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USSR: INITIAL MILITARY REACTION TO DESERT STORM (U)

Summary

Early military public commentary on Operation Desert Storm indicates that coalition operations in the Persian Gulf War will significantly influence the internal Soviet debate over the future of their armed forces. While the General Staff has yet to intensively analyze Desert Storm, we expect that the impact of high technology on coalition battlefield successes will be used to reinforce calls for increases in the military RDT&E budget. Coalition successes will reinforce Soviet calls for negotiating limits on naval forces and cruise missiles, and could be used to support the Soviet interpretation of the CFE Treaty. (CONF)

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Soviet proponents of defense reform will probably use the Gulf War to argue for a far smaller, professional military saturated with high-technology weapons. More traditional officers will probably argue that several unique circumstances affected the outcome of the war and that the existing structure and operational concepts of the armed forces--which stress armor, artillery, and mass--will remain decisive factors in future wars. Minister of Defense Yazov already is working to shield the Soviet military, arguing that Desert Storm is "... not a war whose experience can be taken as a pearl (of wisdom)." (CONF)

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Will Tanks Save The Day?

An analysis of NATO Allied Forces command and staff exercises . . . in the Central European TVD (theater of military operations) shows that the Air Force is the basis of striking power . . . and is given the deciding war role both with and without the use of nuclear weapons.

Major General Ye. M. Antonov
Military Thought
January 1989

Operation Desert Storm has begun to thunder across the ongoing Soviet debate on defense reform and the future structure of the Soviet military. In a 23 February interview in the traditionalist military newspaper *Krasnaya zvezda*, Chief of the General Staff Moiseyev said that the General Staff had created a special operations group to monitor the course of the war and to study the impact modern weapons and command-and-control systems were having on the battlefield. Interviews of other senior military officers in the Soviet media in the first weeks of Operation Desert Storm, while purely descriptive, suggest that they see the Persian Gulf War as the first modern war pointing potentially to a revolution in military concepts and operations:

- o The Air Force Commander-in-Chief, Colonel General Shaposhnikov, claimed in *Krasnaya zvezda* on 25 January that the initial coalition air campaign was aimed at achieving victory at the very outset of the war. He asserted that the coalition was using the most modern weapons systems and new methods of warfare to achieve this end.
- o Lt. General Gorbachev, a faculty chief at the General Staff Academy, commented in the moderate newspaper *Izvestiya* on 21 January in an article entitled "Tanks Will Not Save the Day," that the coalition--combining advanced technology weapons, electronic warfare, and operational-strategic surprise--paralyzed Iraqi air defenses and command-and-control, thus attaining air superiority at the outset of the war. In his view, the outcome of the war at that point was already determined.
- o General Lobov, Chief-of-Staff of the Warsaw Pact, however, while noting the danger of making final conclusions before hostilities end, cautioned in a radio broadcast on 1 February that the final outcome of the war depended--as in past wars--on the ground battle.
- o Major General Filatov, Chief Editor of the hard-line *Military Historical Journal*, has actually predicted that the coalition will lose the war because Iraq has the decisive advantage in ground forces.
- o The Chief of the General Staff's Operational-Strategic Research Center, Major General Bogdanov, was more circumspect, noting in a 31 January *Krasnaya zvezda* interview that the coalition was using the latest military technology, much of it not combat-tested prior to the outbreak of hostilities. He claimed that this has required coalition commanders to develop new methods of warfare. (C.M.F.)

High Tech and the Revolution in Military Affairs

War outcome will be determined by a single massed strike by precision-guided conventional weapons. Consequently, the traditional role of conventional armed forces equipped with infantry, tanks, and artillery is virtually eliminated.

Major General Slipchenko, Chief,
Military Science Department, General
Staff Academy, NDU-General Staff
Exchange, September 1990

Soviet military comments reflect a long-standing debate within the military over the impact of advanced technology on the battlefield. The fundamental issue is whether the combination of advanced technology and conventional weapons systems has brought about a revolution in military affairs akin to the revolution wrought by nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles in the 1960s. If such a revolution has occurred, the fundamental structure of the Soviet military needs to be examined--as it was thirty years ago--to determine if it is appropriate for the demands of future war. (CNF)

Marshal Ogarkov, former Chief of the General Staff, began writing on the revolutionary effects of modern reconnaissance systems, precision-guided munitions, and automated command and control systems in the early 1980s. The argument that quality was replacing quantity as the key determinant of military power won wide acceptance and led to significant early military support for President Gorbachev as the leader who could modernize the Soviet economy to match Western technological developments. (CNF)

At a series of conferences hosted last year by the National Defense University and the Soviet General Staff Academy, senior Soviet military officers claimed that the Academy has been charged by the General Staff to develop a new "future war" concept to serve as a critical planning framework for future Soviet force development. The General Staff Academy reportedly has concluded that new precision-guided weapons and real-time reconnaissance systems are revolutionizing military art. The Chief of the Academy's Military Science Department, Major General Slipchenko, remarked that the traditional role of tanks, artillery, and infantry is being virtually eliminated since advanced conventional weaponry could determine the outcome of a war at the very outset. This view, if accepted, raises doubts about the existing structure of the Soviet armed forces which still hold large armored forces as the decisive element. (CNF)

Nuclear War Without Nuclear Weapons?

A world war with conventional weapons would also be fundamentally different from past wars. . . . Nuclear power plants, chemical enterprises, and stockpiles of nuclear ammunition and chemical weapons would also be demolished, which would result in vast areas of contamination and devastation.

Minister of Defense Yazov, 1987

Soviet military commentators also have focused on the outcome of coalition attacks on Iraqi nuclear, chemical, and biological installations and stockpiles. Soviet interest reflects a concern that attacks on such targets blur the once sharp distinction between conventional and nuclear war. For some years Soviet spokesmen argued that conventional war would be extremely destructive because the latest conventional weapons have capabilities previously attributed only to nuclear weapons. More recently, however, the Soviets have been expressing concern that even relatively unsophisticated conventional weapons have such destructive capabilities, primarily because of the consequences of their use against targets such as nuclear reactors, chemical enterprises, and stockpiles of chemical weapons. Soviet interest in this question, heavily influenced by their Chernobyl experience, is an important factor in Soviet efforts to understand the nature of modern war, including the question of whether "victory" is possible in modern war between superpowers. (C/NF) 1.5(c)(d) 1.6(d)(1)(6)

Soviet military commentary on the attacks on nuclear reactors have focused on two aspects--the size of the reactors and whether they were in operation. Colonel General Petrov, chief of the Chemical Troops, played down the danger of contamination in an 18 January *Trud* interview. He stressed that the reactors were relatively small, research-type units rather than large, Chernobyl-type power generation installations and that they had been closed down and the fuel unloaded. (U)

The Soviet military probably also will place a high priority on collecting information about the outcome of attacks on Iraqi chemical and biological weapons, whether in stockpiles or field-deployed. Colonel General Petrov expressed concern about the effects of attacking such weapons. He indicated that attacks on chemical weapons production and storage facilities could result in dangerous contamination up to several dozen kilometers and "concentrations above permissible levels" out to 100 kilometers. He was more pessimistic about attacks on biological weapons, warning that "the consequences of the escape of pathogens into the atmosphere during the destruction of their storage sites are difficult to predict" and that the spread of epidemics beyond the borders of Iraq was possible. This concern was repeated by Petrov in a 29 January *Izvestiya* interview and by Colonel of the Medical Service Uskov, deputy chief of the Central Military Medical Directorate Sanitary and Epidemiological Department, in a 30 January *Krasnaya zvezda* interview. (C/NF)

The Soviets recognize that Iraq does not contain the concentration of nuclear- and chemical-related targets that would be present in military operations in Europe. Nevertheless, they probably believe that analysis of Desert Storm experiences will improve their understanding of the likely consequences of "conventional war" in that environment. (C/NF)

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Desert Storm: Feeding A National Security Debate?

We cannot help but be concerned that the United States is creating a large grouping of non-nuclear strategic offensive arms which do not fall under the (START) Treaty and can be stationed anywhere.

Minister of Defense Yazov in the
preamble to the Ministry of Defense
Draft Military Reform Plan, November,
1990

Our armed forces in Europe, which we are reducing in accordance with the Treaty on Conventional Arms, have been deployed in order to balance the superiority of the United States Navy. . . . Hence, an imbalance has emerged which does not correspond to the prospects for developing the Paris Agreements. . . . I can only say one thing . . . that at the next stage the subject, the problem of the navy, will be raised.

President Gorbachev, Supreme Soviet
Address, 26 November 1990

In the larger military-political venue, the Persian Gulf War has been linked to arms control issues and the future general direction of security policy. Chief of the General Staff Moiseyev has attempted to associate initial coalition successes with the CFE Treaty.

Moiseyev claimed that initial coalition successes have highlighted the superiority of Western weapons systems, making the CFE Treaty--in which the Soviets will have to remove or destroy more military equipment than any other nation--more difficult to justify to CFE critics. These critics may play up the threat of non-ratification to blunt Western complaints over Soviet interpretation and associated actions.² (S ~~SECRET~~)

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General Moiseyev also has suggested that events in the Persian Gulf will influence the debate over national security policy between the Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs. According to a *Krasnaya zvezda* summary of his remarks at a recent General Staff Party conference, Moiseyev declared that the Persian Gulf War was having a negative effect on the military-political situation in the world. This required the General Staff to draw "the appropriate conclusions" in order to strengthen "the country's defense capability." He went on to assert that, although national security is primarily attained through political means, "this certainly does not mean that responsibility for the country's reliable defense is shifted from the armed forces to the diplomats."

the military--using its current influence--will do whatever it can to circumvent diplomatic efforts which it feels are detrimental to national security. (C ~~SECRET~~)

² The Soviets have reclassified three divisions in the European USSR as coastal defense units subordinate to the Navy. They claim that since these divisions are now "naval" they are not subject to the treaty limiting requirements of Article III. (U)

Desert Storm and Military Reform: Quality vs. Quantity

In my opinion, the war in the Gulf will end in a major U.S. defeat. . . . Iraq's advantage lies in the ground troops (and) as soon as the first U.S. soldier steps onto Iraqi soil . . . it is then that the war will begin.

General Major Filatov, Chief Editor, *The Military Historical Journal*, in "War In the Gulf Has Not Yet Begun," *Komsomolskaya pravda*, 1 February 1991

So far it's been impossible to unequivocally assess the military situation. The armed services . . . used up until now are not crucial to the fate of either side. . . . Only when ground forces are in action can a conclusion be made. But forecasts may be wrong.

General V. Lobov, Warsaw Pact Chief of Staff, Radio Moscow, 1 February 1991

The initial public reactions of senior military officers indicate that military operations in the Gulf War are being viewed in the light of the "future war" concept. The General Staff Academy's view of future war appeals to military officers who prefer to develop and field high-technology weapons systems even if their cost forces further reductions in the size of the military. This issue--framed as a quality vs. quantity debate--has become an important focal point in the debate on military reform. (CNF)

Influential moderate military reformer Colonel Ochirov, deputy chairman of the Supreme Soviet's Defense and State Security Committee, in a military magazine last November wrote that security was dependent on the quality, not quantity of military forces. He further noted:

While in the United States (in September 1990), I interested myself in the opinion of specialists. What significance do Americans attach to modern electronic warfare systems in a possible armed conflict with Iraq? And competent people . . . answered--a very great significance. The electronic warfare systems deployed in Saudi Arabia increase the overall combat potential of the American grouping of forces that faces Iraq. If this additional potential is employed against Iraq, then . . . enemy systems of command and control of troops, forces, and weapons (will) be paralyzed . . . Really, the level of development of these systems is so high that they change the character of armed conflict qualitatively. (U)

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Radical military reformers such as reserve Major Lopatin and Lt. Colonel Podziruk have also argued that more resources need to be allocated towards the research and development of advanced military technologies. However, they have also pressed for a radical restructuring of the armed forces towards a smaller structure manned largely by

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well-paid and well-trained professionals, rather than a large standing army comprised of poorly motivated conscripts. They have rejected the primarily anti-NATO thrust of the Soviet military structure, arguing that the West is no longer a threat to the Soviet Union, and that the real external threat will emanate from the Third World. (C/NF)

The November 1990 reform plan of the Ministry of Defense--while noting the need to re-equip the armed forces with advanced weapons--calls for only an additional 10-12 percent reduction in ground forces manpower by 2000 and no radical restructuring. This suggests that traditionalist officers--primarily those such as the Warsaw Pact Chief of Staff--while agreeing on the need to modernize, believe that the Soviet Union still faces a Western threat and correspondingly needs to generate a force capable of conducting large-scale ground operations, continental in scope, with the more traditional types of decisive elements such as armor, artillery, and mass. (C/NF)

The traditionalist officers have taken particular pains to argue that only a ground war will ultimately decide the outcome in the Persian Gulf. They have also argued strenuously against the conclusion that an Iraqi defeat would indicate that Soviet weaponry, force structure, and operational concepts are obsolete. They fear that this conclusion could be used by reformist critics both inside and outside the military with unpredictable results during uncertain times. Consequently, they blame the poor showing of the primarily Soviet-supplied Iraqi armed forces on the use of older Soviet weapons and the unprofessional performance of the Iraqi military. Significantly, Minister of Defense Yazov, in a 23 February *Pravda* interview, seemed to align himself with the traditionalists. Pointedly referring to those who "have begun to admire U.S. technology," he asserted that Iraq had few modern Soviet weapons systems while the coalition had an overwhelming advantage in modern weapons. He went on to claim that T-62 tanks operated by the Syrians--not the Iraqis--had performed better in the desert than the U.S. Abrams. (C/NF)

Outlook

The allocation of an excessively high share of the gross national product to defense and the uncontrolled race to produce arms and combat equipment to the detriment of quality lead to an intensification of the economy's instability and a curtailment of social programs. The diktat of the industrial-military complex leads to the imposition of costly equipment with low combat effectiveness on the army.

Major V.N. Lopatin, Draft Military Reform Proposal, August 1990

Desert Storm military successes could be used by the military to strengthen its hand in internal arms control and national security debates. It could be used--as Moiseyev hinted--to justify the Soviet interpretation of the CFE Treaty and influence the treaty ratification debate within the Supreme Soviet. We expect Soviet military commentators will also use Operation Desert Storm to press for talks on naval forces. Elements of Desert Storm--sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs), carrier aircraft attacks, and amphibious operations--are precisely the forces often mentioned by Soviet military officials as a

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strategic threat to the Soviet Union. It is likely that senior officers will use the initial successes of coalition advanced technology and naval weapons systems to argue that the Gulf War proves that naval strike forces must be included in future conventional arms control talks and that equal force ceilings in the CFE Treaty place the Soviets at a net disadvantage, given the qualitative superiority of Western weapons systems. They also will probably highlight the effectiveness of cruise missiles against strategic targets in Iraq to underline the importance of limiting conventional cruise missiles in strategic arms control negotiations. (C,NF)

Operation Desert Storm will almost certainly fuel the internal debate on the size and makeup of the military budget. Real defense spending has almost certainly declined in the past two years, and will probably fall in 1991. The Commander of the Air Defense radar troops, however, already has made a strong pitch for increases in resources allocated to his forces in his commentary on Desert Storm--even though the draft Ministry of Defense Reform Plan calls for 18-20 percent reductions in Air Defense personnel by the year 2000. Both reformers and traditionalists have in the past supported increased funding for RDT&E and personnel services such as housing and increased pay. While resources allocated for personnel services have probably been increased in the 1991 budget, RDT&E resource levels are still being debated after the government proposed cuts of 23 percent. When asked what worried him most as Minister of Defense in the *Pravda* interview, Yazov replied that he was most concerned about reduced appropriations for RDT&E. (C,NF)

The fallout from Desert Storm will thus likely further complicate what is already an antagonistic and complicated internal debate over future military budgets. It is likely that traditionalists will argue more strongly that resources cannot be cut further, and along with the radicals, press for increases rather than cuts in RDT&E. It is also possible they could seek to reverse the decline in defense spending, using coalition military prowess to buttress their claims that the West remains a significant military threat to the motherland. Several military commentators have already claimed that the UN coalition is in reality a disguised NATO testing new weapons and military concepts, thereby hoping to make concrete the nature of the military threat from the West. (C,NF)

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In the longer term, a General Staff analysis of the course, character, and outcome of the Persian Gulf War will almost certainly have a profound impact on debate within the Soviet military regarding its future structure. The decisive coalition victory will most likely reinvigorate proponents of radical military reform and be used as support for their argument that the existing leadership has wasted the country's resources to produce an obsolete military machine incapable of protecting vital national interests. They are likely to press their contention that the country needs a professional army made up of volunteers who are well-paid, well-trained, well-educated, and thus highly motivated and able to skilfully employ modern weapons systems. (C,NF)

Opponents of reform will probably counter by pointing out that the Gulf War had unique factors--the extended period allowed for the coalition buildup, the participants, the correlation of forces, the limited size of the theater of operations, the terrain--which limit the extent to which "lessons learned" can be applied to changes in military doctrine or

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structure. They are likely to claim that the country cannot afford a volunteer army, that conscripts can handle modern weapons systems, and that traditional elements of military power—armor, artillery, and mass—will remain decisive factors in the type of wars which are ever likely to involve Soviet forces. Marshal Yazov appears to have initially accepted this view. In his interview he stated that "this is not a war whose experience can be taken as a pearl (of wisdom)." The outcome of the debate will be heavily influenced by the Desert Storm endgame and the overall internal political environment extant in the next few years.

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