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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

3 May 1974

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT : MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Resumption of Combat Operations After a Nuclear Strike

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 by the Soviet Chief of Armored Troops stresses the importance of mastering the art of conducting decisive combat operations with surviving forces and means after a nuclear exchange. He gives his criteria for determining combat effectiveness, specifying 70 percent casualties as making a large unit ineffective, and defining combat effective as 40 to 50 percent casualties. Soviet forces will maintain tank superiority after the exchange, while Western forces will retain tactical nuclear superiority. The author asserts the need for greater realism in relevant Soviet exercise scenarios. This article appeared in Issue No. 3 (82) for 1967.

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.

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David H. Blee
Acting Deputy Director for Operations

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Intelligence Information Special Report

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SUBJECT

MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Continuation of a Front Offensive Operation with the Limited Strength of Troops Remaining After Enemy Nuclear Strikes

SOURCE Documentary

Summary:

The following report is a translation from Russian of an article which appeared in Issue No. 3 (82) for 1967 of the SECRET USSR Ministry of Defense publication Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought". The author of this article is Colonel-General A. Babadzhanyan. This article by the Soviet Chief of Armored Troops stresses the importance of mastering the art of conducting decisive combat operations with surviving forces and means after a nuclear exchange. He gives his criteria for determining combat effectiveness, specifying 70 percent casualties as making a large unit ineffective, and defining combat effective as 40 to 50 percent casualties. Soviet forces will maintain tank superiority after the exchange, while Western forces will retain tactical nuclear superiority. The author asserts the need for greater realism in relevant Soviet exercise scenarios.

[redacted] Comment: End of Summary

Marshal of Armored Troops A. Kh Babadzhanyan is a former Chief of the Armored Troop Academy imeni R. Ya. Malinovskiy. He is the author of Roads of Victory and is a prolific contributor of articles about armored tank troops, the most recent appearing in Agitator, No. 15, August 1972. 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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Continuation of a Front Offensive Operation with the Limited Strength of Troops Remaining After Enemy Nuclear Strikes

by

Colonel-General A. Babadzhanyan

The need for mastering the art of conducting decisive combat actions with the limited forces and means remaining after enemy nuclear strikes is assuming particular importance, since huge troop losses are possible in nuclear warfare.

Continuation of a front offensive operation with the limited forces and means remaining after enemy nuclear strikes requires, first of all, eliminating the aftereffects of nuclear attack and restoring, even if only partially, the striking power of attacking groupings of the first-echelon troops of the front in the shortest possible time period during conduct of intense combat actions, and also finding and using the most advantageous forms and methods for the combat actions of the troops corresponding to the changing conditions of the situation. All this must be accomplished simultaneously, in order to retain the initiative in actions and successfully develop the offensive. In light of this, we would like to express a few views.

The easiest and most reliable method of accomplishing the set of tasks mentioned above (apart from the carrying out of measures for eliminating the aftereffects of nuclear attack) is to replace the large units which have lost their combat effectiveness by committing second echelons and reserves to the engagement. However, it is doubtful that they can remain intact and be used immediately in the numbers required while undergoing massive nuclear strikes, since the enemy has the capability to use high-yield warheads against them. Therefore, along with committing to the engagement the large units remaining intact in the reserve or in the second echelon, it will be required to devote special attention to restoring the combat effectiveness of first-echelon units and large units which have been subjected to a nuclear strike, and to using them for developing the operation.

It seems to us that analyzing this problem, which still has been insufficiently explored in theory and tested in field training exercises, first requires determining the combat effectiveness criteria for divisions, rocket brigades and other large units and units which have sustained losses, and on this basis establishing some sort of general terminology

characterizing the condition of the troops. This has practical significance for finding methods of restoring the combat effectiveness of the troops and properly allocating tasks to them based on their actual capabilities.

As a preliminary, we will mention that the opinion recently has become prevalent that supposedly the overall percentage of full strength in combat equipment and personnel of large units does not fully reflect their combat capabilities and therefore cannot be considered a criterion of combat effectiveness. One might agree with this assertion in principle if in calculations one could be guided by such an unlikely fact as, for example, tanks, comprising the basis of fighting power of a division, being put out of action after an enemy nuclear strike while the personnel remain intact. However, tanks are more resistant to nuclear strikes. Therefore, if overall losses in a division are, let's say, fifty percent, it is not likely that tank losses will be greater. The reverse is most likely. There undoubtedly can be exceptions, but we believe that they cannot be considered in a general statement of the problem.

Certainly if a rocket battalion, which for the time being is the only means of employing nuclear weapons in a division, is put out of action, the division's combat capabilities, especially in actions separated from the main forces of the army, are significantly reduced. However, the absence of the battalion cannot serve as the basis for considering the division even partially not combat effective, since the deficiency in nuclear means can be quickly compensated for by strikes of army and front means. There is one rocket battalion to a division. The enemy will search for it and try to destroy it. The commander of the army planning the operation has to provide for this and be ready to compensate for possible losses of the battalion during the operation by strikes with his own means.

Thus, when operationally assessing our troops, the overall percentage of full strength of large units can be the criterion for their combat effectiveness. This permits quickly assessing the situation and assigning tasks to the troops with consideration of their combat capabilities, without waiting for the receipt of developed data on combat and numerical strength presented via the various departments, directorates, and staffs of the arms and services of the front field headquarters. The situation is different within the divisions, and even more so within units. There the commanders and staffs must specifically account for each item of combat equipment and weaponry on hand and determine combat capabilities on this basis. Proceeding from operational training experience, we have accepted the following criteria as a guide for determining the combat effectiveness of large units.

We consider as having lost combat effectiveness those divisions in which more than seventy percent of the personnel, combat equipment and command posts have been put out of action, and their organizational structure has been completely disrupted. In these cases, depending on the situation, composite detachments can be formed from the remnants of large units and units, but if this is impossible, it is advisable to use them to reinforce other units.

Divisions having lost more than fifty percent, but not more than seventy percent, of their personnel and equipment, can be considered to have partially lost combat effectiveness. If the organizational structure of the division is not disrupted, then it obviously must continue the offensive without carrying out any reorganizations. If the organizational structure is partially disrupted, but combat-effective battalions of various regiments and some of the command posts remain, it is advisable to form composite regiments. But if the division organizational structure is completely disrupted and the command posts destroyed, composite detachments can be formed from them. Composite organizations also are possible in the Rocket Troops if some brigades and battalions retain launchers but their means of control are destroyed, and others, on the contrary, have means of control but no launchers.

Divisions should be considered to have temporarily lost combat effectiveness if their losses have been relatively light but their command posts and materiel reserves have been destroyed or their personnel have received dangerous doses of radiation or have been contaminated by chemical or bacteriological means. Restoring the combat effectiveness of such large units requires a certain amount of time to establish command posts (finding command personnel, means of communication and transport within the divisions, or allocating these means from the staff of the army), and also to deliver materiel reserves and carry out personal cleansing and radioactive decontamination.

If divisions have about forty to fifty percent losses, they clearly should be considered combat effective. Granted, their combat capabilities will be reduced, but they will be able to carry out characteristic, though limited, large unit tasks. From the experience of the past war, we know many instances in which large units and units having up to a fifty percent deficiency in combat equipment and, particularly, personnel carried out their assigned tasks. Of course, present-day conditions will have several characteristic special features which can't be overlooked. If in the past war primarily the first-echelon troops, and especially the infantry, bore losses in preserving the integrity of large units whose combat effectiveness had gradually fallen during the operation, then in nuclear war we observe a completely different phenomenon. In the first hours the

groupings of troops will be subjected to destruction throughout the depth of the theater of military operations. Whole military organizations--units, large units, command posts, etc.--can be put out of action almost simultaneously.

Undoubtedly, the determination of the degree of combat effectiveness of large units, especially from the standpoint of percentages, of losses, is purely approximate and requires further study, research and verification through the experience of exercises. Thus it is important to determine the total number of specific measures for restoring the combat effectiveness of the troops and for establishing composite regiments and composite detachments and the time periods needed for carrying them out.

As a result of enemy nuclear strikes and resultant losses, and, what is no less important, as a result of our own nuclear strikes, the situation may change so much that the forms and methods of combat actions of the troops outlined while planning the operation will no longer fully ensure achieving the goal of the operation under the new conditions. All of this requires refining not only the plan of the operation but also the tasks for the troops, forces and means. However, during the time that must be spent on this, the front troops must continue the offensive in their original disposition and with their previous tasks in order to retain the initiative and not give the enemy an opportunity to put his troops in order and close the gaps in his operational disposition formed as a result of our nuclear strikes. The exception may be rocket troops and front aviation, which must immediately start fulfilling new tasks in accordance with the changed conditions of the situation.

In delivering nuclear strikes, the enemy will try, just as we do, to detect and destroy, first of all, the main grouping of front troops. Therefore it is quite natural that the large units which have remained most intact may turn out not to be on the axis of the main strike of the front, as a result of which the grouping of the troops of the front often will not correspond to the aim of the operation.

From the foregoing stems the need to carry out a transfer of combat-effective large units to the main axis. However, despite the fact that the enemy also will sustain large losses on that axis, such a solution of the problem will not always prove to be advantageous. To gain time, it frequently will be more advantageous to temporarily change the axis of concentration of the primary efforts of the front, with a subsequent transfer of them to the previously selected axis of the main strike, if, of course, it has not lost its significance as a result of the destruction by nuclear weapons of the most important targets within the depth of enemy

territory, the capture of which was the task of the front offensive operation.

In theaters with a difficult terrain contour, the movement of troops from the secondary axes to the main axis can be caused by the advisability of developing an offensive at high speeds on terrain which is more accessible for the actions of all arms of the branches of the armed forces. In that case, it will be more advantageous to transfer army reserves, since pulling first-echelon large units out of action entails considerable difficulties.

As is known, our operational-tactical nuclear means and especially our strategic nuclear means are capable of decisively destroying enemy reserves throughout the entire depth of a theater of military operations. At the same time, with the existing arming of large units with tactical nuclear means, our capabilities for destroying the enemy immediately in front of the advancing troops are comparatively small.

As a result of such a ratio of nuclear forces, one can expect that after the massed nuclear strikes by both sides, the enemy will be deprived of combat-effective reserves to a considerable degree, with relatively less losses in first-echelon troops. Along with this, one should take into consideration that with identical losses, the surviving combat strength of our divisions and those of the probable enemy will not be equal. While retaining superiority over him in tanks, we will be inferior in tactical nuclear means, artillery, antitank means and also in manpower.

Under such conditions, the primary efforts of the front, in continuing the offensive operation with the limited troop strength remaining after enemy nuclear strikes, must be directed to overcoming the resistance of the first echelon of the enemy. Allowing for the results of destroying the reserves in the depth, successful destruction of the first echelon of the enemy will make it possible to develop a rapid front offensive for attaining the final goal of the operation. This task will be carried out, first of all, by nuclear strikes on those axes where it is planned to continue the offensive into the depth under the new conditions of the situation.

As we already noted, the enemy has the potential capabilities for destroying our second echelons and reserves with high-yield nuclear weapons, delivered mainly by aviation. However, with the present-day 1967 development of our air defense means, the aviation is very vulnerable, i.e., the effectiveness of its actions may be significantly reduced. Therefore, to some extent we can count on a certain portion of the second echelon and reserves of the front retaining their combat effectiveness

after the enemy nuclear strikes. For developing the offensive these forces, obviously, must be committed to the engagement as quickly as possible in the gaps of operational disposition of the enemy or on those axes where the enemy has sustained the greatest losses. The offensive should be continued on the other axes by first-echelon troops which have retained their combat effectiveness, or by composite regiments and composite detachments. Immediate commitment of the second echelon and reserves to the engagement will give us the opportunity to forestall the enemy while he is building up his efforts, overcome the resistance of his first-echelon troops, and quickly transfer the primary efforts of the front into the depth.

The inevitability of high losses in the first hours of the operation leads to the conclusion that in planning the commitment to the engagement of the second echelon or reserves of the front, we must particularly carefully consider the need for timely build-up of the efforts of the first echelon to continue the offensive, which may arise right after the exchange of massive nuclear strikes by the sides. Therefore the position that supposedly the second echelon of the front, as a rule, is committed to fulfil subsequent tasks is, in our opinion, wrong today. This must be taken into consideration and the correct conclusions drawn concerning the place of the second echelon in the operational disposition of the troops of the front, its distance away, the degree of dispersal, and the sequence of movements forward for commitment to the engagement.

In connection with the changed conditions of the situation as a result of losses sustained, the need can arise to change the methods of conducting the offensive operation. If the planned aim was to conduct the offensive on some of the shortest axes until attaining the final goal of the operation, then due to shortages of forces and means the number of axes might be reduced. In a case where the offensive is planned along converging axes to encircle and destroy an enemy grouping, one, obviously, has to abandon such a method of combat actions when one has limited troop strength remaining after enemy nuclear strikes. This will be caused not only by a shortage of forces but also by the fact that after our massive nuclear strikes such groupings may not exist, and encircling isolated enemy units which have sustained large losses only wastes time and reduces our capabilities for developing the offensive into the depth.

The basic method of continuing the offensive under the conditions described will be to deliver frontal strikes into the depth through zones of massive nuclear strikes and gaps in the operational disposition of the enemy, in conjunction with flank strikes against enemy groupings which have retained their combat effectiveness. Deep raids by tank large units and units widely separated from their main forces must be widely used, in

conjunction with the actions of airborne assault forces, to seize or destroy important targets in the depth of enemy territory.

As a result of massive enemy nuclear strikes, the troops will also sustain large losses in transport means and materiel reserves, including fuel. Massive destruction, obstructions and fires will occur, and vast areas with high levels of radioactive contamination will be formed. As a consequence, the maneuvering capabilities of the troops will be reduced and supplying materiel to them will become complicated. Under such conditions we can hardly count on attaining an offensive rate of advance of seventy to eighty kilometers per day, even on selected axes.

As for the depth of the assignment of tasks to the troops, in this case one must proceed from the combat strength of the armies and take into account the actual capabilities of their large units. Composite regiments and composite detachments are not divisions, and therefore the depth of their tasks may be less. However, their aggressive actions, even with tasks which are limited in depth, will be important, since they make possible moving forward to the missile deployment areas of surviving enemy tactical nuclear means and containing his troops on secondary axes, ensuring development of the offensive on the axis of the main strike. Even if the remnants of defeated and demoralized enemy units appear before the front of the composite regiments and composite detachments, they can and must continue the offensive to a great depth.

Continuing a front offensive operation with the limited strength of troops remaining after enemy nuclear strikes is inconceivable without comprehensive support. The following will be important: actions of chemical defense units, engineer units, and units of other troops to eliminate the aftereffects of enemy nuclear attack; stable radio communications with two echelons lower so the senior commander can immediately assume control of large units and units in the event their command posts are destroyed and clarify the status of the troops after nuclear strikes; the conduct of reconnaissance, first of all, to ascertain the surviving nuclear means and also the results of our nuclear strikes, and to detect the most vulnerable places in the enemy disposition; combat against radio-electronic means to deny the enemy an opportunity to restore his disrupted control; and the conduct of deception to create for the enemy a false impression of the status of our troops. Restoring the functioning of the rear, especially ensuring the delivery of nuclear warheads, missile propellant, and fuel, will also be very important.

In conclusion, we should speak, if only briefly, about the organizational structure and the operational and combat training tasks of

the troops, stemming from the possible nature of the conduct of present-day offensive operations.

The organization of our large units must be flexible and equally suited for conducting combat actions both in the non-nuclear period of a war as well as, particularly, in the decisive nuclear period of a war, including even after massive losses sustained as a result of enemy nuclear strikes. The organization basically meets these requirements. However, in improving the organizational structure of the troops, it is necessary to critically take into account the experience of the makeup of the armies of the principal capitalistic countries. We specifically should study to what extent the presence in the divisions of our probable enemies of a considerable amount of artillery, capable of using nuclear munitions of very low yield, and also the presence of separate battalions [artillery or rocket], battalions (divizion) and headquarters of brigades, reflect organizational flexibility and ensure the conduct of combat actions in the non-nuclear and nuclear periods of a war, and should draw from it specific theoretical and practical conclusions.

A correct understanding of the possible nature of combat actions in the decisive nuclear period of a war also will make it possible to draw practical conclusions on improving the methods of operational training. Today command personnel and staffs should be prepared to be capable of controlling the combat actions of the troops one or two echelons higher.

While conducting exercises and war games we should more decisively "put out of action" large units and whole elements of the operational disposition, "inflict more losses", and work out practical measures for restoring the combat efficiency of the troops, i.e., we have to create a situation which is close to the real situation.

Such an overall view gives the special features of continuing a front offensive operation with the limited strength of troops remaining after enemy nuclear strikes as well as several problems arising in conjunction with it which require comprehensive research.

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