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Soviet Preceptions of Nuclear Warfare

Introduction

Soviet perceptions of the world differ vastly from ours; their attitudes and reactions are conditioned by their historical experience and ideology to a much greater degree than our own. Consequently, U.S. students of the Soviet threat to the U.S. and of Soviet views of the U.S. are frequently lead astray by Soviet writings, statements, and military programs. The ideology of the Soviet Union is Marxism-Leninism and this ideology is divided into Marxist philosophy - including dialectical and historical materialism - political economy, and scientific communism. The dialectic plays an important role in Soviet theory at all levels. In the Western world, philosophy has been primarily speculative - a nuisance and impediment to clear headed thinking for most military and scientific men. In the Soviet Union, by contrast, philosophy is a guide to action.

A clear "line" is discernible from Soviet writings and pronouncements and several constant features of their attitude toward war emerge from the Soviet Defense community, all consistent with their ideology:

1. Military Doctrine has two sides - Political and Military Technical

The Political side is the more important.

a. Political side

- (1) against: aggressive, unjust, predatory wars
- (2) for: liberating, just revolution of wars
- (3) considers: war no longer a fatal necessity

b. Technical side is determined by:

- (1) radical changes in armaments and equipment
- (2) combat training and moral combat qualities of troops

2. Constant Features of War

- a. Doctrine is primarily concerned with World War
- b. If not prevented, a new World War will be unleashed by the imperialists; i.e., the United States
- c. If unleashed, a new World War would be a decisive armed clash of two opposing social systems - capitalism and socialism

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- d. War might begin by a surprise attack with massive use of long-range rockets with nuclear warheads or it could grow out of a local conflict.
- e. Surprise attack is most likely. Therefore, primary task is to be constantly ready to reliably repulse a surprise attack of the imperialists.
- f. Length of War: Short and swift or protracted. Must be prepared for both.
- g. Nuclear rockets: The nuclear weapon will have the decisive role; its introduction has caused a revolution in military affairs. Simultaneously with nuclear rocket strikes, the Ground Troops, the Air Defense, the Air Force, and the Navy, through joint actions will bring final victory.
- h. Troops must be ready to fight both with the use of the nuclear weapon and without it.

Apparently the Soviets have followed their own doctrine in which they have emphasized the decisive role of the nuclear weapon - a revolution in military affairs. This revolution was not to be compared with the tank revolution or the airplane revolution. Rather the resulting changes were comparable to the discovery of gun powder which caused old methods of waging war to disappear from the battlefield. The man with the gun is no longer decisive in war - the nuclear missile is now decisive.

This revolution in military affairs, along with the traumatic experience of the German invasion of the Soviet Union, moved Soviets to give the major emphasis to the development of nuclear rocket systems. Only after their development and deployment could the Soviets play an equal role in world politics with the United States. As long as the United States possessed superiority in nuclear weaponry, the Soviet leaders had no illusions that they could fight and win a non-nuclear conflict against the United States and her allies. The United States would scarcely submit to a defeat of her forces in Western Europe in a non-nuclear conflict with the Soviet Union, if the United States at the same time had a clear-cut superiority over the Soviet Union in nuclear weapons and delivery systems. This attitude set the stage for the rapid buildup of Soviet nuclear capability.

Soviets Concepts of War in Europe

The current Soviet military concepts for the conduct of a war between NATO and the Warsaw Pact are basically unchanged from those of the early sixties. Warsaw Pact forces are still planned and structured based on the strategy of conducting theater-wide warfare in a nuclear environment. The Soviet strategy and doctrine reflects the following basic assumptions:

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1. The main potential enemy is NATO.
2. The substantive threat posed by NATO is nuclear fire power.
3. Nuclear fire power will ultimately decide the outcome of a war in Europe.
4. There may be a preliminary conventional phase in a NATO/Warsaw Pact conflict.
5. The Warsaw Pact forces would win a conventional war and thus the NATO forces must eventually resort to nuclear operations.
6. The initial stages of a nuclear war will be critical and probably decisive.
7. In non-nuclear operations, the Warsaw Pact forces must maintain a nuclear posture in the event of nuclear war.
8. The limited use of nuclear weapons by the Warsaw Pact forces would only offer NATO the excuse and opportunity to deliver first a massive and decisive nuclear strike.
9. The initial Soviet nuclear strike, therefore, must be massive and must be delivered throughout the entire depth of the theater of war. The targets for such an attack would be:
 - a. Nuclear delivery systems (airfields and missiles)
 - b. Nuclear storage location
 - c. Command and control facilities
 - d. Troop concentrations
 - e. Logistical support installations
 - f. Communication centers

The timing and division of effort of such an attack would be:

- a. The Soviet Strategic Rocket Forces would strike on signal by the High Command; their first salvo would be launched before other forces.
- b. Concurrently or immediately following, the missile submarines would strike aircraft carriers, submarines and communications.
- c. Simultaneously with the missile strike, or immediately thereafter, the long-range aircraft would take off.

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- d. If possible, operational-tactical rocket troops would strike simultaneously with strategic rocket troops.
- e. Air Forces of the front would be deployed away from enemy attack and would subsequently fulfill their tasks.

Soviet/Warsaw Pact Nuclear Capability

There are two overriding tactical requirements which seem to dominate Warsaw Pact planning, force capability, and doctrine development. They are:

- a. The reduction of vulnerability to enemy nuclear weapons.
- b. The development of tactical concepts to insure maximum advantage from Soviet nuclear weapons.

Their training exercise scenarios stress:

- a. The surprise, pre-emptive employment of nuclear weapons.
- b. The use of armor, mobility and dispersal in a clever combination of Soviet concepts of mobile warfare and the German Blitzkrieg.

Warsaw Pact exercises have been remarkably consistent in their emphasis on rapid escalation to nuclear war. Their exercises call for the rapid movement of armored motorized rifle and airborne troops in the wake of destruction and disorganization caused by initial preparatory nuclear strikes. The Warsaw Pact nuclear capability to mount an initial nuclear strike throughout the entire depth of the theater of war can be summarized as follows:

- a. Some 670 MRBMs and IREMs in the western USSR probably targeted at NATO targets.
- b. About 30 SLBM launch tubes on diesel-powered submarines in the Northern Fleet.
- c. Approximately 600 medium bombers based in the western USSR.
- d. Up to 500 FROG and SCUD TBM launchers in the Warsaw Pact area.
- e. Some 600 nuclear capable tactical aircraft.

Each side watches the other side's exercises with great interest. There seems to be no doubt that both sides tailor and design their exercises for foreign consumption. In 1964 NATO's interest in developing flexible response concepts resulted in the introduction of a conventional phase in a major NATO exercise. The following year the Warsaw Pact responded in Narew 1965. All other Warsaw Pact exercises escalate rapidly to nuclear war. One of the main goals in Pact exercises, at least in 1967,

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has been to preempt NATO in the use of nuclear weapons. This doctrine of Preventative Pre-emption seems to dominate Soviet thought and thus it is not surprising that almost no attention has been given to the concept of gradual escalation through the limited use of Nuclear weapons.

Soviet Attitude toward the Use of Tactical Nuclear Weapons

The Soviets, because of their overwhelming numerical superiority in conventional forces, would almost certainly prefer to see any European conflict remain non-nuclear. They believed that a NATO conventional offensive would be unsuccessful and NATO would be compelled to resort to nuclear weapons. The Soviets believe, moreover, that NATO does not intend to restrict a European conflict to the use of tactical nuclear weapons only and that a limited nuclear response on the part of the Pact would only offer the West the opportunity to deliver first a massive and decisive strategic nuclear strike.

There is no evidence to indicate that the Soviets would consider using nuclear weapons at as low a level as limited tactical nuclear warfare.

Additionally, the Soviets have shown a remarkable lack of interest in nuclear tube artillery with its superior accuracy at very low yields in tactical situations of low levels of violence.

Conclusions

Although there is little data upon which to draw conclusions as to the Soviet Doctrine/Strategy in the conduct of the transition from conventional to nuclear war, all available data (including open source literature) is self consistent and unambiguous. The following points summarize Soviet Doctrine/Strategy on the conduct of war in Europe:

- a. The overwhelming numerical superiority of the Warsaw Pact conventional forces would almost certainly insure their victory over the NATO forces in a conventional war; therefore, NATO forces must eventually resort to nuclear operations.
- b. The initial stages of a nuclear war would be critical and probably decisive and the limited use of nuclear weapons by the Warsaw Pact would only offer NATO the excuse and opportunity to deliver first a massive and decisive nuclear strike.
- c. The initial Warsaw Pact nuclear strike, therefore, should be massive, Preventive Pre-Emptive strike and should be delivered throughout the entire depth of the theater of war.

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