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**CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY**  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

12 March 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT : MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Problems of Conducting Military Operations During a Non-Nuclear Period

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 concerns the use of a tank army in a front to conduct an offensive in a non-nuclear period of a war. The author stresses the importance of preparing a single plan to cover both conventional and potential nuclear actions. This article appeared in Issue No. 1 (83) for 1968.

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 [Redacted]

[Redacted]  
William E. Nelson  
Deputy Director for Operations

[Redacted]

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## Intelligence Information Special Report

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COUNTRY USSR



DATE OF INFO. Early 1968

DATE 12 March 1975

SUBJECT

MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Problems of Conducting Military Operations During a Non-Nuclear Period

SOURCE Documentary

Summary:

The following report is a translation from Russian of an article which appeared in Issue No. 1 (83) for 1968 of the SECRET USSR Ministry of Defense publication Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought". The author of this article is Colonel A. Kurkov. This article concerns the use of a tank army in a front operation, to break through enemy defenses and conduct an offensive in the non-nuclear period of a war, as well as to exploit the effects of nuclear weapons. A tank army in the first echelon provides superiority over the enemy, but it also is capable of expanding troop efforts from the second echelon. The author stresses the importance of preparing one plan of a tank army operation to include both conventional and potential nuclear actions, as opposed to separate variants, and describes the application of this theory in exercises.

End of Summary

Comment:

A. Kurkov has made two other contributions to this publication. His article entitled "The Commitment to Combat of a Tank Army During a Front Offensive Operation" appeared in Issue No. 2 (69) for 1963. He co-authored another article, "Combat Actions of a Tank Army Separated from Other Front Forces", published in Issue No. 2 (78) for 1966. 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.

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Problems of Conducting Military Operations During  
a Non-Nuclear Period

(Combat Operations of a Tank Army)

by  
Colonel A. Kurkov

Minister of Defense Marshal of the Soviet Union A. A. Grechko has pointed out that under modern conditions, regardless of how a war begins, with or without the use of nuclear weapons, ground forces operations will not be static in nature. At the beginning of a war both sides probably will begin to move immediately, and as a result, meeting engagements and battles on different scales are inevitable.

Hence, front troops are faced with the very important task of quickly shifting their efforts into the depth, that is, of expanding the zone of simultaneous action against the enemy. This is especially necessary in order to destroy as many nuclear means of attack as possible and thereby reduce enemy capabilities for using nuclear weapons. It also is very important to quickly destroy the enemy reserves during this period, to preempt them in occupying advantageous lines, and to prevent them from combining efforts with the troops operating ahead.

It is clear that to accomplish this task it will be necessary to have on the axis of the main strike the most mobile and powerful groupings of troops, possessing great striking force and capable of conducting an offensive at high speed. Such a grouping among front troops will be first of all a tank army, as an important strike and mobile force representing the highest form of the organizational massing of tanks.

The presence of a tank army in the first echelon of front troops will make it possible, when combat operations are begun in its offensive zone, to achieve a substantial superiority over the enemy in tanks. And this, as is known, is one of the major factors in achieving success in an operation, especially during the period of actions without the use of nuclear weapons. To overcome this superiority in tanks, the enemy will have to regroup

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several tank large units simultaneously and in a short time on the axis of the tank army actions, which is very difficult to do under combat conditions, and in some cases is almost impossible.

The advisability of using a tank army in the first echelon of front troops on the axis of the main strike also stems from the fact that it is very difficult to determine in advance when nuclear weapons will be used, and at what point in time it will be necessary to immediately exploit their results. But we must be ready to do this at any moment. There is no doubt that a tank army situated in the first echelon can handle this task the most successfully.

In examining the use of a tank army mainly as part of the front first echelon, we do not in any way deny that during the non-nuclear period, under certain conditions of the situation it will be advisable to use it in the second echelon. This could happen, for example, when an offensive begins with a breakthrough of a prepared enemy defense and, in addition, the front and army commands do not have accurate data on his engineer preparation, system of fire, and density of antitank means. A tank army, obviously, also can be in the second echelon in those cases where this is dictated by terrain conditions, especially when front troops have to force a large water obstacle at the beginning of an operation. The tank army will be brought into action as the need arises in order to expand efforts from the depth in the process of developing the operation or when shifting to actions with nuclear and chemical weapons. The specific time it is to be introduced will be determined by its capabilities for moving toward the area of commitment to the engagement and for delivering a strike on the axis most favorable to the development of success. But, in the process, every effort must be made to see that the tank large units of the army come into contact with the enemy more quickly. This could reduce losses from nuclear and chemical weapons, even in the event that they are used during the period of overtaking the combat dispositions of the first echelon.

When breaking through the defensive line of the enemy, the establishment of the necessary superiority of forces and means for both divisions and armies requires, in our view, that we determine either the axis on which to concentrate the main efforts, or the breakthrough sectors. The width of the offensive zone of each division at the moment of the breakthrough on the main axis may average ten kilometers. In this zone, in turn, breakthrough sectors can be chosen, where the main efforts of the units are concentrated with their own and supporting fire means. Hence, a breakthrough sector may be up to four kilometers for two tank regiments. Such a concentration of forces in the breakthrough sectors is a necessary

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and extremely short-term occurrence, because there exists the constant threat that the enemy will use nuclear weapons.

After the breakthrough, when success is in sight and the troops are going over to the pursuit of the enemy, large units must immediately disperse, enlarging the action zones to 10, 15, and 20 kilometers. A tank army in most cases will advance in its zone, that is up to 100 kilometers or more. Only under these conditions is it possible to achieve sufficient dispersal of troops for better protection against weapons of mass destruction. The basic requirements in actions to defeat an opposing enemy are speed and suddenness of movement, preemption in opening fire, and for the main forces of an army to deliver a strike in narrow sectors of the front for the purpose of establishing a temporary superiority in forces and means, especially in tanks and artillery. After fulfilling each specific task, the army troops must quickly disperse and execute an abrupt movement to reach the flank and rear of a new enemy grouping.

In the event that a tank army offensive is conducted against a defending enemy at the beginning of a war, it is advisable to allocate from first-echelon divisions strong forward detachments and advance guards to negotiate his security zone; these detachments, by advancing rapidly toward the forward defensive line, seize advantageous sectors and support the approach and deployment of the main forces of the divisions for an attack from the march. The actions of the forward detachments and advance guards, according to the army plan, are supported by aviation and also by artillery fire. The main portion of the artillery advances and deploys under their cover to carry out preparatory fire in the chosen breakthrough sectors.

According to calculations, preparatory fire, based on the possible density of targets and objectives in the enemy defense, will require up to 50 or 60 guns and mortars per kilometer of the breakthrough sector. This would indicate that an army requires considerable reinforcement of its artillery. In the DNEPR exercise, for example, when the 17th Tank Army was brought into action, it was reinforced with an artillery division from the Reserve of the Supreme High Command. Three regimental flights of fighter-bombers and one divisional flight of bombers were assigned as air support for the period of preparatory fire. The duration of preparatory fire, as shown by the experience of exercises, can be up to 40 to 50 minutes.

Thus, in a non-nuclear period, when tank army troops are conducting combat actions with the use of conventional means of destruction only, the commander and army staff each time will face a dilemma: the requirement

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for the maximum concentration of troop efforts, and forces and means to establish decisive superiority in individual sectors of the front, and the need to disperse because of the constant threat of the use of nuclear weapons by the enemy.

To find the appropriate solution in each specific case, the army commander and staff will be required to make a careful analysis first of enemy capabilities for delivering a strike with nuclear weapons at the critical moment, as well as other conditions of fulfilling the tasks assigned to the army. Based on this, the limits of concentration and dispersal of forces, means, and troops are established, the feasibility of which will depend each time on specific conditions: whether tank army forces are conducting an offensive against a defending enemy, and whether they are going over to the pursuit or moving into a meeting engagement. In the latter case the concentration of troop efforts will be required not in the breakthrough sectors, but on the axes on which strikes are delivered mainly against the flank and rear of the enemy groupings conducting the offensive. Here the offensive zones of the regiments and divisions will be wider than those for breaking through a defense.

The reduced capabilities of both sides to destroy objectives on the battlefield in the non-nuclear period result, as has already been pointed out, in a certain decrease in the pace of the offensive, and consequently in an increase in the time required to fulfil tasks.

At the same time, compared to the last war, the scope of an operation will be different because of changed conditions and means of combat. The increase in the striking power and mobility of tank large units enables army troops to conduct fast-moving and highly mobile combat actions. This, in turn, will lead to a more frequent occurrence of meeting battles and engagements, and will make it possible to conduct an offensive, not over a continuous front, but along the most important individual axes, with wide use of flanking and enveloping moves, movement of fire, forces and means, deep mutual penetration of both sides, and continuous conduct of combat actions both by day and by night. A rapid transition from one form of combat actions to another, with the execution of a continuous and broad move, will be one of the most important prerequisites for a successful offensive by tank army troops in the period of non-nuclear actions.

In conclusion we would like to make a few remarks about the planning of a tank army offensive operation. This question continues to be discussed in the military press. Some authors\* propose planning

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\*Collection of Articles of the Journal of "Military Thought", No. 2, 3, 1967.

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essentially two operations: a non-nuclear and a nuclear variant. If it were only a question of developing the graphic part (the map) of the operations plan (decision), then we could still agree with this opinion. But on the whole, to plan an operation with two variants is, in our view, hardly advisable. We believe that planning must be unified and based principally on the variant that envisages unlimited use of weapons of mass destruction by both sides. This is corroborated by the experience of the DNEPR exercise.

The objectives of the operation and the tasks of the tank army troops in case combat actions begin with the use of conventional means of destruction, were set forth in the operational directive (order) of the front, the basis of which was a plan of operations involving the use of nuclear and chemical weapons. The 15th Tank Army, operating in the first echelon of the front was assigned, for example, single operational objectives and the boundaries of the immediate and follow-up tasks. But the time allotted for their fulfilment varied. The immediate task, with the use of nuclear and chemical weapons was completed on the 6th day of the operation, while using conventional means of destruction only it was completed on the 7th or 8th day. The follow-up task was completed on the 11th or 12th, and on the 13th or 14th day of the operation, respectively.

The 17th Tank Army, brought into the engagement from the second echelon of the front, also was assigned a single objective and tasks in the operation. In this case its commitment to the engagement was planned for the morning of the 4th day of the operation in the non-nuclear period of actions, and for the morning of the 6th day, when nuclear and chemical weapons were used. It was determined that the follow-up task of the army was completed on the 11th or 12th day of the operation, when nuclear and chemical weapons were used, and on the 14th to 16th day with conventional means of destruction. The assigned axis for commitment to the engagement and boundaries for completion of tasks were the same for both periods of actions.

The definition of the task, the assessment of the situation, and the formulation of a decision by the army commander were carried out simultaneously for both the nuclear and non-nuclear periods of combat actions. As a result a single plan was drawn up for both a transition to an offensive with the use of nuclear and chemical weapons and an offensive without them. And this is as it should be, since only a comparison of possible conditions and operating methods in the non-nuclear and nuclear periods makes it possible, in our view, to make the most correct determinations of the tasks and operating methods of the troops and their

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coordination, in relation to the situation as it develops. The tasks of divisions, rocket troops, aviation, and other forces and means in the combat order were formulated simultaneously, but the actions of all of these which involved the use of nuclear and chemical weapons were planned first. They included mainly the destruction or capture of nuclear means of attack, and the sudden arrival and capture of important areas and installations on the main axis of the offensive, with losses to the enemy that would ensure the defeat of the opposing grouping.

The depth of advance of large units of the tank army in the first and second day was planned at 40 and 60 kilometers, respectively. Average daily rates of advance when breaking through the enemy defense were expected to be no more than 25 to 30 kilometers; and when developing success in the operational depth, it was 40 to 50 kilometers.

The width of the offensive zone of the tank army was determined in accordance with the situational conditions under which it was brought into action. In anticipation of an enemy offensive and the conduct of meeting battles and engagements, the advance and deployment of the tank army for the purpose of going over to the offensive was planned in a zone of up to 100 kilometers, and in the case of its large units, up to 15 or 20 kilometers. For this reason considerable gaps (as much as 15 to 20 kilometers) occurred between first-echelon divisions; these gaps were used extensively for movements with the objective of emerging on the flank and rear of the opposing grouping.

Almost all of the army and front staffs worked out a single operations plan. Despite the fact that the combat actions of the two sides at these exercises were begun and conducted for a certain length of time without the use of nuclear weapons, the army and front commanders each time, when formulating a decision to defeat the enemy by conventional means, planned the actions of all the forces and means to allow for a decisive nuclear period. This significantly reduced the number of documents that had to be prepared and the time spent in preparing them, and made the plan more convenient to use when controlling troops.

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