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<b>14. ABSTRACT</b> The Soviet theories of Operational Art, developed in the 1920s and 30s, provided a solid theoretical foundation for the Red Army with regards of organization, training, and concept of fighting. Stalin's purges in 1937 stalled the development and left the Red Army ill prepared to meet the German attack in 1941. After two years of strategic defense, the Soviets turned to a strategic offensive, aiming at the decisive defeat of Germany. The large summer offensive in 1944 was the largest and most decisive operation in the war. Operation BAGRATION was the centerpiece of five large interlinked operations with clear strategic objectives. A comparison of this operation with the theory of operational art from the 20s and 30s shows correlations. First, in the strategic imperative. Second, the design of the large summer offensive and Operation BAGRATION particularly resembles the core design of the Operational Art. Third, the role and use of mechanized and tank units in combined arms operations achieved what the theory promised. Fourth, the 1936 Field Regulation's (the institutionalizing of operational art) key features are clearly recognized in the operation. Fifth, the importance of quality commanders at the operational level was highlighted in theory and proved crucial in practical application. This provides a greater understanding of operational art and demonstrates the importance of theory for success in war.					
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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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**TITLE:**

OPERATIONAL ART IN THEORY AND WAR: A COMPARISON OF SOVIET THEORY  
AND THE RED ARMY'S CONDUCT IN OPERATION BAGRATION 1944

**AUTHOR:**

Major Terje Bruøygaard

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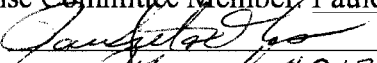
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: OPERATIONAL ART IN THEORY AND WAR: A COMPARISON OF SOVIET THEORY AND THE RED ARMY'S CONDUCT IN OPERATION BAGRATION 1944

Author: Major Terje Bruøygaard

Thesis: A comparison of Soviet theories of operational art, developed in the 1920s and 1930s, with the Red Army's conduct of Operation BAGRATION in 1944 shows to a large degree correlations.

Discussion: As a part of a new foundation for the newly established Soviet state in the early 1920s, the Red Army enjoyed a dynamic and innovative military-theoretical debate. This created an understanding of the Red Army as a provider for the nation and the socialist cause. The Soviets recognized that a future war would be fought for existential purposes, and that the future enemy would have to be decisively defeated. The best way of achieving this strategic objective was to take the war to the enemy. Furthermore the scale of the wars required linkage between successive operations, conducted simultaneously multiple places in depth and width of the theater to cause a collapse within the enemy. However well effective this concept seemed in 1937, the development stalled abruptly when Stalin initiated the purges of the officer corps, and the theory of operational art waned quickly. The disastrous eradication of qualified commanders at all levels left the Red Army ill prepared for the German attack on June 22 1941. The Red Army fought a strategic defense while preparing for an offense. In 1944 the large Belorussian campaigns marked the start of an offensive that would end in a decisive Soviet victory. Operation BAGRATION, the centerpiece of five interlinked operations in the summer of 1944, was the largest Soviet operation in the war, where in three weeks four fronts encircled and destroyed the German Army Group Center, arguably echoing the theories of operational art developed before, and abandoned after, the 1937 purges.

There are several correlations between the theory of operational art that was developed before the purges, and the conduct of operational art in operation BAGRATION. First, the strategic understanding that victory would require a total defeat of the enemy. Second, the larger design of the summer offensive and the design of Operation BAGRATION resemble the fundamental operational ideas from the theory. Third, the new means of warfare (mechanized and air forces) delivered what the theory promised. Fourth, the key features of the operationalized ideas and concepts in the 1936 Field Regulation, *PU-36*, are evident in the operation. Fifth, the operational commanders competence was important both in theory and performance of operational art.

Conclusion: A comparison of theory and praxis provides greater understanding of operational art. Operation BAGRATION validates the Soviet theory developed before the purges to a large degree, and although it does not provide the causation of the success, it offers understanding of the importance of having a sound military theory and operational art in peacetime in order to succeed and win wars in the future.

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## **PREFACE**

My interest in this subject started at the Norwegian Military Academy in 1996-98, where Professor Nils Marius Rekkedal lectured about Soviet operational art. His enthusiastic teaching, Norway's close proximity to the former Soviet Union, and the interest in operational art in western military thinking motivated me to read more, and in the fifteen years that has passed, I have gradually increased my knowledge. My attendance at the USMC Command and Staff College provided an opportunity to research further the relationship between the theory and practical conduct of operational art. As I do not speak Russian, I have utilized a number of translations and books from primarily English-speaking authors. However, the extensive bibliography reflects translations and analyzes from several experts and provides a sufficient breadth of sources.

Many people have helped me with this paper. Dr Mark Jacobsen has lent me translated Soviet literature from his personal collection. Professor Rekkedal has provided subject matter expertise through mail correspondence and provision of bibliography and selected writings. He has challenged my assessments during the writing process and helped increase my understanding of highly complex subjects. Dr Edward Erickson has been most helpful with academic guidance. The biggest challenge has been to narrowing the scope of the paper. Dr Erickson helped me find the gap I needed when I only saw the surfaces. I feel privileged to have received guidance and mentorship from these distinguished scholars, and I am forever thankful.

The magnitude of the Soviet theory and the Red Army operations in World War II has required a massive and time-consuming research. Needless to say, the time spent on this paper has required an understanding wife and family. Without their support, it would have been difficult to write this masters thesis.

## INTRODUCTION

Military history analyzes and explains wars in the past. Military theory, however, encompasses the thoughts, ideas, and concepts of how to fight and win future wars. Russian military thought at the beginning of the twentieth century merged with the revolutionary political ideas in the establishment of the Soviet Union. This created a dynamic, innovative, and broad military theoretical debate that forged Soviet strategy, doctrine, and operational art. Stalin's purges stalled this theoretical development, and contributed to the Red Army's poor performance in response to the German attack in 1941. The Soviets fought a long strategic defense before they, in 1944, assumed the strategic offensive and contributed massively to the allied victory. The last two years of the war demonstrated that the Soviets mastered the skills of linking several tactical battles and activities, over a large area in width and depth, to operational objectives aiming at the strategic goals.<sup>1</sup> The period of 1917-1945, with development of theory and war experience, served as a foundation for Soviet military thinking until the end of the Cold War.<sup>2</sup>

A comparison of Soviet theory of operational art with the Red Army's conduct of operations offers increased insight into a subject that remains a topic of considerable focus in military schools around the world. Operation BAGRATION, a large Red Army summer offensive in 1944, serves this purpose well because it marks a shift in the design and conduct towards deep successive operations at a large scale. The Red Army's performance in Operation BAGRATION correlates to a large extent with the pre-purge theory of operational art. Although it is not possible to prove causation, the correlations validate the theory of Soviet operational art specifically, and more than confirms the importance of military theory in general.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael D. Krause and Cody Phillips, *Historical Perspectives of the Operational Art* (Washington, DC: Center for Military History, United States Army, 2005), 484.

<sup>2</sup> Condoleezza Rice, "The Making of Soviet Strategy" in *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 674.

## MILITARY THEORY AND DOCTRINAL FRAMEWORK

Clausewitz extensively discussed the theory of war throughout his book *On War*, and said that the “primary purpose of any theory is to clarify concepts and ideas that have become...confused and entangled.”<sup>3</sup> The well-respected retired U.S. Army officer and historian Trevor Dupuy elaborated on this in his book *Understanding War*. He said a theory of combat is “The embodiment of a set of fundamental principles governing or explaining military combat, whose purpose is to provide a basis for the formulation of doctrine, and to assist military commanders and planners to engage successfully in combat at any level.”<sup>4</sup> Military theory, then, provides the necessary insight to operationalize ideas in a practical application for military forces through doctrine. Doctrine, according to Dupuy is the, “Combination of principles, policies, and concepts into an integrated system for the purpose of governing all components of a military force in combat, and assuring consistent, coordinated employment of these components... Doctrine represents the available thought on the employment of forces that has been adopted by an armed force.”<sup>5</sup>

Doctrine, however, does not speak to what ends military forces should be used for, but strategy does. Strategy, operations, and tactics are closely linked together. One way to understand the relationship is to view strategy as the use of campaigns and operations to achieve national objectives; operations as unified series of actions, battles, and campaigns to achieve intermediary goals in support of the strategic objective; and tactics as how to conduct the fight to win the battle.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 132.

<sup>4</sup> Col T.N.Dupuy, *Understanding War: History and Theory of Combat* (New York, NY: Paragon House Publishers, 1987), 79.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>6</sup> Krause and Phillips, *Historical Perspectives of the Operational Art*, vi.



According to Dr Milan Vego, Professor at the Naval War College and author of several military books and articles, “A new theory of war emerges as a result of a combination of drastic changes in the international security environment, diplomacy, domestic politics, ideology, economics, and revolutionary advances in technology.”<sup>7</sup> The Soviet Union experienced all of the above. Vladimir I. Lenin and the Bolsheviks fueled the idea of establishing a new socialist state with a solid ideological direction, also for the military. Lenin and his ideological comrades initiated analytical studies of the past wars and detailed analyses of possible future enemies. They believed that understanding war required an understanding of class struggle as its underlying cause. This included an understanding that as long as imperialism existed, war would be inevitable.<sup>8</sup> When victory in that war was achieved, this struggle was solved, and the possibility of continued war would then be eliminated.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Lenin stated that if the proletariat wanted to remain in power, it must prove this by its military power.<sup>10</sup>

Consequently, the Soviet Union created a new military to serve the new state. By a decree of 1918, the Workers and Peasants Red Army (Red Army) was directed to serve both internally against the overthrown landowners and bourgeoisie and externally against foreign aggression.<sup>11</sup> This ideological foundation inspired the dynamic and innovative military-theoretical debate that eventually would influence the development of Soviet doctrine until the end of the Cold War.

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<sup>7</sup> Milan Vego, “On Military Theory” *JFQ*, issue 62 (3<sup>rd</sup> quarter, 2011), 60.

<sup>8</sup> Rice, *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 661.

<sup>9</sup> Harriet Fast Scott and William F. Scott, eds. *The Soviet Art of War: Doctrine, Strategy, and Tactics* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1982), 24.

<sup>10</sup> S.A Tyushkevich, *The Soviet Armed Forces: A History of Their Organizational Development*, translated by CIS Multilingual Section Translation Bureau, Secretary of State Department, Ottawa, Canada. (Washington DC: United States Airforce, 1978), 7.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

## SOVIET STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT

One of the first strategic questions for the Soviet Union's new Red Army was whether it should be organized to defend the country on its own soil or to conduct offensive operations on enemy territory. Michael V. Frunze, a former Red Army commander in the Russian Civil War, and one of the founding fathers of Soviet military theory, said that question "...defines the entire nature of the organizational development of our armed forces, the nature of and system for training individual soldiers and major troop formations...."<sup>12</sup> Frunze's view was that the Soviet Union was encircled by capitalist countries, and even though a temporary peace was possible, he said "a parallel existence of our proletarian Soviet state with...the bourgeois world...is impossible."<sup>13</sup> Such a threat created a need for a scientific and methodological study of the future war. Frunze presented much of his views in a series of articles between 1921-1924.<sup>14</sup> He believed in a large citizen's army with strong ideology and equipped with new technology capable of conducting offensive decisive operations on the enemy's home ground. Frunze argued that these were the features of a socialist way of war, and that all the nation's powers should be incorporated to achieve the goals of the nation.<sup>15</sup> Frunze developed his views more detailed in the *Unified Military Doctrine*, pertaining themes as training, organization, and leadership. Most notable, though, is his assertion that maneuver, offensive, and activity are the essential elements in military operations.<sup>16</sup>

Frunze's main opponent was Leon Trotsky, a political theorist, orthodox Marxist, and founder of the Red Army. As the first Commissar of War, Trotsky represented a more traditional

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<sup>12</sup> Scott and Scott, *The Soviet Art of War: Doctrine, Strategy, and Tactics*, 29.

<sup>13</sup> Krause and Phillips, *Historical Perspectives of the Operational Art*, 229.

<sup>14</sup> David M. Glantz, *The Military Strategy of the Soviet Union: A History* (London, England: Frank Cass, 1992), 34.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

<sup>16</sup> David M. Glantz, *Soviet Military Operational Art: In Pursuit of Deep Battle* (London, England: Frank Cass, 1991), 65.

view and believed and argued for a small professional standing army, augmented by a large militia, primarily with a defensive stance. He believed that the scale and magnitude of the previous wars argued against the possibility of a short and decisive victory, and that the Soviet economy could not afford a military with the potential of achieving it. Hence, a war with the capitalist countries would be protracted and consist of a strategic defense and a mobilization of the society for war before a victory could be achieved. Moreover, Trotsky denounced Frunze's idea of doctrine, because it would turn into dogma and create a rigid military incapable of overcoming future challenges.<sup>17</sup>

Frunze's death in 1925 and Trotsky's gradual removal from influence set the stage for new and vigorous advocates. Mikhael Tukhachevsky, a successful commander in the Civil War and later Chief of the Red Army General Staff, became one of the most dominant contributors in the Soviet strategic debate.<sup>18</sup> Tukhachevsky followed Frunze's path towards a progressive and offensive theory. He experienced the power of ideology during the Russian Civil War, and strongly believed in an offensive strategy aiming at the total destruction of the enemy.<sup>19</sup> By using the economic conditions of the Soviet Union as evidence, he argued against Trotsky's views on the economy, and said that the Soviet Union could not afford a long and protracted war. Hence, it would be more efficient and economical to raise an army that was capable of rapidly destroying the enemy through an offensive strategy.<sup>20</sup>

Another commander from the Civil War, later to become professor in the General Staff Academy, Alexander Svechin, became one of Tukhachevsky's strongest opponents. He was a highly influential theorist and strategist who published extensively. In his book *Strategy* he

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<sup>17</sup> Richard W. Harrison, *The Russian Way of War: Operational Art, 1904-1940* (USA: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 124.

<sup>18</sup> Scott and Scott, *The Soviet Art of War: Doctrine, Strategy, and Tactics*, 44.

<sup>19</sup> Harrison, *The Russian Way of War: Operational Art, 1904-1940*, 138.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 131.

discussed the dualistic and ever changing character of military action by discussing the relationship between destruction and attrition, defense and offense, and maneuver and position.<sup>21</sup> Svechin argued that a strategy of destruction meant pursuing the physical destruction of the enemy as the only goal. Everything would have to be subordinated and focused to achieve that result. Battles, therefore, had to be successively won along a straight logical line of operations towards that one goal. Svechin believed that pursuing only a strategy of destruction would limit critical thinking and effective decision-making and create a one-dimensional inflexible conduct of war.<sup>22</sup> He recognized the fundamental uncertainty of war, and the almost infinite numbers of forms it could take, and therefore advocated a broader approach. A strategy of attrition, according to Svechin, could apply across the full range of military operations, from a conflict with the threat of use of force to the total destruction of the enemy, with a number of limited objectives in between. Such a strategy would include both defense and offense, and maneuver and positional warfare. Svechin furthermore emphasized the need for operational decision-making, because he believed every battle created a new situation.<sup>23</sup>

Tukhachevsky and others attacked Svechin's view with charges of a "lack of revolutionary spirit" and "defensivism."<sup>24</sup> They argued he was not ideological enough, and Tukhachevsky even accused him of being an "imperialist sympathizer."<sup>25</sup> Svechin was less concerned with ideology than with understanding war. He understood the ever-changing character of war and rejected the idea that one form of warfare was inherently superior to another.<sup>26</sup> The situation and the chosen strategy would guide the type and form of operation, and

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<sup>21</sup> Scott and Scott, *The Soviet Art of War: Doctrine, Strategy, and Tactics*, 35.

<sup>22</sup> Harrison, *The Russian Way of War: Operational Art, 1904-1940*, 129.

<sup>23</sup> Scott and Scott, *The Soviet Art of War: Doctrine, Strategy, and Tactics*, 39.

<sup>24</sup> Harrison, *The Russian Way of War: Operational Art, 1904-1940*, 130.

<sup>25</sup> David R. Stone, "Misreading Svechin: Attrition, Annihilation, and Historicism" *The Journal of Military History* 76 (July 2012), 678.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 682.

war would consist of several phases with a constant combination of defense and offense. A negative aim of denying the enemy to conduct his desired actions would naturally follow a defensive strategy, while a positive aim of gaining something would follow an offensive. The question of employing maneuver or positional warfare would logically depend on the strategy, but with the understanding that a negative objective achieved with a positional war might just as well be the first stage of an offensive operation of a war of maneuver.<sup>27</sup>

The debate over the primary direction of strategy enriched the Red Army officers with a better understanding of war, and even Tukhachevsky admitted the importance of the strategic defense as a first stage to buy time to prepare for the decisive offensive. An offensive war of maneuver, Tukhachevsky argued, would be desirable, although a positional war could not be ruled out completely.<sup>28</sup> The Red Army appointed Tukhachevsky as Director of Armaments in 1931, and from this position he led the development of the Red Army towards becoming a force able to conduct decisive offensive operations aiming at the annihilation of the enemy through an offensive strategy of destruction.<sup>29</sup>

Based on the proportion of World War I, the Russian Civil War, and their study of future enemies, the Soviets realized that the width and depth of the fronts, where battles were fought, would be vast, and the distance from the fronts to the rear would be long. The fronts would be linked with a large rear where logistical support and reserves were being generated.<sup>30</sup> The strategic debate suggested that victory in war would require one or more campaigns consisting of one or more operations. A campaign, according to Tukhachevsky, was “that portion of the war

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<sup>27</sup> Scott and Scott, *The Soviet Art of War: Doctrine, Strategy, and Tactics*, 43.

<sup>28</sup> Harrison, *The Russian Way of War: Operational Art, 1904-1940*, 136.

<sup>29</sup> Willard C. Frank, Jr and Phillips S. Gillette, eds, *Soviet Military Doctrine from Lenin to Gorbachev, 1915-1991* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1992), 117.

<sup>30</sup> Krause and Phillips, *Historical Perspectives of the Operational Art*, 7.

that may coincide with a series of consecutive operations.”<sup>31</sup> Accordingly, the link between tactics and strategy drew much attention at the end of the 1920s, and many authors contributed to the establishment of operational art.<sup>32</sup> Svechin, one of the first to use the term, explained in 1926, “Tactics makes up the steps from which operational leaps are assembled. Strategy points out the path.”<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, Svechin wrote about operational art in official Soviet publications in 1928, with Tukhachevsky as one of the editors.<sup>34</sup> This shows that although they still disagreed on strategic issues, they shared a common recognition of the importance of operational art. From this unified view upon the practical application of forces in combat, a large variety of publications and authors thrived.<sup>35</sup>

Vladimir K. Triandifillov, a Civil War commander, general staff officer, and author of several books, was a notable contributor to the development of operational art. One of his main views was that a decisive result in combat could only be achieved by a large encirclement of the enemy, made possible by a series of offensives linked together. Two or three independent armies would attack along their separate axes within a front of no more than a hundred kilometers, able to penetrate to a depth of up to fifty kilometers.<sup>36</sup> Triandifillov argued that such a “series of consecutive operations, following one after the other in time and space” would effectively serve the achievement of strategic goals.<sup>37</sup> An important detail in Triandifillov’s ideas was that the independent armies capable of conducting these major operations had to be self-supported. Hence, Triandifillov tied logistical and other preparations to the successful offensive and decisive action.

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<sup>31</sup> Harrison, *The Russian Way of War: Operational Art, 1904-1940*, 160.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 141.

<sup>33</sup> Krause and Phillips, *Historical Perspectives of the Operational Art*, 8.

<sup>34</sup> Harrison, *The Russian Way of War: Operational Art, 1904-1940*, 141.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 141.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 150.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 157.

Consequently, by the start of the 1930s the strategic debate had concluded with a dominance of a strategy of the offensive and an emphasis on the destruction of the enemy. The theoreticians had discovered, or invented, the operational level of war, as a link between tactics and strategy. Activities in this level, linked together in time and space, consisting of preparation, planning, and conduct of operations directed toward the achievement of strategic goals would then be referred to as operational art. Dr. Bruce W. Menning, a historian and expert on the Red Army formative years, explains that the foundation in Soviet operational art was to identify strategic objectives within a theater, visualize that theater in three dimensions, and determine what sequence of military actions – preparation, organization, support, battles, and command arrangements – would bring the attainment of those objectives.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Krause and Phillips, *Historical Perspectives of the Operational Art*, 9.

## FROM STRATEGY TO OPERATIONAL CONCEPT

Having accepted the idea of operational art as a link between strategy and tactics, the Soviets had to develop operational concepts that supported their strategic situation, and effectively transition these ideas into official publications. Tukhachevsky and Triandifillov first developed the concept of *Successive Operations*.<sup>39</sup> A victory according to this concept could only be achieved through multiple operations conducted simultaneously over a large theater. The magnitude of an operation like this required an organizational giant. Hence, the *front* became the “premier force to operate strategically and to achieve strategic aims.”<sup>40</sup> A front would have command of all forces in its theater, and would be able to fight successive operations in a coordinated manner to achieve the strategic objective. The fronts consisted of several armies, and were directly in the chain of command under the Soviet supreme command, the Stavka.<sup>41</sup>

The next concept to emerge was the *Deep Battle*. It basically described the organization and tactics required to penetrate a strong defensive line, and exploiting the breakthrough in order to destroying elements deep in the enemy’s rear. This idea was further refined with the idea of encircling the enemy by penetrating several places and blocking off the flanks with bombers and airborne units. The new means of war, to include armor, aircraft, airborne units, and modern artillery, played a key role in this concept, where the crux was to translate a tactical penetration to an operational breakthrough.<sup>42</sup> Thence, the deep battle concept emerged into *Deep Operations* at the operational level, conducted by one or more fronts supported by large air forces.<sup>43</sup> A front in this concept consisted of three to four shock armies, one to two standard armies, one to two

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<sup>39</sup> Glantz, *The Military Strategy of the Soviet Union: A History*, 44.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 39-40.

<sup>41</sup> Harrison, *The Russian Way of War: Operational Art, 1904-1940*, 159.

<sup>42</sup> Richard Simpkin in association with John Erickson, *Deep Battle: The Brainchild of Marshal Tukhachevskii* (London: Brassey’s Defence Publishers, 1987), 40.

<sup>43</sup> Glantz, *Soviet Military Operational Art: In Pursuit of Deep Battle*, 79.



mechanized, tank or cavalry corps, and fifteen to thirty aviation divisions, capable of attacking in a 250 to 300 kilometer wide sector at a depth of 150 to 200 kilometers.<sup>44</sup> The armored units, with their mobility, firepower, and protection were a vital factor of the concept, and deserve some attention.

The invention of the tank was a solution to a problem that seemed unsolvable in World War I, specifically how to break through the trenches. The development of mechanized warfare was a combination of theorizing and engineering an answer to that question on a larger scale. The Germans spent four years unsuccessfully trying to break the trench lines in France in World War I, but accomplished it in four days in World War II. The combination of speed, surprise, and penetration created by tanks, aircraft, mechanized infantry, and modern artillery in close coordination provided the necessary means to achieve a breakthrough and exploitation into the enemy's rear.<sup>45</sup> This concept of fighting, usually described as *blitzkrieg*, had similarities with the Soviet operational concept of deep operations. Both countries developed new theories and technology of war, and enjoyed a strange symbiotic relationship in the interwar period. Noteworthy though, is that the Soviet Union established its first tank corps in 1932, years ahead of the Germans. Hitler and Stalin were both pragmatics, and although ideologically opposites, they agreed to cooperate. The Germans needed a place to experiment and secretly test the new equipment out of sight, and the Soviets needed technological assistance to ignite their ambitious industrialization program.<sup>46</sup> The latter was intended to provide a "solid industrial base and the ability to mobilize civilian industries rapidly in the event of war."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>45</sup> Krause and Phillips, *Historical Perspectives of the Operational Art*, 178.

<sup>46</sup> Mary R. Habeck, *Storm of Steel: The Development of Armor Doctrine in Germany and the Soviet Union, 1919-1939* (Ithaca, USA: Cornell University Press, 2003), 80-81.

<sup>47</sup> Rice, *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 663.

Tukhachevsky eagerly preceded the industrial program with the development of concepts and the organization of forces. When the Soviet industrialization program came to effect, it provided the necessary means to support the concepts and forces. The Soviets did not produce any serious armored vehicle until 1929, but just four years later their annual production was 3,000.<sup>48</sup> The technological development continued, and the quality increased based on experience and research in all aspects from ammunition to heavy tanks. Needless to say, the war boosted production extensively. According to Soviet sources, the field armies inventory rose from 1,954 to 7,350 tanks, and from 2,238 to 4,544 combat aircraft in the period from December 1941 to November 1942.<sup>49</sup> Even more impressive was the annual production of 24,000 tanks and 34,884 aircraft in 1943.<sup>50</sup> The realization of the physical means required to conducting deep operations and practicing operational art in pursuit of a strategic objective created a capable and powerful Red Army.

In 1936, the Commissar for the Defense of the USSR issued *The Provisional Field Regulation of the Red Army, PU-36*. Produced under the supervision of Tukhachevsky, this publication integrated the concepts, formations, and modern materiel formed by the prevailing military thinkers and Soviet industry. According to Dupuy's definition, a doctrine covers principles, policies, and concepts to assure consistent effort in combat. To a large degree the *PU-36* fulfills this requirement. It briefly covers general principles, and then presents specifics such as command, support, various forms of maneuvers (as meeting engagement, attack, and defense), and special circumstances. There are five distinct features of the *PU-36* in relevance to the theory of operational art developed thus far. First, the *PU-36* makes it clear that an attack on the Soviet

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<sup>48</sup> David M. Glantz and Jonathan House, *When titans clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 9.

<sup>49</sup> S.A Tyushkevich, *The Soviet Armed Forces: A History of Their Organizational Development*, 272.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 312.

Union would be repelled and the war would be shifted to the enemy's territory.<sup>51</sup> This statement reflects the overarching strategic viewpoint. Second, any battle or use of force must be aimed at defeating the enemy.<sup>52</sup> Third, surprise is a key element in achieving combat success.<sup>53</sup> Fourth, success is best achieved by encirclement, and all operations "should not strive for producing an enemy retreat, but rather an encirclement ..."<sup>54</sup> Fifth, modern weapons and concepts provides an operational opportunity to conduct a simultaneous attack over the entire depth with an objective to isolate, encircle, and destroy the enemy.<sup>55</sup> The publication of *PU-36* occurred just months before the purges, where many of the contributors were killed or imprisoned. Hence, the *PU-36* did not have the benefit of active endorsement and elaboration by its authors, and consequently it did not achieve the impact it deserved in the training and education of the Red Army.

It is hard to grasp the devastating impact of Stalin's purges. By 1937, the Red Army had reached a level of quality comparable to the large European armies.<sup>56</sup> Stalin felt threatened by the growing power of the Red Army and initiated the purges to clear what he saw as potential enemies. The killings had drastic consequences for military leadership, thinking, and innovation.<sup>57</sup> Within a year the program had killed 40,000 people. Three of five marshals, fourteen of sixteen army commanders, and sixty of sixty-seven corps commanders were killed. At the lower levels, seventy-five percent of the division commanders, fifty percent of the brigade commanders, and seventy-nine percent of regimental commanders suffered the same fate.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *USSR Report: Military Affairs, June 12, 1986, Provisional Field Regulations for the Red Army (PU-36)*, trans. Foreign Broadcast Information Service (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1986), 2.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 32.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 55.

<sup>55</sup> Simpkin and Erickson, *Deep Battle: The Brainchild of Marshal Tukhachevskii*, 197.

<sup>56</sup> Harrison, *The Russian Way of War: Operational Art, 1904-1940*, 272.

<sup>57</sup> Rice, *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 669.

<sup>58</sup> Harrison, *The Russian Way of War: Operational Art, 1904-1940*, 220.

As a part of Stalin's tightening grip on the Red Army, he also abandoned the strategy of offensive maneuvers in this process in favor of a strategy of defense. This was a drastic move that led to much confusion. Condoleezza Rice describes the state of the Red Army in this period as "caught between a preparation for the war of maneuver and the war of position, and...not ready for either."<sup>59</sup> The fact that young and unqualified officers without appropriate rank or experience had to assume key leadership positions throughout the ranks to fill the gaps made the case even worse.<sup>60</sup> An understanding of Soviet operational art requires some attention on the performers of the art, the officer corps.

It is a strange contradiction to assess the Red Army officer corps. The Soviets generated outstanding strategists and writers, and provided solid military theory, strategy, and operational concepts. Much of this was conducted through the military academies. Education was important, not only to produce theory, but also to produce quality leadership. In 1932, all major services had their own academies, and by 1938 Soviet Armed Forces had 14 military academies. Between 1929 and 1937, Soviet higher military and specialist academies graduated about 10,000 military commanders.<sup>61</sup> Even so, the Red Army officer corps enjoys a bad reputation. Professor Roger Reese, a specialist in the social history of the Soviet military is very critical in his book *Red Commanders*.<sup>62</sup> He blames the officer corps for several failures and especially for the large number of casualties throughout the war. Reese argues that the officers were not sufficiently technically competent to leverage the strengths of the new modern army.<sup>63</sup> However, war is a cruel but efficient teacher, and Reese points out that, "The Soviet officer corps began the war

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<sup>59</sup> Rice, *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 671.

<sup>60</sup> Glantz and House, *When titans clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler*, 12.

<sup>61</sup> S.A Tyushkevich, *The Soviet Armed Forces: A History of Their Organizational Development*, 208.

<sup>62</sup> Roger R. Reese, *Red Commanders: A Social History of the Soviet Army Officer Corps, 1918-1991*(Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 3.

<sup>63</sup> Reese, *Red Commanders: A Social History of the Soviet Army Officer Corps, 1918-1991*, 175.

with such a low level of expertise as to be incompetent, but in the long term, the experience of war significantly raised the level of expertise.”<sup>64</sup> Menning agrees with his assessment, “Stalin’s marshals learned to command and control ... operations in depth and breadth while coordinating air support with armored thrusts.”<sup>65</sup> It is a fair assessment to say that the impact of Stalin’s purges influenced commanders long into the war, but that the necessity for effective battlefield leadership gradually nurtured great military talents.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 176.

<sup>65</sup> Krause and Phillips, *Historical Perspectives of the Operational Art*, 11.

## WAR INEVITABLE: TOWARDS THE GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR

The Soviet strategists in the 1920s and 30s viewed war as inevitable, with the country encircled by capitalist powers.<sup>66</sup> In the latter parts of the 1930s, Germany in the west and Japan in the east became more aggressive and posed an increasing threat. An escalating conflict set the Soviet Union resolve to a test when Japan attacked into Mongolia. A mutual pact with Mongolia required the Soviets to intervene, although Stalin was cautious not to declare a war on Japan.<sup>67</sup> Stalin sent Georgy Zhukov, then the deputy commander of the Belorussian Military District and an expert on cavalry and tank operations, to settle the dispute. Zhukov had a reputation for getting things done.<sup>68</sup> After two months of preparation his First Army Group conducted a double envelopment defeating the Kwantung Sixth Army in just days, demonstrating operational art in an operation that clearly echoed the rejected theory of offensive operations.<sup>69</sup>

Just a few weeks after the Soviets signed a truce with Japan, they experienced a different result when Stalin decided to attack Finland to regain strategically important territory. Stalin expected a quick and decisive victory, and launched a three-axis attack to defeat the inferior Finnish force within fifteen days. The Finns, however, fought hard and gave unexpected resistance. The war lasted for over three months, and the much smaller Finnish army inflicted severe losses on the Red Army, which sustained 391,783 casualties out of a total force of 760,578.<sup>70</sup> The Soviet high command's evaluation revealed that the Red Army was robust but inefficient, having problems with training, organization, equipment, and leadership.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Harrison, *The Russian Way of War: Operational Art, 1904-1940*, 126.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 240.

<sup>68</sup> Stuart D. Goldman, Nomonhan, *1939: The Red Army's Victory That Shaped World War II* (Annapolis, MA: Naval Institute Press, 2012), 101.

<sup>69</sup> Harrison, *The Russian Way of War: Operational Art, 1904-1940*, 242.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 244.

<sup>71</sup> Roger Reese, "Lessons of the Winter War: A Study in the Military Effectiveness of the Red Army, 1939-1940", *The Journal of Military History*, Volume 72, Number 3, July, 2008, 850.  
[http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal\\_of\\_military\\_history/toc/jmh.72.3.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_military_history/toc/jmh.72.3.html)

Moreover, it was the stunning German attack on France in 1940 that opened Stalin's eyes and clarified Soviet strategic direction. The Germans achieved a decisive breakthrough near Sedan in four days and encircled nearly two million allied troops.<sup>72</sup> The Soviet strategists realized that the Germans had successfully conducted a massive deep operation of the type envisioned by the Soviets in the 1920s but which they abandoned years ago.<sup>73</sup> In December 1940, the Red Army held a seminar to discuss operational art and tactics with a handful of key commanders. Among the conclusions was a renewed Soviet emphasis on operations in depth, conducted by massive mechanized and tank forces in coordination with aviation and airborne forces. The seminar was an important event in gaining the Red Army's attention to the issue, but also displayed to some extent that the Red Army was not at all prepared to fight a total war.<sup>74</sup>

When Hitler launched Operation BARBAROSSA on June 22, 1941, he was determined to destroy his opponent in a series of encirclements.<sup>75</sup> The Germans attacked with 152 divisions.<sup>76</sup> The ill-prepared Red Army managed to stop the Germans just short of Moscow. From November 1942 until December 1943 the Red Army fought hard to regain the initiative. The Soviets increased training, force structure, and industrial production. They studied the war, and began issuing new regulations and concepts. Moreover, they returned to a strategy of the offensive, and victories at Stalingrad and Kursk turned the tide.<sup>77</sup> Even so, in 1944, the Germans still occupied Soviet areas from the Gulf of Finland to the Black Sea. While the German powers waned and the Soviet's grew, Stalin and the Red Army became determined to clear the enemy out of Soviet territory and relentlessly pursue the Germans to a final defeat.

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<sup>72</sup> Krause and Phillips, *Historical Perspectives of the Operational Art*, 174.

<sup>73</sup> Glantz, *The Military Strategy of the Soviet Union: A History*, 102.

<sup>74</sup> S.A Tyushkevich, *The Soviet Armed Forces: A History of Their Organizational Development*, 250.

<sup>75</sup> Glantz and House, *When titans clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler*, 30.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

<sup>77</sup> S.A Tyushkevich, *The Soviet Armed Forces: A History of Their Organizational Development*, 309.

## **OPERATION BAGRATION: A SOVIET “LIGHTNING CAMPAIGN”**

In 1944 the Soviets had completed a strategic defense and set the conditions for a large offensive to decisively defeat Germany. The Stavka planned five successive and interdependent operations to be conducted during the summer of 1944 in concert with the allied landing in Normandy to create a strategic dilemma for Hitler. The first was a shaping attack on Finland to set the conditions for Operation BAGRATION.<sup>78</sup> Operation BAGRATION, the centerpiece of the operations, would be launched twelve days later towards Army Group Center and Minsk, with the intent of creating a gap in the German line thereby providing an opportunity to attack the flanks with operations towards L’vov-Sandomierz, Lublin-Brest, and finally Iassey-Kishinev.<sup>79</sup> Stalin signed the order for Operation BAGRATION on 31 May. His strategic objectives for the operation were the liberation of Belorussia and the positioning of Soviet forces along the Vistula River and the border of East Prussia.<sup>80</sup>

In the summer of 1944 the German Army Group Center deployed five armies (Third Panzer, Fourth Panzer, Ninth Infantry, Fourth Infantry, and Second Infantry) from the town of Vitebsk in north to the Pripjat Marshes in the south, facing its Red Army counterpart at a front of approximate 780 kilometers.<sup>81</sup> The Germans expected a Soviet offensive either north or south of Army Group Center. Field marshal Ernst Busch, commander of Army Group Center, had about one million troops under his command, but they were not well positioned for the expected attack. Most of the heavy armor was positioned either to the north or the south to meet the Soviet attack. Of the nearly 5,000 German tanks and armored vehicles in the Eastern Front in the summer of 1944, only 553 were assigned to Busch, and most of them were lighter infantry

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 296.

<sup>79</sup> Glantz and House, *When titans clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler*, 196.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 316.

<sup>81</sup> Earl F. Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 2002), 319.



fighting vehicles. The vast area held by small undermanned divisions led to gaps that were covered only by minor and ad hoc forces.<sup>82</sup> Luftflotte 6, tasked to provide air support, consisted of 312 bombers, but due to heavy losses the number of fighters was only about forty. Consequently, the Germans had about 9,500 artillery and mortar pieces as their main fire support.<sup>83</sup>

The Red Army organized its units in fronts, with combined-arms armies as the major subordinate units. The Red Army commanders had developed their operational skills throughout the war, and by 1944 the effectiveness of deception, penetration, encirclement, and destruction of the enemy had gradually become a formula for success.<sup>84</sup> The Stavka tasked four Red Army fronts to conduct Operation BAGRATION. The First Baltic Front was the northernmost unit. The Third Belorussian Front, the Second Belorussian Front, and First Belorussian Front followed accordingly to the south. The Soviets established a forward Stavka element to coordinate the fronts. Georgy Zhukov, the hero from Manchuria, was tasked to oversee the First and Second Belorussian fronts. Alexander M. Vasilevsky, another of Stalin's top commanders, oversaw the First Baltic and Third Belorussian Fronts. The Soviet fronts consisted of nearly 160 divisions, with almost two million troops. The Red Army enjoyed a six-fold advantage in armor over the Germans with more than 2,000 tanks and 1,300 armored vehicles, and enjoyed an overwhelming superiority in artillery and air power. The Soviets prepared extensive engineer and logistical support for the breakthrough of the German defense.<sup>85</sup> These forces were attached to the front units to achieve penetration and rapid exploitation. The final contribution to the Soviet offensive

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<sup>82</sup> Glantz and House, *When titans clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler*, 204.

<sup>83</sup> Steven J Zaloga, *Bagration 1944: The Destruction of Army Group Centre* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 1998), 27.

<sup>84</sup> Glantz, *The Military Strategy of the Soviet Union: A History*, 138-139.

<sup>85</sup> Zaloga, *Bagration 1944: The Destruction of Army Group Centre*, 33.

was the large number of partisans operating behind enemy lines. About 150,000 partisans organized in 150 brigades and 49 smaller detachments supported the attack.<sup>86</sup>

The Stavka design included a deception operation and three stages. The aim of the deception was to make the Germans detach forces from Army Group Center while the Soviets built up the necessary logistical support. The partisans would disrupt the German forces by attacking and destroying infrastructure thereby forcing the enemy to allocate forces to his rear. The first stage of the offensive was to attack on six axes and neutralize the strongpoints in Vitebsk, Orsha, Mogilev, and Bobruisk. Stage two was set to exploit the breakthrough and encircle and destroy the enemy in the area of Minsk, while stage three was to pursue relentlessly and defeat the German forces all the way to the East Prussian border.<sup>87</sup>

The clear and attainable objectives for the fronts were improvements on earlier planning methods.<sup>88</sup> The First Baltic front was tasked to advance on and envelope Vitebsk, thereby covering the north. Third Belorussian Front was tasked to break through at Orsha and then advance on Minsk. Its Fifth Guards Tank Army would be reserve, tasked to exploit a breakthrough. The Second Belorussian Front was tasked to seize Mogilev and conduct follow up operations to clear German pockets. The First Belorussian Front was tasked to attack and encircle Bobruisk, and then advance on Minsk from southeast.<sup>89</sup>

The operations commenced according to the plan. The Soviets managed to conduct massive logistical buildup and secret movement of large forces out of German sight. The German intelligence was able to identify the first line of Soviet forces, but not the operational

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<sup>86</sup> Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East*, 304.

<sup>87</sup> David M. Glantz and Harold S. Orenstein, editor and translator, *Belorussia 1944: The Soviet General Staff Study* (New York, NY: Frank Cass, 2004), 4.

<sup>88</sup> Glantz and House, *When titans clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler*, 201.

<sup>89</sup> Zaloga, *Bagration 1944: The Destruction of Army Group Centre*, 41.

and strategic forces in the rear.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, the partisans planted over 5,000 mines behind the German Second and Fourth Armies the night before the attack.<sup>91</sup> The Soviet main attack started with an artillery barrage on June 23 before the four fronts attacked simultaneously in six places along a 600 km front.<sup>92</sup> By the end of the first day, the First Baltic Front was about to surround the city of Vitebsk and gain access to the Moscow-Minsk highway. The Third Belorussian Front achieved a breakthrough at Orsha, some fifty kilometers south of Vitebsk on June 27. The Soviets encircled the cities of Vitebsk, Orsha, Mogilev, and Bobrusk within days. Multiple penetrations allowed several armies to advance seizing the crossing of the Berezina River. When the Germans realized that this was the anticipated summer offensive, they were already three days into the largest and most massive campaign of the whole war.<sup>93</sup> Hitler's directive to defend the towns under attack to the last man fixed the Germans along the front, making it easier for the Red Army to encircle them.<sup>94</sup> Subsequently, the Red Army penetrated along the whole front, and conducted the exploitation without any major delay. The tempo of the operation left the Germans unable to establish a defense along the Berezina River, opening the rear for Soviet exploitation and pursuit.

Operation BAGRATION started more successfully than Stalin and the Stavka had dared to hope for and on June 28 they issued an order to all fronts to push further west. By June 30, the First Baltic and Third Belorussian Fronts crossed the Berezina River in several places, and on July 3, they reached the outskirts of Minsk, more than 200 kilometers into the German positions. The Soviets caught large German forces in Minsk, and it took a week for the Soviets to gain control of the city. The Second Belorussian Front destroyed the encircled Fourth Army, while

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<sup>90</sup> Glantz and House, *When titans clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler*, 203.

<sup>91</sup> Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East*, 315.

<sup>92</sup> Glantz and Orenstein, *Belorussia 1944: The Soviet General Staff Study*, 177.

<sup>93</sup> Glantz and House, *When titans clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler*, 203.

<sup>94</sup> Zaloga, *Bagration 1944: The Destruction of Army Group Centre*, 56.

elements from the First and Third Belorussian Fronts maintained momentum westwards. The multiple penetrations and encirclements were followed by rapid exploitation of the situation and the Soviets continued to pushing westwards even with unfinished business in and around the cities. Eventually, the Soviets surrounded Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, and Stavka ordered Ivan S. Konev, one of the greatest Soviet commanders, and his First Ukrainian Front to initiate Operation L'vov-Sandomierz to destroy the Army Group Northern Ukraine.<sup>95</sup>

Operation BAGRATION produced a decisive result. The Soviets achieved their strategic objectives and set the stage for the follow-on operations. The speed and the depth of the operation were remarkable. The average advance rate was over twenty kilometers a day, pushing the Red Army 400-500 kilometers in twenty-three days.<sup>96</sup> According to the Stavka, the Germans suffered 381,000 killed and 158,480 captured.<sup>97</sup> In comparison, the nearly three-month long battle of Stalingrad, a much better known event sometimes cited as the turning point in the east, inflicted only 60,000 dead and 110,000 captured on the Germans. However, the Red Army's losses in Operation BAGRATION were also significant. The Belorussian offensive from 23 June to 29 Aug 1944, caused 180,040 killed or missing, and 590,848 sick or wounded, in addition to 2,957 tanks and 822 aircraft lost.<sup>98</sup> Professor Nils Marius Rekkedal, a Norwegian expert and author of several articles and books, explains these losses with a Soviet inferiority in tactical competence. One lesson from this battle, according to Rekkedal, is that the Soviets compensated poor tactical ability with a willingness to pay a high price in losses.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Glantz and House, *When titans clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler*, 210.

<sup>96</sup> Glantz and Orenstein, *Belorussia 1944: The Soviet General Staff Study*. 176.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 176.

<sup>98</sup> Glantz and House, *When titans clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler*, 298.

<sup>99</sup> Nils Marius Rekkedal, e-mail with excerpts from a 2011 manuscript about the development of the Soviet Military before World War II, 4. Jan 2013.

## CORRELATIONS

There are several correlations between the theory developed before the purges and the performance of operational art during Operation BAGRATION. First, an early Soviet strategic assessment that a war with the capitalist power was inevitable and that a victory had to be achieved by completely defeating the enemy on his territory correlates with Stalin's strategy towards the Germans. The Soviets drew some lessons from Manchuria, the German attack on Poland, and their costly victory in Finland in 1939. However, it was the German blitzkrieg on France in 1940 that made it clear that war was imminent.<sup>100</sup> Stalin realized that the Soviet Union could not coexist with Hitler's Nazi Germany. Hence, in order to prevail as a nation, the Soviet Union had to decisively defeat the Germans. It was not sufficient to retain territory and stop the Germans on the border. Consequently, Stalin set the country on war footing, allowing the Soviet industrial defense production to supply the armed forces with new and modern equipment at very high rate.<sup>101</sup> Hitler's intention to achieve a lightening victory was overly ambitious due to the vastness of the country, the spread of the Soviet forces, and the strategic depth. The Soviet Union and Germany ended up fighting a strategy of attrition, and Svechin and Tukhachevsky's compromise with a strategic defense to prepare for a decisive offense proved to be quite prophetic. The shift to the offensive first occurred with the campaigns of 1942-43.<sup>102</sup>

Second, the design of Operation BAGRATION clearly reflects the operational idea of conducting multiple attacks over the whole front to penetrate, encircle, and destroy the enemy throughout the depth of its defense. Stalin's strategic objectives for the operation were to surround and destroy as much as possible of Army Group Center, liberate Belorussia, and

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<sup>100</sup> Glantz, *The Military Strategy of the Soviet Union: A History*, 102.

<sup>101</sup> S.S.A. Tyushkevich, *The Soviet Armed Forces: A History of Their Organizational Development*, 310-311.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 330.

position the fronts for the follow up operations.<sup>103</sup> Operation BAGRATION was one of five linked operations, where the core of the larger plan was to assure that an overlapping operation was in motion before the former had culminated. Stalin's order to Konev to assume the L'Vov-Sandomierz exemplifies this. Moreover, Operation BAGRATION itself resembles the core of Soviet operational art. The deception, logistical preparations, and eventually the partisan activity to disrupt the German forces and their withdrawal routes, marked the first shaping phase. Soviet reconnaissance units' identification of the surfaces and gaps informed the decision of breakthrough points, and the Soviet multiple axis attack, encirclements, and neutralization of identified German strongpoints allowed the main force to push towards Minsk for the big encirclement. Furthermore, while second and third echelon units were busy with the destruction of the bypassed pockets, the advance units exploited the breakthrough and pushed all the way to the Vistula River.<sup>104</sup> Consequently, the tactical penetrations were exploited to an operational breakthrough. It is also interesting to note that the four fronts involved in Operation BAGRATION covered a total of 600 kilometers, or up to 150 kilometers each, with a 150 kilometer limit of advance. These numbers correlate with the theoretical concepts of the 1930s. Ultimately, the operational reach surpassed that of the concept basically because the Germans did not manage to establish effective defensive lines after the initial breakthrough, and the Soviets chose to continue to the full extent of their logistical supportability.

Third, the role of armored vehicles and especially tanks achieved what the theory promised. The growing Soviet industrial base provided greater firepower, mobility, and sustainment to form a breakthrough capability establishing several tank and mechanized armies

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<sup>103</sup> Glantz and House, *When titans clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler*, 196.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 209.

from 1942.<sup>105</sup> More than 2,000 tanks and 1,300 armored vehicles, supported by artillery and modern aircraft, spearheaded the Soviet forces in Operation BAGRATION. Each front had one organic air army, more or less designed solely to support the ground forces for the purpose of a breakthrough.<sup>106</sup> The tactics were to penetrate and exploit, and the speed and mobility produced the desired shock in the German defense. When the encirclement of Vitebsk in the northern sector and the breakthrough at Orsha to the south was completed, the Third Belorussian Commander launched his reserve to breach the Berezina River before the Germans could regroup their defenses. His Second Tank Corps found and exploited a gap, enveloped the German pockets east of Minsk, and seized the lightly defended city. The follow-on attacks from the Third Belorussian Front from the east and the First Belorussian Front from southeast completely encircled and defeated the entire German Fourth Army.<sup>107</sup> However important armor was for the success, it is noteworthy that the involved fronts lost nearly all their armor upon achievement of the end state, and were, for a while, combat ineffective. The Soviets were only able to swiftly resume the strategic offensive because by this time Soviet industry was working full time, and was able to compensate for the losses, in fact increasing the armor inventory by the end of 1944.<sup>108</sup>

Fourth, the key features of *PU-36* are recognized in many aspects of Operation BAGRATION. The strategic guidance to take the war to the enemy echoes Stalin's overarching intention with the 1944 summer offensive, namely taking the war to the German border. The imperative that all combat is about the destruction of the enemy forces is very recognizable in tactics and maneuver throughout the operation. Moreover, the importance of surprise, and the

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<sup>105</sup> S.A Tyushkevich, *The Soviet Armed Forces: A History of Their Organizational Development*, 281.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, 345.

<sup>107</sup> Zaloga, *Bagrations 1944: The Destruction of Army Group Centre*, 71.

<sup>108</sup> Glantz and House, *When titans clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler*, 215.

effectiveness of the encirclement are seen at the Stavka level with its design of the operation, as well as in the front and army operations. The fact that it took the Germans three days to realize the magnitude of the attack illustrates the operational surprise achieved. The encirclement, entrapment, and destruction of the German LIII Corps, located in Vitebsk, exemplify the effectiveness of the applied tactics. Of the 28,000 German troops, only a handful of soldiers managed to escape, and the rest were either killed or captured in a ferocious attack.<sup>109</sup> There is no doubt the Soviets, by 1944, mastered the new means of war, as mechanized and air forces, and achieved synergy by using combined arms formations and tactics. A good example of Soviet ability to conduct combined arms operations is the penetration and encirclement of Bobruisk, where the First Belorussian Front's 65<sup>th</sup> Army, supported by a mobile cavalry-mechanized group and air forces, penetrated the Germans lines in four days.<sup>110</sup> In the encirclement, 40,000 Germans were trapped and became targets for Soviet artillery and air power. 50,000 Germans were killed in the few days of fighting in and around Bobruisk.<sup>111</sup>

Fifth, excellent commanders were important for the 1930s theory and proved decisive in the 1944 conduct of operational art. The Soviet general staff described Zhukov and Vassilevski as outstanding leaders, but also endorsed the front commanders and some army commanders for their "operational skills".<sup>112</sup> The Soviets reached the Berezina River and seized Minsk several days faster than the plan.<sup>113</sup> This gives some indications on the quality of the operational commanders. Leadership skills improved throughout the war through a tough school. Although the quality of the tactical leaders may have been of various qualities contributing to great losses, talented operational commanders rose to the occasion and were generally of high quality.

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<sup>109</sup> Zaloga, *Bagration 1944: The Destruction of Army Group Centre*, 53.

<sup>110</sup> Glantz and Orenstein, *Belorussia 1944: The Soviet General Staff Study*, 83.

<sup>111</sup> Zaloga, *Bagration 1944: The Destruction of Army Group Centre*, 63.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, 178.

<sup>113</sup> Glantz and Orenstein, *Belorussia 1944: The Soviet General Staff Study*, 177.



## CONCLUSION

In the 1930s Soviet strategy established a basic understanding that an existential war was unavoidable. This spurred a massive and dynamic discourse on how to best prepare the nation, the army, and the people to win it. Hence, from the theory of war and the strategic understanding, operational art became a product of that logical reasoning. The Soviet Union designed the Red Army to win an existential war as a modernized force able to fight a series of linked operations to serve the strategic objectives. The concepts of successive operations, deep battle, and deep operations became the closest thing to doctrine the Soviets produced before the purges. The comparison of operational theory with the Red Army's performance in Operation BAGRATION shows correlations, and validates the theory of operational art providing an understanding of the power of a well-developed operational theory to serve strategic purposes.

It is possible that Stalin and the Stavka deliberately sought to apply the abandoned theory of operational art, although it is not the intent of this paper to prove this. Instead, this paper is a reminder of the importance of having a continuously dynamic and innovative military theoretical development in peacetime. Military theory travels through strategy, operational concepts, and doctrine practiced by military commanders and units in what Dupuy described as a "representation of the available thought on the employment of forces adapted by an armed force." To what extent concepts and ideas such as maneuver warfare or counterinsurgency produce a similar unified view is a reasonable question. Suffice it to conclude this paper by stating that whether NATO, the U.S. or some other country has to mobilize for a full war in the future, it could very well be the existing theory, strategic objectives, doctrine, and operational art that provide the foundation needed to win it, and the subject deserve the utmost attention in the peace that precedes war.

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