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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

24 May 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director of Central Intelligence
FROM : William W. Wells
SUBJECT : Deputy Director for Operations
MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Questions of
Modern Defense

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 a critical commentary on a work by General-Mayor V. Petrenko, entitled Modern Defense, in which he considers nuclear weapons and troop maneuvers to have a decisive role. The author takes issue with Petrenko's view of the goal of defense as the disruption of an offensive in preparation or in progress, considering it instead the repulse of an enemy offensive and the holding of occupied areas; he also disputes Petrenko's view on the ability of defending troops to go over to an offensive. Other topics considered include a preference for close combat fire means over nuclear weapons in a defense and the distinction between antinuclear defense and antinuclear protection. This article appeared in Issue No. 1 (68) for 1963.

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

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Intelligence Information Special Report

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COUNTRY USSR

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SUBJECT

MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Questions of Modern Defense

SOURCE Documentary

Summary:

The following report is a translation from Russian of an article which appeared in Issue No. 1 (68) for 1963 of the SECRET USSR Ministry of Defense publication Collection of Articles of the Journal 'Military Thought'. The author of this article is Colonel A. Yekimovskiy. This article is a critical commentary on a work by General-Mayor V. Petrenko, entitled Modern Defense, in which he considers nuclear weapons and troop maneuvers to have a decisive role. The author takes issue with Petrenko's view of the goal of defense as the disruption of an offensive in preparation or in progress, considering it instead the repulse of an enemy offensive and the holding of occupied areas; he also disputes Petrenko's view on the ability of defending troops to go over to an offensive. Other topics considered include a preference for close combat fire means over nuclear weapons in a defense and a fire strike over a counterattack, the advisability of an attack in front of the forward edge, the disposition of a defense, conditions for going over to a defense, and the distinction between antinuclear defense and antinuclear protection. End of Summary

Comment:

Colonel A. Yekimovskiy has been identified as a candidate of military sciences and as the author of several articles in the Soviet Military Historical Journal.

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Questions of Modern Defense

by
Colonel A. Yekimovskiy

Equipping ground forces with nuclear weapons and missiles, and employing them in a modern battle and operation on a mass scale, has decisively influenced the nature and methods of conducting not only an offensive but also a defense. Therefore, the comprehensive research and working out of theses on the organization and conduct of defensive actions have great theoretical and practical significance.

Among the theoretical works dedicated to questions of defense, the recently published work of General-Mayor V. Ya. Petrenko, Modern Defense*, is of the greatest interest.

This work in rather great detail identifies and substantiates new factors exerting some influence on the nature and methods of organizing and conducting defensive actions. The decisive role of nuclear weapons and maneuvers by the troops in achieving the goal of the defensive actions is shown. The basic premises characterizing modern defense as mobile-positional are properly portrayed; the predominant role of mobile forms over positional forms is shown; and based on this, the forms of organizing and methods of conducting an aggressive defense on the scale of units, large units and formations are examined. However, in our opinion, the work also has serious shortcomings which we would like to deal with.

First of all, we question the correctness of General Petrenko's view on the goal of defense. The author feels that the goal of modern defense should be to disrupt an enemy offensive which is in preparation or has already begun, to rout his attacking groupings, and to create the conditions for going over to the offensive. Many sections of the work (pp. 18, 37, 42, 65, 89, 99, 105-109) discuss this in various formulations.

* General-Mayor Petrenko, V. Ya., Modern Defense, Moscow, Publishing House of the Military Academy i/n M. V. Frunze, 1962, 114 pages and 2 insets.

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The question of the goal of defense has fundamentally great importance, since many other questions of organizing and conducting defensive actions are connected with it. Therefore, it deserves rather detailed examination.

In our opinion, repulsing an enemy offensive and holding the defensive areas occupied should more properly be considered the goal of defense. This definition will be more suitable for the overwhelming majority of cases, regardless of the scale of the defense and the specific conditions of the combat situation. This, in essence, also includes as one of the integral parts of the overall goal of defense disrupting an enemy offensive which has begun.

Regarding disrupting an enemy offensive in preparation, routing his advancing groupings and creating the conditions for going over to the offensive, there are no grounds for setting such goals for defense, as if they were goals common to all or a majority of cases.

If we turn to the experience of the Great Patriotic War, we see that defense, as a form of combat actions, was widely employed by our troops on various scales. This being the case, depending on the conditions of the situation, the role and tasks, and hence also the goals of defense, varied.

Thus, defense on a strategic scale and withdrawal of the Soviet Army were carried out in the summer and fall of 1941, and again in the summer and fall of 1942, as a result of the treacherous attack of fascist Germany and the unsuccessful outcome of the initial period of the war. Under these conditions, it was the task of defense to weaken the force of the strikes by the advancing German-fascist army, to decrease the rate of its advance by holding successive defensive lines, and, finally, to stop the enemy's offensive. The question of disrupting the enemy's offensive while conducting one or another defensive operation was not brought up in the majority of cases, since it was extremely difficult to achieve this under those conditions.

After conducting large-scale offensive operations in the winter campaign of 1942-43, the Soviet Army again went on the defensive along the entire Soviet-German front. But the role and tasks of the defense were already completely different, for by this time the overall balance of forces had formed in favor of the Soviet Army, and the strategic initiative was finally wrested from the hands of the enemy. "It was decided to use

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the advantageous aspects of defense in order to wear down the enemy in defensive battles and then, by going over to a counteroffensive, to completely rout the enemy troops concentrated in the area of the Kursk Bulge."*

As we know, this goal was achieved, the enemy offensive was disrupted, but not before he had gone over to the offensive. In determined defensive battles with enemy groupings which had penetrated our defense, our troops also went over to a counteroffensive.

It should be mentioned that during the last war this was, perhaps, the only case in which we had enough ready forces to go over to the offensive, but decided to wear the enemy down in defensive engagements first.

Can we act this way under present-day conditions? In our opinion, this would not be advisable. The availability of means of mass destruction on both warring sides now deprives defense of those advantages which it had before. Previously, before going on the offensive, the enemy was not able to inflict heavy casualties by fire on troops who were on the defensive in previously prepared defensive works. The defending troops, making use of advantageous terrain features and shelters, were able to employ their fire means more effectively to destroy an attacking enemy located on open terrain. Modern means of combat enable heavy losses to be inflicted on defending troops. Therefore, when the balance of forces and means is approximately equal, and especially in the case of superiority, it is necessary to preempt the enemy in delivering nuclear strikes and, exploiting their results, go over to the offensive immediately rather than after repulsing the enemy offensive, so that, by aggressive and decisive actions, the final rout of the enemy can be accomplished.

Thus, premeditated defense which counts on a transition to the offensive after enemy strikes have been repulsed is unacceptable under present-day conditions. Now, the transition to the defense will occur as a short-term form of combat actions which we are forced to use when, because of a shortage of forces and means on a given axis, an offensive will be impossible and hopeless.

* Second World War 1939-1945, Military Publishing House, 1958, p. 451.

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Such cases occurred in the last war, also. Even in 1944, when the Soviet Army conducted large-scale offensive operations almost continuously, our troops were on the defensive for a prolonged time on a number of axes and sections of the front; and, in certain periods, defense was conducted along the entire Soviet-German front (December 1943 to mid-January 1944, 12 May to 10 June 1944, November to December 1944). But, regardless of the great scale on which it was carried out, such defense was not viewed as a form of combat actions for achieving strategic goals. It was employed to gain time in order to prepare for a subsequent offensive, or to conserve forces and means in support of an offensive on other decisive axes. This means that this defense was conducted with limited forces with which it was impossible to begin or continue an offensive. The only task set for this defense was to repulse a possible enemy offensive and to hold the lines occupied. The task of disrupting an enemy offensive in preparation was either not set at all, or set but not achieved. With the counterpreparation which was carried out at that time, it was very difficult to inflict such damage on the enemy that he would not begin the prepared offensive.

Modern means of combat allow more powerful strikes to be delivered against the enemy, and therefore it would seem possible and expedient to set for defense the task of disrupting an enemy offensive in preparation. However, it is necessary to keep in mind that, just as before, a transition to the defense will be implemented only when we do not have sufficient forces at our disposal for an offensive, i. e., when superiority of forces and means, including nuclear weapons, will be on the enemy's side. Under these conditions the defending troops can inflict serious damage on the enemy during his preparation for the offensive. But, to inflict such losses as would force the enemy to give up the offensive is exceptionally difficult with only the limited number of nuclear warheads available to the defending troops. Therefore, the goal of nuclear strikes by the defending troops will be to destroy the enemy's nuclear means of attack and his troop groupings, and to weaken the force of his strikes when he goes on the offensive. This will subsequently permit us to stop the enemy's offensive and, thus, fulfil the task of defense -- repulsing the offensive and holding the areas occupied.

In those cases where there are sufficient forces and means, especially nuclear weapons, to disrupt an enemy offensive in preparation, it is not even necessary to go over to the defense. Having delivered massed nuclear strikes we must exploit their results with maximal effectiveness and go on the offensive.

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From what has been said it is clear that under modern conditions defense will be a less common phenomenon than in the last war. But, in those cases where troops will still have to go over to the defense, it is most proper to assign them the task not of disrupting an enemy offensive in preparation, but of repulsing his offensive and holding the areas occupied.

The very same thing should be said of the other goal of defense which is dealt with in this work -- routing an attacking enemy grouping. After all, troops will go on the defensive only when there are insufficient forces and means for an offensive. Therefore, naturally, they will not be able to completely fulfil this task. With the available forces and means, defending troops can rely only on inflicting serious damage on enemy groupings which are preparing for or have broken through our defense, which could force the enemy to give up the offensive.

And, we would like to speak about another goal of defense -- creating conditions for going over to the offensive during the course of defensive actions. This goal is achieved as a result of the successful fulfilment of the main task when the defending troops, while repulsing an enemy offensive, hold advantageous lines and areas and inflict damage on the enemy. Besides this, conditions for going over to the offensive are created also when, in the course of defensive actions, time is gained for concentrating additional forces and means and preparing for an offensive. However, whether a transition to the offensive is advisable will depend not only on the successes of defensive actions, but mainly on the overall operational or strategic situation and the plans of the higher command. It is not often that the task of creating the conditions for going over to the offensive can be assigned to the defending troops. Therefore, we cannot agree with the opinion of the author of the book, set forth on p. 27: "Troops, on the scale of both army formations and large units can and must strive to go from defensive actions to offensive actions...". These recommendations are hardly suitable, especially for large units.

Underrating the assumption that defending troops will have limited forces and means, including nuclear weapons, at their disposal compared with the attacking enemy, obviously has led the author of the work to make certain incorrect recommendations on the disposition of a defense and methods for conducting it.

General Petrenko assigns a decisive role in the success of defensive actions to areas of fire destruction "...for concentrating the fire efforts of various long-range means of destruction, which might not always be directly tied to a defensive position" (p. 82). Can a defending division

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rely on destroying the main forces of an enemy grouping attacking in its zone if the division at best has two or three nuclear warheads? It is completely obvious that it can not. Therefore, when organizing a system for defense and fire, we must proceed from the assumption that the decisive role in modern defense must be given to close combat fire means -- artillery, mortars, tanks, antitank means, and small arms and machineguns. Only by combining the power of all means, presenting a zone of continuous fire of all types (which, by the way, is denied by the author, p. 101), can we count on success in repulsing an enemy offensive. This means that the defending units and subunits on the axes of the enemy offensive must firmly hold their occupied positions and defensive areas and destroy the advancing enemy by firing from position.

General Petrenko writes that areas of fire destruction, where fire and attacks by the troops will be massed, should be the points where the main efforts of the division are applied. (pp. 82 and 84). In addition, he feels that "for the number of powerful fire strikes the division can deliver in succession, there should be as many counterattacks" and "that all subunits and units must strive to carry out the counterattack..." (p. 20). In our opinion, it is impossible to concur with these recommendations.

The experience of the last war convincingly shows that, in a defensive battle and operation, counterattacks were the culminating moments of the defensive actions of troops. Counterattacks were successful only when they were carried out at the most crucial, critical moments of the battle, not separately by small subunits but by units and individual large units simultaneously, according to the instructions of the senior commander on the basis of his overall concept for conducting the defensive actions. In this, part of the forces of the defending troops were given the task of firmly holding defensive positions in order to support the deployment and transition to the counterattack of other troops. If we rely completely on the initiative and decisions of subordinate commanders in this matter, it is extremely difficult to count on success. It is also impossible to make the number of counterattacks by a division directly dependent on the number of fire strikes delivered. There undoubtedly will be instances when, because of the conditions of the overall situation which has developed, a fire strike by a division will be more expedient than a counterattack and will produce the proper effect. In particular, this applies to the delivery of fire strikes against an enemy who has prepared for an offensive, when the defending troops must leave their defensive positions and deliver a counterattack in front of the forward edge of the battle area.

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The author of the book attaches great importance to the delivery of an attack in front of the forward edge of the battle area. The advisability of delivering such an attack is made dependent only on whether, according to the conditions of the situation, the division in carrying it out can count on success in achieving the rout of the enemy (pp. 84, 85). Moreover, it is pointed out that if a fire strike is delivered under conditions of close contact with the enemy, then an immediate attack by the troops is absolutely necessary in order to complete the destruction of the enemy on that axis (p. 99). In our view, it is impossible to consider such an opinion correct. An attack in front of the forward edge of the division should be delivered only in those instances when it is necessary to seize specific areas in the enemy's disposition in order to improve our defensive positions or create more favorable conditions for a subsequent transition to the offensive, as well as when we intend to go on the offensive immediately after an attack is delivered in front of the forward edge. The decision to deliver such attacks will be made by the senior commander, and army and even front fire means can be allocated to deliver the fire strike. Such instances can occur in a modern defense, but not very often.

A serious shortcoming of the book being reviewed is that it mentions the disposition of a defense only with reference to the concentration of the main efforts in the depth, while how it is set up and on what scale such a defense is possible are not stated. Moreover, in examining the question of the composition of echelons of units and large units, their purpose, combat tasks, and methods of combat actions, the author proceeds only from the variant in which the main forces are included in the first echelons and only a part of the forces in the second echelons or the reserves. General Petrenko even proposes that troops located in the depth be called reserves, rather than second echelons, based on the fact that these troops will be multipurpose (p. 65). This proposal, in the first place, emphasizes that the author does not consider the possibility of concentrating the main efforts in the depth of the defense, since the main forces, which are concentrated in the depth of the defense to offer decisive resistance in the fight for defensive areas in the depth, can in no way be called reserves. These troops comprise a very real echelon, actually the main echelon. And, in the second place, even when the main efforts are concentrated in the first echelon, in some instances it is sufficient to have only reserves, while in others -- powerful second echelons, designated by the concept for the defensive battle primarily to deliver counterattacks, are needed.

The underestimation of the role of fire of all types and the significance of firmly holding defensive positions also influences the

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author of the book in that he considers it unlikely that an enemy offensive can be repulsed during the fight for the forward edge of the battle area (p. 80). He states directly: "...it will hardly be possible to disrupt an enemy offensive which has already begun on the forward edge of the battle area" (p. 108).

If this assumption applied to the disposition of a defense involving the concentration of efforts in the depth, then we could agree with it. However, inasmuch as it is viewed as applicable in all cases, it is unconvincing. It seems that, by delivering fire strikes against an enemy who has prepared for an offensive, it is possible to disrupt his offensive even when only long-range means of destruction can take part in these strikes. But, when all fire means including means of close combat are brought into action, it is impossible to fulfil this task. We must assume that the period of the fight for the forward edge, when the main efforts are concentrated in the first echelons of the defending troops, is the most decisive in repulsing the enemy's offensive. Fire of all types, including by long-range means, must be carried out in this period to the maximum possible extent. In our opinion, this is the key to fulfilling the task of defense. It is natural that, in a number of instances, the enemy will succeed in breaking through into the depth of the troop disposition; but, if serious damage can be inflicted on him in front of the forward edge, then combating the groupings which have penetrated into the depth will be considerably easier.

The author of the work being reviewed has not portrayed fully enough the procedure for going over to the defense under the conditions most characteristic for today -- when there is direct contact with the enemy and when under his active influence. On pages 87 and 88 the author speaks about these conditions. However, he feels that they do not cause special difficulties. As a result of the growing capabilities of modern reconnaissance, according to the author, it is possible to make the decision to go over to the defense in advance, and to make the necessary changes and additions in the previously adopted decision for the operation and battle. It is impossible to imagine that the transition from offense to defense is so simple. The transition to the defense in the course of an offensive will require the timely assignment of completely new tasks to the troops, the fortification of the areas seized, the setting up of a system of fire of all types, and then the carrying out of the necessary regrouping of troops and engineer preparation of the terrain. Implementation of these measures in a short time under conditions of continuous combat actions with the enemy is not an easy matter and requires precise organization in regard to establishing the procedure and sequence for implementing them. These

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matters should have been covered extensively in this work.

Finally, we must point out still another substantial mistake of the author regarding the sphere of antinuclear protection of the troops. General Petrenko introduces a new term -- "antinuclear defense" and identifies it with the concept of "antinuclear protection" (p. 52). As a matter of fact, if "antinuclear defense", as it is properly pointed out, is the essence of defense as a whole, and if in this case it is correct to include measures for combating the enemy's nuclear means within the total set of measures for "antinuclear defense", then "antinuclear protection" must include only those measures which are directly aimed at protecting the troops and reducing the effectiveness of the enemy's employment of nuclear weapons. At the same time, nothing is said about eliminating the aftereffects of the enemy's employment of means of mass destruction, which, as we know, is also included under protective measures.

In conclusion we should say that in addition to the shortcomings which have been pointed out, General Petrenko's book contains a number of useful theoretical assumptions and practical recommendations for organizing and conducting the defensive actions characteristic for modern conditions.

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