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9 June 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT : MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Certain Problems  
in Planning Combat Operations Without Using  
Nuclear Weapons

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 asserts the need for separate operation plans for nuclear and non-nuclear actions. The author recommends that operations be planned by intermediate tasks, and stresses the problem of maintaining readiness for nuclear action while conducting a conventional operation. The role of a nuclear planning group is defined. 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. For ease of reference, reports from this publication have been assigned the [redacted] Codeword [redacted] LA

William E. Nelson  
Deputy Director for Operations

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## Intelligence Information Special Report

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COUNTRY USSR

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SUBJECT

MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Certain Problems in Planning  
Combat Operations Without Using  
Nuclear Weapons

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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, General-Leytenant V. Petrenko, argues that because of substantial differences between nuclear and non-nuclear operations, separate operation plans are needed for the two variants. Operations, regardless of the means of destruction used, should be planned to their entire depth. Non-nuclear operation plans must cover immediate and follow-up tasks, which are broken down into intermediate tasks rather than days of an operation. A nuclear planning group should refine the plan for nuclear actions while a conventional operation is in progress. End of Summary

Comment:

General-Leytenant V. Petrenko wrote several articles for this publication which include "Combat with the Tactical Means of Nuclear Attack of the Enemy in Offensive Operations", Issue No. 1 (80) for 1967 (FIRDB-312/03013-74), and "The Use of Nuclear Surface Bursts in a Front Offensive Operation", Issue No. 6 (67) for 1962 (FIRDB-312/04885-73 in the Russian language).

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Certain Problems in Planning Combat Operations  
Without the Use of Nuclear Weapons

by  
General-Leytenant V. Petrenko

Under modern conditions, the successful conduct of combat operations using only conventional means of destruction presents great difficulty, and their organization is many times more complex than was the case in the last world war. This point has been made rather convincingly in the articles by Colonel A. Volkov and other authors that have been published previously in the Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought".

Among the many problems requiring solution, the planning of these actions occupies a special place because of its complexity. In this article we would like to dwell on this subject in greater detail.

In mastering the methods of simultaneous planning of operations with and without the use of nuclear weapons in the troops and in military academies, there have arisen several different viewpoints on the solution of certain problems, both theoretical and practical. It appears to us that this was due basically to a different conception of the possible duration of the period of non-nuclear operations.

Foreign military theoreticians, citing the experience of strategic and operational exercises, maintain that the duration of the period of non-nuclear actions may vary from a few hours to a few days (with a maximum of three to four days). But these assertions have not been supported by any convincing evidence whatever of an objective nature. Nor should we rule out elements of misinformation here. Opinions also have been expressed in our literature and periodic press\* that the period of non-nuclear actions can

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\*Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought",  
No. 2 (81) for 1967.

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last from only a few hours to a few (two or three) days. On this basis it is assumed that combat actions by operational formations of the Ground Forces in a non-nuclear period cannot be considered independent operations in the accepted sense, since by using only conventional means of destruction for two or three days it is impossible to achieve either strategic, or even important operational, results. And it is further concluded that in the event a war is unleashed with only conventional means of destruction, it is not necessary to plan operations, but simply to plan "combat actions" by fronts and armies.

In our view, when determining the duration of the non-nuclear period we should proceed first of all from the fact that at the present time the opposing world military groupings possess an enormous number of nuclear weapons, and the results of using these weapons are difficult to foresee. It is quite obvious that it would require exceptional circumstances to cause the imperialist countries, and particularly the US, to take the risk of using nuclear weapons from the very outset of a world war. The consequences of a war in that case unquestionably would be catastrophic for them. It is precisely for this reason that the aggressive circles of NATO have begun to look into the possibility of unleashing broad-scale military actions without nuclear weapons and conducting them for a certain period of time.

Nor can we ignore the fact that the opposing coalitions of countries of the aggressive NATO bloc and those of the Warsaw Pact possess powerful and combat-ready armed forces, a developed economy, and vast territory. Their potential capabilities for conducting aggressive combat actions using only conventional means of destruction is considerably greater than was the case with the combatants in the last world war. On the other hand, when combat actions are conducted with the use only of conventional means of destruction, troops are unable to make full use of their fighting power, since the threat of nuclear actions forces them to hold most of their rocket troops and about half of their aviation in reserve. The constant threat of surprise use of nuclear weapons limits the possibilities for decisive massing of troops and conventional means of destruction on

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the axes of the strikes. Thus, there is no real reason to count on the quick destruction of large enemy groupings in the non-nuclear period, and consequently no reason to assume that it will be possible at the outset of a war to create, within two or three days, a realistic threat of a military defeat of one side and thus force it to resort to extreme measures -- the use of nuclear weapons.

Under modern conditions, the destruction of large groupings of enemy armed forces with conventional means and the creation of the conditions for his ultimate defeat will require enormous efforts and an extended period of time. But this, of course, does not mean that we can rule out the possibility of the use of nuclear weapons at the very outset of a war. The enemy is insidious; the imperialists may resort to the use of nuclear weapons during a war at any moment that seems advantageous to them, especially since they are continuing an intensive expansion of their nuclear potential.

All this points to the fact that determining in advance, even approximately, the duration of the non-nuclear period is extremely difficult. Moreover, it cannot be ascertained solely on the basis of an assessment of the operational-tactical situation.

From this the conclusion emerges that combat actions on an operational scale obviously should not be linked directly to the possible duration of the non-nuclear period, just as the problems of planning them should not be placed in direct relationship to our assumptions about the moment when the enemy will use nuclear weapons. /In our opinion it is more correct when organizing the actions of operational formations to proceed not from an assumption about the possible duration of the non-nuclear period, but on the basis of accomplishing the task of destroying an opposing enemy to his entire depth, bearing in mind here the real possibility of his using nuclear weapons at any moment. This would also meet the requirements for maintaining troops in constant readiness for action in the event of a surprise use of nuclear weapons./

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It seems to us that even if there is some reason to expect that the duration of the non-nuclear period will not exceed three or four days, it would still be advisable to plan operations to their entire depth. During this time, given an average troop offensive momentum of up to 50 kilometers per day, the depth of their advance could be as much as 200 kilometers. Front troops will have to negotiate sectors of a nuclear mine belt, destroy army corps to the entire depth of their battle disposition, as well as the immediate operational reserves, i.e., the main forces of the enemy field army.

These tasks, as well as the capture of important installations, areas, and lines at a depth of 200 to 300 kilometers, may be regarded with good reason as comprising the immediate task of a front or the entire offensive operation of an army operating in the front first echelon. And this is all the more correct in that the battle for the defensive lines of a field army may involve the reserves of an army group, the destruction of which has always constituted an important part of the immediate task of a front offensive operation. At the same time such an important operational task as the destruction of the enemy operational-tactical nuclear means of attack and his main aviation groupings may be completed.

The fulfilment of the tasks examined above presupposes the use of the maximum allowable amount of forces and means. We do not even rule out bringing the second echelon of the front into action and using operational airborne landing forces. All this taken together is, in our opinion, evidence of the need to develop a special independent plan for the conduct of front and army offensive operations using only conventional means of destruction.

Before developing this thesis we should examine the objective possibility of the practical development of a single operation plan for conditions of nuclear warfare with various supplements, additions, and refinements recommended by certain authors for the case of non-nuclear combat actions.

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The operation plan, as is known, is a decision developed in detail by the troop commander, with the necessary details depicted on a map, in an explanatory memorandum, and on charts. One might ask: is it possible to adapt the decision on an operation and the plan for its conduct which was developed in the nuclear variant, to conditions under which combat actions are launched and conducted using only conventional means? Is it possible that a decision taken to destroy the enemy with nuclear weapons could remain fundamentally unchanged if the same task were to be carried out with only conventional means of destruction? Is it possible, in other words, to get along with one decision on an operation and one plan for preparing and conducting it under such different conditions for launching and conducting military actions?

In order to give a proper answer to this question we must establish what is different about the decision and the operation plan under the conditions named above. If we examine a front or army offensive operation, the only thing common, without any distinction, to the conditions of the nuclear and non-nuclear period is the width of the offensive zone of the operational formation and, with certain distinctions, the objective of the offensive operation. Everything else -- the tasks of the formations and large units of troops, methods of destroying the enemy, means and methods of concentrating our main efforts, the number and axis of strikes, and the operational and battle disposition of the troops -- will have specific differences.

As is known, the combat operations of operational formations of the Ground Forces when nuclear weapons are used, are aimed at completing the destruction of the enemy and capturing his territory. In the Western Theater of Military Operations, according to the views of our probable enemy, a cover zone 20 to 75 kilometers or more in depth may be established for defense, as well as a zone of defense comprising several defensive lines with an overall depth of up to 200 kilometers. Consequently, the total depth of defense may amount to 250 to 300 kilometers. To achieve the objective indicated above, tasks are defined for the operational formations and are subdivided into immediate tasks and follow-up tasks. The immediate task of a front

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(army) will be to destroy the nuclear means of attack, complete the destruction of the main forces of an enemy army group (field army), and to capture important areas and installations at a depth of 400 to 500 kilometers; and the task of an army is to capture areas and installations at a depth of 200 to 250 kilometers. The follow-up task of a front is carried out at a depth of up to 1000 kilometers, and the follow-up task of an army at a depth of 400 to 500 kilometers. The combat actions of the troops of a front and of a combined-arms army also are planned to the depth of these tasks.

Let us examine the objective of combat actions and the tasks of operational formations when war is unleashed using only conventional means, and compare them to the objectives and tasks carried out in a nuclear period.

The most important objective of combat actions involving only conventional means of destruction is assumed to be, as we know, to inflict destruction on an opposing enemy grouping and reduce his capabilities for using nuclear weapons. To achieve this, the tasks of operational formations when conducting combat actions with only conventional means may be the rapid negotiation of nuclear mine obstacles in the border zone and the defensive lines of the enemy.

A forward defensive line, for example in the Western Theater of Military Operations, could be established by the enemy at a distance of 20 to 75 kilometers from the border and occupied by the main forces of army corps. The overall depth of this line could reach 30 to 50 kilometers. At a distance of 30 to 60 kilometers from the forward edge of the forward defensive line it is planned to establish an intermediate line on which corps reserves and sometimes part of the army reserves usually are stationed. Reserves of the field armies and the army group are located on subsequent intermediate and interdutory lines; and tactical aviation air bases, siting areas for Pershing guided missiles, special weapons depots, and other important installations also are placed here.

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On the basis of the situation indicated, the objective of the combat actions of a front, army, and division can be achieved only by destroying a definite enemy grouping. Thus, front troops, in coordination with troops of adjacent fronts and other forces of the Supreme High Command, must destroy the main forces of the enemy army group operating in its zone. A combined-arms army in coordination with adjacent armies and other front forces must carry out the destruction of the main forces of a field army. A motorized rifle (tank) division in coordination with other divisions of an army must destroy an enemy operating in the zone of its offensive, i.e., the main forces of the opposing enemy division and part of his corps reserves. Tasks must be assigned to the troops accordingly. If, for example, the troops were required only to "inflict losses", "weaken" the enemy, and "create favorable conditions", the objective of the offensive actions could not, in our opinion, be achieved. Requirements of this kind are more typical of defense than of offense.

Nor can we agree with the idea of planning an offensive by troops of an army or even a front for only one or two days. In such a case it is impossible, it seems to us, to fully take account of all the factors determining the substance and depth of combat tasks -- the real forces, composition, form of actions, and depth of deployment of an enemy grouping operating in the zone of a front or army, and the composition and combat capabilities of our own forces. And it is these factors, as well as the possible rates of advance by the troops on the offensive, that will determine the substance and depth of tasks, and the time needed to fulfil them by operational formations of the Ground Forces.

Analysis of the tasks of operational formations of the Ground Forces when conducting combat operations with and without the use of nuclear weapons shows that there are fundamental differences between them. In the first instance, the troops of these formations complete the destruction of the enemy which was achieved by strikes by strategic nuclear forces; while in the second instance, they inflict destruction on the enemy independently, using conventional types of weapons, i.e., they must on their own, without the participation of strategic nuclear forces,

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destroy an opposing enemy. As a result, the need inevitably arises to develop different concepts for an operation with and without the use of nuclear weapons, and to define different types of combat tasks for the troops.

Even more substantial differences exist between the methods used by operational formations in conducting an offensive and in destroying enemy groupings in the nuclear and non-nuclear periods. The methods of combat actions on any scale are determined by the quantity and quality of combat materiel. If war is unleashed by the surprise use of nuclear weapons by the strategic forces of the two sides, the basis of the methods of conducting offensive operations by Ground Forces formations must be the massive use of nuclear weapons by operational-tactical means and the decisive exploitation of the results by combined-arms large units for a rapid advance into the depth.

~~Should war be unleashed without the use of nuclear and chemical weapons, the decisive force in the battle in ground theaters of military operations will be the Ground Forces and aviation.~~ Therefore the methods of conducting offensive operations and destroying enemy groupings also will be different in form and content.

For example, the constant threat from strategic and operational-tactical nuclear forces and means will have a definite impact on the methods of combat actions of the Ground Forces in the non-nuclear period. First of all, this inevitably will have an effect on the procedure for concentrating the main efforts of the troops on both the offensive and defensive. To achieve superiority on selected axes the two sides will be forced to concentrate their troops, forces, and means there at least briefly. They will have to resort to this immediately prior to the delivery of strikes and while the strikes are being carried out. In the other sectors of the front, as well as in their own depth, the troops will operate in dispersed dispositions, so as not to create favorable targets for enemy nuclear weapons.

It is quite obvious that when only conventional means are used, it is impossible to inflict a decisive defeat on an opposing enemy simultaneously over the entire depth of

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his disposition, because of the lack of a sufficient quantity of long-range means. Therefore, the methods of combat actions under these conditions will typically consist of the successive destruction of enemy groupings and installations along the depth.

The number of strikes delivered in the zones of operational formations will probably be less than under conditions in which nuclear weapons are used. And it will by no means always be possible to deliver strikes and conduct an offensive on the shortest possible axes into the depth. When only conventional means of destruction are used, the typical methods of conducting an offensive on the scale of an operational formation will most probably be a powerful strike on one axis with a subsequent development of the offensive into the depth and toward the flanks, or a strike on two axes, of which one will be the main axis.

Whereas it is advantageous during the nuclear period of actions to deliver strikes primarily against the main enemy grouping, when only conventional means of destruction are used, strikes must first be delivered against the weakest and most vulnerable point in the battle and operational disposition of the enemy, with a subsequent movement onto the flanks and into the rear of the main grouping in order to destroy it piecemeal by strikes from different directions. Bold breakthroughs, especially by tank troops, into the depth through poorly covered sectors and gaps in the enemy disposition, and outflanking and envelopment of enemy groupings and his centers of resistance by using airborne landings -- all this must characterize the offensive actions of our troops in the non-nuclear period. Only in the event that there is no opportunity on a given axis for mobile actions and for shifting strikes to a different axis, should we resort to a breakthrough in the form of frontal strikes. In this case during the period of approaching the enemy defense, when negotiating his forward security zone, it is necessary to destroy or effectively neutralize his means of nuclear attack, especially his tactical means.

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Differences in methods of combat actions inevitably result in changes in the operational and battle disposition of forces. The successful conduct of combat actions using only conventional types of weapons requires a strong first echelon of troops, saturated with artillery and supported by aviation. To develop success into the depth will require expanding our efforts until the enemy grouping is completely overwhelmed. To achieve this a deeply echeloned disposition of troops is necessary, since the intensification of strikes under these conditions is possible mainly by massing aviation and committing combined-arms reserves and second echelons to the engagement.

Thus, an analysis of the methods of conducting an offensive in the nuclear and non-nuclear periods graphically shows the substantial difference between them and confirms our beliefs about the necessity for the simultaneous development in a front and in an army of two independent variants of the decision on the operation. One would be for cases where war is unleashed by a surprise massive use of nuclear means, the other for when war is unleashed using only conventional types of weapons.

If we are going to have two variants of the decision on the operation, then naturally we must have two operation plans. Sometimes the fear is expressed that the existence of two variants of an operation plan supposedly will make the training of troops and staffs for an operation more difficult, and will create confusion and disorder in the plans. It is hard to explain the basis of these opinions. In our view, it is precisely the attempt to reflect in one decision and operation plan two concepts, differing in substance, for the destruction of an enemy grouping, two tasks for the same formations and large units of troops, and two methods for their actions, that is most likely to create confusion in the work of commanders and their staffs. Furthermore, the troop commanders of fronts, armies, and their staffs, having planned the operations of troops under their command for only one or two days of the operation, run the risk of encountering great difficulties in troop control if the period of conducting the operation should be longer. This applies first of all to materiel, technical, and other types of support, which hardly can be carried out

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concurrently with combat actions. By planning combat actions in detail to the entire depth of the initial operation, separately with and without the use of nuclear weapons, we would be taking no chances and would only gain from the fact that we would be providing for all the necessary measures on which the successful actions of the troops depend.

\* What are the special features of planning an operation without the use of nuclear weapons? In our view, the most important feature is the fact that the destruction of the enemy is carried out not by all the available forces and means, but by only a certain portion of them, and these consist only of conventional types of weapons. But the basic means of destruction -- nuclear and chemical weapons -- which form the basis of the fighting power of modern operational formations -- are not in fact used. Moreover, the indeterminate duration of the non-nuclear period and the constant threat of enemy nuclear attack make it necessary for the troops, while conducting combat actions using only conventional means, to be ready at any moment to make the transition without pause to actions with the use of nuclear weapons.

Analyzing these special features, we have come to the conclusion that an offensive operation using only conventional means of destruction must be planned to its entire depth according to tasks -- immediate and follow-up -- but it is advisable to break down the immediate task not by days, as is generally done, but by intermediate or individual tasks. / Under the conditions of the Western Theater of Military Operations, attacking troops on the way to achieving the objective of an operation will be forced to accomplish successively such tasks as: negotiating a cover zone containing nuclear mine obstacles; defeating the enemy on a forward defensive line and creating conditions for the conduct of highly mobile offensive operations into the depth; destroying the immediate operational reserves and expanding our efforts to quickly negotiate the intermediate defensive lines of the enemy. If within the depth of the immediate task of the army there exists a wide water obstacle, forcing it also may constitute one of the individual tasks.

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Fulfilling any of the above intermediate tasks as part of accomplishing the immediate task will require that a combined-arms army have a special operational disposition, specific methods of combat actions, and a definitely prescribed amount of time which might be more or less than one day. For example, the negotiation of a cover zone under the threat of the detonation of nuclear mine obstacles will be accomplished by an army using the forces of its forward detachments and advance guards, with maximum reinforcement by artillery and with air support, and by using tactical airborne landings and special detachments for reconnaissance and for deactivating nuclear land mines. The main forces of first-echelon divisions at this time will advance in dispersed dispositions immediately behind the forward detachments and advance guards, ready to support the actions of the latter and follow up the success that is achieved. The task of breaking through the enemy forward defensive line will require a reforming of troops of the first operational echelon and the concentration in selected sectors of a large amount of artillery, tanks, and other forces and means, including some moved up from the T/O of the troops of the first echelon of the army. The problems of forcing a water obstacle and destroying enemy reserves in the depth will have to be solved in a different manner.

In the plan for an offensive operation without the use of nuclear weapons it is essential to develop in detail the basic measures for accomplishing each of the above-mentioned tasks. Here we must bear in mind that the troops may take different amounts of time to fulfil each task, and therefore their one-day tasks cannot always coincide in depth with the intermediate tasks. For example, to negotiate a cover zone with nuclear mine obstacles could take the troops, depending on the depth of the zone, up to two days, while breaking through the forward defensive line could take from one to 1.5 days, etc. The successful accomplishment by the troops of each of the intermediate tasks constitutes a definite stage on the way to fulfilling the immediate task and achieving the objective of the operation. Breaking down the operation plan into intermediate combat tasks will help achieve an orderly transition by the troops to nuclear actions. With this kind of planning the entire operation will represent a single process of destroying the enemy

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grouping to its entire depth, as well as successive actions linked by a single concept for fulfilling a number of intermediate tasks.

But the mere recognition of the need for separate planning of an operation with and without the use of nuclear weapons is not enough. We must also find the most applicable methods and forms of planning. To achieve this it is important first of all to establish: what is the interconnection and interdependence of plans developed for the conduct of an operation using nuclear weapons and only conventional means; must the decision on an operation using conventional means define the tasks of nuclear weapons and of the rocket and aviation large units and units which are supposed to use them, and must it also outline their operating procedure in the event of transition to the use of nuclear and chemical means when there exists a plan for a nuclear operation that has been developed in peacetime? These questions are of great theoretical and practical significance.

At the beginning of an operation involving the surprise and massive use of nuclear weapons, the plan of combat actions developed for the conditions of the non-nuclear period will naturally cease to apply. But should the operation begin using only conventional means, it cannot be assumed that a plan for an operation involving the use of nuclear weapons that was developed in peacetime would lose its significance and would no longer be needed by the staffs and troops. Nor should it be assumed that this plan would be needed only when the time comes to shift to actions involving the use of nuclear weapons. The matter is much more complex. There is no doubt that during combat actions without nuclear weapons, staffs and troops must at the same time also consider the variant of the plan of the operation with nuclear weapons. The need to be in constant readiness for the transition from non-nuclear to nuclear actions makes it compulsory to assign, in one and the same formation, some of the troops to the task of destroying the enemy with conventional means, and at the same time have the others ready for use in the event of a transition to nuclear actions.

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For an efficient transition to actions with nuclear weapons, it is essential during the entire non-nuclear period -- whatever its duration -- to amplify and refine as carefully as possible specific sections of the operation plan developed for actions involving the use of nuclear weapons. For this purpose the commander must, to the extent possible, refine his decision on the destruction of the enemy with nuclear weapons in the event of a transition to actions involving their use. Research shows that it is necessary first of all to determine which enemy installations are to be destroyed by nuclear and chemical weapons in the initial nuclear strike, the order of delivery of nuclear strikes, the measures which ensure the desired degree of readiness on the part of rocket and aviation large units and units for the delivery of nuclear strikes, as well as the tasks of combined-arms large units when surprise use is made of nuclear weapons. Other aspects of the decision also may be refined depending on the situation. On the basis of the refinement of the decision by the commander, the staff will make the appropriate adjustments in the operation plan.

The plan for the initial nuclear strike and the schedule for delivering it will be especially sensitive to changes in the situation. They must therefore be adjusted with great care and, in effect, continually. All this naturally makes troop control more complex. As research done in the Military Academy i/n M. V. Frunze shows, it is advisable that questions of planning actions involving the use of nuclear weapons be handled by a specific group of generals and officers of the Field Headquarters. The nuclear planning group must operate under the personal direction of the commander and the chief of staff, and must be headed by the deputy chief of staff or the deputy chief of the operations directorate (department). It includes officers from the operations and intelligence directorates (departments), the rocket troops and artillery staff, the air army, missile-technical support service, and from the chemical department. An analytical evaluation station also is subordinate to it.

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The nuclear planning group has the following responsibilities: on the basis of orders from the troop commander it must constantly refine the plan for the initial nuclear strike and the schedule for delivering it, and also the sequence for destroying enemy installations with nuclear and chemical weapons; convey to the troops all instructions resulting from the refinement of the decision of the troop commander on the delivery of the initial nuclear strike and involving the maintenance of combat readiness of the rocket troops and aviation to deliver nuclear strikes; plan the preparation and delivery of nuclear warheads; maintain the coordination established among nuclear forces and means; perform the calculations involved in forecasting the nuclear and chemical situation that may develop as a result of the initial nuclear strikes by the two sides. The existence of such a group will ensure the troop commander quick implementation of his ideas for using nuclear weapons in the event of transition to their use, and will enable the rest of the staff to operate efficiently in controlling combat actions in the non-nuclear period.

But the operation plan is, of course, not only a representation on maps of the decision, calculations and explanations. The plan is primarily a guide for specific actions by staffs and troops when preparing for war in peacetime and after war begins. A significant part of the plan for the preparation of the initial operation and the organization of the combat actions of the troops is carried out in peacetime. In our view, this also applies fully to the development of an operation plan for the case where combat actions are conducted using conventional means of destruction.

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