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CONSERVATIVE DOCTRINES GAIN NEW CURRENCY
IN SOVIET MILITARY DISCOURSE

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CONSERVATIVE DOCTRINES GAIN NEW CURRENCY
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Evidence of a new interest in conservative concepts in Soviet military thinking is afforded by a number of articles that have appeared in the military press over the past several weeks. Much of the evidence is direct, with some authors arguing openly that traditional methods and conventional arms deserve continued attention despite the contemporary revolution in military affairs. Additional, indirect evidence may be found in complaints by other authors, as if in response to traditionalist agitation, that conservative habits of mind and doctrinal disagreements have held back the forward movement of military science.

It is not yet clear whether the new advocacy of conservative concepts marks the beginning of a long-term trend or a reaction by the conservative military element to some development which it regards as a threat to its interests. The coincidence of the conservative arguments with the recent buildup of Khrushchev's military reputation, in connection with his birthday celebration, could give grounds for interpreting the phenomenon as essentially reactive--reflecting concern that the buildup might be part of some new move to force through more measures on the order of the troops cut. Insistence on the continuing importance of conventional arms and forces would be in keeping with the tactics used in the military press to demonstrate resistance to this measure.

There are grounds also, however, for suggesting that some of the articles may have more far-reaching implications in terms of the evolution of Soviet military doctrine. Viewed as serious contributions to the internal dialogue over doctrine and force structure, these articles could be interpreted as symptomatic of something new in Soviet military thinking--an emergent professional reaction against the one-sided emphasis on nuclear-rocket strategy that has generally predominated in recent years and a tendency to subject the modernist military philosophy to critical review and reevaluation.

Persistence of Doctrinal Conflicts Acknowledged

A striking feature of the recent articles is the acknowledgments they contain that doctrinal disputes continue to divide Soviet military

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theorists. Although references to internal disputes over doctrine have appeared before in Soviet propaganda, such references have been relatively rare and usually cast in the past tense. Soviet writers characteristically betray sensitivity to the imputation that differences exist among Soviet military theorists--a notable case in point being the RED STAR article of 2 November 1963 rebutting American editorial interpretations of Sokolovskiy's "Military Strategy." A basic element of the mythology that Moscow has woven around the new military doctrine is that it represents a "unity of views" on military affairs that has been achieved among all responsible officials in the Soviet state in recent years.

One of the most candid of the recent acknowledgments of discord is contained in an article by Colonel Korotkov which appeared in MILITARY-HISTORICAL JOURNAL No. 4, 1964. Tracing the development of Soviet military theory in the postwar period, Korotkov dwells on the turning points--the periods in which developments in technology stimulated sharp revaluations of military theory. One such period he identifies as the 1960-1961 period--a stage in the process that was marked by a well-publicized debate on military science. But in contrast to the wholly favorable verdict he gives to the other turning points, as for example the comparable debates in 1954, he expresses a qualified appraisal in this case. "Unfortunately," he says, "this discussion was not carried through to a conclusion." Just as before, he complains, "there is still no unity of views on the object, contents, and constituent parts of military science."

Elsewhere, Korotkov refers to some of the specific issues involved in the military disputes. He implies, for example, that the question of the duration of a future war had provoked quarrels. "Certain of our military theoreticians," he observes critically, "despite their recognition that a future war would be nuclear ..., nevertheless believed that it would be prolonged." He refers to disputes over the decisiveness of nuclear weapons: "Certain comrades, recognizing the new qualities of the rocket-nuclear weapon, did not regard it as the decisive means for the achievement of victory." He implies that disputes over the local war issue have persisted up to the present. "It is necessary to recognize," he complains, "that our military thought... has devoted insufficient attention to the study of limited [local] wars Only in the most recent past has this shortcoming begun to be corrected."

Similar complaints are echoed in other recent articles. The most recent installment in the "Revolution in Military Affairs" series,

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which appeared in RED STAR on 25 April, contains the following examples:

‡ The truth is evident and the majority of comrades have mastered it well. But one still meets people with their own peculiar views on modern weapons. They to the end have still not understood that it is impossible to approach the problem of employing the new weapons with the old yardstick.

‡ Nevertheless, there are some who are strongly attached to the old.

‡ To break with habits, however, is not so simple.

Continued Validity of Traditional Methods and Weapons Asserted

Several of the recent articles directly address the question of the relationship between the "old" and the "new" in military affairs. Surprisingly, the predictable accolades to the new are accompanied by repeated reminders that the old should not be prematurely cast aside. This duality of emphasis is so pronounced in some of the articles that the paragraphs assume almost an antiphonal quality.

An article by Colonel Kuzmin, in KOMMUNIST OF THE ARMED FORCES No. 8, 1964, is illustrative. The author asserts, for example, that the "new" is distinguished from the "old" by virtue of the fact that it is destined to replace the latter--but then he adds that for a certain period the two must exist together and develop in close harmony. In another place, he reiterates the standard doctrine that nuclear-rocket weapons are now the main means of combat. But again he adds the qualifier: "This in no way excludes the possibility and the necessity of using other--including 'old'--types of technology and weapons on the field of battle." In still another such passage he refers to the dominant role of nuclear strategy in the conduct of modern war, but adds: "This in no way signifies a complete disregard of other means and methods connected with the 'old' types of weapons." The author's use of the quotation marks around the word "old" underscores his disapproval of the accuracy of this designation.

A review of the book "The History of Military Art," edited by Marshal Rotmistrov, which appeared in RED STAR on 25 April, reflects a similar emphasis. The critics praise the book for demonstrating the continued relevance of past military experience to contemporary problems. The experience of history teaches, they say, that developments in the art of war have always come gradually and that new

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developments have never invalidated old methods quickly or completely. "From the past is always borrowed that which has not lost its significance for the new conditions." This conclusion, they say, remains "unconditionally important for the present day as well."

The same theme is reiterated even more forcefully by Rotmistrov himself in the 26 April issue of RED STAR. Criticizing what he describes as a tendency among his colleagues to overemphasize the conclusiveness of contemporary military propositions, Rotmistrov argues that the achievements of the past should not be minimized. "It is necessary to remember," he says, "that an overestimation or an underestimation or, still worse, a disregard of the old types of forces or the old weapons is not only impermissible but harmful..." Like the other articles mentioned above, he stresses the continuity of historical development in military affairs. "As the history of war teaches, new forms of combat replace the old not at once, but gradually, inasmuch as the new for a long time cannot manage without the old." This proposition, he points out--in an apparent reference to current policy problems--relates specifically to the "development of armaments and combat technology." He adds a criticism of oversimplified approaches to the problems of weapons development which seems perilously close to an implied criticism of Khrushchev: "In defining the roles [of various weapons] in armed combat, a calculation based on the results [to be anticipated from] one new type of weapon alone may lead to mistaken conclusions."

Air Forces' Role in Future War Emphasized

In addition to generalized emphasis on the continued importance of conventional arms, some of the articles contain references to specific types of armed forces said to retain an importance for future war. The air forces are singled out for special attention in this regard.

An article entitled "Man, Altitude, Speed" in the 25 April RED STAR provides an example. Not only does the article stress the importance of the air forces in a future war, but it does so in such a way as to suggest that the air forces are inseparably linked with the forward movement in the art of war. It makes a point of stressing that the air forces are better suited than the rocket forces for achieving some of the essential tasks of a future war:

It is easy to destroy airdromes with rockets. It is easier still to strike launching pads with airplanes. Rockets need aviation reconnaissance. A peculiar fellowship arises. A clear example of this is the possibility of launching ballistic rockets from heavy airplanes.

The Rotmistrov article mentioned above contains another example of special attention to the air forces. Here the emphasis is the

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more striking in that Rotmistrov has never been noted for any particular regard for the air forces. He says:

In the conditions of conducting a war of maneuver, aviation becomes not only an irreplaceable means of reconnaissance, but also a reliable and fully effective means of destroying moving targets either with the use of nuclear ammunition or conventional bombs.

The recent articles also contain statements which reflect a special concern for the role of the ground forces in a future war. This carries forward a trend which has been evident in military press commentary since Khrushchev first raised the threat of further troop reductions in his concluding speech to the Central Committee plenum last December. Such a concern seems reflected in Rotmistrov's somewhat plaintive observation--appended to an enumeration of the problems standing before Soviet military theorists--that "many problems await their solution also in the theory of the use of conventional arms." The review of Rotmistrov's book which appeared in RED STAR on 25 April contains a more direct reference to the importance of the ground forces in a future war. Praising the book for its careful attention to the tactics and strategy of tank employment during World War II, the authors state: "These questions have an important topical significance because the examples ... are most instructive for contemporary conditions as well."

A New Stage in Soviet Military Theory?

A question arises as to whether the evidence presented above registers a passing phenomenon in Soviet military discourse or something more fundamental--a basic reaction against the one-sided emphasis on nuclear-rocket weapons which has generally characterized official thinking in recent years. If the often noted time-lag between American and Soviet doctrinal developments applies in this case, such a reaction might have been regarded as long overdue. Western research has already turned up evidence of a growing Soviet concern to find ways of loosening the self-imposed military and political limitations which its all-or-nothing philosophy of war has entailed. The evidence described above fits with such an emergent trend.

But it appears to entail something more--a new spirit of criticism of the heretofore dominant official philosophy. This is most evident in Rotmistrov's article. Rotmistrov seems to be attacking not only individual professors of military theory but the very notion that an "official" military theory yet exists. His stress is on the tasks still to be tackled, the problems still to be solved. He betrays

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ill-concealed scorn for the pretension that currently approved solutions of military problems represent the last word in military theory. He criticizes theorists who express their views "with categorical assurance as though they had been validated by the experience of war."

A noteworthy feature of the article from this standpoint is that it presents what have heretofore been regarded as "conservative" views under the aspect of reformist innovations. For example, Rotmistrov's references to the use of air power and conventional arms in a future war, mentioned above, are presented in this way. The impression is conveyed that a cycle has been completed in Soviet military theory-- that the "advanced" views espoused until recently have somehow become outmoded and that the official orthodoxies in which they are embodied are now on the defensive. Rotmistrov is virtually explicit on this point. "Today," he says, "it is possible to observe that as a result of the military-theoretical researches that have been conducted ..., certain established views and propositions of military art are already beginning to lose their original significance." And again: "Researchers should free themselves from the fruitless repetition of even the so-called 'established' propositions of the manuals." In the context of the article there can be little doubt that the "established propositions" to which Rotmistrov alludes are the propositions of the new orthodoxies, not the old.

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