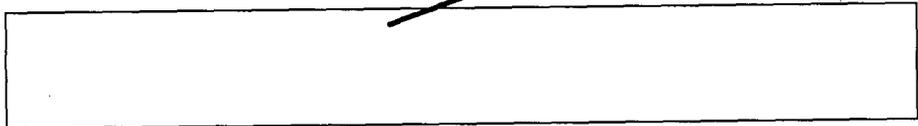


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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

13 July 1976

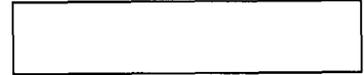
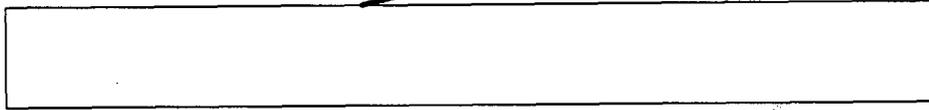
MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director of Central Intelligence
FROM : William W. Wells
Deputy Director for Operations
SUBJECT : MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): The Problem
of Selecting the Axis of the Main
Attack in an Operation

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 is an analysis of two diametrically opposed points of view regarding the selection of the axis of the main attack. One proposes to concentrate the bulk of the main attack against a weak point in the enemy disposition, while the other would have the attack delivered against the enemy's strongest grouping in order to destroy it. The author points out the shortcomings in both these principles as applied to modern conditions, and suggests that they be employed in combination, while spatially separating massed nuclear strikes and the axes of actions of attack groupings. This article appeared in Issue No. 4 (65) for 1962.

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

William W. Wells

~~TOP SECRET~~



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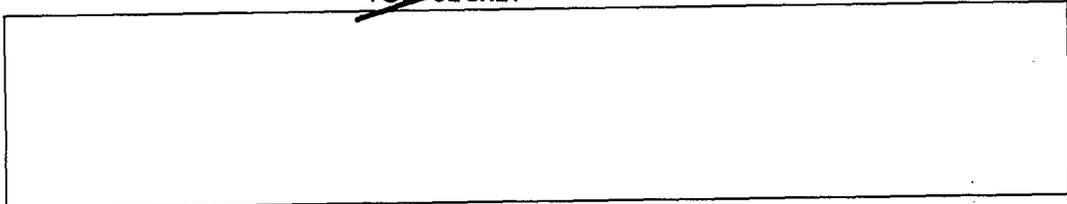
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Intelligence Information Special Report

Page 3 of 9 Pages

COUNTRY USSR



DATE OF INFO. Mid-1962

DATE 13 July 1976

SUBJECT

MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): The Problem of Selecting the Axis of the Main Attack in an Operation

SOURCE Documentary

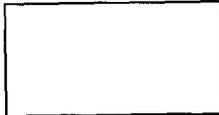
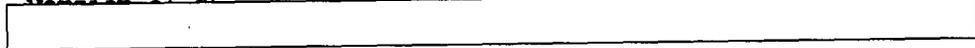
Summary:

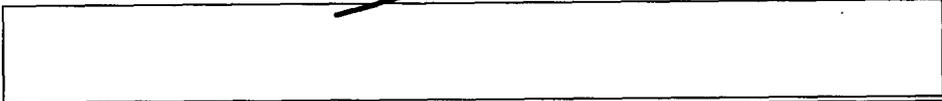
The following report is a translation from Russian of an article which appeared in Issue No. 4 (65) for 1962 of the SECRET USSR Ministry of Defense publication Collection of Articles of the Journal 'Military Thought'. The author of this article is Colonel V. Solovyev. This article is an analysis of two diametrically opposed points of view regarding the selection of the axis of the main attack. One proposes to concentrate the bulk of the main attack against a weak point in the enemy disposition. The other maintains that the present level of the development of combat equipment is such that the main attack should be delivered against the enemy's strongest grouping, destroying it so that tank and infantry forces can be dispersed throughout the zone of the front and directed against those axes where nuclear strikes are being delivered. The author points out the shortcomings in both these principles as applied to modern conditions, and suggests that they be employed in combination, while spatially separating massed nuclear strikes and the axes of actions of attack groupings.

End of Summary

Comment:

After 1962 the SECRET version of Military Thought was published three times annually and was distributed down to the level of division commander. It reportedly ceased publication at the end of 1970.





The Problem of Selecting the Axis
of the Main Attack in an Operation

by
Colonel V. Solovyev

Two diametrically opposed points of view regarding the selection of the axis of the main attack in operations are often expressed in military periodicals.

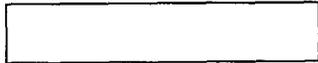
Some authors consider it desirable to deliver the main attack against a weak, extremely vulnerable point in the enemy's disposition, concentrating the bulk of the nuclear weapons, troops and combat equipment on this axis. This principle, which justified itself completely during the operations of the Great Patriotic War, in their opinion remains a basic principle even in the conduct of military operations under conditions of the massive employment of nuclear weapons.

Another point of view consists in the fact that at the present level of development of armament and combat equipment, it is necessary to deliver the main attack against the enemy's strongest grouping, destroying it to the greatest possible extent with nuclear weapons, and that under these conditions it is not necessary to concentrate major tank and infantry forces on the main axis; rather, these forces should be dispersed throughout the entire zone of a front and directed against those axes where the nuclear strikes are being delivered.

Let us analyze the first point of view. It is known that the basic task of any operation in past wars was to destroy the enemy's main grouping, which consisted of infantry and tank divisions, and to seize certain lines in the depth in order to develop subsequent military actions. Owing to the fact that the combat capabilities of the armed combat means were comparatively limited at that time and did not permit entire large units to be put out of action by one strike, in order to carry out this task it was required that a quantitative superiority be established over the enemy in artillery, tanks, and manpower, and that the best operational and tactical position be selected for one's own troops.

Since it was very difficult to achieve the necessary superiority over the enemy in forces and means throughout the entire zone of the offensive,



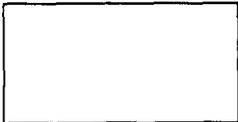


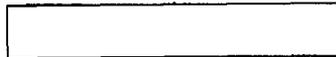
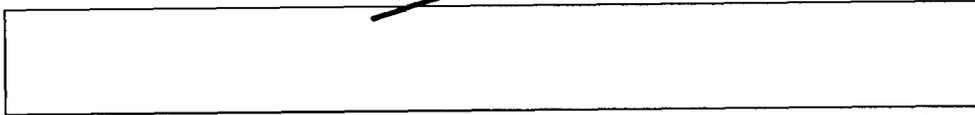
and sometimes virtually impossible, operations were conducted by means of a breakthrough of the defense in narrow sectors of the front with a subsequent commitment of tank groupings to the breakthrough for an attack against the enemy's flanks and rear and swift actions in the operational depth. Significant densities of troops and combat equipment were established in the breakthrough sectors for this purpose, thus ensuring a twofold to threefold superiority in manpower and a more significant one in artillery and tanks, which led to the success of the operation. Thus, during the operations of 1944, the Soviet troops on the axis of the main attack had superiority over the fascist German troops: in infantry -- three to six times, artillery -- three to ten times, tanks -- four to ten times and aircraft -- two to ten times. The densities of artillery in the breakthrough sectors were 150 to 240 guns and mortars for one kilometer of the front, and the average operational densities of tanks on the axis of the main attack were 65 to 80 tanks. Naturally, it was comparatively easy to establish superiority over the enemy in forces and means against a weak point in his defense. A breakthrough in such a sector ensured that the enemy's tactical zone of defense could be very rapidly negotiated even before the approach of his operational reserves, against which only the aviation could take action, using conventional bombs. Its actions could not inflict substantial losses or detain the approach of reserves for a significant amount of time.

Under those conditions the delivery of an attack against a strong sector of the enemy's defense which was very densely occupied by troops and combat equipment, was not advantageous, demanded considerable forces and means, led to enormous losses of attacking troops and slowed their rate of advance, as a result of which the opposing enemy was not destroyed but pushed out, and the goal of the operation, as a rule, was not achieved.

In this manner, the principle for delivering the main attack against the weakest point in the enemy defense during the Great Patriotic War stemmed from the level of the development of the means of destruction which had been attained at that time, or, in other words, from the limited capabilities of the means of armed combat of that period.

Will this principle remain valid under conditions in which missile/nuclear weapons are employed? Obviously not. Missile/nuclear weapons make it unnecessary to search for sectors in the enemy disposition which are poorly covered by the troops, for no matter how dense the defense is, in principle it can still be destroyed or sufficiently effectively neutralized by nuclear strikes, as a result of which the strong points in the disposition of the defense can be transformed into weak ones. In





addition, the defense itself will be established not on the principle of a solid front and on the enduring retention of zones and positions, but on a completely new basis -- on nuclear weapons strikes, counterattacks, and the maneuvering of troops.

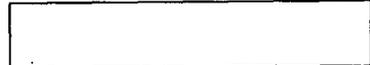
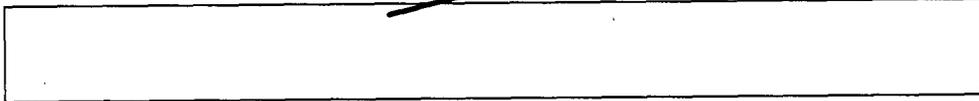
Under these conditions the employment of the bulk of the nuclear means against the secondary grouping, against "weak points" in the enemy disposition -- means to use the most powerful means of destruction inefficiently and unskilfully, to scatter nuclear warheads over areas which are empty or sparsely occupied by the enemy, without exerting the proper effect upon the enemy's main grouping. Even the very concept of the "weak point" in the enemy's defense, as the sectors of his defense which were insufficiently covered by the troops, and the boundaries and flanks usually were considered to be, underwent radical change and does not correspond to the former meaning. Now if we examine, for example, the organization of a mobile defense according to the views of our probable enemies, we may observe the presence of entire regions which are poorly covered or not occupied by troops at all, and the absence of close contact and a unified system of small-arms and artillery fire at the boundaries of adjacent units and large units. But these sectors and areas of the defense cannot be considered "weak" or "vulnerable", inasmuch as the enemy's possession of missile/nuclear weapons permits him to maneuver with nuclear means and to concentrate strikes in any area. The main grouping of our troops, finding themselves in such areas, might be subjected to damage from nuclear weapons and powerful counterattacks by the enemy groupings which are deployed in the depth.

Consequently, under present-day conditions the delivery of a main attack against a weak point in the defense in the majority of cases obviously will be undesirable.

Perhaps now we should adhere to the second point of view and deliver the main attack against the enemy's strongest grouping. At first glance this will seem most acceptable, since it answers the very purpose of nuclear weapons -- to destroy mass targets. And this is really so. However, to fully accept this point of view -- in all cases to deliver the main attack against the enemy's strongest grouping and to concentrate the main forces and means for this, including nuclear weapons -- in our opinion, would be incorrect for two reasons.

First, in selecting the axis for the main attack in an offensive operation against the enemy's most powerful grouping, we either voluntarily or involuntarily proceed from the old hypothesis concerning the dominating





role in a battle or an operation of the infantry and tank large units, to whose actions we tie this attack. Now no one doubts that nuclear weapons have become our main destructive force, as well as the enemy's. By the same token, only the enemy's tactical means of delivering nuclear weapons will be deployed together with the large units of the ground forces. As can be seen from the experience of exercises in recent years, operational-tactical nuclear weapons, in the majority of cases, are positioned on the flanks of the main grouping of the ground forces, or in the depth, since the great operating range of these types of missiles permits nuclear strikes to be concentrated on any axis.

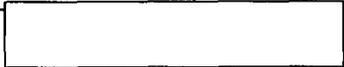
Thus, the enemy's main grouping (encompassing first of all the means for delivering nuclear weapons and the main grouping of infantry and armored large units) will be deployed not on one axis, but distributed over the terrain. Therefore, under present-day conditions it already is impossible to speak of selecting the axis of the main attack in conformity with the deployment of the enemy's main grouping in one area.

Second, if the main attack is delivered against the enemy's strongest grouping, thus concentrating the bulk of the forces and means, including nuclear weapons, to destroy it, then the attacking troops will have to negotiate the enormous zones of destruction and radioactive contamination created as a result of the massed nuclear strikes. As a consequence of this, the rate of the troops' advance might be very slow and the success of the operation will be subject to doubt.

In command-staff exercises, frequently large-scale attack groupings are sent through areas against which dozens of nuclear strikes have been delivered. Therefore, it is assumed that the troops can conduct successful combat actions and advance at a rapid rate. Will it actually be that way? It is highly doubtful. Let us assume, for example, that 40 to 60 nuclear strikes are delivered against an area 80 by 100 kilometers in size. What will the terrain be like after this? Demolished cities, populated areas and lines of transportation, zones of continuous contamination with high levels of radiation, huge fires, barriers in the forests, a tremendous change in the landscape which hampers orientation -- all of this will seriously affect the rate of advance of the large troop masses. We must add to this that, in practice, such a large number of nuclear bursts would not take place within a limited area and in a short time, and factual results might far exceed the presumed calculated expectations.

In considering the foregoing, we can conclude that the delivery of the main attack against the enemy's strongest grouping and, even though it is a





wider zone, the concentration upon this axis of the bulk of the nuclear weapons, motorized rifle and tank divisions and other forces and means, also conceal many negative features.

We consider only the combination of both these principles and the spatial separation of massed nuclear strikes and the axis of the actions of the attack groupings to be the most acceptable.

The point is that traditionally the bulk of the nuclear weapons and most of the combined-arms large units have been concentrated on the axis selected for the main attack, in order that the attack grouping, advancing swiftly, could exploit the results of the missile/nuclear strikes to the greatest extent. In our opinion, this cannot always be achieved if the offensive is conducted directly through areas of massed nuclear bursts. In many cases it will be desirable to inflict decisive destruction with nuclear weapons on the enemy's main grouping, and to swiftly develop an offensive with the greater part of the tank and motorized rifle divisions into the depth in sectors and on axes which are poorly covered or not occupied by the enemy. In so doing, the results of the massed nuclear strike can be exploited most effectively, since the main enemy land grouping and the enemy's nuclear means will be destroyed and will not be able to put forth any kind of substantive opposition to the attacking troops by way of a strike against their flank and rear.

We must mention immediately that on the axis of operations of the attack grouping, consisting of tank and motorized rifle divisions, nuclear strikes will also be delivered by the means of these large units, but the bulk of the operational-tactical means will be concentrated on carrying out the most important task -- the destruction of the enemy's nuclear weapons and main land grouping. In our opinion, it is sufficient to allocate the limited forces of the ground forces on the axis of this grouping to complete the enemy's destruction. The rate at which these forces advance might be slightly slower, but it will in no way affect the general high speed of the offensive in the operation.

In this manner, a new principle has appeared in operational art because of the massed use of nuclear weapons -- the spatial separation of nuclear weapons strikes and attacks of the ground forces. Apparently, on the basis of this, it will be necessary to state anew the question concerning the selection of the axis of the main attack in an operation. In our opinion, it is now necessary to select the main areas (targets) for the employment of nuclear weapons and the axis for the offensive of the ground forces groupings, one of which can be the main one.





Recognizing the absence of spatial connection of nuclear strikes and troop actions under contemporary conditions, we cannot, of course, accept this principle as dogma and be guided by it, alone, in all cases of the situation. Such a principle will be used most often when one formation or another is allocated a significant number of nuclear warheads, which will permit large enemy groupings to be destroyed by nuclear strikes and numerically small groupings of the ground forces, and will allow mobile groupings, primarily tanks, to boldly break through into the depth and seize vitally important enemy installations.

When a lesser number of nuclear warheads is allocated, and also if the conditions of the terrain will not permit the attack groupings to move rapidly across the area against which massed nuclear strikes have not been delivered, it will be desirable to develop an offensive across areas in which the bulk of the nuclear means are being used, i.e., to collocate the strikes of the nuclear weapons and the axes of the troop actions in space.

With an extremely limited number of nuclear weapons it will sometimes be advantageous to deliver an attack against a weak point in the enemy's disposition, in so doing widely using conventional means of destruction.

We must use a creative approach in selecting the axis for the main attack. One thing is clear, however: the new principle of spatial separation of nuclear weapons strikes and the axes for the actions of attack groupings should receive universal recognition, since it is based on the objective features of the modern means of armed combat.

