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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

28 May 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director of Central Intelligence
SUBJECT : MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): The Question of
Offensive Operations of Fronts Throughout the Entire
Depth of a Theater of Military Operations

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 presents comments on a previous article. The author believes it necessary to defeat the enemy armed forces and capture vitally important areas, not the outlying territories of a theater, to achieve the goals of a front operation. He recommends the use of two operational echelons in successive operations, but is opposed to successive army operations within a front operation. This article appeared in Issue No. 1 (77) for 1966.

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 F. Nelson
Deputy Director for Operations

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Intelligence Information Special Report

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COUNTRY USSR

DATE OF INFO. Early 1966

DATE 28 May 1975

SUBJECT

MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): The Question of Offensive Operations of Fronts Throughout the Entire Depth of a Theater of Military Operations

SOURCE Documentary

Summary:

The following report is a translation from Russian of an article which appeared in Issue No. 1 (77) for 1966 of the SECRET USSR Ministry of Defense publication Collection of Articles of the Journal 'Military Thought'. The author of this article is Colonel A. Volkov. This article presents comments on a previous article. The author believes it necessary to defeat enemy armed forces and capture vitally important areas, not the outlying territories of a theater, to achieve the goals of a front operation. He recommends the use of two operational echelons in successive operations, but is opposed to successive army operations within a front operation. End of Summary

Comment:

The article by I. Glebov and V. Yemelin, to which the current article refers, was disseminated as [redacted], also in Russian, with the title "Offensive Operations of Fronts in the entire Depth of a Theater of Military Operations". Colonel A. Volkov contributed another article, entitled "Problems of Armed Combat in a Non-Nuclear Period of War", to Issue No. 2 (81) for 1967.

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The Question of Offensive Operations of Fronts
Throughout the Entire Depth of a Theater of Military Operations

by
Colonel A. Volkov

The development of the theory of a modern offensive operation by a front throughout the entire depth of a theater of military operations is a new and very real problem. Therefore, one cannot but welcome the appearance, on the pages of the Collection of Articles, of the article devoted to this problem, written by Colonel General I. Glebov and General-Major V. Yemelin.*

In this article the authors have in general correctly presented the conditions under which an offensive operation of a front may take place throughout the entire depth of a theater. In considering the planning and conduct of the operation the authors made a serious attempt to depart from the usual methods of solving these problems that have been generally accepted in theory and in practice. In this connection we feel it necessary to present our own viewpoint on certain questions of this important subject.

First of all we would like to point out that the depth of the operation under discussion will not as a rule coincide with the depth of a strategic operation conducted in the theater of military operations. The fact is that each theater includes areas at sea, adjacent to the land theater, that have insular territories, the capture of which need not be included in the mission of the advancing front carrying out an operation throughout the entire depth of the theater of military operations. Desert and mountainous theaters have broad areas in which troop operations are impossible because of their relative inaccessibility, or are undesirable due to the absence of military or economic targets. Therefore, the conduct of a front offensive operation throughout the entire depth of a theater does not necessarily mean, in our opinion, the capture of all outlying and insular territories located within its boundaries.

*Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought", No. 2 (72), 1964.

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To achieve the goals of a front operation it is sufficient to defeat the armed forces of the enemy in the theater and capture the vitally important areas of his territory which, as a rule, are located somewhere in the center of the theater. In the majority of cases the distance between the most remote of these areas and the starting position of the troops of an advancing front will not exceed 1,000 to 1,500 kilometers. Usually it is to this depth that offensive operations of fronts have been planned in exercises and war games conducted in recent years to work out problems of an offensive in the entire depth of a theater.

Of course, in a number of cases the enemy may have some important positions away from the main axes of the offensive of front troops in the depth of the territory of the theater, or he may send groupings of his troops to such areas. But under such conditions the task of routing these forces and capturing the territory occupied by them obviously falls outside the framework of the offensive operation of the front and will be accomplished by specially allocated mobile groupings of ground forces and airborne and amphibious landing forces within the framework of the strategic operation in the given theater of military operations.

Thus, in general terms this is how we see the essence of the question of the depth of the operation under consideration.

Theoretical research and the experience of exercises show that the successful completion of a strategic operation in a theater is unthinkable without the timely and continuous build-up of efforts of the forces and means participating in the operation. This will be carried out along two lines. First and foremost is the delivery of nuclear strikes by strategic means against enemy groupings and other targets; the second is the movement forward and commitment of the engagement of reserve formations (including front formations) and large units of the ground forces with their organic nuclear means. And in this respect we cannot agree with the opinions of the authors that the movement of front formations from the interior and their commitment to an engagement to exploit the success of a strategic operation is not consistent with the nature of a strategic operation.

Of course, one cannot guarantee that formations and large units moving from the interior will reach their assigned areas in time. The troops may suffer great losses from nuclear strikes and may have to negotiate broad areas of radioactive contamination as well as areas in which the lines of communication have been destroyed, as a result of which the make-up of formations and large units, the length of time required for their concentration and the times at which they are committed to the engagement

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may undergo serious changes.

But there is also no guarantee that the troops of the first operational echelon will not suffer great losses from the initial enemy nuclear strikes and be unable to carry out their tasks. Thus, the possible losses experienced by troops moving from the interior and their late arrival in areas from which they will be committed to the engagement cannot serve as a reason for the deliberate refusal to use them to build up efforts during operations.

This has also been proven by the experience of exercises. In a strategic operation conducted in the Western Theater of Military Operations, several front formations, forming two operational echelons, usually can participate as the grouping of armed forces. In this case the operations of the ground forces take the form of simultaneous and successive operations of several fronts. Their offensive throughout the entire depth of the theater is organized and carried out with consideration of the most advantageous employment of the formations of both operational echelons.

The fronts of the first operational echelon, which are assigned to offensives on the most important axes of the theater, begin their operations immediately at the start of the war (at the time of, or immediately following, the initial nuclear strike by strategic means).

The front formations of the second operational echelon, which at the start of the war are a considerable distance from the troops of the first echelon, will move to the areas of combat operations over a period of several days and then enter the engagement and conduct their own offensive operations, as a rule on new axes, for the purpose of destroying advancing enemy reserves, completing the destruction of withdrawing (withdrawn) enemy troop groupings, and capturing important areas and key positions that are left unoccupied in the theater. In view of the different conditions under which the troops move forward, the operations of the fronts may begin successively rather than simultaneously, as the troops become ready to enter the engagement.

In situations when the advancing troops of the second operational echelon suffer such significant losses that they cannot be used as whole formations, they may be transferred as individual large units, or even units, to reinforce the troops of the first echelon.

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Thus, in considering questions of offensive operations throughout the entire depth of a theater, we should not be guided by only one variant, as is recommended by the authors of the article, in which all tasks of the ground forces will be accomplished by one echelon.

We would like to express our views on the question of successive army operations within the framework of a front offensive operation.

We believe that the method of planning army operations employed in training practice, in which the combined-arms armies carry out as a rule two successive (without any delays or pauses) operations in the course of an offensive operation by a front: one operation for the immediate task and another for the follow-up task of a front, does not agree with the nature of a modern war.

As is known, the relatively shallow army operations conducted during World War II were the result of the limited capabilities of the armies to destroy the enemy in the entire depth of his operational defensive structure. Enemy groupings were routed by the successive methodical actions of the troops on which a great deal of time, forces and means were spent. The replacement of personnel and equipment and the build-up of reserves of materiel necessitated lengthy interruptions in an offensive, which in fact separated one operation from the next. ✓

But now nuclear strikes, made primarily by strategic means, carried out simultaneously throughout the entire depth of a theater of military operations, are used for the decisive destruction of the enemy. Formations and large units of the ground forces, taking advantage of the results of these strikes and using their own nuclear weapons, now have the real capability of conducting a sustained offensive at high rates of advance and to great depths. It is for precisely this reason that army offensive operations should be planned and carried out in the entire depth of a front operation.

If an army is to be used in an offensive operation of a front in its entire depth and on one axis, its actions in this case obviously must be considered within the framework of one army offensive operation. As a matter of fact, the actions of a tank army in a front offensive operation are treated in exactly this way. The differences between tank and combined-arms armies are not so substantial as to require a different approach to the planning of their operations.

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Another point that should be mentioned is that it will not always be advantageous to plan an offensive of all the armies of the first echelon for the entire depth of a front operation. Depending upon the situation, some armies will conduct two, and sometimes three, operations in one front offensive operation. In this case they will not be successive or carried out on one axis. Each of them will be a separate army operation to accomplish a major independent task within the framework of the front operation.

In actual combat the completion of one and the start of another army offensive operation may be brought about by the following circumstances. First, when an army loses its capability to continue an offensive and goes on the defensive as a result of enemy strikes, having no prospects of resuming the offensive itself. In this case the commander of the front will be forced to commit a new army to the engagement to continue the operation on this same axis; for the new army this will be the start of its first or a subsequent operation (if it had been in combat previously). Second, when an army fully accomplishes its task on a given axis, and is sent to the second echelon and prepared for a new task. Third, in the course of a front operation, when an army is removed from one axis and sent to another because of the situation that has developed.

In each of these cases the next operation of an army will be a new one for it, both with respect to tasks and axes as well as to the nature and methods of its operations.

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