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**Historical Roots of Contemporary Debates
on Soviet Military Doctrine and Defense**

Sally W. Stoecker

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Historical Roots of Contemporary Debates on Soviet Military Doctrine and Defense

Sally W. Stoecker

Prepared for the
United States Air Force
United States Army

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PREFACE

This Note examines the themes of and historical context for the writings of Soviet strategists of the 1920s, such as Alexander Svechin and Leon Trotsky, who emphasized the importance of defensive operations. It discusses early Soviet debates about the "operational-political" and "operational-strategic" aspects of doctrine, wars of destruction versus wars of attrition, and strategic offense versus strategic defense, as well as related arguments concerning the organization and missions of infantry and the use of fortifications. Finally, it suggests some parallels between the strategic circumstances facing Soviet military theorists in the 1920s and those confronting planners today—to shed light on the possible uses of these earlier writings in contemporary Soviet debates about "reasonable sufficiency" and "defensive defense."

Based on a study prepared for the RAND project, "Soviet Concepts of War in Europe," supported jointly by Project AIR FORCE and the Arroyo Center, the Note should be of interest to individuals and organizations concerned with the evolution of Soviet military doctrine and its potential implications for Soviet force structure and operations.

The blocked quotations throughout have been translated by the author from the original Russian into English.

SUMMARY

The 1920s and early 1930s witnessed extensive and heated debate about the future role of the Red Army and the character and contents of its military doctrine and strategy. Among the key figures to debate these issues were the former Imperial Army officer and General Staff academy professor, Alexander Svechin, and the legendary revolutionary and People's Commissar of War, Leon Trotsky. In part because of their dissenting views on military doctrine and other issues, both Svechin and Trotsky were political casualties of Stalin's rise to power. They are only now, for the first time since Stalin's reign, being fully rehabilitated in the Soviet Union.

While the controversial works of Trotsky and Svechin tended to be rather theoretical and highbrow, many Red Army officers were also disputing various forms of force employment at a tactical level in a variety of military journals. These debates concerned matters such as the proper composition of the new infantry company, the importance of active defenses, and the utilization of trenches and fortifications in the offense and defense. At this time, in the middle to late twenties, there was no perceptible emphasis on the offense over the defense; rather, they were treated evenhandedly.

Similarly, Svechin and Trotsky agreed that offensive and defensive actions were equally important military and political concepts. While the offense was employed on one axis, the defense would naturally occur on another. Svechin went further than most theorists of his time in advocating a strategy of attrition for the Soviet Union, largely because of its undeveloped economic base. Because this strategy permitted the exchange of territory for time, it was not well received by many of the "Red Commanders" who regarded an offensive as the only proper strategy for the Red Army in the wake of the October revolution.

Svechin and Trotsky were also firm believers in and supporters of polemics and innovative thinking. They consistently rallied against the "bureaucratism" and narrow-mindedness that they argued plagued the military in the early years of its development—especially among the "Red Commanders," who greatly exaggerated the "lessons" of the civil war and attempted to base the formation of Red Army doctrine largely on the Soviet experience in that war.

In the wake of the Berlin Communique of 1987, in which the USSR proclaimed its adoption of a new defensive-oriented military doctrine, more articles about Svechin, in particular, began to appear in the Soviet press. These were produced by a group of civilian and military analysts who related his ideas on economics, politics, and defensive strategies to

the present-day Soviet Union. The direct, substantive relevance of Svechin's works of the 1920s for the USSR today is questionable, given the enormous changes in the technological and political landscape since then. His revival, however, may serve the political objective of helping to legitimate the renewed emphasis on defensive military operations currently under discussion by identifying historical roots for them. Moreover, the renewed attention to Svechin serves to reintroduce healthy debate and polemical discussion to the military as an institution—debate which, until recently, has been conspicuously absent in the Soviet armed forces.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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I. INTRODUCTION

In promoting Mikhail Gorbachev's move toward a more "defensive" military doctrine based on a concept of minimum deterrence called "reasonable sufficiency," several authoritative Soviet civilian and military figures have begun to resurrect the writings of former military theorists Alexander Svechin and Leon Trotsky, among other strategists of the 1920s, who originally emphasized the importance of defensive actions but who were publicly denounced for their controversial views on military doctrine and defense in the latter half of the decade.¹

In contrast to most prominent military theorists of the time, neither Trotsky nor Svechin found the military achievements of the Red Army in the civil war terribly impressive. According to Trotsky, the opportunity for offensive thrusts—so uncharacteristic of World War I—were products of the expansive terrain, not Red Army prowess. Moreover, the offense and defense were viewed in the dialectical sense; while the offense was employed on one axis, the defense would naturally occur on another.

Svechin, who eloquently underscored the importance of the country's economic base in peacetime and in war—presently the basis of Gorbachev's "perestroika"—was later denounced for underestimating the industrialization gains of the first five-year plan. Svechin's sober assessments, although correct, were not welcomed at a time when only optimism surrounding the successes of the "great transformation" of Soviet society was permitted.

Concurrent with the debates about "grand strategy" were those of a very practical, "nuts and bolts" nature regarding the size and composition of the Red Army and its military art. A close examination of articles appearing in *Voennyi vestnik* (hereinafter, *VV*) in the early to mid-1920s—then a weekly publication—reveals that there was no clear preference for the offense, since just as many articles were written about defensive operations and a considerable number of those concerned fortifications and trenches.²

An understanding of the history of the original debates may help to provide a context in which to view the concept of "reasonable sufficiency" that recently has come to symbolize

¹A. Kokoshin, "A. A. Svechin o voine i politike," *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn'*, no. 3, 1988; Colonel-General V. N. Lobov, "Aktual'nye voprosy razvitiia teorii sovetskoi voennoi strategii 20-kh- serediny 30-kh godov," *Voennno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, no. 2, 1989; and most recently, Kokoshin and Lobov, "Foresight (General Svechin on the Evolution of the Art of War)," in *Znanya*, no. 2, February 1990, translated in *FBIS*, 13 April 1990.

²Two secondary works were used for reference throughout: J. Erickson, *The Soviet High Command: A Military-Political History, 1918-1941*, Westview reprint, 1984; and I. Berkhin, *Voennaia Reforma v SSSR: 1924-1925*, Voenizdat, Moscow, 1958.

Gorbachev's "new thinking" in military affairs. The historical record reveals that the concepts of "defensive defense" were not pulled out of thin air by Gorbachev and his lieutenants, but rather have deep historical roots in Soviet military strategy.

II. CHTO TAKOE VOENNAIA DOKTRINA?

It is important to bear in mind that the Red Army of the 1920s was made up of a diverse mixture of soldiers with correspondingly diverse points of view. As Mackintosh has succinctly remarked, the army was comprised of ". . . every conceivable type of unit from bands of forest brigands to tightly knit groups of fanatical communists, from saber-rattling ex-NCOs and desertion prone conscripts to doctrinaire professors and specialists in the military academies and General Staff."¹ While some officers, such as Civil War Commander Mikhail Frunze, saw a glaring need for the Red Army to have a new military doctrine, others saw no need for a doctrine whatsoever. Thus, at this early stage in the development of the army, the question was not *what kind* of doctrine was appropriate for the Red Army, but *whether or not* it ought to have one.

TROTSKY: COMMISSAR OF WAR

Perhaps no one captures the confusion and controversy surrounding the formation of a military doctrine better than the Commissar of War himself, Leon Trotsky, in his lucid and thought-provoking article entitled "Military Doctrine or Pseudo-Military Doctrinairism" of 1921.² In this piece, Trotsky critiques a report delivered earlier in the year by Frunze advocating the creation of a single or "unified" military doctrine. Trotsky's skepticism about the creation of a new "Red" military doctrine was at odds with the heroes of the civil war known as "Red commanders" (in Russian, *Kraskomy*), who were anxious to formulate a military doctrine in which all reference to the Tsarist past would be expunged and only the Red Army experience in the civil war would be reflected.³

Trotsky withstood the initial challenges of the Red commanders, as he was fully backed by Lenin until the latter's death in 1924.⁴ Soon after Lenin's death, Trotsky fell victim to the political opposition of the "Triumvers" (Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Stalin), in the

¹M. Mackintosh, *Juggernaut: The Russian Forces, 1918-1966* Macmillan Co., New York, 1967, p. 52.

²L. Trotsky, "Voennaia doktrina ili mnimo-voennoe doktrinerstvo," *Voennaia nauka i revoliutsiia*, book 2, 1921, pp. 204-234. This was a response to a report delivered by Frunze at a command staff congress in the Ukraine. His theses were later debated at the eleventh Communist Party of the Soviet Union Congress in 1922. For a summary of the theses and Trotsky's criticisms, see D. Petrovsky, "Disput o voennoi doktrine," *Voennaia nauka i revoliutsiia*, book 2, 1922.

³It is ironic that Frunze and other Red commanders who called for a new proletarian doctrine were also fans of foreign military developments which they hoped to wrap into their own doctrine. Trotsky remarked, in reference to Frunze's use of the French field manual's discussion of the offense to support his views, "Just as we want a republic with our national emblem, so do we want a purely proletarian strategy, but one with Marshal Foch's stamp of approval on it." (See Petrovsky, "Disput o voennoi," cited in footnote 2 above.)

⁴I. Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed, Trotsky: 1921-1929*, Oxford University Press, 1970, pp. 55-56. Based on materials in the Trotsky Archive, Deutscher illustrates Lenin's tendency to side with Trotsky on military decisions in spite of initial differences between them.

course of which he lost his post as War Commissar to Frunze in early 1925 and, in the latter half of the decade, his standing in the Party altogether.⁵

In spite of his political misfortunes, Trotsky's writings on the military were extremely rich and insightful. Unlike the works of the Red commanders who followed him, Trotsky's texts were erudite and lucid and therefore are worth quoting at length. For example, on the diversity of views within the army, he noted that debates about the future army occurred on very different levels. While some were concerned about the class nature of the army, others were preoccupied with retaining civil war-vintage weaponry.

One person makes the sensational discovery that the Red Army is a *class* army and an army of the proletarian dictatorship. Another adds to this, that because the army is revolutionary and international, it should be offensive. A third person proposes, with offensive goals in mind, to pay special attention to the cavalry and air power. A fourth underscores the importance of the *tachanka* (horsedrawn carriage used to mount guns in the civil war).⁶

In Trotsky's view, the offense, defense, counterattack, and retreat were basic and natural reactions performed by every living creature. Because the condition of a society at a particular time in history could not be repeated, he noted, the study of historical documents was of little use in predicting future courses of military action.

An ass who gobbles up oats from a torn sack and vigilantly turns his croup in the direction opposite to the anticipated danger, does this in keeping with the eternal principles of military science. Moreover, the ass who ate the oats certainly did not read Clausewitz nor even Leer. [Similarly,] war, about which we are speaking is a societal and historical phenomenon which arises, develops, changes forms and must disappear. Therefore, it cannot have eternal laws.⁷

In Trotsky's opinion, and to a large extent also that of Svechin, each military confrontation must be evaluated within the temporal and spatial context in which it occurs. Attempts to make "doctrine" out of historical experience are very misleading because they try to classify something that is ever-changing and fluid.

Trotsky's overall disdain for uncritical thinking and the "vices of officialdom" were fundamental aspects of his thinking and were published in his pamphlet *The New Course of 1923*.⁸ According to Trotsky, "officialdom" was rampant in his own department (the army) and others. It occurred when people "cease to think things through; when they smugly employ conventional phrases without reflecting on what they mean; when they give the

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶Trotsky, "Voennaia doktrina," p. 209.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 119-120.

customary orders without asking if they are rational. . . ." Histories of the civil war were good examples of this, according to Trotsky:

To read it [such a history] you would think that there are only heroes in our ranks; that every soldier burns with the desire to fight; that the enemy is always superior in numbers; that all our orders are reasonable and appropriate to the occasion; that the execution is always brilliant; and so on . . . Supreme heroism, in military art as in revolution, consists of truthfulness and a sense of responsibility . . . Such idealistic talk is sheer hypocrisy in a class society where there are antagonistic interests, struggle, and war.⁹

THE OPERATIONAL-POLITICAL ASPECTS OF DOCTRINE

Although Trotsky was skeptical about the prospects of developing a prescriptive doctrine, he did appreciate that there were both political and operational strategies contained therein and drew distinctions between them. But he was clearly not a fan of labels and viewed as fallacious the categorization of a strategy as offensive or defensive. Military and political events were, in his view, dynamic and must by nature alternate between the offense and defense. Hence, he called those who believed that a revolutionary epoch automatically required an offensive policy "offensive-minded simpletons."¹⁰

In illustrating the virtues of the defense, Trotsky referred to the Carthaginian Treaty of Brest-Litovsk as a "political-strategic retreat" which turned out to be the Soviets' "saving grace" despite his original protests against the peace in 1918. In 1921, at the time of the publication of "Voennaia doktrina . . ." (see footnote 2), Trotsky admitted that the pace of revolutionary change abroad had slowed down and that the bourgeoisie were in a more stable position politically and economically than in Soviet Russia, which was ridden with domestic problems. In order to ameliorate a war-torn economy, the New Economic Policy, viewed by many dogmatic Bolsheviks as a heretical retreat from the road to socialism for its throwback to capitalism, was inaugurated at the tenth Party Congress of that year. But Trotsky, like Lenin, viewed the retreat a temporary one that would invariably lead to a revolutionary counteroffensive.

The initiative of the offensive has temporarily fallen in the hands of the bourgeoisie. The work of the communist parties has now assumed a defensive and organizational-preparatory character. Our revolutionary defense is, as always, elastic and resilient; that is, it is capable of turning into the

⁹L. Trotsky, *The New Course*, pp. 99-105, quoted in Deutscher, p. 120. (See footnote 6.)

¹⁰*Ibid.*

counteroffensive, which may in its own time be completed with a decisive struggle, given a corresponding change in circumstances.¹¹

Trotsky also found the preoccupation with an offensive revolutionary strategy objectionable on the grounds that the RKKA's¹² peasants and workers had sustained enormous hardships in recent years. Hence, the last thing they needed to hear was how they must be indoctrinated in offensive revolutionary theory and must prepare for war—especially at a time of demobilization. The most important task for the Party at that time was to create a link (*smychka*) between the proletariat and the peasants as a means of enhancing productivity and facilitating industrialization. But in order to do so, the peasants and workers needed reassurance that another war was highly unlikely. Thus, the dissemination of a defensive posture was politically advisable from the standpoint of the peasants who comprised nine-tenths of the army at this time.¹³

THE OPERATIONAL-STRATEGIC ASPECTS OF DOCTRINE

Trotsky also criticized the Red commanders' treatment of the operational aspects of doctrine chiefly because it was based on the Soviet experience in the civil war. While many of the Red commanders such as Frunze and Varin (Kamenev)¹⁴ lauded the superior maneuverability of the Red Army in the latter years of the civil war, Trotsky insisted that the Red Army actually learned how to maneuver from the more combat-proficient Whites. This was facilitated by objective factors such as the expanses of territory on the eastern and southern fronts, rather than by the Red Army's combat prowess, as the Red commanders tended to insist.

Moreover, Trotsky noted that the distinction between the offense and defense is lost in a war of maneuver. The key concepts for victory are not "offense" but "*aktivnos*" (aggressiveness) and "initiative."

Namely, in a war of maneuver the distinction between the offense and defense is rendered meaningless. A war of maneuver is a war of movement. The goal of the movement is the annihilation of the enemy at 100 versts, give or take a few. Victory will be assured if maneuver preserves the initiative. The basic aspects

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 219.

¹²RKKA stands for *Rabocho-krestianskaia Krasnaia Armiia* (Workers' and Peasants' Red Army).

¹³A few years later, G. Zinoviev would assert that any war conducted in the name of socialism against the exploiter class, be it feudal or absolutist, would always be viewed as "defensive" and "just" no matter who attacked first, because it would presumably save the people from their oppressors. As such, this justified any invasion! For the purposes of this paper, the "just" war will not be examined. See, among many other writings, G. Zinoviev, "Voina i Leninism," *VV*, no. 28, 1924.

¹⁴For Varin's (pseudonym for S. S. Kamenev) view of the lessons of the civil war, see S. Varin, "K itogam grazhdanskoi voiny," *Voennaia nauka i revoliutsiia*, book 1, 1921; and "K voprosu ob urokakh grazhdanskoi voiny," *VV*, no. 4, 1922.

of maneuver strategy are not formal offensives, but initiative and aggressiveness.¹⁵

In essence, Trotsky maintained that the offense and defense were equally important to every military campaign and that without the interplay of the two, victory could not be guaranteed. He reproached those "doctrinaires" (namely, Mikhail Frunze) who believed that the army should be trained predominantly in one manner or the other and who advocated a "single doctrine" for all military ventures.

A.A. SVECHIN: GENERAL STAFF PROFESSOR

In one of his major works, *Strategiia*, former Imperial Army officer and innovative military theorist A. A. Svechin was similarly skeptical about the formation of a new "Red" military doctrine.¹⁶ He advised approaching military situations on an individual basis, having due regard for the economic and social development of the country's "rear" at a given time. Indeed, Svechin viewed economic mobilization so critical to the success of military operations that he called for the creation of an "Economic General Staff" to oversee it.¹⁷ Svechin continues:

We view contemporary war in all of its manifestations and do not intend to condense our theory into a draft of the Red Soviet Strategic Doctrine. It is incredibly difficult to foresee the kind of war in which the USSR may get involved and [therefore] it is necessary to be skeptical of all limitations on the general study of war. A special course of strategic conduct must be developed for every war; every war is a separate entity requiring its own special logic and not the application of some template, even if it is Red.¹⁸

Svechin's insistence on critical thinking is very similar to that of Trotsky, although Svechin drew much more heavily on historical experience to illustrate his points and define his terms. However, he made it clear from the outset that the study of historical examples alone would not secure the answers to future military problems. Rather, history must provide the material with which independent analysis could be undertaken.¹⁹

¹⁵Trotsky, "Voennaia doktrina," p. 227. A verst equals 1.067 km or .6629 miles.

¹⁶A. A. Svechin, *Strategiia*, Voenizdat, Moscow, 1926.

¹⁷Such ideas were drawn largely from Clausewitz' On War and Engel's *Anti-Duhring*. Later, Svechin was attacked by Tukhachevsky and others for lacking Marxist ideas. See D. Fedotoff-White, "The Soviet Philosophy of War," *Political Science Quarterly*, no. 3, 1936, pp. 321-353.

¹⁸Svechin, *Strategiia*, p.9.

¹⁹G. Girs also stressed that historical experience must be systematized and legitimized in order to develop military art. See his lengthy and erudite article, "Zadacha nauka i voennaia doktrina v sviazi s perezhivaemoi nami revoliutsionnoi epokhoi," *Voennaia nauka i revoliutsiia*, book 1, 1921.

WAR OF DESTRUCTION OR WAR OF ATTRITION?

Like Trotsky, Svechin also viewed offensive and defensive actions as equally important at both political and military levels. However, Svechin believed that a more important contradiction lay beyond that of offense and defense. In his view, the most important decision for the political leadership to make, upon consulting with the strategist, was whether to plan for a war of attrition (*izmor*) or a war of total destruction (*sokrushenie*). Svechin's favorable views of a war of attrition—views that ultimately led to his demise in the late 1920's—are currently being resurrected by Soviet military scholars and hailed for their insight into the importance of a country's peacetime economic development in sustaining war efforts, the advantages of establishing limited war aims, and the overriding significance of political maneuvering during both the outbreak and the termination of war.

Svechin argued that the concepts of "war of destruction" and "war of attrition" were critical in orienting all military activities, including in particular the organization of the economy. Preparation for a war of destruction à la Moltke or Napoleon would require such an enormous increase in the military budget that it could severely set back the development of the state's industry. Preparation for a war of attrition, in contrast, concerned itself with the general, proportional development and improvement of the economy from the outset of war, because a flagging economy certainly would not sustain the "trials" of attrition.

Svechin believed that a war of destruction would require rapid and explosive operations, whereas a war of attrition would call for developing lengthy, successive waves of attack. A war of destruction would be conducted primarily on the basis of reserves created in peacetime, whereas a war of attrition would rely on industrial production in the course of a war.²⁰ Svechin's favorite historical example of the strategy of destruction was the offense-oriented Schlieffen Plan of World War I. The Germans' sweeping and daring attack into France via Belgium in 1914, without proper regard for Russian mobilization, ultimately failed. To Svechin this was, among other things, an example of a preoccupation with a specific strategy without due regard for secondary circumstances and avenues of advance.²¹

Svechin also examined the strategies of attrition and destruction through the lens of operational aims. Concerning the strategy of destruction, Svechin considered it imperative to combine the three basic elements of an operation—force, time, and space—in order to gain time and destroy the enemy's forces. Everything was subordinated to the interests of the general plan, which in turn was dependent on a decisive point or "compass arrow"—the basis

²⁰Svechin, *Strategiia*, p. 205. Svechin uses the example of the Russian capacity to mobilize industry successfully during the initial defensive phase of WWI in the spring of 1915 to underscore the advantages of the "attrition" model.

²¹Svechin, *Strategiia*, pp. 255–256.

of all maneuvers. There could be only one correct decision: all secondary axes and geographical objects were "insignificant," and pauses in the development of military actions were incompatible with the idea of destruction.

In Svechin's view, this approach was extremely shortsighted. Given the unpredictability of war, it was dangerous to focus on one plan to the exclusion of other alternatives. Should the initial attack fail, the absence of any fallback plan would leave troops in an extremely vulnerable position.

Svechin discussed two other problems with the strategy of destruction in his day. First, operations were of relatively short distances; therefore, operations needed to be divided into small units. Second, and most interesting, he did not view the outbreak of war as the "culminating point of strategic tension." The military and economic mobilization of the second and third echelons of forces was equally important to the success of a military venture, and the defensive posture would buy time for the development of the economy and deployment of these echelons. Nonetheless, Svechin did not exclude the strategy of destruction from the realm of possibility in a future war. Rather, he believed that the Soviet society was not equipped to plan for a war of destruction in the 1920s.

It is imperative not to discard the theory of destruction in the soiled trash basket; we confirm this in our work and not only as a means of illuminating the dialectical contradiction between the strategies of destruction and attrition. Certainly the enemy whose territory may be torn asunder in a matter of weeks must swallow the methods of destruction. Also, with respect to a large country that has become politically decayed, destruction is the most rational type of strategy.²²

In contrast to the strategy of destruction, the strategy of attrition is diverse and has many goals. Instead of basing the entire combat plan on one position, geographical points embodying political and economic interests are often the most threatening ones in a strategy of attrition, and hence of primary importance. Operational and tactical questions play a subordinate and technical role. Dividing the troops between main and secondary axes is a major strategic problem. Moreover, the objectives of the strategy of attrition are limited. Total destruction of the enemy is not necessarily the preferred option.

Truly, in the context of the strategy of attrition, operations are characterized, above all, by their limited aims; war preparations are not based on a decisive strike, but with the intention of gaining [favorable] positions on armed, political,

²²*Ibid.*, p. 259.

and economic fronts from which it would be possible to launch a decisive attack in the end.²³

STRATEGIC OFFENSE AND DEFENSE

One level below the attrition-destruction dichotomy, according to Svechin, lay that of the strategic offense and defense. Svechin, like Trotsky, believed that every operation was comprised of both types of combat, but he also characterized the strategic defense as the culmination of a series of what he termed "negative aims" (defensive actions).

We don't agree with the assertion that each delay on the military front must impede the side pursuing positive aims. A politically offensive aim can be connected with the strategic defense; the struggle goes on simultaneously on economic and political fronts, and if time works in our favor—that is, the pluses and minuses balance out in our favor—then the armed front . . . can gradually attain an advantageous change in the correlation of forces. . . . Strategic defense, which is formed from several operations with a negative goal, can generally pursue a positive final goal The pursuit of negative aims, that is, the struggle for self-preservation (*sokhranenie*) . . . requires a smaller expenditure of force and means than the pursuit of positive aims, that is, seizure and movement forward.²⁴

Perhaps the single most objectionable aspect of the strategic defense, especially in the view of Svechin's critics, was the possibility of losing friendly territory in the course of such an operation. Svechin found the requirements of the strategic offense more daunting, however, because the objectives were undefined and because strategic offense also required a constant flow of new troops, operating far from their home bases.

The third dichotomy discussed by Svechin was position and maneuver. When both sides pursued positive aims, then a war of maneuver or "meeting engagement" would occur, as during the Russian civil war between 1918 and 1920. If both sides seek negative aims, however, positional war will usually occur and casualties will be substantially reduced.

When both sides pursue negative aims, positional lulls prevail. Casualties and force expenditures at the front decline, which creates favorable conditions for the further mobilization of echelons. Therefore, if the preparation of both sides is insufficient, and in particular if material reserves are poorly prepared, it is likely that a positional war will occur.²⁵

²³*Ibid.*, p. 264.

²⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 267-268.

²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 274-275.

SVECHIN COMES UNDER ATTACK

Svechin's erudite, balanced, and insightful work, *Strategiia*, which was hailed initially and used by the professors of the General Staff Academy for several years, came under attack in the late 1920s and early 1930s, as ideas about the primacy of the offense gained the upper hand in military circles.²⁶ This attack appears to have coincided with Stalin's all-out offensive against "bourgeois specialists" in all fields, ranging from industrial engineers to college professors. In 1931, however, Stalin ended his onslaught on most of the "bourgeois specialists" (also referred to as the "old technical intelligentsia") when he realized that their talents could best be used in helping promote industrialization. Why this logic did not apply to the military is unclear. One possible explanation is that Stalin's dependence upon the military to help him carry out collectivization may have caused him to insist upon complete allegiance to his methods by all military personnel.²⁷ Moreover, Stalin's rise to power was predicated on the idea of the external threat to socialism and the importance of industrialization as a means of making the Soviet Union self-sufficient and secure in order to protect the society from "capitalist encirclement." Hence, any favorable reference to bourgeois military thought or any skepticism about the capabilities of the Soviet economy to meet its country's defense needs was severely reprimanded. Svechin's works were attacked on both scores.

Tukhachevsky led off the series of assaults on Svechin in 1931, calling him everything from an agent of "imperialist intervention" trying to sabotage the Red Army's technological development to a "right opportunist" and "enemy of the people."²⁸ He accused Svechin not only of abandoning Marxist principles, but also of writing *Strategiia* as a means of protecting the capitalist system from a Soviet attack.

Perhaps most biting were the attacks by Tukhachevsky and other critics on Svechin's realistic and practical appraisals of the state of the Soviet civilian and defense economy at that time. Svechin's sober assessments contrasted sharply with his opponents' politically savvy but highly exaggerated estimates of the "colossal" fruits of industrialization which, they asserted, were making it possible to plan for a war of destruction.

²⁶Soon after *Strategiia* was released in 1926, it received a favorable review in *Voennyi Vestnik* for its discussion of an attrition war as a "counterweight" to decisive operations. See the book review section of *VV*, no. 1, 1926, pp. 58-60.

²⁷This offensive against specialists ranging from educators to engineers trained in the Tsarist system lasted about three years, 1929-1931, according to the work of Sheila Fitzpatrick and Kendall Bailes. Stalin delivered a speech rehabilitating the "old technical intelligentsia" on 23 June 1931. The offensive against the military specialists, however, appears to have lasted longer.

²⁸M. N. Tukhachevsky, "O strategicheskikh vzgliadakh prof. Svechina," *Protiv reaktsionnykh teorii na voenno-nauchnom fronte* (hereinafter, *Protiv*), Komakademii pri TsIK SSSR, Gosvoenizdat, Moscow, 1931. It should be noted that anyone who was not in agreement with Stalin was branded a "right opportunist" at this time.

If we take a step back and look at the production figures of the first five-year plan (1928–1933), we discover that Svechin had a firmer grasp on reality than did Tukhachevsky. It is commonly held that heavy industrial production did not begin to make headway until the second five-year plan in the mid-1930s and that until then, the Soviet Union was importing heavy machinery from abroad.²⁹ This view is corroborated by former Imperial Army officer Nikolai Golovin, who expressed skepticism about the promises of the first five-year plan and described the technical equipment of the country and army in 1928 as barely meeting prewar levels.

The backwardness of the country's technology is certainly reflected in the comparatively weak technical equipment of the Red Army. The weakest areas are heavy metallurgy, motor building, auto industry, chemical industry, and nonferrous metallurgy. With regard to transportation, especially railroads, the issue is not so much in how to develop it, as in how to maintain it at its prewar level.³⁰

Golovin also referred to the "embryonic stage" of the air and auto industries and the "catastrophic state" of the Soviet chemical industry about which many "fantastic rumors" were being falsely spread.³¹ Thus, he did not leave the impression that the Soviet Union would be ready to launch a war of destruction in the late 1920s. In fact, Golovin's views of the state of the economy square with the available statistics on industrialization, including many of the official ones. Hence, the optimism expressed by Tukhachevsky and others in 1931 appears to have been premature and unfounded, but in keeping with Stalin's requirements for glowing appraisals of the "great transformation."

Finally, and perhaps most slanderous of all, were attacks on Svechin by Bocharov, who accused him of failing to tie the development of military art to the growth of productive forces.³² This charge was outlandish, if we consider that Svechin stressed the importance of the nation's economic base above all else, maintaining that the choice of strategy—be it one of attrition or destruction—was contingent on the state of one's economic might. Bocharov's attacks were not only completely unfounded; they were wrong. It appears that Bocharov wanted to illustrate Svechin's lack of appreciation and enthusiasm for the gains of the five-year plan which, as mentioned above, were not impressive in 1931.

²⁹See, among other works on the Soviet economy, A. Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR*, Penguin Books, Inc., 1982.

³⁰This material is drawn from N. N. Golovin's unpublished papers held at the Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University. It appears that this work was written in 1928 or 1929.

³¹*Ibid.*, pp. 12–13. Golovin lamented that Poland had more cars than the Soviet Union and that the USSR occupied the last place in the world regarding chemical production.

³²K. Bocharov, "Kritika voenno-istoricheskikh vzgliadov prof. Svechina," *Protiv*, p. 41. (See note 28 above.)

III. DEBATES ON INFANTRY REORGANIZATION

Among the most contentious and protracted debates of the 1920s were those concerning the reorganization of the infantry. In contrast to Trotsky's and Svechin's more lofty exchanges about the offense and defense, concerns about the composition of the new infantry company, including nuts-and-bolts issues such as how many machine guns to allocate each platoon, were fiercely debated. The motives for this debate appear to have included widely disseminated changes in French and German infantry organization and new battlefield technologies. In the aftermath of the civil war there was also a heightened concern to achieve mobility and maneuver without compromising firepower.

Although most military figures favored a shift from linear to more mobile and independent combat configurations, they also doubted that the country's nascent industrial base could provide the army with the weapons needed to put these new tactics into practice. A few officers continued to insist that the Red Army must rely first and foremost on its superior morale and able-bodied troops to carry it through future battles.¹

Among proponents of the reorganization, there was a split between those who wanted to retain the Maxim machine gun (*stankovoi pulemet*) and include it in the infantry platoons and those who wanted to replace it with light machine guns (*legkii pulemet*) in the platoons and, at the very most, create a separate platoon composed entirely of the Maxims. This boiled down to a debate over firepower and mobility. The Maxim machine gun required a platform for firing and its weight was an impediment to high-speed operations.² The light machine gun, on the other hand, offered much more mobility. In the end, the Maxim gun was retained in platoons.

ORIGINS OF THE INFANTRY REORGANIZATION

In the aftermath of WWI and the civil war, the Soviet military appears to have spent enormous time and resources on the translation of French and German field manuals into Russian. The extensive citations of foreign works in Soviet articles coupled with the large number of book reviews contained in each journal leaves little doubt that many members of the military looked abroad for insights and ideas.³ With respect to the infantry

¹One of the most fervent believers in the decisiveness of troop spirit and morale was B. Feldman, "Dve taktiki," *VV*, no. 24, 1924.

²In WWI and during the civil war, the Maxim was mounted on a horsedrawn carriage (*tachanka*).

³According to one catalogue of Soviet military literature published between 1921-1930, roughly one quarter to one third of the works were translations of German and French, and to a lesser extent, English and Polish manuals and books. See Roginsky and Shleming, *Katalog Voennoi Literatury*, Biblioteki tsen. doma krasnoi armii imeni Frunze, Moscow, 1931.

reorganization, the scrutiny of foreign field manuals by Soviet officers suggests that the Red Army officers were less inclined to set combat trends than to follow them.⁴ Citing a German artillery field manual, one author noted:

It is clear that new weaponry influences infantry tactics and company and regiment organization. And actually, beginning in France and then Poland, the infantry company was reorganized and it appears that the formula for future infantry tactics may be "to completely paralyze" the enemy's infantry defense and take the remaining troops hostage.⁵

The author goes on to describe at length the features of French, German, and English offensive and defensive infantry actions. However, the idea of the infantry assuming the predominant role within the army was not embraced by members of the cavalry and artillery.⁶ Nor did they relish the idea of all arms being on equal footing. For example, one German work by V. Balk, *Die Entwicklung der Taktik im Weltkrieg* (1920), stressed that there was no longer a single dominant combat arm.⁷ In light of the lethality of new weapons introduced in the course of World War I, all combat arms of the future would be expected to perform similar missions in order to enhance survivability.

Virtually all of the military contributors to the journal cited the profound influence of new weapons on war preparations and infantry reorganization.⁸ There were exceptions, however. An interesting exchange took place between Svechin and Akhov⁹ as to whether technology should drive tactics or the reverse. Svechin maintained that technology should serve the consumer, who in this case was the soldier, as only he could determine what his battlefield needs were.

Technology must not march forward, but be a slave of the consumer. The inventor or specialist is only a salesclerk offering his goods to the consumer.

⁴A. A. Svechin was highly critical of the Red Army's proclivity to borrow French and German military theories without due regard for the Soviet Union's needs, calling the army a "tactical parasite." He scorned the army's failures to draw lessons from its own participation in wars, especially the Russo-Japanese War, claiming, "Indeed our tactical history has been dramatic in the past twenty years; we study the Manchurian experience using German translations, we reject independent tactical thinking, we have lost the capacity for original thought. . . ." See "Bezmol'vnyi front," *VV*, no. 6, 1924.

⁵V. Nikolaev, "Na puti k novoi taktike pekhoty," *Voennaia mysl i revoliutsiia*, book 4, 1922.

⁶There was, in fact, a very bitter debate about the role of the cavalry on the future and highly mechanized battlefield. Many wanted to retain the cavalry for specific missions, such as exploitation, while others believed it should perform the same missions as the infantry. See P. Levandovsky, "Mashinizatitsiia konnitsy i bovoi kon'," *VV*, no. 6, 1924.

⁷A. Verkovsky reviewed this book by V. Balk in *VV*, no. 8, 1921, p. 22.

⁸See for example, S. Mikheev, "Boi pekhoty," *VV*, no. 2, 1923, pp. 14-15; A.N. Suvorov, "O novoi i staroi rote," *VV*, no. 3, 1923, pp. 5-7; and A. Verkhovsky "Novoe v taktike pekhoty," *VV*, no. 4, 1923, p. 12.

⁹The author has been unable to find any biographical information about Akhov. Even his initials are lacking in the articles themselves.

The tactical apparatus only fulfills the function of the merchant, soliciting the needs, tastes, and views of the consumer.¹⁰

In response, Akhov criticized Svechin's poor knowledge of the fundamentals of political economy and proceeded to argue that the inventors of new technologies create their own markets, irrespective of military requirements.

[The market] certainly no longer functions as in the Middle Ages when handicrafts were traded . . . Contemporary industry creates its own consumer, organizes the market, and draws the consumer into its progress. Contemporary industry is active and not passive in its relations with the market; an illiterate peasant can hardly be an effective dictator of the market.¹¹

While Akhov did not deny that the infantry and artillery troops' battlefield experience had some impact on the types of weapons and equipment produced, he insisted that the technical specialist who invented new technologies or the academic who developed innovative tactical methods was equally if not more important. He pointed out that the soldier cannot identify all of his combat needs and must rely on detailed instructions and assistance from above. Secondly and more importantly, he added, Svechin failed to realize that the ultimate goal is not the satisfaction of the consumer-soldier, but the achievement of victory. In closing, Akhov noted, "it's a good thing that Svechin's advice is not heeded by anyone. This would lead to the complete paralysis of military affairs."¹²

Svechin believed in innovative means of employing forces¹³ but his traditional view was that defense industrialization would have a negative effect on the formation of military art.¹⁴ It appears that his intention in the above-mentioned article was to underscore the importance of the connection between the soldier and his weapons to ensure that they are closely interwoven in the development process.

A. Verkhovskiy also understood the importance of new weapons for tactical development, but viewed this as only one of many elements—along with the quality of troops, the external and internal situation at hand, the time of year and weather, and lessons of past and present wars—that affect tactics.¹⁵ All things considered, the majority of Red Army officers believed that more lethal weapons mandated changes in tactics and unit organization

¹⁰A. A. Svechin, "Potrebitel' taktiki," *VV*, no. 16, 1924.

¹¹Akhov, "Oshibki ostroumiia," *VV*, no. 20, 1924, pp. 20–21.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³For example, Svechin suggested using howitzers to deliver chemical weapons. See "Chernyi krest," *VV*, no. 1, 1924, p. 21.

¹⁴A. Svechin, *Vestnik militsionnoi armii* no. 4–5, 1921.

¹⁵A. Verkhovskiy, "Vliianie usovershenstvovaniia oruzhiia na taktiku," *VV*, no. 7, 1924.

to provide for more flexibility and maneuverability. To effect these changes, a series of orders were issued in the early 1920s that sparked substantial debate.

ORDER NO. 28

Much of the discussion of infantry reorganization was inspired by the Red Army's issuance in the spring of 1922 of Order No. 28, which concerned the creation of new mechanized companies consisting of six light machine guns per rifle regiment. This "new company" was officially called a "model company" (*pokaznaia rota*). Those who questioned the capability of the Red Army to equip these new companies with automatic weapons called for a "practical company" (*real'naia rota*). This topic was opened for public discussion in July 1924 by the committee on the readiness of RKKA.¹⁶

With respect to the automation of the infantry company, two enthusiasts, Vlasov and Modenov, expressed support for the concept but complained about the shortage of field manuals and the lack of clarity surrounding the order. They noted that while it sounded good in theory, practical ways of implementing it were lacking.¹⁷

Our units and commanders are experiencing great difficulties with the new organization. According to our sources, in some units, matters with the model company have reached a standstill, thanks to the lack of knowledge about where to start [and] how to approach it. There's nothing surprising about this. Only dry instructions have been provided to units . . .¹⁸

S. S. Kamenev responded to their concerns about moving from theory to practice, by noting the difficulty of putting ideas into practice and of coping with the conservatism of some of the command staff members.¹⁹

One of the most critical articles on the new company, written by A. Karpun, noted the contradiction involved in trying to develop new and complicated infantry tactics while at the same time relying on a scaled back territorial-militia system without adequate numbers of weapons. Sounding very much like Feldman, Karpun looked to troop morale to overcome the shortage of weapons and personnel.

...[A] fact is a fact: neither did [H.G.] Wells in his novels, nor do we have large numbers of submachine guns, machine guns, tanks, gases, airplanes—but our enemy does. We can counter all of this with two important factors: (1) morale—

¹⁶I. Berkhin, *Voennaia reforma v SSSR (1924–1925)*, Voenizdat, Moscow, 1958.

¹⁷Vlasov, "Teoriia i praktika," *VV*, no. 5, 1923; and Modenov, "Deviat' voprosov," *VV*, no. 11, 1923.

¹⁸Vlasov, "Teoriia i praktika," pp. 11–12.

¹⁹S. S. Kamenev, "Voobrazhaemyi 'trudnosti'," *VV*, no. 13, 1923, pp. 12–14.

that is, inspiring the masses, agitation, intensifying the class struggle, the moral decay of the enemy rear, . . . and (2) personnel.²⁰

In 1924, the debate about the infantry shifted from generalities to particulars. The composition of the infantry company and the inclusion of Maxim machine guns in the platoons became a hotly debated topic. Tukhachevsky and M. Mirsky were two of the most fervent supporters of the heavy machine gun, while A. I. Egorov and I. P. Ubovich²¹ tended to question its relevance on the contemporary battlefield.

According to Tukhachevsky, Maxim machine guns had historically been capable of supporting the infantry by firing over their heads. Thus, the machine gun "doctrinairism" of some officers (i.e., those who opposed it), he noted, caused him tremendous vexation because the Maxim gun was the most powerful infantry weapon in the Soviet arsenal and was therefore indispensable for strengthening the firepower of infantry platoons.

Isn't the idea that Maxim machine guns will weaken instead of strengthen the platoon absurd? . . . The common sense of the Command Staff must stifle these dangerous ideas and start the machine guns moving forward in units (presumably, mounted on trucks) instead of just lounging in the rear.²²

Mirskii pointed out, in support of the Maxim gun, that creating a separate unit for them outside of the platoon would shift the center of gravity to the company and thus cause the platoon to lose some of its independence. This he saw as a step backward.²³

In response to Tukhachevsky's article, former Imperial Army Lieutenant Colonel A. I. Egorov wrote a rebuttal entitled "Platform or Common Sense" in the editorial section of the *Voennyi Vestnik*. Noting that the whole debate had been surrounded by confusion, Egorov criticized Tukhachevsky for advocating the employment of the heavy machine gun on the battlefield in general, because it was vulnerable to attack. In attempting to set the record straight, Egorov discussed four principles of infantry organization that needed to be considered when deciding to use the Maxim: the ease with which the units having the guns could be administered and controlled, the flexibility of organizational forms, the independence of units, and the correlation of all these factors with the material resources of the army. Because of the Maxim's poor mobility, Egorov recommended that they be used

²⁰A. Karpun, "Nado podumat'," *VV*, no. 2, 1924, pp. 55-56.

²¹A. I. Ubovich was one of the few Red Army officers reportedly studying German tactics at the Truppenamt via secret military arrangements between Germany and the Soviet Union in the 1920s in circumvention of the Treaty of Versailles.

²²M. Tukhachevsky, "Mashinizatsiia pekhoty," *VV*, no. 29, 1924, p. 7.

²³M. Mirsky, "Kakoi dolzhna byt' organizatsiia pekhoty," *VV*, no. 30, 1924, p. 8.

only as a last resort.²⁴ He blamed Order No. 28 for leading officers to believe that the army had or would soon have the resources with which to truly mechanize the companies—which was clearly not the case in 1924. According to Egorov, “It would be extremely unwise to organize the infantry without evaluating our arsenals and industrial capacity. Such a flagrant error was made during the introduction of the ‘rifle company’ and we must not repeat it.”²⁵

One of the most thoughtful appraisals of the “Maxim” issue was presented by I. P. Uborevich in the same issue of *Voennyi vestnik*.

Without a doubt, Maxim machine guns that reach the close battle render the most material and morale support, especially in the conditions of surprise and massing of fire. Hence, it is advisable that Maxim guns always belong to the infantry companies. . . . In light of shortages of light machine guns, we absolutely must include Maxims.²⁶

But while the heavy machine guns were more abundant, Uborevich noted, there were many drawbacks associated with them from an organizational standpoint: they were awkward, heavy, virtually immobile, and unable to perform in difficult terrain and weather. In these respects, the Maxim impeded the infantry company's advance. Uborevich also advocated, like Egorov, the creation of a separate platoon of heavy machine guns that could assist the rifle/light machine gun platoons when needed without slowing them down.

Tukhachevsky's idea of keeping the heavy machine guns included in the rifle platoons along with light ones ultimately prevailed. Perhaps the most compelling reason was, as all authors noted, the shortage of light weapons and the inability to produce them in any quantity in the near term. Foreign influence invariably also played a role—Maxim guns were still included in German and French units. Frunze eventually agreed, and these changes were codified in Order No. 1298/203 of 7 October 1924.²⁷ The immobility associated with the Maxim seemed to indicate a willingness to sacrifice some mobility for firepower. But it must be remembered that the introduction of tanks and personnel carriers was not far off, so that the heavy guns could be mounted. This combination of fire and maneuver would facilitate not only offensive actions, but active defenses as well.

²⁴A. I. Egorov, “Platforma ili zdravyi smysl,” *VV*, no. 34, 1924, p. 45. G.D. Khakhanian supports Egorov's position suggesting, moreover, that heavy machine guns should form their own unit separate from the platoon. See “Eshche o real'noirote,” *VV*, no. 31, 1924, pp. 54–56.

²⁵Egorov, “Platforma,” p. 45.

²⁶I. P. Uborevich, “O reorganizatsii nashei pekhoty,” *VV*, no. 34, 1924, p. 50.

²⁷Berkhin, *Voennaia reforma*, p. 190.

IV. DEFENSIVE TACTICS AND STRATEGY

In the early 1920s, there was no consensus that the offense was the predominant or more desirable form of combat in an operational or tactical sense. Even Mikhail Tukhachevsky, who often emphasized the importance of the offense in the 1920s, did not exclude the possibility of and the necessity to prepare for defensive operations in a future war.¹ Throughout most of the decade, however, it appears that there was a very evenhanded approach to the offense and defense and a strong belief that both were indispensable for combat victory.

One possible reason for the absence of any clear preference for the offense over the defense was the belief, as expressed by some officers, that the offense and defense were "closely intertwined." Quoting Clausewitz, S. S. Kamenev took issue with his strict delineation of the offense and defense, noting as did Trotsky that such a distinction was now meaningless.

Nowadays, with mass armies and their indecipherable fronts, it is difficult and even impossible to imagine the offense and defense in their pure form. . . . Contemporary war is the combination of the offense and defense: the defense on one axis supports the offense on another and vice versa.²

Contrasting views of the offensive-oriented Schlieffen Plan of World War I also provide insight into the military's offense-defense sentiment in the early 1920s. N. Kakurin wrote that in the wake of the Russo-Japanese war, which was a disaster for the Russians for a variety of reasons, the Schlieffen Plan to envelop the enemy's flanks and attack him with a "big fist" grew popular in military circles.³ But in fact, Kakurin argued, the theory was deceptive. When fronts were extended, encirclement would not work and would only result in a waste of time and resources. This happened, he noted, during the fateful campaign in Poland in 1920 led by Tukhachevsky.

Indeed, in order to recreate Cannae, one condition must be met: the enemy must be as anxious as we to fight . . . because if the will to fight is missing, despite the situation and common sense, then the realization of Cannae-strategy on extended fronts will not succeed and will only lead to a waste of time and to the use of our forces on unfavorable axes: the enemy will always manage

¹M. N. Tukhachevsky, "Voina kak problema vooruzhennoi bor'by," in *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 2, Moscow, 1964, pp. 15-17.

²S. S. Kamenev, foreword to Clausewitz' work, "Studies on War," VV, no. 9, p. 53.

³N. Kakurin, "Kanny v usloviakh rastianutykh frontov," VV, no. 12, 1924, p. 10. For sharp criticism of the Russian combat performance in the Russo-Japanese war, see A. Neznamov, "Nepovorotlivost'," VV, no. 20, 1925, pp. 12-13.

to escape from an envelopment and will hardly wait for us to tighten our claws around him.⁴

A more favorable review of the Schlieffen Plan is found in a review by *voenspets* (military specialist) A. N. Suvorov of a book by Hans Ritter on the lessons of WWI,⁵ which noted that if Schlieffen had been alive he would have concentrated all of his troops on one axis through Belgium as originally planned. Although the plan was not carried out as designed, the idea of surprise and war of destruction were right on the mark. But while one gets the impression from this review that Ritter was offensively minded, his other writings paid homage to the defense. Ritter saw four aspects of the strategic defense: defense with the aim of holding the enemy's offensive; withdrawal into the rear to one's auxilliary resources; exploitation of natural barriers against the enemy's offensive; and careful observation of the enemy's offensive movements followed by an all-out counterattack against the enemy's weak spots.⁶

The author and reviewer agreed that time (to detect the enemy's advance axes) and political sympathies tend to lie with the defender. They also agreed that lengthy stays in one place—such as in trenches—could have a harmful effect on the soldier's morale and combat readiness. Therefore, a defense must be active and vigilant about seizing propitious moments to launch counteroffensives against enemy weak points. A similar view was held by N. Stoliarov who insisted that a "passive" defense would lead nowhere and therefore a counterattack must be launched against the enemy as soon as his offensive shows signs of weakening.⁷

Former Imperial officer S. Pugachev gave one of the most interesting and piquant commentaries on this issue when he attacked the army historically for lacking a clear conception of defensive operations. In both the civil war and WWI, he maintained, the defense was nonexistent. The only two forms of combat undertaken were the offense and the retreat.⁸ The retreat, he noted, was particularly harmful to troop spirit because the destruction of rail and road nets by the enemy would make it very difficult to counterattack.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵A. Suvorov, "Po povodu odnoi knigi" (K. Ritter, *Kritika mirovoi voiny: nasledstvo Mol'tke i Shliffena v mirovoi knigi*," translated from the German, Voenizdat, 1923), in *VV*, no. 10, 1924, pp. 35-42.

⁶G. I. Teodori reviewed an article in the military journal *Voina i mir*, no. 10, Berlin, 1923, which appeared in *VV*, no. 6, 1924, p. 58.

⁷N. Stoliarov, "Oboronitel'nyi boi," *VV*, no. 34, 1923, p. 28.

⁸S. Pugachev, "Obuchenie oborone," *VV*, no. 45, 1925.

If the command staff had organized defensive movements, the chances for counterattack would have been greatly increased.⁹

The offensive tendencies of our command staff are praiseworthy, but they are not always appropriate for the situation. Focusing attention on the training of troops for defensive operations does not mean preparing them for positional war; rather, we must answer every attack with an attack and if possible even preempt the enemy's attack. Yet, along with this, certain sectors of the front will need to be firmly defended.¹⁰

Pugachev faulted the training of commanders for ignoring the defense and overemphasizing the offense. He criticized the commanders for, among other things, attempting to solve all missions with the offensive, even ones of a defensive nature; insufficiently evaluating the terrain and other natural barriers; mistakenly viewing the psychology of the defense; misallocating the numbers of troops on all fronts; conducting the offense without sufficient reconnaissance or artillery support; and viewing the defense as hopeless and unable to succeed.

Many articles were also written that took for granted the integral role of the defense and concentrated on the new changes in defensive organization brought about by new weapons and tactics. Spacing troops for defensive operations, as well as trench warfare, appeared to be major concerns at this time.

According to Soviet writings, the defense consisted of three major zones: security, main resistance, and reserves. The structure, strength, size, and placement of these zones were discussed in detail. Thus, for example, citing a recently released document entitled "The Combat Service of the Infantry," Tukhareli challenged many of the conclusions drawn therein, especially those concerning the size of the security zone and the inclusion of artillery in this zone.¹¹

Referring to French and German field manuals wherein security was located four to eight kilometers from the main resistance, Tukhareli believed the Soviet document placed the troops within dangerous reach of enemy artillery at one and one-half kilometers. He also called for at least two to three companies to be sent into the security zone to blunt an enemy offensive, instead of only one or two, as earlier Soviet writings suggested.

⁹According to other authors, even the retreat was not performed properly and should be given more attention because "the retreat in all armies always was and always will be performed." See Fabritsius and Yershov, "Eshche ob organizatsii otstupleniia," *VV*, no. 5, 1925, pp. 19-21.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹¹G. Tukhareli, "Polosa okhraneniia," *VV*, no. 30, 1925, pp. 47-51. On the organization of the combat security zone in addition to the main security zone, see N. Stoliarov, "Polosa boevogo okhraneniia," *VV*, no. 7, 1924.

A scathing rebuttal to Tukhareli's article appeared in a later issue of *Voennyi vestnik*, firmly defending the "Combat Service of the Infantry" training document¹² and accusing the author of basing some of his conclusions on the old infantry document and failing to account for later changes.¹³ For example, Shepel' noted that the infantry reconnaissance would travel well ahead of the sentry zone by three to four kilometers and that the main resistance would be located some three to four kilometers from the security zone. Hence, the spacing would resemble that suggested by Tukhareli after all.

With respect to the counterattack, Varin took issue with the Red Army's practice in past wars of merely "plugging up" holes in the defense with fresh forces that were soon thereafter destroyed by enemy forces.¹⁴ Later, he and Neznamov advocated the launching of counterattacks from the rear against enemy flanks, provided adequate information and fire support were supplied to the counterattacking units and provided those units were not too far in the rear. Neznamov regarded the counterattack by larger reserves (battalions and regiments) as a "temporary offensive mission" for a given unit at a certain time and place.¹⁵ Neznamov also stressed the importance of developing several options of possible enemy advance routes ahead of time and establishing particular departure areas for friendly counterattacking troops.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this exchange is not the particulars of the reconnaissance and security zones of the company, but the seriousness with which these aspects of the defense were treated. Whereas several authors heretofore criticized the Red Army for lacking a conception of the defense, these articles illustrate otherwise. A rather well designed concept for the employment of troops in offensive and defensive postures emerges.¹⁶

¹²Berkhin, *Voennaia reforma*, p. 350. This was one of the first official manuals for training infantry, issued 11 April 1924. It served as temporary instructions until the publication of the infantry field manual in 1925.

¹³K. Shepel', "Boevoe okhranenie i razvedka pri oborone," *VV*, no. 47-48, 1925, pp. 71-75.

¹⁴S. Varin, "Otskoki Krasnoi Armii pri neudachakh," *VV*, no. 5-6, 1922; and "Kontr-manevr, kak protivodeistvie otkatam," *VV*, no. 8, 1922.

¹⁵A. Neznamov, "Kontr-ataka," *VV*, no. 18, 1925.

¹⁶For an elaboration of the steps of the defensive battle in the security zone, in the zone of main resistance, and in the counterattack and retreat, see N. Kotov, "Provedenie oboronitel'nogo boia," *VV*, no. 16, 1924.

V. ENTRENCHMENT AND FORTIFICATIONS IN THE OFFENSE AND DEFENSE

Another topic of heated and lengthy debate concerned the role of fortifications and entrenchment in a future war of maneuver. Were these concepts relevant to the offense and the defense or only to the latter? How should trenches be organized and manned? How much time should be allowed for digging trenches and camouflaging them? One of the earliest endorsements of fortifications cited low cost and good troop protection as the two main reasons for the army to continue using them. It also did not view the use of fortifications in the offense as incongruous.¹

To many, it now seems impossible to link the two concepts: fortification and maneuver war, fortification and the offense. But one must not forget that the offense consists of forces [introduced] successively. The intervals between them will require cover from enemy attacks. . . . Fortifications have a special advantage for the Red Army: unlike other types of military technology, fortifications don't cost the Republic anything: earth and logs, shovel and pick—these are the only materials needed.²

The most heated exchange over fortifications took place between L. Malevanov and G. Nevsky. Malevanov initiated the controversy with an article advocating the use of individual trenches (*individual'nye iamki*) during an offensive because they were the easiest kind of cover to construct in proximity (600 to 1,200 meters) to enemy lines. Malevanov also said that camouflage would not be needed in the case of the offense, only in the defense.³

Nevsky questioned the need for fortifications altogether—especially foxholes—in the offense. He pointed out that the company, which had already been reduced to smaller units to enhance survivability, need not and should not be reduced further, as this would complicate the control process. In his view, while entrenchment could be an option, it would always depend on the situation at hand. Terrain (*mestnoe zakrytie*) would be the preferred option for covering and camouflaging lighter weapons and dug-in positions for heavy artillery. Nevsky also charged Malevanov with underestimating the importance of camouflaging positions.

¹At this time, fortifications were an integral part of military art along with strategy and tactics. According to one definition, "Fortification is the science of artificial cover and barriers to strengthen the situation of forces in battle." It is not only a physical phenomenon, but also a political one. ". . . censorship is a barrier to attacks on the government by enemy parties." See E. Smyslovsky, "Voennaia nauka i voennoe iskusstvo," *Voennaia mysl i revoliutsiia*, book 3, 1922, pp. 16-17.

²M. Radolitsky, "Kak teper' ukrepliaut pozitsii," *VV*, no. 20, 1923, p. 12.

³L. Malevanov, "Fortifikatsiia v ognevykh rotakh pri uslovii manevrennoi voiny," *VV*, no. 25, 1923, pp. 18-21.

In a curious twist, Nevsky shortly thereafter called into question the role of fortifications and entrenchment in the *defense*. He cited the lessons of World War I to support his view that fortifications in general contradicted the tactics of the group battle as they would take too long to construct.⁴ Drawing on quotations from Nevsky's attacks on Malevanov, yet another party entered the debate in support of Malevanov in 1924. A. Kolmachevsky insisted that in spite of the "mechanization" of the infantry, shovels and foxholes would remain indispensable for combat.

It seems unlikely that if the soldiers find themselves caught in hours of artillery and machine gun fire, they will not think of their shovel and try to dig up the earth and hide behind a mound of it. As such, the shovel is necessary for the offense. Troops must be trained in digging in (self-entrenchment).⁵

In 1925, a resolution was adopted on the basis of a report delivered by the VNO⁶ Inspectorate of the RKKA entitled "Reinforcing Field Positions." This later became the official army regulations for contemporary field fortifications. Among the main provisions adopted were (1) the interrelationship between entrenchment and camouflage; (2) the importance to all commanders, including guard and engineer, of knowing the basic tactics and technologies of entrenchment, specifics about creating trenches and lines of communication with them, and other forms of protection including shelters and fire cover; and (3) the use of reserves.⁷

Thus, in spite of the tremendous trench-related casualties endured in WWI, many Red Army officers continued to believe that foxholes served a purpose in offensive and defensive operations, and would do so in the future. Owing to the severe shortages of weaponry in Soviet Russia at that time, using the earth—of which there was an abundance—for protection was an extremely attractive option.

An examination of these tactical-level debates which appeared in *Voennyi vestnik* in the middle to late 1920s illustrates that offensive and defensive combat actions were treated evenhandedly without undue emphasis on the offense. Although these particular articles do not appear to have been cited by the Soviet civilian and military scholars who are currently

⁴G. Nevskii, "Samookapyvaniie pri oborone," *VV*, no. 35, 1923. See also Nevsky, "Samookapyvanie pri nastuplenii," *VV*, no. 33, 1923. To these attacks Malevanov reasserts his position that entrenchment can take place in the offense in "Otvét tov. G. Nevskomy," *VV*, no. 39, 1923: "It is impossible for me to agree with the basic tenets of this article. Moreover, I protest fervently against the idea that fortifications are not applicable to the offense. . . ." He insists that the conduct of the offense without provision for entrenchment by natural or man-made means is suicide.

⁵A. Kolmachevsky, "Samookapyvanie pri nastuplenii," *VV*, no. 11, 1924, p. 44.

⁶VNO stands for Voenno-nauchnoe obshchestvo (Military-Scientific Society).

⁷A. Malevsky, "Ukreplenie polevykh pozitsii," *VV*, no. 5, 1925, pp. 16–19.

resurrecting the works of the 1920s and 1930s, they are further evidence of the degree to which military concepts were debated freely in military journals at that time.

VI. THE CONTEXT OF SVECHIN'S RESURRECTION TODAY

The resurrection in recent years of Svechin and other Soviet military theorists of the 1920s and early 1930s appears to have been both facilitated by the Warsaw Pact's promulgation of a "new" defensive military doctrine in 1987 and intended to help legitimate this new defensive-oriented doctrine since that time. Moreover, it appears that the revival of these controversial theorists is also a means of reintroducing debate and discussion to the Soviet military today.

THE BERLIN COMMUNIQUE: A BREAK WITH THE PAST

The spring 1987 announcement of a new Warsaw Pact military doctrine based on a concept of minimum deterrence or "defense sufficiency" was initially viewed in the West with circumspection. Soviet spokesmen described Warsaw Pact military doctrine as "defensive" and insisted that force would be used only in reply to a surprise attack by the West. But western observers commonly expected that in the event of hostilities Soviet-Warsaw Pact forces in Eastern Europe would launch an all-out counteroffensive and immediately assume an offensive posture, penetrating deep into NATO territory as rapidly as possible with the aid of airborne assaults and special high-speed mobile groups and forward detachments. Indeed, since WWII, Soviet military forces have emphasized, equipped, and practiced for highly mobile, offensive-oriented operations. Thus, in light of these exercises and the ponderous Warsaw Pact arsenal amassed on the Central Front, the "defensive nature" of Warsaw Pact doctrine was not taken very seriously by western defense analysts.

However, in the wake of the dramatic democratic movements in "Eastern" (Central) Europe in 1989, the unification of Germany in 1990, and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact as a military entity, coupled with the enactment or prospect of serious arms control treaties removing intermediate-range nuclear and conventional forces from Central Europe, the discussions of "reasonable sufficiency" and "defensive defense" began to gain merit. Soviet Defense Minister Dmitri Yazov wrote in *Kommunist* that the contradiction between the political and military-technical aspects of Soviet military doctrine of the past—wherein the political side was defensive but the military-technical side was offensive—had, with the issuance of the Berlin communique, been removed. Now Soviet military requirements would be reduced considerably and only enough force "sufficient for the defense" would be retained.¹

¹D. Yazov, "Novaia model' bezopasnosti i vooruzhennye sily," *Kommunist*, no. 18, December 1989. For the Minister of Defense to admit that the military-technical side of its doctrine had been offensive at all was a clear departure from past insistence on its defensive nature.

These remarks by the defense minister represented a clear departure from past insistence on the defensiveness of all aspects of Soviet military doctrine.

The Soviet conception of this new defensive doctrine has remained a topic of considerable discussion by defense analysts. In the summer of 1988, however, some light was shed on this question with the publication of an article by Andrei Kokoshin of the Institute of the USA and Canada and Major-General Valentin Larionov, positing four variants of a defensive doctrine, ranging from an active defense to a passive one.² This publication in turn generated debate among western defense analysts as to the relevance of these models or "variants" to the reformulation of Soviet military doctrine currently under way. While this question has not been completely resolved, the Kokoshin and Larionov schema represented a serious examination of defensive military approaches for the Central Front.

THE REVIVAL OF SVECHIN AND TROTSKY

After the proclamation of the Berlin Communique, Soviet civilian and military writers began to pay new attention to the Soviet military theorists of the 1920s and 1930s, and especially to the ideas of Alexander Svechin.³ Recent articles have touched on several aspects of Svechin's works, including the importance of a country's economic status in formulating its military doctrine, the subordination of military activities to political decisions, and the significance of the strategic defense for Red Army doctrine.

Thus, for example, in a lengthy article, the current deputy head of the Institute of USA and Canada, Andrei Kokoshin, recently hailed Svechin's contributions to Soviet military thought. Referring to *Strategiia*, Kokoshin noted, "[The work's] achievement lies in treating strategy as closely connected with the political and economic aspects of war and the social and cultural development of society. Demonstrating enormous historical erudition, the scholar [Svechin] persuasively showed that contemporary wars are conducted not only with military arms, but also with the political and economic forces of the warring sides."⁴

Svechin's espousal of limited military objectives also has received favorable comment from contemporary analysts; indeed, the idea appears to be the core of many of the Soviet

²A. Kokoshin and Major General V. Larionov, "Protivostoianiiia sil obshchego nazncheniia v kontekste obespecheniia strategicheskoi stabilnosti," *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia* (hereafter, MEiMO), no. 6, 1988. For a more detailed description of these four variants see the author's article, "Soviet Writers Begin to Clarify 'Defensive Defense'," *International Defense Review*, vol. 21, October 1988, p. 1244.

³See, in chronological order, A. Kokoshin, "A. A. Svechin o voine i politike," *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn'*, no. 3, 1988; General V. Lobov, "Aktual'nye voprosy razvitiia teorii sovetskoi voennoi strategii 20kh-serediny 30kh godov," *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, no. 2, 1989; and A. Kokoshin and V. Lobov, "Foresight (General Svechin on the Evolution of the Art of War)," *Znamia*, no. 2, 1990, translated in JPRS-UMS-90-009, 13 April 1990.

⁴A. Kokoshin, "A. A. Svechin o voine i politike," *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn'*, 1988, p. 134.

institutchikis' "new thinking" about war. According to one prolific Soviet researcher, Alexander Savelyev, war aims are now being redefined and objectives such as the "complete destruction of the enemy" based on deep thrusts into the enemy rear are no longer desirable or feasible.⁵ That is, the Soviet military will no longer seek to totally destroy the enemy and capture his territory. Sounding like Svechin, Savelyev advocated the adoption of a military posture by *both sides* that would permit only counterattacks and counteroffensives on friendly territory. This concept also corresponds to one of the force posture "variants" recently put forth by Kokoshin and Larionov, whereby counteroffensives and counterattacks take place on friendly territory and do not extend beyond one's borders.⁶

This appealing idea, of course, does not indicate how war would begin or what its objectives would be. In Svechin's day, before the advent of panzer armies—let alone split-second launch times and nuclear weapons—preemption and surprise attack were somewhat less important notions than today. Nonetheless, the suggestion that the Soviets are redefining their military-political objectives in war may have significant implications not only for Soviet military restructuring, but also for NATO's strategy and force posture. In any case, the link between Svechin's ideas and those of civilian analysts like Kokoshin and Savalyev seems readily apparent.

Although it has been primarily civilians who have revived Svechin's work, at least one prominent senior military officer has referred to him favorably as well. Writing in the *Military-Historical Journal*, General Lobov approvingly cites Svechin's observation that the "disrespect for the defense found in the Red Army is based on a misunderstanding of the dialectical link between the two (offense and defense): He who cannot defend (one axis) will not be in the condition to attack (on another)."⁷ Of course, in light of the technological leaps and political changes that have taken place since Svechin wrote in the 1920s, the direct relevance of his ideas to the current Soviet situation might seem questionable. But Lobov goes on to point out that, "without understanding the historical roots or the circumstances in which one or another theory was formulated . . . it [is] difficult to foresee its further development at the present time."⁸

Lobov also makes it clear that part of his purpose in writing about the 1920s and 1930s is to present documents to the public that were formerly off limits. Indeed, it may well

⁵Discussions with Alexander Savelyev at the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), Moscow, January 1989.

⁶See author's "Soviet Writers Begin to Clarify 'Defensive Defense'."

⁷Lobov, "Aktual'nye voprosy," p. 43.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 41.

be that these materials are now being published in the Soviet Union not only in an effort to legitimate new ideas about defensive force deployment by demonstrating their historical roots in earlier Soviet military thinking, but also to bring debate and open discussion back to the military institution—debate that had been conspicuously absent in the Soviet army since Stalin eliminated dissent and purged most of the officer corps in the late 1930s.⁹ Lobov refers several times to the “brave” convictions, “heated” military-theoretical discussions, and “free exchange of ideas” or “pluralism” which characterized the 1920s and 1930s. He writes:

Alongside the interesting scientific views of military theorists of that time is the *special significance which that level of democratization, scholarly competitiveness, and pluralism of opinion has for today*. These characteristics, which prevailed at that time, facilitated the expansion of military-strategic thought and the *appearance of true democratism in the development of Soviet military science*.¹⁰ [emphasis added]

Both Lobov and Kokoshin underscore the ultimately tragic consequences for the Soviet Union resulting from the “elimination of discussion” in the Red Army by Stalin. Had more attention been paid to military theorists like Svechin, so they write, many of the mistakes made at the outset and in the course of WWII could have been avoided. With “glasnost” now having entered military discussions, scholars are also able to review all WWII operations more critically, including the defensive ones. Until recently, as the authors point out, only the strategic offensive operations of the second half of WWII were fully open to discussion.¹¹

This emphasis on debate and innovative thinking is as much if not more characteristic of Trotsky's works as of Svechin's. Thus, the resurrection of this revolutionary figure is significant not only for the military establishment, but also for the foreign ministry and Communist Party in general—institutions in which Trotsky also held important offices. “New thinking” about foreign policy has been encouraged officially by Gorbachev at least since 1986, and new challenges to the communist party by the newly created Soviet parliament in the wake of “democratization” are testimony to the extent to which alternative ideas and ways of thinking have reentered Soviet politics. While the military may have been the last holdout of “bureaucratism” and “old thinking,” the developments in both discussion and in deed have demonstrated that it, too, is subject to “glasnost” and, consequently, to reform.

⁹The author thanks Rolf-Dieter Müller of the Military History Research Office in Freiburg, Germany for helpful discussions of the motivations behind Svechin's revival in the USSR.

¹⁰Lobov, “Aktual'nye voprosy,” p. 48.

¹¹Kokoshin and Lobov, “Foresight,” p. 23. Kokoshin and Larionov were among the first authors to examine defensive operations in a positive light. See their article, “Kurskaia bitva v svete sovremennoi oboronitel'noi doktriny,” *MEiMO*, no. 8, 1987.

VII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Many political and economic parallels may be observed between the condition of Soviet society today and that of the 1920s: the threat of war has receded; semi-capitalistic economic reforms have been implemented to help remedy a slow-growing, inefficient, and corrupted economy; and, perhaps most important, the leadership has recognized the overriding significance of a healthy economy for legitimacy at home and abroad and for political and military leverage. Gorbachev, like Lenin, has taken a very practical approach to problem solving and subordinated most issues to economics, including military matters.

In light of these trends, it is not surprising that Soviet researchers and military theorists should turn to the writings of former War Commissar Leon Trotsky, General Staff professor Alexander Svechin, and other prominent Red Army officers who firmly believed that military success was contingent on a society's "forces of production" in peacetime and in war and who questioned the preoccupation among some of their colleagues with offensive actions at the expense of defensive ones—a trend that gained momentum and has characterized Soviet military strategy for the past sixty-odd years.

Trotsky questioned the creation of a "Red" military doctrine altogether and viewed the application of "laws" to arising military situations harmful because they failed to consider the prevailing conditions of society, economy, and politics at a given time. He was also extremely scornful of the fascination among Red commanders with the civil war experience. In Trotsky's view, the Reds took lessons from the Whites in the first years of war and, moreover, the terrain and not Red Army "genius" facilitated maneuver and mobility.

He was also careful to distinguish between the defense and offense at political and operational levels—a feature of Soviet military doctrine that has persisted over time. The Peace of Brest-Litovsk was a "political-strategic" retreat which was necessary, in his view, in order to regain strength and eventually launch a counterattack. Operationally, he viewed the offense and defense as equally important to combat success and believed that the distinction between them was blurred in a maneuver war. Unfortunately, Trotsky failed to grasp the importance placed on the creation of a "new" and "revolutionary," offense-oriented doctrine for the Red Army by the Red commanders who sought to sever all ties with Imperial Army traditions.

Alexander Svechin, whose works have been resurrected in civilian and military circles today, was denounced in 1931 for emphasizing the equal importance of economic, political, and military factors in war planning and the suitability of the Soviet Union for a strategy of

attrition, as opposed to one of destruction. Svechin's ideas of limited objectives and the pursuit of negative (defensive) goals have become the preoccupation of some *institutchiki*. They claim that the operational side of Soviet doctrine is now defensive and that the intent to launch "crushing blows" against the enemy in an effort to defeat him totally is a thing of the past. Military writers, such as Lobov, have emphasized Svechin's contributions in underscoring the importance of strategic defense in particular and defensive operations in general.

In rehabilitating the work of Svechin and Trotsky—both punished for their dissenting ideas in the 1920s—Soviet scholars appear to be illustrating that the military, too, must tolerate and even embrace debate and discussion in its ranks in order to bring change and innovation to a formerly narrowminded and entrenched institution. "New thinking" has pervaded foreign and economic affairs, but only recently have theories of military reform begun to surface in the Soviet Union. In referring to the Soviets' own historical roots, ideas about defensive methods of force employment, for example, gain a certain amount of legitimacy. They demonstrate that new military concepts such as "reasonable sufficiency" have not been merely pulled out of thin air; rather, they have roots in the Soviets' own experience.

While the controversial writings of Trotsky and Svechin tended to be rather theoretical and intellectual, army officers were also disputing very practical matters concerning the offense and defense in a variety of journals. At this tactical-operational level, the offense and defense were treated much more evenhandedly. In the years 1921–1925, there was no noticeable decline in the number of articles on fortifications, trenches, and counterattacks vis-à-vis those on offensive maneuvers in *Voennyi vestnik*. Thus, the Soviets' renewed interest in the theories of the 1920s provides evidence that they may be seeking to reestablish a more balanced approach to the offense and defense, instead of allowing ideas about the primacy of the offense, so characteristic of Soviet doctrine in the past, to persist.