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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

31 August 1978

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director of Central Intelligence
FROM : John H. Stein
Acting Deputy Director for Operations
SUBJECT : MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Methods of
Conducting a Front Offensive Operation
Using Means of Mass Destruction

1. The enclosed Intelligence Information Special Report is part of a series now in preparation based on the SECRET USSR Ministry of Defense publication Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought". This article contains two comments on a previous article of the same title. The authors of the first comment feel that the article being reviewed overrates the role and importance of nuclear weapons in a present-day operation, maintaining that success is achieved only through the combined efforts of all branches of the armed forces and combat means. The second comment deals with the changed nature of combat of ground forces under present-day conditions, as well as with the role of second echelons and reserves of operational formations in offensive operations. This article appeared in Issue No. 3 (70) for 1963.

2. Because the source of this report is extremely sensitive, this document should be handled on a strict need-to-know basis within recipient agencies. For ease of reference, reports from this publication have been assigned

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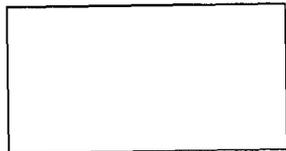
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Intelligence Information Special Report

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COUNTRY USSR

DATE OF INFO. Late 1963

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SUBJECT

MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Methods of Conducting a Front Offensive Operation Using Means of Mass Destruction

SOURCE Documentary
Summary:

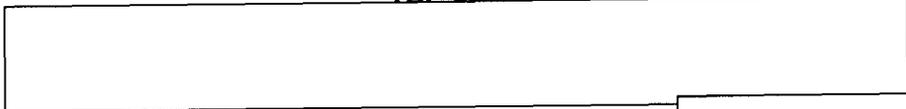
The following report is a translation from Russian of an article which appeared in Issue No. 3 (70) for 1963 of the SECRET USSR Ministry of Defense publication Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought". The authors of this article are General-Leytenant A. Yakovlev and Colonels A. Oleynik and I. Pombrik. This article contains two comments on a previous article which dealt with questions of improving methods of conducting front offensive operations. The authors of the first comment feel that the article being reviewed overrates the role and importance of nuclear weapons in a present-day operation, maintaining that success is achieved only through the combined efforts of all branches of the armed forces and combat means. They also feel that the capabilities of the enemy are underestimated and that emphasis should be put on preempting him in delivering strikes. The second comment deals with the changed nature of combat of ground forces under present-day conditions, as well as with the role of second echelons and reserves of operational formations in offensive operations.

End of Summary

Comment:

Colonel A. Oleynik also wrote "Some Questions of Modern Defense" in Issue No. 4 (65) for 1962

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Methods of Conducting a Front Offensive Operation
Using Means of Mass Destruction

by
General-Leytenant A. YAKOVLEV
Colonel A. OLEYNIK
Colonel I. POMBRİK

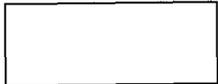
The article by General-Leytenant D. BARINOV* raises the very important question of improving the methods of conducting a modern front offensive operation. The author, in our view, correctly considers that exploiting the results of nuclear strikes on a timely basis and to the fullest extent and developing a front operation to the entire depth of the theater of military operations are the most important problems of operational art today.

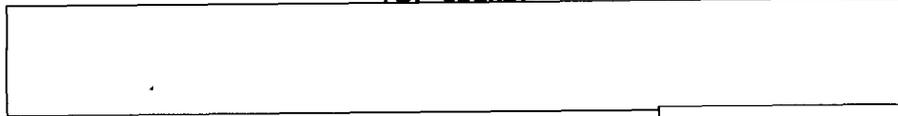
The essence of the method discussed in the article for conducting a front offensive operation lies in subjecting the enemy to the effects of nuclear weapons throughout the depth of his operational disposition simultaneously and immediately thereafter committing ground forces large units which will operate jointly with airborne landing forces dropped at a different depth.

In our view, this article, aimed at finding the best methods of conducting a front offensive operation, is of particular interest, and discussing it will unquestionably be beneficial. In this response, we wish to express our thoughts on a number of questions touched upon by the author.

First of all, a certain overrating of the role of nuclear weapons is perceptible in the article. On page 4 the author writes that "it is these weapons which will basically decide the outcome of operations." Experience shows that no new weapon, no matter how powerful, will in itself lead to victory. Even under present-day conditions, success in any operation can be achieved only through the combined efforts of all branches of the armed forces and combat means. It is more correct to consider that even in a nuclear war the decisive role will belong not to one

* Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought" No. 6 (67), 1962.





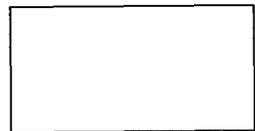
type of even the most powerful equipment (weapons), but to the skilful utilization of all branches of the armed forces (branch arms). The overrating of any given branch of forces can also serve as an unfavorable precedent.

If we do speak of a predominant role for missile/nuclear weapons in modern warfare, this should be taken to imply strikes not only by strategic rocket forces, but also by long-range aviation, naval forces, and finally by ground forces missile/nuclear weapons. It must not be forgotten that, except for the ground forces, not one branch of the armed forces can exploit strikes with missile/nuclear weapons. In land theaters of military operations and under conditions of a nuclear war, the main burden of combat against the enemy rests on the ground forces.

It is impossible to correctly resolve the question of methods of conducting offensive operations without taking into account the capabilities of conventional combat means. In connection with the enemy's growing number of tactical nuclear attack means, the role of artillery, tanks, aviation, and other conventional means is, in our view, on the rise.

General BARINOV is unquestionably right when he says that success in the accomplishment by the ground forces of tasks to exploit the results of missile/nuclear strikes depends entirely on the rapidity of the offensive of the tank groupings operating in cooperation with the airborne landing forces to a great depth, on the flexibility with which forces and means maneuver, and on the skilful utilization of new methods of conducting combat actions. However, we cannot agree with his assertion that the rate at which an offensive operation is conducted "may reach literally the march speed of tank troops" (page 7). Here we have a clear overestimation of the capabilities of our own troops.

The march speed of tank troops is 200 to 250 kilometers per day. In order to attain such an average daily rate of troop advance it is necessary, taking into account the coefficient of maneuverability, to move forward 350 to 400 kilometers every day. Under conditions of massive road destruction, and not infrequently of a total absence of roads, it is hardly possible to achieve this. It must be taken into account, moreover, that in the Western Theater of Military Operations, the troops will





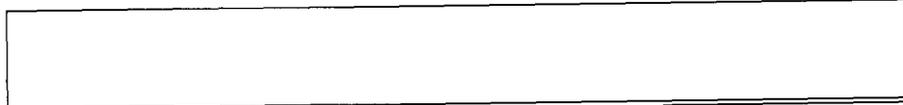
encounter numerous natural obstacles (rivers and a branching network of canals), whose negotiation involves extremely great difficulties.

Solution of the problem of increasing the rate of advance hinges on the very complex problem of increasing the versatility of equipment and of providing the troops with enough amphibious combat equipment and with self-propelled crossing means. The experience of exercises confirms that four or five hours are required for one division to cross a river of average width and up to 10 to 12 hours for the main forces of an army. If an army encounters only one body of water per day on its route, it cannot advance at a rate of 200 to 250 kilometers per day even if it is not in combat. It would be considered good if army large units attained a rate of advance of 100 to 120 kilometers per day when a water obstacle must be crossed.

In General BARINOV's proposals regarding new methods of conducting an operation, there is a clear underrating of the growing capabilities of the enemy, whose views on conducting combat actions are not taken into account. The author of the article has made no attempt to analyze what the grouping of enemy forces and means may be, to determine the approximate number of targets which must be hit simultaneously by our nuclear strikes, etc. The enemy, it seems to us, is presented as weak and passive, while our own troops, in the author's opinion, can with one simultaneous strike inflict a decisive defeat on the enemy and safeguard our forces against his nuclear strikes (page 6).

It is known that in the Western Theater of Military Operations the enemy's strength lies not only in ground forces groupings, missiles, and operational-tactical aviation, but mainly in the availability of powerful strategic aviation groupings and a strong submarine fleet with nuclear means. It is the view of our probable enemies that military actions are most likely to begin with the carrying out of a nuclear attack by all branches of the armed forces. If a surprise enemy nuclear attack is not disrupted, the offensive operation may not achieve decisive success. Under such conditions, it will be of utmost importance at all times to preempt the enemy in delivering nuclear strikes and to have the capability for our troops to conduct the offensive in the complex situation in which both sides are using means of mass destruction. ||





It must be taken into account that even if we preempt the enemy in delivering the first nuclear strike, his troop groupings and especially his nuclear attack means may not be completely destroyed. Moreover, after a day or two the enemy may get his surviving troop groupings organized and then in two or three days throw in reserves from other axes, and combat will inevitably acquire an exceptionally violent nature. The advancing troops will be obliged to enter into meeting engagements with the approaching enemy reserves. The success of the offensive operation will also depend on how successfully the maneuvering capabilities of the enemy's troops are reduced and his counterthrusts disrupted.

In order to exploit the results of the nuclear strikes in good time, the author proposes landing airborne landing forces immediately thereafter. However, from his comments it is difficult to make out how many tactical and operational airborne landing forces would be required in a front operation. If we take the width of the zone of the front offensive as 300 to 400 kilometers and the depth as about 1,000 kilometers, then the simultaneous seizure of the main enemy lines and centers would require dozens of tactical landing forces and several operational landing forces. If the operation is planned to the full depth of the theater, however, it is necessary to prepare a strategic landing force as well. To support the landing (dropping) of this many airborne landing forces in support of just one front, the greater part of our entire military transport aviation might actually be activated, since dropping a single division requires 600 to 700 of the most modern aircraft. As we see, the front capabilities for dropping landing forces are very limited, and this must not fail to be taken into account when selecting the methods for conducting a front offensive operation.

In conclusion we wish to express our agreement with General BARINOV's statement that the attempt is often observed in our country to adapt old methods for conducting operations to the sharply increased capabilities of new weapons and of the troops. At the same time we feel that the author is mistaken when, in seeking new methods of conducting operations, he fails to give adequate consideration to the capabilities of our own forces and means and also to the capabilities of our probable enemy and the nature of his actions.





* * *

In his article, General D. BARINOV has devoted attention mainly to simultaneous action to the entire depth of the enemy operational disposition. The question he raises is not a new one on the theoretical level. It is well known that the theory of the deep operation was worked out in our country long before the Great Patriotic War. But full practical implementation of this theory became attainable only with the appearance of missile/nuclear weapons, extensive use of tactical and operational airborne landing forces, and the capabilities which appeared for the massive airlifting of subunits, units, and large units for actions in the enemy rear.

The majority of the recommendations put forth by the author to improve the methods of conducting front offensive operations are entirely legitimate and in keeping with the altered nature of armed combat under conditions of the massed employment of missile/nuclear weapons and of other present and prospective combat equipment. At the same time, the article contains many statements with which it is difficult to agree.

First and foremost, doubt is raised by the author's assertion that combat as engaged in by ground forces subunits and units has not changed fundamentally as of the present time since the combat means with which they are armed have undergone nothing more than a certain degree of improvement.

Underrating the changes in the nature of combat as engaged in by ground forces subunits and units contradicts the objective patterns in the development of methods of combat actions. The statement can be made, without requiring any special proofs, that combat as engaged in by ground forces subunits and units cannot be considered apart from the actions of combined-arms large units. In reading this article, however, the impression is created that the author considers combat as engaged in by subunits and units as something independent, isolated from the employment of new, constantly developing combat means and above all from nuclear and missile weapons.

Combat as engaged in by ground forces subunits and units is, by its very nature, combined-arms combat, and at the same time it is an integral part of operations conducted by operational



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formations. Therefore, there can be no situation in which the nature of operations would change fundamentally while combined-arms combat remained the same as it was prior to the employment of missile/nuclear weapons.

The author's assertion that no fundamental changes have occurred in combat as engaged in by units and subunits can, in our opinion, lead to incorrect views regarding the dependence of the development of combined-arms combat tactics on the development of the forms and methods of conducting operations. Such a dependence, an unbreakable connection between the tactical and operational principles of conducting a battle and operation, has always existed and exists at the present time. Operational art has been and remains one of the most important factors influencing the development of tactical principles, methods, and forms of conducting combat.

We consider that fundamental changes have occurred in the methods of conducting combat actions as engaged in by ground forces subunits and units. It suffices to point out that, unlike combat during the last war, combat actions by motorized rifle, tank, and airborne assault subunits and units have come to be dominated by mobile forms of combat typified by irregular development of combat actions, advance along separate axes, and multiple centers of battles, with rapid transition from one type of combat to another. There is no need in this comment to dwell on the other changes in the methods of combat by combined-arms units and subunits since they are sufficiently well known. These changes are just as natural as the changes in the methods of conducting an operation.

We cannot agree with the author's opinion on the role and function of the second echelons and reserves of the operational formations in an offensive operation. The evidence which he presents is one-sided, based for the most part on a simple arithmetic total of the number of units to be committed to combat simultaneously in the complement of the first operational echelon.

If we assume that a front offensive operation is conducted to a considerable depth, without a clearly defined front line and with the development of events occurring very irregularly as to both time and space, then it is not difficult to notice that

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units and large units located in the first and second operational echelons will be subjected more or less equally to the danger of being hit by enemy nuclear strikes. The degree of danger of being hit by enemy nuclear weapons, for troops of the first and second echelons, will depend on many factors. It is not quite correct to consider only one of these factors -- disposition within operational echelons -- and on this basis to draw conclusions about the role of the second echelons of operational formations in a front offensive operation.

Irregularity in the occurrence of the development of events can lead to combat actions breaking out simultaneously throughout the depth of the operational disposition of the front troops. It is not to be ruled out that not only units but entire large units belonging to the front second echelon may be committed to action at the same time as the troops of the first echelon. Therefore, it is no longer possible to speak of any idleness of troops located in the second operational echelon or the reserve.

We shall not dwell specially on the question of whether or not second echelons or reserves are necessary; we shall merely note that without second echelons and reserves of operational formations it is difficult, and sometimes impossible, to achieve continuity in conducting an offensive operation to its entire depth. It is very important, in our view, in setting up the second echelons and reserves of operational formations, to establish the optimum balance of forces between the first and second echelons, not only quantitatively but also qualitatively, and also to work out the best methods for utilizing the front or army second echelon. These questions have the most direct bearing on the methods for conducting a modern offensive operation to a great depth.

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