aspects of military strategy. This essay subjects Soviet open declarations regarding their military strategy during the Second World War to the historical record in order to cast light on less open Soviet motivations. This is a particularly important issue, since contemporary Soviet strategists are using that historical record as a tool for shaping Western opinion regarding contemporary and future Soviet military strategy and national policy itself.

### On the Eve of Barbarossa

Since the end of the Second World War, the Soviets have maintained that their military strategy on the eve of Operation Barbarossa (June 1941) was essentially offensive in nature. They attribute poor Soviet military performance in the initial period of war to inadequate attention paid to the defense. According to official Soviet views:

Prior to the beginning of World War II, Soviet military strategy validly presumed that the class nature of a war in defense of the socialist homeland would make the armed struggle uncompromising and determined, that the war might be prolonged and highly maneuverable, and would be conducted against a coalition of imperialist states. The strategic offensive in the form of successive front operations carried out with close interaction among all the services of the armed forces was recognized as the decisive type of strategic operations. And the decisive role was assigned to the ground forces, especially tank and mechanized combined units employed in close interaction with the air force. The theory of the operation in depth [glubokaia operatsiia] developed in the 1930's was highly important to the development of military strategy. The main strategic tasks of the Navy were considered to be those of cooperating with the ground forces in operation conducted along the coastline and of conducting independent naval operations. Soviet military strategy considered the defense to be a valid form of military operations, but it did not devote adequate attention to the development of the theory of defensive operations on a strategic scale. It was also considered that a surprise attack by an aggressor was possible, but questions of repelling an unexpected attack by previously fully-mobilized enemy forces as well as the overall problem of the initial period of a war [nachal'nyi period voyny] under changing conditions were not properly worked out. Not all of the correct theoretical principles worked out by Soviet military science with respect to military strategy were promptly taken into account in practical work or included in regulations.'

While this was true of the decade of the 1930s as a whole, it certainly was not true of Soviet military strategy during the year preceding Operation Barbarossa.

Soviet military strategy on the eve of Operation Barbarossa was clearly defensive, despite the fact that Soviet military

theorists throughout the 1930s had been thoroughly imbued with the "spirit of the offensive." Although state policy, military policy, and military doctrine consistently emphasized the defense of socialism, the concept of repelling aggression and mounting counteroffensives into enemy territory dominated military thought. During the early 1930s, Soviet military theorists capitalized on the motorization and mechanization of the Red Army by espousing new theories of deep battle and deep operations. These theories posited reliance on offensive actions by mechanized and airborne forces to penetrate enemy tactical defenses and conduct operational maneuver by exploiting into the depths. Cumulative operational successes would then achieve strategic aims. This offensive spirit, characterized by deep battle and deep operations, found full expression in the 1936 Red Army Field Service Regulation (Ustav). The Ustav embodied the offensive spirit dominating Soviet military art until the harsh realities of the late 1930s abruptly thwarted that spirit.<sup>8</sup>

The purge of the Soviet military from 1937 to the outbreak of European war stifled military thought and analysis, and the experiences of Soviet military specialists and units in the Spanish Civil War, the invasion of Poland, and the Russo-Finnish War cast serious doubt on the feasibility of conducting deep offensive operations in the manner envisioned by the 1936 Ustav. Consequently, a brief period of reassessment followed, during which the Soviets abolished their large armored formations and replaced them with smaller combined-arms formations. Despite these changes, Soviet military art remained offensive in tone and spirit. This reform program was short-lived, however, in light of experiences in the German-Polish War and the 1940 War in the West. Soviet theorists largely discounted German success in Poland and explained it as a product of Polish ineptitude; they could not, however, dismiss the precipitous fall of France in so cavalier a fashion. Soviet theorists were shocked to realize that Germany had successfully implemented the theories of deep battle and deep operations, which the Soviets had developed and now, in part, discarded. These events also shook Soviet faith in their own offensive prowess.

Soviet military analysis published during 1940 and 1941 in the Red Army General Staff journal, Voennaia mysl' [Military Thought], and the Ministry of Defense journal, Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal [Military-Historical Journal], accurately assessed what the Germans had done.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, it clearly articulated the implications of German success for the Red Army in particular and the Soviet state in general. In fact, this analysis conveyed the message that a fate similar to that of France might befall the Soviet Union, and it provided a stimulus for subsequent Soviet defensive planning. Overnight, Soviet strategic plans began focusing on defensive measures, if only to permit the General Staff time to correct recent errors and restore a real deep operational capability to the Red Army.



Soviet strategic planning on the eve of Barbarossa reflected an understandable dichotomy between adherence to traditional offensive concepts (which was, in part, ideologically driven) and Soviet realization that only a well-founded defense could guarantee the near-term safety of the Soviet state. While the Soviets embarked on a program to increase the size of the Red Army and restructure and reequip it to make it a formidable offensive tool (ostensibly by summer 1942), Soviet planners formulated defensive strategic plans to protect the nation during this transitional period.

The program to increase the strength of the Red Army proceeded apace. According to the Soviets:

In the course of two years--from 1939 to 1940--the quantity of divisions in the ground forces increased from 98 to 303. In 1940 command and control entities were brought up to strength: military districts, armies-7, corps-6; as well as rifle divisions-25, brigades-28, motorized regiments-14, and reserve regiments-42. At the same time, 9 mechanized corps, 20 tank divisions, 20 tank brigades, 18 automobile, and 18 motorcycle regiments were formed. The strength of the armed forces rose from 2 million men (September 1939) to 5.4 million (mid-June 1941).<sup>10</sup>

Drawing upon the experiences of the Soviet-Finnish War and the War in the West, the Soviets refined their views on contemporary war, reworked mobilization plans and operational-strategic war plans, accelerated force training, created central control organs, and prepared command cadre. While implementing this program, they began a force regrouping, which culminated in a major strategic deployment of forces from May into June 1941.<sup>11</sup> Despite extreme turbulence in the High Command (which employed three chiefs of the General Staff between August 1940 and July 1941), a new strategic defensive plan emerged. Actual Soviet force deployments prior to Barbarossa evidenced the nature of that strategic defense, which, in turn, provided context for combat in the initial stages of Operation Barbarossa.<sup>12</sup>

Today, Soviet military theorists criticize the weakness of Soviet defensive planning in 1940 and 1941 and attribute the weakness to the effect of the purges and the negative influence of Stalin. V. R. Lobov has written:

The deformation of military doctrine caused serious mistakes in working out a series of theoretical strategic positions and in conducting measures to prepare the armed forces for war. As a result, the problems of strategic defense, the escape of the mass of forces from under enemy blows, and going over to the

counteroffensive were weakly worked out. General recognition of the importance of the initial period of war in circumstances of surprise were not in full measure confirmed by practical measures to increase the capabilities of forces to repel aggression. In particular, arising from the position of military doctrine, it was outlined that the first onslaught would be repelled by limited numbers of covering forces, while the main forces of the Soviet Army deployed for conducting a decisive offensive to carry combat actions to enemy territory. The variant of prolonged strategic defense was not contemplated, and, in this connection, the creation of defensive groupings of the armed forces was not planned.

This was based on mistaken assumptions that the enemy would begin combat operations with only part of his forces, with subsequent strengthening of them during the course of war.<sup>13</sup>

Numerous contemporary theorists echo this view as they catalogue the negative influence of Stalin on Soviet military preparedness and initial wartime military strategy. These assessments, however, ignore the voluminous prewar writings that indicated the seriousness with which Soviet analysts addressed the German threat. To a considerable degree, past and current de-Stalinization continue to color Soviet views of prewar planning and exaggerate the supposed neglect of defense.

### The First Period of War

The first period of war, by Soviet definition, encompassed the seventeen month period from 22 June 1941, the day Operation Barbarossa began, to 19 November 1942, the day the Soviet Stalingrad counteroffensive commenced. Throughout this period the Germans maintained the strategic initiative, except from December 1941 to February 1942, when Soviet forces conducted the Moscow counteroffensive and temporarily forced the Germans to go on the defense. The first period of war was marked by the near destruction of the Soviet prewar army; severe alterations of the Soviet force structure to accommodate the demands of war; and serious testing of Soviet prewar operational concepts, which had proven difficult, if not impossible, to implement in wartime.

Marked weaknesses in Soviet force structure and combat technique, so apparent in combat late in the prewar years, were also strikingly evident in the initial period of war. The surprise German offensive accentuated these weaknesses, wrought havoc on the Red Army, and threatened its destruction. Throughout the summer and fall of 1941, the Soviets sought, at huge cost, to slow and halt the German offensive. In late fall, assisted by deteriorating weather and German overextension, Soviet forces were able to seize the initiative. In November and December, first on the flanks (Tikhvin and Rostov) and then in the center (Moscow), the Red Army launched counteroffensives that halted and threw back German forces. These hastily planned and conducted counteroffensives surprised the Germans and thwarted achievement of German strategic aims.

As fighting waned and the front stabilized, both contending High Commands planned to resume combat in the spring. The Germans postured pretending to renew the attack on Moscow. Actually, however, they prepared for a strategic offensive across southern Russia. The Soviets took the bait and prepared for a strategic defense in the Moscow region. To supplement that defense, the Soviet High Command planned offensives in the south, near Khar'kov and Kerch, to distract German attention and forces from the critical Moscow axis. In May 1942 German forces, secretly concentrated for the strategic drive in the south, defeated these Soviet offensives.

After inflicting heavy losses on the Soviets in the Khar'kov and Kerch operations, German Army Group South advanced into the Donbas and toward the Don River. By mid-fall, after a series of unsuccessful Soviet counterattacks, German forces reached the Stalingrad and Caucasus regions. The Soviets strained to halt the German advance and simultaneously prepared a counterstroke of their own. During the summer and fall, Soviet forces in the Leningrad and Moscow regions postured for or launched limited

offensives to weaken the German southern thrust. By November 1942 the momentum of the German drive had ebbed, establishing favorable conditions for Soviet resumption of the offensive.

Soviet policy during this critical period sought to achieve the dual aims of forging an international alliance against Nazi Germany, while mobilizing the full power of the state to repel the German military onslaught. Military exigencies dictated that the first priority was to deal with the direct military threat. Meanwhile, Stalin began pressing his Western Allies to open a second front on the continent of Europe.

Official Soviet statements concerning their military strategy in the first period of war emphasize the defensive nature of that strategy and the titanic struggle to regain the strategic initiative:

During the first period of the war, when the enemy held the strategic initiative, military strategy performed the tasks involved in setting up an active strategic defense, mainly employing the tactics of exhausting the enemy with determined resistance at already created and natural positions, frustrating the enemy's plans with determined counterstrikes and conducting individual offensive operations (army and front). In the process the strategic defense in 1941 was established, as a rule, as a forced measure, during the course of active enemy offensive operations; in 1942 it was prepared in advance, and in 1943 it was deliberately set up with the objective of exhausting the enemy and switching to a counteroffensive. Characteristic was an increase in the depth and number of defensive zones [polosa oborony]. An important achievement of Soviet military strategy in the first and second periods of the war was the execution of a strategic counteroffensive near Moscow and its development into a general offensive by Soviet troops in the winter of 1941-1942, and also in 1942-1943 at Stalingrad.<sup>14</sup>

The foremost strategic problem confronting the Soviet High Command during this period was to orchestrate a successful strategic defense. Specifically, the Soviets had to halt the German general offensive, deprive the Germans of the initial advantages they had derived from achieving surprise, counter the clear German superiority in operational and tactical skills, and establish defenses along an immense front while defending the major cities of Moscow and Leningrad. As they struggled to halt the German advance, the Soviets had to prepare and then conduct crucial counteroffensives. All this had to be done over tremendous distances and in the face of catastrophic losses in manpower, equipment, territory and in the nation's productive base.

The Red Army conducted its strategic defensive operations simultaneously along several strategic directions, employing on each direction several fronts cooperating according to Stavka plans. The practice of employing multiple fronts in a single strategic operation contradicted prewar views which had maintained that single fronts would be able to conduct strategic defensive operations in their own right. This departure from prewar procedure ultimately gave rise to new concepts involving strategic operations by groups of fronts. These strategic operations sought to inflict maximum casualties on the enemy by weakening and bleeding his main offensive groups to slow his offensive while denying him possession of the most important economic and political regions and to create conditions suitable for the conduct of counteroffensives. Strategic defensive operations raged along frontages from 200 to 800 kilometers to depths of from 100 to 600 kilometers over a period of from 20 to 100 days.

Strategic reserves played a significant role in the strategic defense by establishing new defense lines, liquidating enemy penetrations, and providing forces necessary to launch counteroffensives. During this period the Stavka retained from two to ten reserve armies under its direct control. These reserve armies were instrumental in slowing and containing the German onslaught, and in launching the winter counteroffensive around Moscow in 1941-42, the abortive Khar'kov offensive in May 1942, and finally the Stalingrad offensive of November 1942. Soviet strategic offensives, usually begun as counteroffensives, developed in sectors of from 50 to 550 kilometers and penetrated to depths of from 50 to 250 kilometers. All were overly ambitious, and, because of force and logistical inadequacies, they fell far short of expectations. The Soviet High Command still had to learn the art of the possible.

Strict centralization of command and control at the highest level made successful strategic defense possible. Early Soviet attempts to create three separate groups of fronts to cover the three main strategic directions (northwestern, western, and southwestern) failed because of inept command and control during the disastrous operations in the summer of 1941. Even before their initiation, on 23 June 1941 Stalin had created the Stavka of the Supreme High Command (Stavka V GK) to provide "uninterrupted and qualified command and control." By 8 August Stalin reorganized the Stavka with himself as Supreme High Commander.<sup>15</sup> The Stavka, either directly or through its representatives, familiarized commanders of directions and fronts with the aims of each operation, provided forces and weaponry, designated missions, and organized cooperation between fronts and other large units. It also provided linkages between political and military leaders and, hence, clear political control over the conduct of the war.

Soviet military strategy in the first seventeen months of war evidenced unevenness and uncertainty, which, in turn, reflected the complex nature of the initial period of war, the unpredictable subsequent course of combat, inexperience within the Soviet High Command, and the heightened role of personality (namely Stalin's) on the workings of the Stavka. The "Stalin" factor operated throughout to pervert the nature of prewar assessments and shape military strategy once war had commenced.

The catastrophic course of combat in June and July 1941, produced in part by erroneous prewar assessments, stripped the initiative from Soviet strategic planners. As a result, the newly emergent Stavka was limited to reactive planning based on the single imperative of restoring stability to the front. Virtually all strategic decisions throughout the summer and fall reflected that reality. Throughout the period, the single most redeeming factor was the single-minded effort by the Stavka to amass strategic reserves and apply them at the point of most acute danger. This process capitalized on the innate strength of the Soviet state--her large population--and exploited the most obvious German weaknesses--a limited supply of manpower and an inability to establish strategic priorities. By playing that strength against German weakness, the Soviets were able to maintain a reasonable correlation of forces and, ultimately, achieve their preeminent strategic aim of conducting a viable strategic defense and halting the German drive, albeit just short of its initial strategic objectives. Exploitation of this strength enabled the Soviets to survive several strategic defeats and compensated for a host of obvious Soviet weaknesses. All the while, Soviet military leaders amassed experience, realizing that failure educates those who survive.

Throughout this period Stalin dominated. Although he personally unified the Soviet strategic effort, his personal power and threatening demeanor intimidated the General Staff and high-level military leaders. Often operating on the basis of whim and prejudice, his subjective judgments frequently overcame objective reality. His single-minded insistence upon marshaling reserves and his ruthless, but often stingy, allocation of those reserves strengthened the Red Army strategically, but his meddling in strategic and operational decisionmaking often produced disaster. At Moscow the energy and determination of the counterattacking Red Army, in part, reflected his strength of will. Strategic blunders notwithstanding, the threadbare Red Army of December 1941 fought with a ferocity and desperation mirroring the determination and ruthlessness of its leader.

Again, in 1942 Stalin's misjudgments, which he forcibly imposed on the High Command, produced disaster after disaster until in November 1942 he replicated his positive performance of December 1941. According to one Soviet critic:

The defeat of the Red Army on the southern wing of the Soviet-German front could not be explained by the peculiarity of conditions, since it served in some measure to justify our defeat in the summer of 1941. The chief reason for the failure of the summer's campaign of 1942 was the mistaken decision of the High Command "to affix" to the strategic defensive operation numerous individual offensive operations on all fronts. This resulted in a dispersal of strength and a premature expenditure of strategic reserves that certainly doomed the Stalin plan to failure.<sup>16</sup>

By fall 1942, however, there was increasing evidence that Stalin was heeding the counsel of his, by now, tested and more trusted key military advisors (such as Zhukov, Vasilevsky, Antonov, and Voronev).

Throughout the first period of war, Stalin retained tight control over his political and military subordinates. He undertook harsh disciplinary measures against those he suspected of being disloyal, and he often confused combat failures or ineptitude on the part of individuals with disloyalty.<sup>17</sup> To insure political reliability of commanders, Stalin retained the onerous commissar system in the chain of command, and he backed up his strategic concepts with arbitrary and often extreme orders (like the "not a step back [ne shagu nazad]" order of the Stalingrad period). Commissars validated all commanders' orders, and failure to carry out these orders provided grounds for arbitrary arrest or even execution.

### The Second Period of War

In November 1942 the Stavka, using several reserve armies, one tank army, and the majority of its new tank and mechanized corps, launched a surprise counterattack against overextended German, Rumanian, Hungarian, and Italian forces in the Stalingrad region. The success of the ensuing operation exceeded Soviet expectations. The Soviets smashed Rumanian Third and Fourth Armies and encircled German Sixth Army and a major portion of German Fourth Panzer Army at Stalingrad. This first successful Soviet encirclement operation wrested the strategic initiative from German hands. Thereafter, the Stavka, attempted simultaneously to reduce German forces surrounded at Stalingrad, defeat German relief attempts, and expand the Soviet offensive to encompass the entire southern wing of the Eastern Front. As had been the case during the winter campaign of 1941 and 1942, Stalin was overoptimistic and tried to achieve too much, too soon, with too little. Soviet forces reduced the Stalingrad "Cauldron," forced the upper and middle reaches of the Don River, cleared the Caucasus region, and pressed westward through Khar'kov and into the Donets Basin (Donbas). Threadbare Soviet armies, led by weakened tank corps at the end of tenuous supply lines, advanced too far. A brilliant counterstroke delivered by Field Marshal Erich von Manstein's Army Group South struck the overextended Soviet force and drove it back across the Northern Donets River, liberating Khar'kov and forming the inviting yet ominous Soviet salient around Kursk. It was on that salient that the Germans next focused their attention.

Hitler and the German High Command selected the relatively narrow Kursk sector for their next major offensive, an offensive finally launched in July 1943 in an attempt to crush Soviet operational and strategic reserves, restore equilibrium to the Eastern Front and, if possible, restore the strategic initiative to Germany. For the first time in the war, at Kursk the Soviets eschewed conducting a precipitous strategic offensive and instead prepared an imposing strategic offensive plan, unparalleled in its size and complexity, designed first to crush the advancing Germans and then to hurl them back in disorder. The strategic plan incorporated a uniquely defensive first phase to absorb the shock of the German offensive. Once the German offensive had stalled, the Soviets planned to launch massive offensives north and south of Kursk and then in other sectors as well.

The script played as the Soviets wrote it. The titanic German effort at Kursk failed at huge cost, and a wave of ensuing Soviet offensives rippled along the Eastern Front, ultimately driving German forces through Smolensk and Khar'kov back to the line of the Dnepr River. There, in a brilliantly conceived operation during the late fall, Soviet forces suddenly



forded the Dnepr River north of Kiev, liberated the city, and created an extensive strategic bridgehead on the river's right bank.

The monumental struggles of mid-1943 marked the beginning of the end for the Germans. Never again could they launch a major offensive. Stripped of most of their allies and increasingly bereft of operational reserves, the Germans could only defend and delay, relying on scorched earth tactics, overtaxed Soviet logistics, and a tenuous defense to erode Soviet combat capability and impede the Soviet advance. The Germans hoped in vain that Soviet exhaustion and depleted manpower would produce stalemate or Soviet collapse in the east.

Soviet policy during the second period of war sought to capitalize on cascading German defeats by orchestrating a fundamental turning point [perelom] in the war, through her own active military operations and increased cooperation with the Allies. While emphasizing the necessity for joint Soviet-Allied political and military action, principally by establishment of a strategic second front, the Soviets implemented a military strategy which would enable them to resolve the conflict, if necessary, on their own. Official Soviet pronouncements regarding its military strategy reflect that policy, stating; "During the second period of the war the Soviet Army seized the strategic initiative and secured it once and for all. All subsequent development of Soviet military strategy was related to the main type of strategic operations--the strategic offensive."<sup>18</sup>

The principal strategic aim of the Soviet armed forces in 1943 was to secure and maintain the initiative by using all types of strategic operations (defensive and offensive), by carefully employing field forces on critical strategic directions, by judiciously using strategic reserves, and by implementing ambitious strategic deception plans. The dominant form of strategic operation was the strategic offensive. Multiple strategic offensives formed distinct campaigns, and, to an increasing extent, the Soviets planned for the entirety of the campaign. The winter and summer-fall campaigns commenced with Soviet strategic offensives at Stalingrad and Kursk, each of which began as counteroffensives. These counteroffensives were each conducted by a group of fronts and directed by a Stavka representative. Each was larger in scale than any earlier counteroffensive, and each involved simultaneous or successive blows delivered across a broad front. The winter offensive, conducted on the heels of the Stalingrad counteroffensive, involved four fronts and eighteen combined-arms armies advancing in a 700 to 900 kilometer-wide sector to a depth of 120 to 400 kilometers. The summer offensive, which commenced at Kursk, involved ten fronts, forty combined-arms and five tank armies, operating on a 2,000-kilometer front to a depth of 600 to 700 kilometers. Although the winter offensive fell short of its

ambitious objectives, the summer offensive achieved virtually all of its aims.

The Soviets focused their strategic efforts during the winter campaign along the southern and southwestern strategic directions and these operations were far better coordinated than those that had occurred at Moscow a year earlier. The summer 1943 strategic offensive (and the summer-fall campaign) commenced in the Kursk region with initial defensive operations by a group of fronts. Sufficient time existed to prepare and fully man a deeply echeloned and fortified defense extending to a depth of over 100 kilometers. Simultaneously, the Soviets massed deeply echeloned forces along the Moscow and Voronezh directions to deal with any altered German threat and to participate in the summer offensive as it developed. Soviet strategic planning included extensive deception, use of diversionary operations, and secret movement of reserves. After initial operations in the Kursk region, the Soviet strategic offensive grew to encompass the entire Eastern Front from the Moscow area southward to the Black Sea. The year 1943 also saw the rise of a strategically significant partisan movement, which disrupted the German rear area and tied down a considerable number of German troops.

Throughout the period, the Stavka continued the practice it had inaugurated at Stalingrad; it employed a representative of the Stavka to coordinate operations by groups of fronts. When required, front commands were reorganized or new fronts created to satisfy changing strategic requirements. In earlier years no single unifying plan had provided a basis for a campaign, but this situation changed in the second period of the war. The Stalingrad operations took place in the context of broader strategic aims, and subsequent operations were envisioned in at least outline form. The rapid development of the offensive, however, blurred the intended strategic aim and ultimately produced confusion and operational defeat. During the latter stages of the operation, Stalin and, to some extent, other Stavka members and staff personnel, reverted to earlier bad habits. They stubbornly insisted on continuing operations despite unsettling intelligence reports. They chose to follow subjective judgment rather than objective fact, just as had been the case in the winter of 1941 and 1942. Similarly, they ignored the eroded strength of their forces and again fell victim to the mistake of seeking strategic ends that were disproportionate with the forces at hand. These lessons were not lost on the High Command. In the future, forces and means would be better matched against desired ends. This became a marked characteristic of the summer-fall campaign.

The summer-fall strategic campaign plan was more mature than that which had governed winter operations. The Stavka and General Staff planned in advance, and in some detail, for both the defensive and offensive phases of the Kursk operation. They

also sketched out the principal aims and lines of operations for the subsequent drive to the Dnepr.

After the Soviet victory at Stalingrad, Stalin initiated changes in the Red Army designed to harness the latent power of Russian nationalism in the service of military victory. The changes also reflected Stalin's new confidence that he could maintain his dominant political position. A Stavka order converted the onerous position of military commissar into one of political deputy. Whereas the former commissar could veto a commander's military decision, the new political deputy lacked that authority. Simultaneously, the Stavka restored the rank of marshal and created for individual and unit battlefield prowess a series of new orders, honorifics, and decorations named after former heroes from Russian military history (Suvurov, Kutuzov, Alexander Nevsky, Bogdan Khmel'nitsky). In addition to drawing upon national sentiment, these changes seemed to offer hope for a reformed postwar Soviet Union. Collectively they formed a less tangible moral aspect of Soviet military strategy.

### The Third Period of War

In 1944 the Soviets initiated the first of a series of successive strategic offensives forming a series of campaigns, which continued virtually unabated until war's end. The January strategic offensives at the extremities of the Eastern Front against German forces around Leningrad and at Krivoi Rog and Nikopol', south of the Dnepr River, gave way in early spring to the multi-front Korsun'-Shevchenkovskii encirclement operation. Unlike previous springs, the Soviets ignored the thaw [rasputitsa] and continued a series of successive front offensive operations, which liberated the right bank of the Ukraine and brought Soviet forces to the Rumanian borders by the end of April. While Soviet armies chopped away at the German northern flank, ultimately driving Finland from the war, a multi-front strategic offensive in June 1944, using successive encirclement operations within a brilliantly conceived strategic deception plan, crushed German Army Group Center in Belorussia and penetrated to the East Prussian borders. A subsequent strategic blow in the Ukraine brought Soviet forces deep into Poland; they held bridgeheads across the Narev and Vistula rivers north and south of Warsaw. In August, reflecting Soviet political as well as military concerns, the Soviets launched a series of successive strategic offensives into and through the Balkans that drove Rumania from the war and propelled Soviet forces into Hungary and Yugoslavia while other Soviet fronts continued to grind up German forces in the Baltic region.

The Soviets opened 1945 with a series of simultaneous strategic operations extending from the Baltic Sea to the Balkans. The East Prussian and Vistula-Oder operations propelled Soviet troops to the Baltic Sea and across the Oder River, only 60 kilometers from Berlin, while in the south Soviet forces parried a German counteroffensive at Budapest and then continued the advance into Austria. After conducting operations in February and March 1945 to clear German forces from the flanks of the Soviet main thrust, the Soviets commenced the titanic, almost ceremonial struggle to conquer Berlin and liquidate the Nazis in their own lair, thus ending the Great Patriotic War. However, combat for Soviet forces was not over. In August 1945, responding to requests for assistance from their allies, the Soviets organized and conducted their largest-scale strategic operations of the war (in terms of space) which crushed Japanese forces in Manchuria and won for the Soviet Union a place in subsequent negotiations for peace and postwar reconstruction in the Far East.

Having irrevocably seized the strategic military-initiative in 1943, in the third period of war, Soviet policy matured to reflect political as well as military realities. While the

Soviets still sought the military destruction of Nazi Germany, they did so within the context of their view of the postwar world. Central to that view was their desire to establish political relationships which would insure the future security of the Soviet state in particular, and socialism in general. At a minimum, this involved the extension of Soviet influence into eastern Europe and northeastern and southern Asia to create a cordon sanitaire around her borders and to support any subsequent advance of socialism. This intent was underscored by Soviet policy statements at wartime conferences with her allies in 1944 and 1945 and by evolving military policy, doctrine, and strategy, as well as military operations themselves.

Officially, the Soviets say the following about their military strategy in the third period of war:

In the third period of the war, under conditions of increasing combat strength of the armed forces and the build-up of large strategic reserves, the development of Soviet military strategy was manifested in the successive and continuous conduct of strategic offensive operations over the entire Soviet-German front. Fundamentally new forms of strategic operations by the armed forces were discovered and successfully employed. These were front group operations [operatsiia gruppi frontov] involving from 100 to 200 divisions, 20,000-40,000 guns and mortars, between 3,000 to 6,000 tanks and self-propelled artillery units and from 2,000 to 7,500 aircraft. Such operations were carried out on the most important strategic axes and were characterized by the decisiveness of the objectives, great spatial scope, the dynamic nature of the combat operations, and the achievement of important military-political and strategic results. Some of them were carried out on a front of 800-1,000 kilometers and extended to a depth of up to 500-600 kilometers. From 50 to 100 enemy divisions were destroyed in the process. One of the most characteristic features of the strategic operations carried out was the encirclement and destruction of large groupings of enemy troops. Military strategy underwent considerable development with respect to the organization and conduct of large Joint operations involving long-range aviation and naval forces.<sup>19</sup>

Soviet strategy in the third period of war grew in scope and ambition and took on a more subtle political flavor. With the strategic initiative firmly in Soviet hands, strategic operations became totally offensive, more grandiose, and incessant. While earlier operations occurred along separate strategic directions, by 1944 they took place along the entire strategic front, successively in 1944 and simultaneously in

1945. Each operation was conducted within the context of a deception plan coordinated by the Stavka, a plan that encompassed the entire campaign. These plans successfully concealed both the location and scale of the strategic offensives and, to some extent, the timing as well.

By war's end operations by groups of fronts involved from 100 to 200 divisions, up to 2.5 million men, 20,000 to 40,000 guns and mortars, 3,000 to 6,000 tanks and self-propelled guns and 2,000 to 7,500 aircraft. These operations had decisive objectives (usually the encirclement and destruction of large enemy groups), huge scope, high maneuverability, and significant military-political or economic results. They spanned frontages from 450 to 1,400 kilometers (4,400 kilometers in Manchuria) and thrust to a depth of 500 to 600 kilometers while destroying as many as 50 to 100 enemy divisions. Often the political and economic goal of the operation was as important as the military goal, and these goals affected the nature of military operations (for example, the operations against Finland, the drive into the Balkans, and the Manchurian offensive).

Strategic offensive operations, conducted under a cloak of deception, sought to achieve multiple penetrations of the enemy front and subsequent rapid encirclement of enemy forces. The Korsun'-Shevchenkivskii operation and subsequent operations on the right bank of the Ukraine encircled corps-size German groups. A series of successive encirclement operations in Belorussia in June through July 1944 destroyed the bulk of German Army Group Center and the Iassy-Kishinev operation encircled and destroyed the better part of Army Group South Ukraine in Rumania. The East Prussian and East Pomeranian operations pinned entire German army groups against the Baltic seacoast. The pace of Soviet offensive operations increased in accordance with their increased depth to produce rates of advance up to 100 kilometers per day for armored and mechanized units and 15 to 20 kilometers per day for rifle units.

During 1944 Soviet conduct of strategic deception became a motive force for achieving strategic success. In 1943 the Soviets had been able to conceal their operational intent on numerous occasions, but the Germans were able to discover where Soviet strategic priorities lay. Consequently, Soviet strategic offensives were more difficult and more costly in terms of Soviet losses. In 1944, however, the Soviets were able to conceal their strategic priorities and capitalize on strategic patterns formed in 1943, as well as on German preconceptions and political notions (mostly Hitler's).

In the winter campaign of 1944, the Soviets conditioned the Germans to expect a year-long drive through the Ukraine into Poland and Rumania by constantly conducting operations in that direction. Then, in the spring, the Soviets implemented an

elaborate strategic deception plan to conceal a strategic redeployment of forces and prepare a secret strategic strike against German forces in Belorussia. As had been the case before Kursk, the Soviets planned in advance for all stages of the summer campaign, and all of those stages were based on the premise that the initial strategic deception would accomplish its aims. The deception succeeded, and Soviet intelligence effectively kept track of the movement of German operational and tactical reserves.

The success of the June strategic offensive against Army Group Center exceeded Soviet expectations. As German reserves moved north to stabilize the situation, the 1st Ukrainian Front struck German Army Group Northern Ukraine in coordination with a 1st Belorussian Front attack toward Lublin. As both forces reached the Vistula River, Soviet forces struck in the Baltic and in Rumania, driving back German Army Group North and shattering Army Group South Ukraine. By late fall continued Soviet operations on both flanks had drawn German reserves from the center and created new German vulnerabilities in Poland and southern East Prussia, thus paving the way for future Soviet successes in the forthcoming 1945 winter offensive.

These successes were made possible by improved Soviet capabilities for shifting large strategic reserves secretly across the front and moving them into the forward area without the Germans detecting their presence and by effective Soviet monitoring of German troops movements and defensive dispositions. The Soviets timed and concealed these regroupings so well that the Germans were unable to counter them, even if specific portions of the strategic deception plan failed.

As a postscript to European operations, in August 1945 the Soviets conducted their most geographically challenging and extensive strategic operation of the war. In response to Allied requests for Soviet assistance in the war against Japan, the Soviets planned joint operations against Japanese forces in Manchuria and on the northern island possessions of Japan (the Kuriles and Sakhalin).

Unique strategic circumstances conditioned the form and outcome of the Manchurian operation. First, the immense size of the theater of operations and its distance from European Russia required the Soviets to move almost 700,000 men and massive amounts of equipment and supplies over 9,000 kilometers along the limited umbilical of the Trans-Siberian Railroad from the European theater to the Far East. To maintain strategic surprise, this movement had to be as secret as possible. Second, the Soviets were confronted with severe time constraints. Japanese reinforcement of Manchuria, American use of the atomic bomb, and possible ensuing Japanese collapse, made it imperative that the offensive achieve its goals in a matter of days, rather than

weeks or months. Manchuria had to be secured within thirty days and the main entrances into central Manchuria within one week, as much for political as for military considerations.

From virtually every perspective, strategic deception and ensuing surprise made the difference between success and failure. Deception in the form of political finesse dulled Japanese apprehensions over possible Soviet war intentions and the Soviets created and orchestrated a deception plan without the context of ongoing combat. The Soviets did not rely on the "noise" of war to conceal their deception. Ultimately, the Soviets concealed their intention to attack, as well as the locations, scale, and form of the attack.

The Soviets conducted a three-front offensive to conquer Manchuria. The Trans-Baikal Front, attacked from eastern Mongolia, spearheaded by 6th Guards Tank Army, penetrated the forbidding terrain of western Manchuria, while the 1st Far Eastern Front struck westward from the Vladivostok area against heavier Japanese troop concentrations in eastern Manchuria. These two fronts linked up and entrapped all Japanese forces in the region, while the 2d Far Eastern Front, in the north, pressured the Japanese along a wide front. Deception to conceal the deployment of the Trans-Baikal Front was particularly important. The Soviet attack achieved surprise and paralyzed Japanese defenders. By 15 August the Soviets had achieved most of their objectives in a strategic operations whose success has since made it a model of how the Soviets would like to operate in the initial period of any future war.

Soviet military strategy in the last two years of war did more than simply defeat Nazi Germany and assist in the defeat of Japan. It also helped shape the political geography of postwar Europe and Asia. Through military action and diplomacy, the Soviets were able to extend their political influence well beyond their prewar borders. Where the Red Army conquered, political control ensued. The Soviets routinely created "national" armies, in advance, for each nation which they intended to liberate and formed embryonic political organs for "liberated" nations as well. Thus, militarily the liberation was a joint one. Meanwhile, in negotiations with her Western Allies at Teheran, Yalta, and Potsdam, the Soviets insisted on political power-sharing between political authorities sponsored by them and those based in, and backed by, the West. In the final analysis, Soviet military strategy and the ensuing presence of military forces dictated political outcome. Hence, by 1948 all nations liberated by the Red Army were firmly imbedded in the Soviet camp.

In Asia the same phenomena resulted. Manchuria became the supply base for the emergence of Communist China, and Soviet-occupied North Korea became a new Communist bastion as well. On the other hand, failure by the Soviets to gain Allied



agreement for a Soviet role in the conquest of Japan guaranteed the future emergence of a non-Communist Japan (less her northern islands, which to this day remain in the hands of their conquerors).

In the last year of war, internal aspects of Stalin's military strategy subtly reflected his appreciation of postwar realities. In 1945 he reduced his reliance on Stavka representatives to coordinate strategic operations and, instead, assigned his most prestigious representative (Zhukov) to command the most important operating front (1st Belorussian). This brought his most powerful fronts, and their prestigious commanders, under even closer personal control.

Soviet military strategy during the last year of war accorded priority to establishing Soviet military power in the Baltic and Balkans, where Soviet postwar interests lay and where wartime agreements with the Allies were least firm. It was no coincidence that the Soviets launched the Vienna operation from Hungary deep into Austria before they mounted the climactic Berlin operation. The Berlin operation itself was carefully timed to coincide with (and forestall) the Allied advance toward Berlin from the west. While the Berlin operation unfolded, the Soviets maintained powerful reserves to insure against any failure of the West to abide by wartime agreements.<sup>20</sup>

### External Aspects of Soviet Military Strategy

One of the most intriguing questions regarding Soviet military strategy is the degree to which that strategy related to political developments and military operations elsewhere in Europe and the world (see figure 1). Soviet knowledge of military conditions elsewhere, their allies' plans, and Germany's actions against the Allies certainly affected Soviet strategy prior to and during war. The ultimate question is to what degree?

Events in Asia and Europe--such as the German-Polish War, the German defeat of Western European powers in 1940 prior to Operation Barbarossa, and the outbreak of war between the U.S. and Japan after Barbarossa had a significant impact on Soviet military strategy. The threatening posture of Germany certainly prompted Soviet restraint at Khalkhin-Gol. The German-Polish War and subsequent German-Soviet dismemberment of Poland eliminated the buffer between Germany and the Soviet Union and prompted heightened Soviet concern for the security of her western borders. Soviet occupation of Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Bessarabia and Soviet aggression against Finland were all manifestations of a more militant Soviet political and military stance conditioned, in part, by Soviet concerns over future German eastward expansion. The fall of the Low Countries and France in May and June 1940 and German failure in the ensuing Battle of Britain accentuated Soviet fears of war with Germany and prompted Soviet adoption of an extremely pacific political stance vis-a-vis Germany; simultaneously, in the military realm the Soviets prepared for future war by developing a strategic defensive plan that could protect the Soviet Union and military reform programs designed to create a military that could, in the future, meet both the defensive and offensive requirements of Soviet military doctrine.

Once the Russo-German War had begun, the outbreak of the U.S. - Japanese War in December 1941 eased Soviet concerns over her eastern borders and permitted wholesale shifting of reserves from the Far East, Trans-Baikal region, and Siberia to help relieve the military crisis at Moscow and enable the Soviets to conduct their first major strategic counteroffensive. From December 1941 to November 1942, the absence of major operations elsewhere in Europe or in peripheral theaters forced the Soviets to go it alone in the development and implementation of military strategy. Periodic and ever louder Soviet appeals for creation of a second front in the West reflected Soviet desires for overall assistance and, more subtly, Soviet wishes to coordinate their strategic operations with those in other theaters.

CORRELATION OF SOVIET STRATEGIC OPERATIONS  
WITH OTHER STRATEGIC EVENTS

OTHER OPERATIONS

28 May 1939--Japanese attack  
at Khalkhin-  
Gol

23 Aug 1939--Molotov-  
Ribbentrop  
Accord

1 Sep 1939--German-Polish  
War

16 May 1940--German invasion  
of Western  
Europe

Sep-Oct 1940--Battle of  
Britain

7 Dec 1941--Pearl Harbor

SOVIET OPERATIONS

20-31 Aug 1939--Khalkhin-Gol

17 Sep 1939--Occupation of  
Eastern Poland

30 Nov 1939--Finnish War-  
Phase 1

11 Feb 1939--Finnish War-  
Phase 2

17 Jun 1940--Occupation of  
Baltic States

26 Jun 1940--Occupation of  
Bessarabia

22 Jun 1941--Barbarossa

5 Dec 1941--Moscow Offensive  
Phase 1

8 Jan 1942--Moscow Offensive  
Phase 2

May 1942--Khar'kov-Kerch  
Debacles

### OTHER OPERATIONS

23 Oct 1942--El Alamein

8 Nov 1942--Torch (N.  
Africa)

Feb-Mar 1943--Tunisia

10 Jul 1943--Sicily

Jul-Aug 1943--Sicily

9 Sep 1943--Salerno

Sep-Oct 1943--To Naples

22 Jan 1944--Anzio

Mar-May 1944--Casino

Jun 1944--Drive to  
Rome

6 Jun 1944--Normandy

25 Jul 1944--Breakout

15 Aug 1944--Anvil-Dragoon

24 Aug 1944--Fall of Paris

16 Dec 1944--Ardennes  
(to 25 Dec)

7 Mar 1945--Remagen

11 Apr 1945--Elbe

6 Aug 1945--Atomic Bomb on  
Hiroshima

### SOVIET OPERATIONS

19 Nov 1942--Stalingrad

Feb 1943--Donbas-Khar'kov

12 Jul 1943--Orel

3 Aug 1943--Belgorod- Khar'kov

Sep-Oct 1943--To the Dnepr

Nov-Dec 1943--Kiev-Across the  
Dnepr

Jan-Feb 1944--Right Bank of  
Ukraine I

Mar-Apr 1944--Right Bank of  
Ukraine II

23 Jun 1944--Belorussia

12 Jul 1944--L'vov Sandomierz

20 Aug 1944--Iassy-Kishinev

12 Jan 1945--Vistula-Oder

15 Mar 1945--Vienna

16 Apr 1945--Berlin

9 Aug 1945--Manchuria

It is not yet possible to define precisely the subsequent relationship between Soviet strategic operations and those of her allies—that is, whether the Soviets consciously planned so as to take advantage of conditions elsewhere or, conversely, planned operations to assist Allied strategic efforts. In reality, Soviet military strategy probably did both. What is certain is that from a purely chronological standpoint, coincidentally or otherwise, there existed a relationship between Soviet strategic operations and strategic developments elsewhere. The relationship certainly went well beyond happenstance, and the Soviets themselves often speak of the interdependence of operations in separate theaters.

A clearer and more direct relationship between strategic operations on the Eastern Front and those in other theaters began to emerge in the fall of 1942. In late October British forces in North Africa struck Rommel's Afrika Korps at El Alamein and began an inexorable drive westward toward Tunisia. In early November the United States conducted Operation Torch, which threatened the German position in North Africa and prompted transfer of German forces from Europe to Tunisia. On the Eastern Front, Soviet forces commenced their winter offensive on 19 November at Stalingrad. During the ensuing three months, while Allied forces pressed German forces in Tunisia, the Soviets conducted a series of offensives across southern Russia into the Donbas with apparent abandon.

While German forces in Africa were weak in comparison to German forces on the Eastern Front, it is likely the Soviets counted, in part, on the deteriorating German situation in North Africa to lessen the likelihood of additional German forces being sent east to deal with the deteriorating situation in southern Russia. In fact, German reinforcements did move east (II SS Panzer Corps and several infantry divisions), and these forces helped the Germans stabilize the front by March 1943. This reality fueled Soviet arguments for the Allies to open a real strategic second front. Conversely, African operations diverted from Russia a sizeable number of German aircraft, which could have been employed during and after the Stalingrad operation.

In July 1943, shortly after the Germans began their Kursk offensive, Allied forces landed in Sicily. The landing occurred on 10 July, two days before the German Kursk assault was halted at Prokhorovka and two days before the Soviets delivered their first Kursk counterstroke against the Orel salient. In July and August, while Allied forces completed their defeat of German and Italian forces on Sicily, the Soviets delivered their main Kursk counterstroke in the Belgorod-Khar'kov operation (3 August). Meanwhile, the Allied Sicilian venture forced the Germans to withdraw the headquarters and one division of II SS Panzer Corps from Russia (the Germans had intended to withdraw all three divisions of the corps, but the crisis around Khar'kov prevented it).

The Allied invasion of the Italian peninsula in September 1943 (Salerno) coincided with the expansion of the Soviet post-Kursk offensive to encompass the entire front from Smolensk to the Black Sea, which culminated in November, when the Soviets breached the Dnepr River line. Later, from January to May 1944, the Allied landing at Anzio and battles around Casino took place while Soviet forces were conducting operations to clear the Ukraine of German forces. Expanded operations in Italy and increased Allied air activity over Germany further diluted German air strength in the East and granted the Soviets air superiority.

From late 1942 through early 1944, there is no concrete data upon which to base precise judgments regarding how Soviet military strategy reacted to strategic conditions in other theaters. While the timing of offensive activity in the East and West matched nicely (as did lulls in the two regions), conclusions are only conjecture. Beginning in the summer of 1944, however, clearer ties between strategic operations in the East and in the West did emerge. Only the motives underlying these linkages remain unclear.

On 6 June 1944, the Allies began the Normandy operation, which certainly increased Germany's concern over her western front. In July and August, Allied forces broke out of the Normandy beachhead in operation Cobra and collapsed Axis defenses in southern France with operation Anvil-Dragoon. By late August the German western front had collapsed, and Allied forces liberated Paris. During this period the Soviets commenced their summer-fall campaign by striking on 23 June at German Army Group Center in Belorussia. Although the Soviets claim the timing of this operation was, in part, intended to assist the Allied breakout from Normandy, in the broadest sense, the Soviet strategic operation also benefited from the opening of the real second front. Subsequent Soviet offensives, in July into southern Poland and in August into Rumania and Bulgaria, likewise capitalized on the collapse of German defenses in the West. Soviet operations into the Balkans were also prompted by strategic political and economic considerations, such as the growing likelihood of British and American operations in Greece or Yugoslavia and the presence of major oil fields in Rumania and Hungary. As the front stabilized in the West during October and November 1944, it did likewise on main attack directions in the East.

In mid-December 1944 German forces launched the Ardennes counteroffensive, which produced temporary crisis among the Western allies. In late December the German Ardennes thrust was halted, and by early January 1945 the Allies had eliminated the "bulge" and were preparing for operations into Germany proper. Soon after, from 12 to 15 January, the Soviets commenced two massive strategic thrusts into Poland and East Prussia, which

collapsed German defenses and, by the end of January, propelled Soviet forces to the Oder River and Konigsberg. The Soviets claim these operations were timed to assist the Allies in the Ardennes, but the Soviets themselves clearly profited from the concentration of German forces and materiel required to conduct the Ardennes counteroffensive.

Allied operations from mid-January to early March 1945 concentrated on penetrating the "Westwall" defenses and advancing to the Rhine, a process that turned out to be slow and painstaking. Soviet activity in the East likewise focused on meticulous operations to clear Pomerania and Silesia and maintain Soviet positions in Hungary. On 7 March 1945 Allied forces seized a bridge over the Rhine at Remagen. Just over one week later, the Soviets thrust from the Budapest area toward Vienna. Soon, other Allied forces seized other Rhine River crossings, and, in thirty days of rapid advance, Allied armies penetrated into central Germany, encircled German forces in the Ruhr, and reached the Elbe (on 11 April). Four days after the vanguard of U.S. forces reached the Elbe, the Soviets began the Berlin operation, Just in time to preempt any prospective Allied drive on Berlin.

Four months later, in August 1945, Soviet forces, at the request of their Western allies, began operations in Manchuria. Although the Soviets had planned this operation for months, they launched the operation earlier than anticipated, in part because of U.S. use of atomic weapons against Japan. The cumulative impact of the U.S. use of atomic weaponry and the massive Soviet offensive forced Japanese surrender before the Soviets could participate in operations against the Japanese home islands.

For whatever motives, from June 1944 to August 1945, Soviet forces and those of her allies operated in interdependent fashion. The degree to which this was planned has still to be proven. Yet, in June major Soviet offensive activity in Belorussia followed the Allied Normandy landings by seventeen days. The second major Soviet offensive against German forces in Poland, which began on 12 July, preceded the Allied breakout from Normandy (Operation Cobra of 25 July) by thirteen days. The landing of Allied forces in southern France on 15 August and the threatened (but failed) encirclement of German forces at Falaise preceeded the Soviet offensive into Rumania by five days. In January 1945, two major Soviet offenses occurred about four weeks after German commencement of their Ardennes counteroffensive and two weeks after the German counteroffensive had been terminated. Subsequently, the Soviet Vienna offensive began eight days after Allied forces first breached the Rhine. Finally, the Berlin offensive commenced just short of two weeks after Allied forces had encircled German forces in the Ruhr and five days after lead U.S. elements first reached the Elbe River at Magdeburg.

From the dates of the major Soviet strategic offensives in 1944 and 1945, it is clear that they were timed to correspond with major periods of combat in the West or the Far East, for they occurred shortly (about two weeks) after the initiation of major U.S.-British or German activity in the West. Although these strategic operations, in some instances, clearly assisted U.S. and British efforts, the Soviets profited as well from the strategic situation in the West. Thus, all three major phases of the Soviet summer offensive of 1944 capitalized on U.S. and British operations in the West and clearly assisted the Western allies. The Soviet winter offensive, while easing the Allied situation in the Ardennes, capitalized even more on the German counteroffensive and Allied counterstrokes. Subsequently, the Soviet Vienna and Berlin operations were facilitated, and probably hastened, by U.S.-British successes in central Germany during March and early April 1945. Finally, in August 1945 Soviet strategic operations in Manchuria were assisted by U.S. use of atomic weapons against Japan, which figured heavily in Japan's decision to surrender on 15 August.

In many cases, Allied sharing of strategic plans and intentions facilitated and affected Soviet strategic planning. In other cases (Ardennes and Berlin), the developing situation and concern over Allied intentions shaped Soviet strategic aims and conditioned Soviet planning. It is clear that whatever relationship existed between Soviet operations and operations elsewhere, the relationship was restricted to the strategic level.



### Reflections on the Past; Implications for the Future

Since the end of the Second World War, Soviet military strategy has been conditioned by "experiences of the war and the new distribution of military-political forces in the world." The Soviets claim their policy has been based on the "fact that the governments of the former allies in the anti-Hitlerite coalition (primarily the United States and England) had departed from the principles agreed upon for the postwar organization of the world." In the resulting Cold War, which the Soviets now infer began in 1949, Soviet military strategy reflected Soviet policy and stressed that "the offensive was the main type of strategic operation, in either a nuclear or non-nuclear context."

From the early 1970s to the mid 1980s, the concept of the theater-strategic operation dominated Soviet military strategy, having replaced the nuclear-dominant strategy of the 1960s.<sup>21</sup> With broadening prospects for large-scale combined-arms operations occurring in future war, with or without the use of nuclear weapons, the Soviets sought to develop concepts which could produce strategic victory within continental theaters of military operations. To more fully understand the potential for theater-strategic operations, the Soviets turned to their Great Patriotic War and operations against the Japanese to thoroughly analyze campaign and strategic experiences of that era in the belief that basic principles and combat techniques of that time retained their relevance. From that and other study emerged the various models--such as Khalkhin-Gol, the initial period of the Great Patriotic War, Kursk, Vistula-Oder, and Manchuria--upon which recent, contemporary, and future Soviet strategic concepts are, and may be, based.

The concept of the theater-strategic operation provided a broad, over-arching framework for understanding the full scope and complexity of strategic military endeavors. Indeed, Soviet articulation of a fully developed theater-strategic offensive neither implied nor required its full implementation in future war, for the very complexity and riskiness of such an undertaking underscored the difficulties inherent in successfully carrying it out. Rather, the theoretical structure of the full theater-strategic operation provided insights as to what strategic objectives smaller-scale operations over shorter durations could achieve. More importantly, the larger model of the full theater-strategic operation vividly underscored the possible consequences should the smaller-scale operations fail.

Today, the Soviets have announced the birth of a new defensive military doctrine, which, if implemented, promises revolutionary changes in Soviet military strategy. Beginning in

1986, the Soviets designated a new period in military development (said to have begun in 1985), defined within the context of a recast military doctrine emphasizing "defensiveness" in its political component but clearly shaped in many of its military-technical aspects by reassessments of military affairs, which had begun during the previous decade.<sup>22</sup> In subsequent analyses, the Soviets have articulated several competing variations regarding how military strategy may be expressed in actual combat operations. In formulating these variations, the Soviets have relied on strategic experiences from the Second World War to provide grist for their analytical mill.<sup>23</sup>

Out of this study, Soviet analysts have advanced publically at least four distinct variations regarding the conduct of strategic operations distinguished by the degree of offensiveness and defensiveness reflected by each (see figure 2).<sup>24</sup> For the sake of analysis, these variations are referred to here as "models." Each of these models possesses a differing set of characteristics and each, being historical, is subject to varying interpretation. The primary factors differentiating these models are the relative correlation of forces characterizing each and the intent of the contending parties.

In descending order of offensiveness, the four models are:

--First, opposing coalitions, each of which possess strong, offensively-oriented force groupings and each of which intends to shift operations quickly to enemy territory. This model primarily addresses capabilities and implies that either or both sides can display offensive intent. Mutual suspicion of their opponent's intent on the part of both contending parties is an inherent feature of this model. It is classically represented by pre-First World War Europe, and the Soviets maintain that it has characterized the Cold War as well.

--Second, the Kursk model, which postulates one side absorbing a major enemy blow and then going over to a decisive counteroffensive or a general strategic offensive.<sup>25</sup> Although this is usually described as a defensive strategy, circumstances surrounding conduct of the Kursk operation underscore its offensive nature. The Soviet Kursk strategic operation was inherently offensive in its intent although it began, by design, with a prudent defensive first stage. Subsequent massive Soviet offensive blows were planned in outline, and in detail, well before the German attacks materialized. Based on the correlation of forces, the results of prior operations, and overall Soviet preparation and planning, a major Soviet strategic offensive in the summer of 1943 was clearly envisioned. It only remained to determine the form and timing of that strategic effort. Indeed, this "classic" deliberate defense was judged to be just the kind of posture Soviet forces should strive to establish under analogous circumstances.<sup>26</sup> It is for that reason that

contemporary Soviet theorists, when describing current "defensiveness," have turned away from the Kursk model to another which seems more appropriate.

### MODELS OF STRATEGIC OPERATIONS

1. OPPOSING OFFENSIVELY-ORIENTED COALITIONS
2. INITIAL DEFENSE AND DECISIVE COUNTEROFFENSIVE - THE 'KURSK' MODEL
3. LIMITED COUNTEROFFENSIVE - THE "KHALKHIN-GOL" MODEL
4. LIMITED TACTICAL CAPABILITIES - THE DILEMMA OF 'SUFFICIENCY'
5. COVERT CONVERSION FROM DEFENSE TO OFFENSE - THE "MANCHURIAN" MODEL

Figure 2

--The model deemed by the Soviets to be more appropriate to today's doctrinal pronouncements is the third model, based on the operations in 1939 against the Japanese at Khalkhin-Gol.<sup>27</sup> In this model each side possesses the capability of routing an enemy force on the territory which that enemy force has invaded and of conducting a counteroffensive which expels the enemy but does not penetrate into enemy territory. Ostensibly, these were the circumstances at Khalkhin-Gol. (Perhaps an even better example, also cited by the Soviets, would be the actions of United Nations' forces in the mid- and later stages of the Korean War.) Closer examination of the circumstance at Khalkhin-Gol, however, indicate some interesting, but often neglected, facets of the operation. First, under a cloak of deception, Soviet forces engaged in a secret build-up of forces prior to the operation, which ultimately accorded the Soviets a considerable degree of surprise, as well as numerical advantage, in particular, in armored vehicles.<sup>28</sup> Second, political circumstances in the West, involving the potential threat to the Soviet Union of Hitler's Germany, were a basic cause of Soviet restraint at Khalkhin-Gol.

--The fourth model involves opposing coalitions, each of which possesses only limited tactical capabilities, and hence, both of which are unable to undertake any operations of strategic consequence.<sup>29</sup> This model also involves relative capabilities and hinges on the amorphous definition of defensive adequacy or, in current parlance, "sufficiency." Moreover, it implies a degree of mutual agreement among opposing parties regarding how "limited tactical capabilities" is defined.

Other variants such as one reflecting the stance of the Soviet Union in 1941 should emerge in the future. This variant is, at present, fraught with uncertainties associated with a current Soviet debate over their doctrinal and strategic posture at that time. Present Soviet insistence that their strategy on the eve of the Second World War was primarily offensive also inhibits Soviet discussion of this model. If this model does emerge, it will have serious political, military, and force structure implications, whether it applies to a continued presence of Soviet forces in eastern Europe or to Soviet forces withdrawn to a national bastion.

President Gorbachev's current program of "defensiveness" postulates Soviet possession of a defensive capability sufficient to absorb and repulse an enemy blow. The essential unanswered questions associated with that program are twofold. First, "Is defensiveness genuine?" and second, if it is genuine, "Is it based upon the Kursk or Khalkhin-Gol models or on yet another model?"

A fifth, and more disturbing, model, has as yet not been advanced by Soviet theorists in the context of currently

changing force posture. This model, which rests at the heart of present and future arms control and verification processes, may be called the Manchurian model.<sup>30</sup> In this case, a defensive force structure and posture is rapidly converted into an effective offensive one through a combination of khitrost' [cunning], maskirovka [deception], and a massive covert strategic and operational regrouping of forces. In the case of Manchuria, over the course of less than three months, the Soviets converted a forty division force into one of about 100 divisions. In a sense, this case paralleled that of Khalkhin-Gol where, in a short period, the Soviets had secretly increased their force from 35,000 to 57,000 men.

Thus, today Soviet military strategy may be fundamentally changing in its assessment of optimum approaches to organizing, structuring, training, and equipping the Armed Forces and planning, preparing, and conducting military operations in future war. Whatever changes are taking place, they are doing so within the context of the Soviet Union's military strategic experience during the Second World War. If the West is to comprehend the nature and implications of these potentially momentous changes, it must also understand the nature of the models which guide it--Soviet military strategy during the Second World War.

### Notes

1. N. V. Ogarkov, "Strategiia voennaia" [Military strategy], Sovetskaia voennaia entsiklopediia [Soviet military encyclopedia], 8 vols., (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1976-1980), 7:555-556. Hereafter cited as SVE with appropriate volume.
2. Ibid., 556.
3. A. M. Plekhov, "Politika voennaia" [military policy], SVE, 6:413.
4. Ibid.
5. Ogarkov, 556.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., 561.
8. Polevoi ustav krasnoi armii (PU-1936), (vremennyi) [Field service regulations of the Red Army (PU-1936) (tentative)], (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1936), 9. Translated by Translation Section, The Army War College, Washington, D. C., 1987. For an explanation of Soviet prewar military theory, see David M. Glantz, Soviet Military Operational Art: In Pursuit of Deep Operations, (London: Frank Cass, 1989).
9. Among other articles, see A. I. Starunin, "Operativnaia vnezapnost'" [Operational surprise], Voennaia mysl' [Military thought], No. 3 (March 1941), 27-35. Hereafter cited as VM. A. Kononenko, "Boi v flandrii (Mai 1940 gg)" [The battle in Flanders (May 1940)], Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal [Military-historical journal], No. 3 (March 1941), 3-20. Hereafter cited as VIZh. Starunin's superb analysis of German use of surprise in Poland and France ended with the enjoinder, "One required high vigilance and constant combat readiness so that the enemy can not take forces by surprise." Three months later, Starunin's warning went unheeded, and his lessons were not learned.

Graphic prewar Soviet writings about battles of encirclement [boi v okruzhenii] attest to Soviet realization of the perils that the forward defending echelons faced. See, for example, B. K. Kolchigin, "Vykhod iz boia" [Withdrawal from battle], VM, No. 7 (July 1940); P. I. D'iachenko, "Razvedka v okruzhenii" [Reconnaissance in an encirclement], VM, No. 9 (September 1940); A. I. Starunin, "Boi v okruzhenii" (Battle in encirclement), VM, No. 10 (October 1940); A. I. Shtromberg, "Operativnoe ispol'zovanie tankov v oborone" [Operational use of tanks on the defense], VM, No. 11-12 (November-December 1940); P. I. Vedenichev, "Protivovozdushnaia oborona v sovremennoi voine"

[Antiaircraft defense in contemporary war], VM, No. 11-12 (November-December 1940).

10. V. D. Danilov, "Sovetskoe glavnoe komandovanie v predverii otechestvennoi voyny" [The Soviet main command on the threshold of the patriotic war], Novaia I noveishaia istoriia [New and newest history], No. 6 (November-December 1988), 4.

11. Soviet suspicions about German strategic intentions were sufficiently strong by April 1941 for the High Command (Stalin) to begin deploying strategic reserve armies forward into eastern Belorussia and the eastern Ukraine. In accordance with prewar planning assumptions, the bulk of these reserves were concentrated in the south. In fact, by 22 June four armies (16th, 19th, 21st, 22d) had deployed into position along the Dnepr River line from Velikie Luki southward to the Zhitomir and Cherkassy regions. Another army (20th) was assembling in the Moscow region. Within thirty days after hostilities had commenced, when the Soviets had correctly perceived the direction of the main German thrust, ten additional armies (24th, 28th, 29th, 30th, 31st, 32d, 33d, 34th, 43d, 48th) formed two new strategic defense lines west of Moscow.

Among the many works describing these deployments, see S. Alferov, "Strategicheskoe razvertyvanie sovetskykh voisk na Zapadnom TVD v 1941 godu" [Strategic deployment of Soviet forces in the Western TVD in 1941], VIZh, No. 6 (June 1981), 26-33; V. A. Anfilov, Proval Blitzkriiga [The failure of blitzkrieg], (Moscow: "Nauka," 1974).

12. In simple terms, Soviet strategic plans called for a defense conducted by rifle and mechanized forces echeloned in considerable depth. The first echelon of rifle forces, arrayed in the immediate border regions, was itself composed of several echelons backed up by the most combat-ready mechanized corps. To their rear, a second echelon of rifle forces and mechanized corps formed at a depth of up to 150 kilometers. A third echelon of reserve armies and mechanized corps deployed prior to or shortly after the outbreak of hostilities along the line of the Dnepr River from Vitebsk in the north to west of Kiev. The first defending echelon had the task of slowing and wearing down enemy forces, the second with halting the enemy drive, and the third with counterattacking to expel the invader.

13. V. N. Lobov, "Strategiia pobedy" [Strategy of victory], VIZh, No. 5 (May 1988), 6.

14. Ogarkov, 562.

15. N. A. Sbytov, "Stavka verkhovnogo glavnokomandovaniia" [The Stavka of the High Command], SVE 1979, 7:511-512.



16. N. Pavlenko, "Na pervom etape voiny" [During the first phase of war], Kommunist [Communist], No. 9 (June 1988), 92.

17. For example, see "Archives Document Torture of Marshal Meretskov," JPRS-UMA-88-019, 19 August 1988, 21. Quoting from an article in Literaturnaia Gazeta, 20 April 1989, 13.

18. Ogarkov, 562.

19. Ibid.

20. As evidence of this Soviet mistrust of Allied intentions, see G. K. Zhukov, Reminiscences and Reflections, 2 Vols., (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1985), II:338-339. Translation of Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia, (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Agentstva Pechati Novosti, 1974); S.M. Shtemenko, The Soviet General Staff at War, 1941-1945, Book 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1985), 399-401. Translation of Sovetskii general'nyi shtab v gody voiny, (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1981).

21. Lecture Materials from the Voroshilov General Staff Academy, supplement to the lecture "Principles and Content of Military Strategy." The basic strategy lecture, along with the 1975 supplementary material, may be found in The Voroshilov Lectures: From the Soviet General Staff Academy--Issues of Military Strategy, (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1989). The basic lecture itself, without the supplement, has been published in The Journal of Soviet Military Studies, Vol. 1 (April 1988), 29-53. Theater-strategic operations relied on high-speed combined-arms offensives designed to seize the initiative and achieve strategic objectives quickly and without employment of nuclear weapons.

22. This assessment, for example, appeared in connection with a review of the A. Babakov, Vooruzhennye Sily SSSR posle voiny (1945-1986) [The Armed Forces of the USSR after the war (1945-1986)], Moscow: Voenizdat, 1987) in V. G. Reznichenko, "Sovetskie vooruzhennye sily v poslevoennyi period" [Soviet armed forces in the postwar period], Kommunist vooruzhennykh sil [Communist in the armed forces], January 1988), 86-88.

23. For example, the issue of strategic operations was addressed in a five-article series appearing in Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal [Military-historical journal, hereafter cited as VIZh] from October 1985 to July 1986. The articles in this Soviet-designated "Diskussiiia" [Discussion or Debate] included V. V. Gurkin and M. I. Golovnin, "K voprosu o strategicheskikh operatsiakh Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny, 1941-1945" [On the question of strategic operations in the Great Patriotic war, 1941-1945], VIZh (October 1985), 11; N. K. Glazunov and B. I. Pavlov, "K voprosu o strategicheskikh operatsiakh Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny," VIZh (April 1986), 48-50; A. I. Mikhalev

and V. I. Kudriashov, "K voprosu o strategicheskikh operatsiiakh Velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny, 1941- 1945," VIZh (May 1986), 48-50; and Kh M. Dzhelaukhov and B. N. Petrov, "K voprosu o strategicheskikh operatsiiakh Velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny, 1941-1945," VIZh (July 1986), 46-48. Also appearing at this same time, though not formally a part of the "Diskussii," was the related article, A.P. Maryshev, "Nekotorye voprosy strategicheskoi oborony v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny" [Several questions on strategic defense in the Great Patriotic War], VIZh (June 1986), 9-16. In the fall of 1987, an unsigned article, "Itogi diskussii o strategicheskikh operatsiiakh Velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny, 1941-1945" [Results of the discussions on strategic operations of the Great Patriotic War, 1941-1945], VIZh (October 1987), 8-24, capped the series. Among the conclusions reached in these assessments was an approach to classifying operations as "strategic." The Soviets have formulated and generally accepted three "fundamental criteria" for describing an operation as strategic. Specifically, a strategic operation: 1.) resolves important strategic missions and attains important military-political aims; 2.) in most cases consists of combat operations of great spatial scope and includes the participation of a considerable quantity of forces and means; and 3.) is planned by the Stavka of the Supreme High Command (VGK), with the coordination of actions by fronts, fleets, and other Services of the Armed Forces carried out by VGK representatives. Thus, as these criteria and associated Soviet discussions make clear, a strategic operation is centrally controlled at the highest level of command, is usually large and of combined arms composition, and, most importantly, accomplishes critically important military-political goals regardless of its size and scope, or the length and intensity of operations.

24. A. Kokoshin and V. Larionov, "Protivostoianii sil obshchego naznacheniia v kontekste obespecheniia strategicheskoi stabil'nosti" [The counterposition of general purpose forces in the context of strategic stability], Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia [World economics and international relations, hereafter cited as MEMO], (June 1988), 23-31. These have been widely discussed by Western analysts to include a number of forums with Western, Soviet, and East European participation.

25. Considerable Western interest in the "Kursk model" was generated by the A. Kokoshin and V. Larionov article entitled "Kurskaia bitva v svete sovremennoi oboronitel'noi doktriny" [The Kursk battle in light of contemporary defensive doctrine], which appeared in the August 1987 issue of MEMO. Numerous other Soviet analyses of Kursk have appeared prior to and since publication of this article.

26. Maryshev, 16.

27. Kokoshin and Larionov, 27.

28. David M. Glantz, Soviet Military Deception in the Second World War, (London: Frank Cass, 1989), 13-14.

29. "Soviets Shifting Military Strategy," The Kansas City Times, 11 March 1989, p. A9, which quotes testimony of A. A. Kokoshin in March 1989. Testimony before the U.S. Congress' House Armed Services Committee.

30. Soviet military theorists and planners continue to assess this three-front strategic operation in detail. L. N. Vnotchenko, Pobeda na dal'nem vostokey [Victory in the Far East], (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1966), is one of the best book-length Soviet assessments of the Manchurian operation, while David M. Glantz, August Storm: The Soviet 1945 Strategic Offensive in Manchuria, Leavenworth Papers, Vol. 7 and 8, (Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute, 1983), is the most substantial Western treatment.