Defense and Counteroffensive Under the New Soviet Military Doctrine

John G. Hines, Donald Mahoney
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John G. Hines, Donald Mahoney

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PREFACE

The RAND Corporation is providing analytical assistance to the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy on the subject of recent developments in Soviet military affairs. This two-year project, "The New Face of the Soviet Military Challenge," seeks to identify and explain the major elements of continuity and change in Soviet military organization, concepts, and goals under President Gorbachev and his "new political thinking." To do so, the project attempts to look beyond glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring) to the motivations underlying recent shifts in Soviet rhetoric, operational doctrine (which the Soviets call military art), national security decisionmaking, and defense resource allocation.

This report examines and analyzes changes in Soviet military art between 1987 and 1989 as discussed in the literature by military scientists serving the Soviet General Staff. It helps to explain and document the real changes that occurred in the Soviet art of war by placing them in the context of the evolving, often contentious military doctrine of the USSR. Because changes in military art usually precede those in Soviet force posture and training practices, an understanding of military art can contribute substantively to defense analysis and forecasting.

The report is based primarily on writings in Voyennaya mysl' (Military Thought), the principal journal of the General Staff. During the period studied (1987–1989), the circulation of Voyennaya mysl' was limited to officers of the Soviet Armed Forces. This and the other Soviet publications reviewed revealed a growing military preoccupation with the conduct of theater defensive operations in the "initial period" of a war against NATO in Europe's central region. These estimates dealt primarily with ground force operations at all levels of warfare from theater-strategic to tactical-technical.

This project is being conducted under the International Security and Defense Policy Program of RAND's National Defense Research Institute, a federally funded research and development center sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The report should be of interest to members of the U.S. defense community concerned with evolving Soviet military policy, civilian-military relations, defense policy formulation, arms control, and conventional deterrence.

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SUMMARY

In May 1987, the Warsaw Pact nations announced a revision of their joint military doctrine. Under the new doctrine—as discussed in the Soviet literature from mid-1987 to mid-1989—the Soviets intended to conduct mainly defensive operations in the initial period of a future conventional war. In December 1988, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev announced that the Soviet Union was reducing and restructuring its forces in Europe so as to make them functionally incapable of surprise attack or large-scale offensive operations.

These developments amounted to a radical reorientation of the military-technical side of Soviet military doctrine. Although this reevaluation of defensive warfare represented the culmination of trends predating Gorbachev’s “new thinking,” the political, diplomatic, and economic imperatives of recent years had hastened the process. In the latter part of 1988, high-level Soviet writing on operational strategy—which the Soviets call military art—increasingly reflected these doctrinal changes. Most significantly, Voyennaya mys’ (Military Thought), the theoretical journal of the Soviet General Staff, markedly increased its coverage of defensive themes at all three levels of military art: strategy, operational art, and tactics.

By early 1989, the Soviet military’s operational thinkers were giving top priority to issues relating to defensive and counteroffensive operations. At the same time, discussion in the press of offensive operations, the traditional focus of Soviet military art, stopped.

Although Soviet military leaders had previously portrayed Soviet military doctrine as defensive in its political nature, they began to admit in 1988 and 1989 that its military-technical side had long had a decidedly offensive thrust. In their view, however, the essentially new art of war that Soviet military theorists were developing would rectify this contradiction.

This report seeks to verify the assertion of Soviet military leaders that their new art of war was in fact defensive. To do so, we assessed whether and to what extent then emerging Soviet operational concepts were defensive in practical military terms. We based the assessment on an examination of three important aspects of Soviet concepts for defensive operations: the role of second echelons and reserves, the role of fire assets, and the balance between positional and maneuver forms in Soviet operational thinking.

With regard first to the role of second echelons and reserves, Soviet concepts during 1988 and 1989 appeared to proceed from the
assumption that forward-deployed fronts would possess reserve forces sufficient for holding a stable defensive line, but insufficient for launching immediate counteroffensive operations. While Soviet military analysts considered early counterstrikes by front reserves likely, they apparently regarded the maneuver forces that would conduct the counterstrikes as lacking the potential for deep penetration or sustained deep operations. The capability for a substantial counteroffensive in effect would depend on the arrival in the forward area of strategic reserves mobilized in the USSR.

Second, Soviet military thinking on the use of fire assets in modern operations posited a convergence of methods and objectives in defensive and offensive warfare. Soviet defensive planners were counting on aggressive and possibly preemptive targeting of NATO deep-fire systems to achieve fire superiority over NATO from the outset of any future conventional war. They envisioned the opening stage of such a war as dominated by fierce fire engagements, the outcomes of which would in large part determine the subsequent course of operations. In particular, Soviet thinking in the years examined assumed that without fire superiority Soviet forces would not be able to launch counterstrikes and a later counteroffensive.

Third, the Soviet writings revealed a belief that a successful defense would depend on an appropriate combination of positional and maneuver forms of action. Military analysts sharply criticized previous biases against static forms of defense and also resurrected the theory of maneuver defense, long maligned as tantamount to retreat. They warned tactical commanders that the realities of the modern battlefield increasingly militated against routine counterattacks by second echelons and reserves. In an era of advanced conventional munitions with enormous destructiveness, the benefits of defensive fire strikes from protected and fortified positions led to the reevaluation of the deeply echeloned defense as an effective form of warfare.

Soviet military theorists believe, however, that a stable defense also requires the aggressive maneuver of fire and forces. This aggressiveness is best exemplified by the counterstrike, an operational form designed to integrate attacks by troop formations with intense fire strikes against an enemy grouping that has breached a positional defense, or against one believed to be preparing an offensive. Soviet writings from the period suggested the possibility of an early preemptive counterstrike; the implementation of this option, however, was believed to depend on several hard-to-predict operational variables, including the attainment of early fire superiority.

Overall, our analysis of Soviet operational concepts for the initial period of the war allowed us to distinguish them in essential ways from
past strategic thinking, with its strong slant toward rapid, deep strategic offensive operations. Although the new concepts seemed to allow preemptive action in certain circumstances, on the whole they best suited initial defensive operations lasting at least a week or more. These operations would have had as their objectives the exhaustion and disruption of an enemy offensive and the creation of conditions favorable to a subsequent counteroffensive.

The analysis employs a framework derived from four scenarios of military operations developed by Soviet analysts Andrey Kokoshin and Valentin Larionov. We conclude that the concept of defensive operations worked out in 1988 and 1989 by General Staff theorists conformed to Kokoshin and Larionov’s third variant. In this paradigm, while a force postured for variant three is functionally incapable of launching an early, sustained counteroffensive, it would possess sufficient reserves to conduct an operational-scale counterstrike intended to restore the status quo ante bellum.

Despite the defensive thrust of Soviet concepts for the initial period of a war, the avowed goal of defensive actions was to facilitate a successful counteroffensive. By viewing the defensive and counteroffensive as a single integrated concept, Soviet discussions in 1988 and 1989 recalled the Soviet plan for the 1943 battle of Kursk.

Thus, the frequent Soviet references to the “strictly defensive thrust” of Soviet doctrine related only to the initial actions in the first weeks of a European war, and not to the counteroffensive that would follow. But whereas the abundant reserves at the disposal of the Soviet command at Kursk had enabled an almost immediate counteroffensive against the Germans, in the period considered in this report, the General Staff expected that Soviet forces deployed in peacetime would require some combination of mobilization and strategic regrouping, and hence delay, before being able to launch a sustained counteroffensive.

While discussions in Military Thought tended to view the counteroffensive as a virtual certainty, they conspicuously and consistently avoided references to the critical parameters of that operation: its intended scope and final objectives, the forces to be used, and its relation to a possible theater-strategic general offensive. While the new doctrine promised a “devastating rebuff to an aggressor,” this phrase by itself failed to specify what it actually intended. During the period considered, the military may have been instructed, because of diplomatic or other considerations, to confine their published remarks and discussions to the defensive-counteroffensive theme.

Although Soviet military and civilian analysts appear to have clashed over the scale and objectives of the counteroffensive, the
political leadership did not intervene in the debate. Moreover, new
field regulations for front and army operations, including counteroffensive,
were completed in summer 1989; the failure to publish or discuss
these operational concepts probably indicated that Soviet military pol-
icy remained in transition.

The military may have postponed the resolution of important stra-
tegic questions because they expected an imminent fundamental policy
change. By early 1989, a critical debate over the external military
threat seems to have reached a decisive stage. Any substantial down-
grading of the perceived threat from the West by the political leader-
ship would have forced the military to fundamentally revise force struc-
ture and military art.

Later in 1989, with that debate still unsettled, the Warsaw Pact’s
warmaking potential suddenly collapsed, and Soviet forces began a
somewhat hasty departure from Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The
strategic and political basis for the aggressive forward defensive/
counteroffensive concept developed after 1987 disappeared; clearly, the
Soviet Armed Forces would no longer be able to deploy their first stra-
tegic echelon on foreign territory.

Because of these and many other changes, Soviet threat assess-
ments, and hence military strategy, will require substantial revamping.
In all likelihood, the strategic concept that will emerge from this reconsid-
eration will differ radically from that produced during 1988 and
1989. This study, then, documents and evaluates operational concepts
from what turned out to be an important transitional period in the
most sweeping transformation of Soviet military strategy in Europe
since the Bolshevik revolution.
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I. INTRODUCTION

The Soviet military in recent years has been revising its operational strategy—which it refers to as military art\footnote{Soviet military terminology is discussed in Sec. II.}—to reflect the "new political thinking" and new military doctrine of the Gorbachev era. Under the new doctrine, discussions of the art of modern warfare have increasingly portrayed the initial period of a conventional war with NATO in terms of defensive and counteroffensive, rather than purely offensive, operations.

SCOPE OF THIS STUDY

This report analyzes the evolution of Soviet military art following the Warsaw Pact's adoption of a defensive military doctrine in May 1987, especially the changes in operational concepts that became increasingly apparent during 1988 and the first half of 1989.\footnote{The report does not attempt to analyze nonmilitary evaluations of and positions on conducting, or avoiding, war in Europe, nor does it seek to determine the influence of such competing assessments on the formulation of security and military policy at the highest political level. For these issues, see Benjamin S. Lambeth, In Soviet Defense Policy Becoming Civilized? The RAND Corporation, R-3939-USDP, August 1990.} The analysis is based on discussions of new concepts that appeared primarily in Voyennaya mys\textsuperscript{1} (Military Thought), the principal journal of the Soviet General Staff.\footnote{Sources are described below, in this section.}

The research for the report was completed shortly before the revolutionary upheavals of late 1989 and 1990 radically changed the political structure of Eastern and Central Europe. These historic events—the rapid fall of communist systems in the Warsaw Pact countries, the accelerated departure of Soviet forces from these countries, the collapse of the Warsaw Pact as a strategically significant warfighting alliance, and the concomitant end to Moscow's political and military hegemony in the region—destroyed much of the strategic and political foundation on which the operational concepts developed and discussed between 1987 and 1989 rested.

Soviet concepts of defensive and counteroffensive operations, which were still being elaborated and amended even as their strategic basis collapsed, must now serve as a point of departure for additional analysis of the radical shifts in Soviet military strategy and operational
concepts that can be expected to occur in the short to middle term. Subsequent strategic models will almost certainly reflect the following new realities:

- The loss of the territorial buffer and forward deployment area formerly provided by the Warsaw Pact states for the Soviet first strategic echelon
- The loss of the enormous logistic and operational infrastructure developed over the past two decades on the territory of those states for the support of Soviet forward-deployed fronts and for the conduct of large-scale operations in the Western Theater of Strategic Military Action
- The loss of other Warsaw Pact states and their armies as potential coalition partners in operations directed against NATO territory.

Given these developments, Soviet strategy for conventional operations in Europe may be expected to shift from the forward defensive/counter-offensive paradigm of 1988–1989 to the defense of Soviet borders.⁴

This report thus assesses discussions of concepts for conventional operations in what turned out to be an exceptionally brief transitional period in the history of the Soviet art of war. We ask the reader, therefore, to remember the temporal limitations of this study when considering its assessments and conclusions.

SOURCES

The report is based primarily on articles published in 1988 and the first half of 1989 in Military Thought, the monthly organ of the Soviet General Staff. These articles give us a means of assessing the military's thinking in light of the military-political guidance and direction that it had been receiving since 1987. During this period, the circulation of Military Thought was limited to officers of the Soviet Armed Forces; the general public did not see it.

Aside from internal Soviet studies, this journal is the most authoritative source in matters of Soviet military art. Its contributors are highly qualified Soviet military scientists, and many—including Generals Sal'manov, Vorob'yov, Larionov, and Zlobin—have some association with the

General Staff Academy.\textsuperscript{5} Top-level command and Defense Ministry personnel also write for \textit{Military Thought}, and several of their articles serve as sources for this study.

We also reviewed other military and nonmilitary publications that could confirm or elaborate on statements and views appearing in \textit{Military Thought}. These additional materials included Warsaw Pact documents and statements and the policy speeches of Mikhail Gorbachev, Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, and other Soviet leaders. Some of the materials appeared in translations provided by the U.S. Federal Broadcast Information Service (FBIS). In addition, we used the most recent edition (1986) of the \textit{Voyennyy entsiklopedicheskii slovar’} (Military Encyclopedic Dictionary) for definitions of military concepts.

The military leaders’ evolving concepts of warfighting interest us, however, because in the final analysis it is they who develop, modify, or reorient operational plans, force structures, and field deployments. As a traditional professional institution, the Soviet Armed Forces, and in particular the General Staff (the “brain of the army”), have considerable autonomy, particularly in the formulation of military art.\textsuperscript{6}

The publications reviewed for this report included the following:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{APN Voennyi Vestnik} (APN Military Bulletin)
\item \textit{Argumenty i fakty} (Arguments and Facts)
\item \textit{Izvestiya} (News)
\item \textit{Kommunist} (The Communist)
\item \textit{Kommunist vooruzhennykh sil} (Communist of the Armed Forces), abbreviated KVS
\item \textit{Krasnaya zvezda} (Red Star), abbreviated KZ
\item \textit{Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn’} (International Life)
\item \textit{Mirovaya ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otношения} (World Economy and International Relations), abbreviated MEMO
\item \textit{Morskoy sbornik} (Naval Collection)
\item \textit{Moskovskie novosti} (Moscow News)
\item \textit{Nedelya} (The Week)
\item \textit{New Times}
\item \textit{Pravda} (Truth)
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{5}The Voroshilov General Staff Academy, as it was previously known, has been called the “commanding intellectual summit of the Soviet military educational establishment.” See Richard Wolff, “Changes in Command of Soviet Military Academies—1986–87,” Center for Strategic Technology. Rapid Report No. 37, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, April 1987, p. 4.

Problemy mira i sotsializma (Problems of Peace and Socialism)
RUSI Journal
Sovetskaya Rossiya (Soviet Russia)
SShA (USA)
Vestnik ministerstva inostrannykh del (Bulletin of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), abbreviated Vestnik MID
Voyenno-istoricheskii zhurnal (Military Historical Journal), abbreviated VZh
Voyennaya mysl' (Military Thought), abbreviated VM
Voyenny entsyklopedicheskii slovar' (Military Encyclopedic Dictionary), abbreviated VES
Voyennyy vestnik (Military Bulletin), abbreviated VV
Zarubezhnoye voyennoye obozreniye (Foreign Military Review), abbreviated ZVO.

Section II describes the background of the adoption of a defensive military doctrine, the objectives and research strategy of this report, and the terminology used in the research. The specific changes in military doctrine beginning in mid-1987 are discussed in Sec. III, and the additional contributions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) to this evolution, in Sec. IV.

Section V analyzes four Soviet scenarios for the initial stage of a conventional war and the three criteria for our analysis. Sections VI–X discuss in detail the forward defensive and counteroffensive operational concept of 1988–1989 in terms of these three criteria. We offer our conclusions with regard to threat assessment, expected changes in Soviet military art, and the collapse of the forward defense paradigm in Sec. X.
II. NATURE OF MILITARY ART DISCUSSIONS,
1988–1989

Our analysis of Soviet discussions of concepts for conventional operations revealed important Soviet assumptions at all three levels of Soviet military art: strategy, operational art, and tactics. At all levels, analysts emphasized defensive conventional warfare against what they perceived as highly capable NATO forces, giving considerably less attention than they had previously to purely offensive themes. This shift in emphasis applied particularly to discussions dealing with the initial period of the war.

These writers portrayed a NATO conventional offensive as an especially grave threat. This perception was driven by (1) the Soviets' alarming assessments of the destructive power of high-accuracy, deep-strike systems being developed for and fielded by Western armies, (2) the formidable and increasing air-mobile and air-assault capabilities of NATO forces, and (3) an apparently unshakable assessment that should NATO initiate a war, it would do so with a massive surprise offensive.

Discussion focused on the requirements for conducting a successful nonnuclear defense in these conditions. At the same time, Soviet military science had concluded that military technical trends were beginning to permit the conduct of aggressive conventional defensive operations with far more decisive goals than had previously been possible.

Writings on Soviet strategy, operational art, and tactics all considered the conduct of defensive operations as a precursor to the preparation and unleashing of conventional counterstrikes followed by a counteroffensive. Soviet military analysts presented the strategic defensive as a temporary, intentional stage, the successful conduct of which was the prerequisite for a successful transition to the counteroffensive. The discussions conspicuously omitted information on the intended scope and final objectives of counteroffensive action. Questions of the number of forces to be included in a counteroffensive and the planned depth of their penetration went unanswered.

In fact, discussion of the new elements of Soviet military art dealt only with what the Soviets call the initial period of the war, namely, the period of the initial strategic defensive up to the transition to a counteroffensive. Soviet military writers may have limited the discussion partially by design: According to Lieutenant General M. M. Kir'yan, the Soviet military's leading authority on the initial period of
the war, this period has been understudied, particularly in the context of conducting initial defensive operations in modern, nonnuclear conditions.

In addition, during more than a decade, the Soviets have produced a well-developed and historically grounded body of thought and practice on the conduct of large-scale strategic offensives. Soviet generals were educated and trained based on this knowledge. They are unlikely to forget lessons and methods so long committed to memory and so often exercised. By contrast, Soviet military art tended to neglect the theory and practice of defenses and counteroffensives.

Political and diplomatic considerations also may have motivated the omission from recent discussions of the complete execution—as opposed to the preparation—of counteroffensive operations. Even before the Gorbachev period, the Soviets were becoming increasingly aware that NATO countries closely monitored and reacted to Soviet operational concepts. By 1987, the Soviets appeared fully cognizant of the sensitivity with which Western countries viewed Soviet internal deliberations and thus were unlikely to discuss publicly operational concepts and alternatives that might undermine the diplomacy of the "new thinking."

INCENTIVES FOR CHANGE

Although the reevaluation of defensive warfare after 1987 represented the culmination of a military-technical trend predating Gorbachev's accession by more than half a decade, the political and economic imperatives of perestroika (restructuring) markedly accelerated this process. Thus, the change in Soviet military doctrine and strategy evolved from two key areas of concern to the Soviet leadership: the military-technical and the political-economic.

The military-technical concerns appear to have grown out of strategic reappraisals made in the early to mid-1980s by both the political leadership and the military establishment. Firmly believing that escalation to nuclear war would threaten the survival of the Soviet state, Soviet leaders reviewed their military assumptions and expectations about battlefield escalation control and escalation dominance. Their review led them to question the expectation—then central to Soviet

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1See Lieutenant General Mikhail M. Kir'yan, "Nachal'nuy period velikoy otechestvennoy voyny" (The Initial Period of the Great Fatherland War), Voenno-istoricheskiy zhurnal, hereafter VIZh, June 1988, p. 11.

theater strategy—that a Warsaw Pact strategic conventional offensive could preemptively deny NATO any incentive to initiate nuclear use.

In previous thinking, success was held to depend on (1) the attainment of early air superiority, (2) timely, discrete cooperation on the part of Warsaw Pact allies, and (3) the achievement of some degree of strategic surprise. The Soviet leaders realized that even if the military could achieve these conditions, a vexing paradox remained: Rapid conventional success on any axis might greatly accelerate NATO’s decision to use nuclear weapons. Any NATO decision, Soviet planners reasoned, would hinge on considerations, such as those inherent in deterrence and flexible response, that they would not necessarily deem rational or predictable. Thus, the Soviet operational concept—because it could lead to the nuclear escalation that the high-speed conventional offensive was designed to preclude—contained the seeds of its own failure.

Furthermore, the implementation and elaboration of this concept in the area of force building and the development of aggressive operational forms led to problems that further undermined Soviet theater objectives. These problems arose largely from the fact that in the late 1970s and early 1980s NATO leaders came to perceive that the magnitude and immediacy of the Soviet military threat had greatly increased, and NATO responded with deliberate political and military measures.

These NATO countermeasures further decreased the likelihood of rapid Soviet conventional victory in a theater war. At the same time, because of the modernization and greater readiness of NATO nuclear forces, Soviet planners could expect an increased danger of nuclear use. The Soviets were perhaps most disturbed by the fact that their aggressive force-building approach had probably increased the likelihood that war would occur in the first place. And finally, the Soviet military buildup had placed Soviet industry and technology in direct competition with the West, where new technologies and their innovative application would dominate the military-technological competition over the middle and long term.

During the early 1980s, Soviet leaders realized that they had locked the USSR into a draining military competition with the economically and technologically superior West, a competition that was eroding the overall security position of their country. Political, as well as military, dissatisfaction with this confrontational approach probably came to a head in the second half of 1984. One result was the leadership’s removal of Marshal of the Soviet Union Nikolay Vasil’yevich Ogarkov, the military figure most closely associated with the confrontational approach, from his powerful position as chief of the General Staff.
The increasingly burdensome economic cost of developing, building, and sustaining the military forces required to support a confrontational, “victory-oriented” theater strategy thus emerged as the second and more widely acknowledged source of change in Soviet military doctrine and strategy. The indirect costs exacted by relative political and economic isolation from the most advanced countries of the world further exacerbated the direct costs imposed by the military’s seemingly insatiable demands on the material and human resources desperately needed in the underdeveloped civilian economy.

In addition to suffering from the well-documented liabilities and distortions of a command economy, the USSR for many years has been allocating one-fifth to one-third of its national wealth to military needs. The political leadership that acceded to power in 1985 understood that the military burden had contributed, probably significantly, to the stagnation and subsequent decline of the Soviet economy and standard of living and, at the same time, undermined the overall defense posture of the Soviet state.

To overcome these problems, the Soviet political leadership has sought since 1985 to redefine security in terms of requiring military strategy and force-building policy to support, rather than undermine, pressing political, economic, and societal concerns. This political imperative was manifested particularly in the publication in May 1987 of a joint Warsaw Pact military doctrine emphasizing defensive themes and war prevention. However, events between the time of the 19th All-Union Party Conference in June 1988 and Gorbachev’s announcement of large unilateral force reductions that December apparently compelled the General Staff to hasten the introduction of what amounted to a new strategic vision for operations to be conducted in the first two to four weeks of a conventional war in Europe.

The introduction of the new strategy began with a major reassessment of the external military threat. The new political guidance was complemented—indeed, in some respects anticipated—by the advocacy among segments of the military leadership of a transition to a less confrontational, more defensive posture around the Soviet periphery. Such a transition was expected to reduce the risk of war and concomitant nuclear escalation.

Under Gorbachev, the friction between the military and political leaderships over changes in doctrine and strategy reflects differences regarding professional prerogative, reciprocity, and the pace and scale of change, rather than disagreement over the basic nature and direction of that change. This overall convergence of Soviet military and civilian views on the new military doctrine and strategy, although based on somewhat divergent perspectives and modes of analysis, suggests that
these views would survive changes in the Soviet political leadership. In fact, since 1985 the political, economic, and societal incentives that spurred the changes in Soviet military and security policies have grown stronger.

A SOVIET WORST-CASE SCENARIO FOR CONVENTIONAL WAR

In undertaking this study, we sought to understand how Soviet operational thinkers were looking at practical issues of warfighting after the political and military leaderships had redefined the previously ambiguous linkage between the political side of military doctrine and the development of military strategy. For the Soviet General Staff, the changes posed a fundamentally new dilemma of how, simultaneously, to prevent and prepare for a major conventional war with the West.

Our analysis focuses on Soviet operational concepts. It does not assess existing Soviet forces and their capabilities, exercises, and training. These latter issues are vital, of course, and they continue to warrant and receive considerable attention in the West. But because revisions in doctrine manifest themselves first of all in military art, a comprehensive assessment must begin with an examination of operational concepts. Thus, the present study focuses on the primary scenario—or variant, as the Soviets call it—of war outbreak and initial operations envisioned and studied by Soviet military theoreticians.

The primary variant centered on a surprise conventional NATO offensive with decisive objectives. In that variant, massive, deep, precision fires with the potential for enormous devastation and disruption preceded and accompanied the offensive. Soviet forces conducted an initial strategic defense to exhaust NATO’s offensive, halt its attack groupings, and set the stage for a subsequent counteroffensive. Obviously, a spurious, worst-case assessment of Western political-military intentions, capabilities, and operational concepts drove the scenario.\(^4\)

\(^3\)A meaningful change in the military-technical side of doctrine should have a measurable effect on deployed forces. Some lag is to be expected, particularly when doctrinal revision is radical. As deputy chief of the General Staff, Colonel General Makhmut Akhmetovich Gareyev pointed out, "one should not underestimate the leading role which the orientation of military doctrine plays. If military doctrine becomes genuinely defensive in nature, that inevitably determines the composition and structure of the armed forces." Gareyev was promoted to army general in 1989. See Gareyev, “Soviet Military Doctrine: Current and Future Developments,” RUSI Journal, Winter 1988, p. 5.

\(^4\)This sort of assessment of NATO/U.S. war plans and operational concepts is by no means new to Soviet military science. See, for example, Kir’yan, Vnezapnost’ v operatsiyakh vooruzhennykh sil SShA (Surprise in the Operations of the U.S. Armed Forces),
PERCEPTION AND DETERRENCE

The fact that an actual war will doubtless proceed entirely differently from that portrayed in the Soviet military’s scenario is itself important. An understanding of Soviet conceptions—even when they are misconceptions—is an invaluable asset to Western military commanders and political leaders. Such conceptions have long been recognized as an important input to threat analysis.6

Decisions and actions that are based instead on a mirror image or on an assumption of enemy rationality can lead to unforeseen and sometimes fatal results.6 Likewise, inaccurate or stereotyped assessments of Soviet thinking on warfighting can introduce biases, pessimistic and optimistic, into Western assessments of likely behavior and performance.7 In these conditions, political and military leaders are far more likely to be surprised. However, an understanding of Soviet military thinking as it evolves in peacetime by no means translates into a prediction of actual Soviet behavior in wartime.8

Nevertheless, the design and execution of a successful NATO deterrence strategy demands such an understanding. To deter an attack, NATO must have a credible defensive concept, because deterrence, in the final analysis, resides in the minds of those to be deterred. Consequently, to maintain and increase the credibility of the nonnuclear elements of its deterrent posture, NATO must remain alert to how the Soviet military might assess potential modifications in that posture, given the Soviet framework for thinking about war and operations.

More specifically, with an understanding of Soviet plans and options for the organization, deployment, and potential employment of forces in Europe, Western decisionmakers are better equipped to evaluate defense policy variants in terms of their relative contribution to deterrence. In addition, such an understanding permits Western decisionmakers to better comprehend the level of deterrence under various European conventional arms-control regimes.

Moscow, 1982, pp. 320–321; Vnezapnost’ v nastupatel’nykh operatsiyakh velikoy otechestvennoy voyny (Surprise in the Offensive Operations of the Great Fatherland War), Moscow, 1986, p. 10.


9Soviet military operational concepts for Europe driven by grossly unrealistic (pessimistic) military-political expectations might under a different set of military-political circumstances quickly yield to more aggressive variants made possible by actual events.
We address below the extent to which Soviet operational concepts developed under the new doctrine are defensive by measuring them with several analytical yardsticks. In making these measurements, we momentarily suspend disbelief, play by Soviet rules, and assess the “defensiveness” of these Soviet concepts on practical military grounds. In other words, postulating a NATO offensive, we ask whether the Soviet concept for an initial forward defensive ruled out (or was unsuitable for) Soviet initial offensive action.

An ostensibly defensive strategy for the initial period of a war in Europe which simultaneously allowed a practical option for initial offensive operations might indicate that operational planners in the Soviet Armed Forces were attempting to delude not only the West, but their own political leadership. Such deception clearly would indicate that old habits were undermining “new thinking.”

RESERVES AND SECOND ECHELONS: THE MODAL ISSUE

Answers to first-order questions relating to force levels, defensive success, and counteroffensive timing and scale depended largely on the size, armament, and location of second-echelon forces. Even a stable strategic defensive needs a second-echelon and reserve force, and the transition to counterattack/counterstrike and general counteroffensive actions requires correspondingly larger reserves.9

Historically, in the oft-examined battle of Kursk in July 1943, Soviet fronts fought on the defensive for only a week before they began successive counteroffensives. Before the German attack, however, the Soviet High Command had marshaled enormous reserves in the rear area and had planned for their prompt use.

Discussions from 1988 and 1989 indicated an operational concept based on an initial defense lasting substantially longer than a week and thus the absence of a strategic reserve in close proximity to the battle area.10 This concept implied a requirement for mobilization under attack and/or movement from the western USSR to the forward area of forces remaining after possible future troop reduction agreements.

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9RAND computer simulations confirmed the fact that the relative availability of large-scale reserves was also the dominant issue in assessing the stability of the NATO-Warsaw Pact force balance. See James A. Thomson, An Unfavorable Situation: NATO and the Conventional Balance, The RAND Corporation, N-2842-FF/RC, November 1988, pp. 27-28.

During the period examined, the prospect of further large, asymmetric reductions—unilateral or otherwise—disturbed Soviet generals and military scientists. Such reductions might have jeopardized the ability of forward-stationed operational reserves and second echelons to provide what the Soviets see as the two characteristic features of a successful defensive operation: stability and aggressiveness (aktivnost'). Reserves and second echelons provide defensive stability by their ability to maneuver onto sectors threatened with collapse. At the same time, they support an aggressive defense by offering a commander the option of ordering rear-deployed maneuver forces into counterstrikes or counterattacks against the attacker's vulnerable points.

During 1988 and 1989, Soviet operational thinking clearly viewed these mobility and maneuverability aspects of a defense as indispensable. Thus, well into 1989, this thinking assumed the continued presence of forward-stationed reserves adequate for conducting aggressive countermaneuvers in the course of defensive operations. Underlying the requirement for these reserves in the forward area, however, was the assumption—pivotal to the Soviet operational concept—that war would commence, as it did in June 1941, with an aggressive offensive from the West.

Therefore, while the roles assigned to reserve and second-echelon forces under the 1988–1989 Soviet concept may have suited an essentially defensive strategy, the spurious nature of the threat assessment underpinning that strategy meant that the West perceived those forces as possessing an offensive potential. The reader should remain aware of this disconnect—caused by misperception of the NATO threat—between Soviet concepts and capabilities.12

**TERMINOLOGY**

A redirection of military doctrine does not mean that the Soviets would have to rebuild strategy from scratch.13 A substantial revamping

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11Operational reserves consist of the second echelons and reserves of forward-deployed fronts.

12This study does not systematically address—nor did the Soviet discussions that we examined—the implications of the 1988–1989 strategy for the initial period of a war in which NATO did not attack. However, we note cases in which these discussions suggested implications for such vital questions as Soviet preemption. But because this sort of inference leads to speculation, any detailed consideration of such questions will remain outside the scope of this study. Nevertheless, aspects of preemption, escalation, and actual wartime outcomes—given a defensive but aggressive Soviet strategy for the initial period of a war, a strategy based on an unrealistic, worst-case, military-political scenario—may continue to warrant consideration.

13Indeed, during the 1980s, the special demands of conducting defensive warfare, including a strategic defense, received steady and increasing attention in Soviet military science for reasons entirely independent of the Gorbachev reforms. See John G. Hines,
of the military-technical side of doctrine, however, would begin with a reassessment of the military threat to the Soviet Union. The reassessment would lead in turn to changes in strategy, that is, in the sequencing, planning, and preparation of initial and subsequent strategic operations, both defensive and offensive.\footnote{In late 1989, Marshal Akhromeyev, formerly chief of the General Staff, told a Novosti correspondent that "the military-technical aspect of doctrine . . . is completely changeable. This is because it depends directly on the military-political situation." See "The Doctrine of a New Policy," Zolnierc Wloności (Warsaw), November 9, 1989, p. 4, in Federal Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), FBIS-SOV-89-221, November 17, 1989, p. 107.} Through strategy, shifts in doctrine would in turn affect operational art and tactics.

Military doctrine should guide the development of military art and its implications for war and peace. At the same time, military art is not a subset of military doctrine. Doctrine consists of general principles, whereas military art deals primarily with practical issues of warfighting and operational success.

At the beginning of a major war, the demands of strategy would come to the fore. As a war progressed, some of the political considerations and principles contained in doctrine might directly affect the conduct of military operations and wartime objectives. Whether wartime demands could be reconciled with the principles of a doctrine developed in peacetime would probably depend on the particulars of the conflict, first and foremost, the national interests involved.

Despite their different functions, however, military art must be closely coordinated with the doctrinal declarations of policymakers to ensure against essential contradictions. This need for coordination applies particularly to the initial period of a war, which Soviet military thinkers have always considered critical. Concepts for operations in the opening stage of a war reflect political intent. Army General Makhmut Akhmetovich Gareyev, a leading General Staff theorist, has written: "While politics usually prevails throughout a war, the political aspects are most prevalent on the eve or at the beginning of a war."\footnote{Gareyev, M. V. Frunze—Voyenny teoretik (M. V. Frunze—Military Theorist), Moscow, 1985, p. 242.}

Military art, in the Soviet lexicon, is the subdivision of military science concerned with the theory, forecasting, planning, and conduct of military actions. Based on the probable battlefields of the present and foreseeable future, professionals in military art (i.e., military scientists) develop guidelines and options for the employment of appropriate military forces in specific and general conditions, and for a range of likely theaters of war.

Military art takes its guidance from the positions of the military-technical side of doctrine. In its published form, this aspect of doctrine describes in general terms the nature of present and near-future warfare, likely opponents, general types of military action to be expected and prepared for, and measures to ready and equip the armed forces, the population, and the national economy for conducting future wars.

The Soviet political leadership develops military doctrine (with due consideration to the conclusions of military science), while the General Staff develops and promulgates strategy, the superior component of military art. The General Staff also formulates combined-arms operational art. Soviet military discussions are usually conducted in the context of strategy, operational art, or tactics.

Strategy deals with the preparation and execution of strategic operations by groups of fronts (in land theaters) in separate or adjacent theaters of strategic military action (TSMAs) and with the sequence and timing of initial and subsequent strategic operations in a war. Strategy, which is unified for all services and groups of forces, prescribes their joint use according to a single plan under a single, combined command. In a continental theater, such as the Western TSMA, covering Central and Western Europe, the two main types of strategic action are strategic offensive and strategic defensive operations. Since 1989, the Soviets have increasingly used the term strategic direction—evidently in place of TSMA—to designate strategic-scale regions for military operations.

16“Strategiya voyennaya” (Military Strategy), Voyenny entsiklopedicheskii slovar’ (Military Encyclopedia Dictionary), hereafter VES, Moscow, 1986, p. 711. Defense Minister Dmitry Timofeyevich Yazov, in an address to the Supreme Soviet, July 3, 1989, stated that “in contrast to other ministries, the organizational development of the Armed Forces, military doctrine, and international relations are determined not by the Ministry of Defense but by the supreme political leadership of the country. In this connection, the Defense Ministry develops the forms and methods of implementing decisions by the supreme political leadership . . . through developing operational, mobilizational, and other plans for using branches of the Armed Forces, services, and special troops.” See FBIS-SOV-88-127, July 5, 1989, p. 40.

17Marshall Akhromeyev revealed in a 1989 interview that during his 15 years on the General Staff his chief duties “were to formulate the military-technical aspect of Soviet military doctrine and to elaborate questions of strategy, operational art, and the development and employment of the Armed Forces.” See “Sovetnik predsedatulya verkhovnogo soveta SSSR” (Adviser to the Chairman of the USSR Supreme Soviet), Krasnaya zvezda, hereafter KZ, July 2, 1989, p. 2.

18“Teatr strategy military action” is a translation of teatr voyennikh deystviy, abbreviated TVD. The literal translation of the latter, “theater of military action,” fails to convey the strategic scale of the area involved. Many Western analysts use the abbreviation TVD instead of TSMA.

19The Soviets now refer to the commanding officers of strategic-level commands as commander in chief of the forces of a direction (glavnykommanduyushchiy voyck napravleniya), rather than as Cinc of a TSMA. For a rare depiction of the organiza-
Operational art—again in a continental TSMA or strategic
direction—is the component of military art dealing with the conduct of
operations by fronts, armies, and corps of the Ground Forces jointly
with units of other branches of the Soviet Armed Forces. The scale of
the forces involved at this operational level implies that the operations
pursue lesser objectives than do operations at the strategic level. The
combat formation employed at this level is the ob'yedineniye, a concep-
tually precise English translation of which would be "operational-scale
formation." Operational formations include the front (front), the army
(armiya), and the operational-scale corps (operativnyy korpus).

The third component of Soviet military art, tactics, refers to the con-
duct of military actions—battles—by division-size and smaller for-
mations. In Soviet Ground Forces terminology, soyedineniye (tactical for-
mation) refers to a small corps, a division, or a brigade; chast' (tactical
unit) often refers to a regiment; and podrazdeleniye (tactical subunit),
to either a battalion or a company. Tactical-scale actions pursue lim-
ited local objectives.

Such terms as counteroffensive, counterattack, counterstrike, and
strategic defensive operation relate to specific circumstances in the
course of a war, although the scale of action involved can sometimes be
ambiguous. While a strategic defensive operation clearly involves a
defense conducted by fronts in a TSMA or strategic direction, it by no
means excludes the possibility of simultaneous offensive counteraction
at various scales.20 A counterattack, for example, is conducted by
tactical-scale units against forces that have penetrated part of an
established defensive line. The counterattack is considered completed
with the full or partial restoration of the former line.21

Counterattacks may be accompanied by counterstrikes, which are
executed according to a single fire plan by aircraft, missiles, artillery,
and sometimes include strikes by tank or assault troops. Brief, power-
ful, and concentrated, counterstrikes can also be operational or even
strategic in scale. A series of destructive counterstrikes against enemy
offensive groupings may begin the transition from strategic defense to
counteroffensive.

A counteroffensive has as its objectives the disruption of an enemy's
offensive, the rout or destruction of his attacking forces, the seizure of
important strategic lines or areas, and the recapture of the strategic or

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20"Strategicheskaya obrona" (Strategic Defense), VES, p. 710.
21"Kontratak" (Counterattack), VES, p. 352.
operational initiative. Thus, a counteroffensive may be conducted on a strategic or operational scale.

The Red Army conducted three notably successful counteroffensive operations in World War II (which the Soviets call the Great Fatherland War), at Moscow, Stalingrad, and Kursk. All three were conducted by a group of fronts and were thus operational-strategic in scale:

Counteroffensives were characterized by the planning of operations and the creation of offensive groupings in the course of defensive battles, while repelling an offensive by superior enemy forces. As a rule, additional forces and means from the Reserves of the Supreme High Command were brought in for the conduct of the counteroffensive.23

In the aftermath of large-scale troop reductions west of the Urals, the objectives of Soviet counteroffensive actions in any future war may well depend on the number of troops and quantity of equipment made available by the Supreme High Command (VGK). The decision to limit the extent of a counteroffensive for political reasons is another possibility, and not one unknown in Soviet military history.24

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22*Kontrnastupleniye* (Counteroffensive), VES, p. 352.
23Ibid.
24Andrey Kokoshin and Valentin Larionov, “Protivostoyaniye sil obshchego naznacheniya v kontekste obespecheniya strategicheskoy stabil’nosti” (The Confrontation of Combat Forces in the Context of Ensuring Strategic Stability), Mirovaya ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, hereafter MEMO, June 1988, p. 27.
III. CHANGES IN MILITARY DOCTRINE: 1987

At the end of May 1987, the Political Consultative Commission of the Warsaw Pact, meeting in East Berlin, adopted the “Military Doctrine of the Warsaw Pact Member States,” according to which

The Warsaw Pact member states will never, under any circumstances, start hostilities against any country or alliance of countries if they themselves do not become the target of an armed attack.¹

The most extraordinary feature of the new joint doctrine was the clarity of its declared central objective: “The military doctrine of the Warsaw Pact, like that of each of its members, is subordinated to the task of not permitting war—either nuclear or conventional.”² The elevation of war prevention to paramount doctrinal status was definitely something new.³ While previous discussions of the political side of Soviet military doctrine had referred to war prevention as an objective of doctrine, the main emphasis clearly had been the prediction of future war and the preparation of the population and the armed forces for waging that war.⁴

INTEGRATION OF WAR PREVENTION AND WAR PREPARATION

Since the promulgation of the new doctrine, leading figures in the Soviet Armed Forces have stated on several occasions that the political goal of war prevention now governs both sides of doctrine. As a result, the processes of war prevention and war preparation are considered to be integrated.⁵ Figure 1 represents this aspect of the relationship

²Ibid.
³As a top General Staff figure stressed a few weeks after the Berlin meeting: “for the first time in military history, the main task of the Armed Forces is to prevent, not to allow, war, both nuclear and conventional.” See Gareyev, news conference, Moscow Television Service, June 22, 1987, in FBIS-SOV-87-120, June 23, 1987, p. AA1.
⁴“Doktrina voyennaya” (Military Doctrine), VES, p. 240. The tendency to view war prevention as effectively divorced from forecasting and preparing the armed forces for future war was evident in statements made by Soviet military figures as late as early 1987.
⁵The political and military-technical sides of present-day Soviet military doctrine have a single, defensive thrust, and the military-technical side is subordinate to the political. The prevention of war is the supreme goal, the nucleus of the doctrine, the basic
between the two sides of Soviet doctrine. The May document, in discussing the peacetime force levels and intended wartime employment of Warsaw Pact forces, noted that Pact nations were compelled to maintain their armed forces in a composition and at a level that would allow them to repulse any attack from the outside against any treaty member state. . . . If they are nevertheless attacked, they would devastatingly rebuff the aggressor.  

Interestingly, the document also maintained that the level of Pact forces at that time corresponded strictly to "the limits of sufficiency for

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function of the Soviet state and its Armed Forces."


defense," that is, at a "sufficient level so as not to be caught unaware."7
Moreover, it asserted that "the existing military-strategic parity remains the decisive factor of preventing war."8

The declaration contained no substantive information, however, on what the Soviets call the "correlation between the offensive and the defensive," that is, on the most substantive features of the military-technical side of doctrine. In that sense, it gave an incomplete picture of the nature of the warfare that the Soviet Armed Forces were expected to conduct.9 Political discretion may partly explain the important omissions.

Marshal of the Soviet Union Viktor Grigor'evich Kulikov, then commander in chief (CinC) of Pact forces, admitted soon after its publication that the joint doctrine included "only those conclusions and recommendations of socialist military science which fully accord with the political course of the allied states."10 As a result, Kulikov said, other views, concepts, and regulations, despite being both "official" and included in extant military documents and procedures, were nonetheless excluded from the military-technical section of the published statement on doctrine.11

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7 Akhromeyev, then chief of the General Staff, described sufficiency for defense as an important principle of the new doctrine. He defined the concept as follows: "Our doctrine proceeds from the position that the composition of the armed forces, and the quantity and quality of armaments with which they are equipped, must correspond strictly to the level of military threat and must be determined by the actual requirements for a reliable defense and for ensuring the security of our countries. We seek to have exactly the forces that are required for attaining these objectives. Nothing more. Herein lies the concept of the principle of defensive sufficiency." Akhromeyev, December 1987, p. 26 (emphasis in the original).


9 The introduction noted that only the "fundamental provisions" of Pact military doctrine were to follow. This continued past practice. As David Holloway has observed, published statements of Soviet military doctrine never went beyond "the most general points." During 1989, however, published Soviet accounts of their doctrine became somewhat more substantive in the military-technical sense. Holloway, The Soviet Union and the Arms Race, New Haven, 1984, p. 30.

10 Kulikov, Doktrina zashchity mira i sotsializma (The Doctrine of Preserving Peace and Socialism), Moscow, 1988, pp. 53–54.

11 Ibid., p. 54; Akhromeyev's December 1987 article (p. 26) referred to several important issues dealt with by the military-technical side of the joint doctrine that were not reflected in the May declaration. He wrote that "the military-technical side of doctrine is subordinate to the political side.... It determines appropriate military, organizational, technical, strategic, and military-economic measures for prevention of war and repulsion of possible aggression. It reveals the probable character of war, should an aggressor attempt to unleash one upon the USSR and the other socialist countries; [it] defines what sort of armed forces are needed in peacetime and in the course of such a war, how to ready the country, the army, and the navy to repulse aggression, and how to employ them."
Following publication of the joint doctrine in May 1987, the top military leadership began to elaborate on its principles and implications. Notably, a monograph by Defense Minister Yazov was sent to press in early October, four months after the Berlin meeting. Defense, Yazov asserted, was considered the basic type of military action "in the repulsion of aggression." The Soviet defense would have to halt the enemy attacker, inflict heavy attrition, and not permit the loss of territory.

However, defense alone would not suffice, in Yazov's view, to defeat an aggressor: "Therefore, after repulsing an attack, the troops and naval forces must be able to conduct a decisive offensive. The transition to it will take the form of a counteroffensive."  

Such a framing of the issue would seem to require no far-reaching modification of existing Soviet strategy, insofar as defensive operations would prevail only during the putative NATO attack. As soon as NATO had been stopped, however, Pact forces would begin to conduct decisive strategic offensives—the heretofore dominant focus of Soviet strategy.

The term "decisive offensive" calls to mind a theater-strategic operation. Moreover, in Soviet military historiography, "decisive" usually connotes the achievement of an important strategic victory. Yazov thus went beyond a stated principle of the new doctrine (which demanded a "devastating rebuff" to aggression) and, in effect, left open an option for the decisive theater offensive foreseen by previous Soviet military strategy.  

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12Army General D. T. Yazov, Na strazhe sotsializma i mira (On Guard for Socialism and Peace), Moscow, 1987, p. 32.  
13Ibid., p. 33 (emphasis in the original).

14Discussion of this strategy dominated Soviet military periodicals especially during the early 1980s. Reviewing the Second World War, Gareyev, then chief of the General Staff military science directorate, wrote in 1985 that the experience of conducting operations by groups of fronts serves as "a prototype for the modern strategic operation in a continental TSMA." See Gareyev, "Tvorchestvy karakter sovetskoy voyennoy nauki v Velikoy otechestvennoy voyne" (The Creative Character of Soviet Military Science in the Great Fatherland War), VIZh, July 1985, p. 24. Army General Yuriy Pavlovich Maksimov, also in 1985, noted that "the strategic offensive of the Soviet Armed Forces in the concluding European campaign of 1945 confirmed the vitality of a most important position of Soviet military doctrine, which holds that only as a result of decisive offensives is it possible to defeat the enemy's armed forces." Maksimov concluded that many lessons of that campaign "preserve their significance in modern conditions." See Maksimov, "Strategicheskoye nastuzhenye sovetskikh voyenno-khizhennykh sil v zaevropeiskoi divizii kampanii 1945 goda v Evrope" (The Strategic Offensive of the Soviet Armed Forces in the Concluding Campaign of 1945 in Europe), VIZh, April 1985, p. 72. However, at least seven multifront offensive operations conducted by the Red Army in the European Theater during that war pursued "decisive objectives," which one important 1983 article defined as "the devastating defeat of a large-scale grouping of enemy forces," the capture of strategically important regions, or the removal from the war of states in the enemy coalition. With the exception of the Berlin operation, each of the other decisive offen-
Only weeks before Yazov’s book went to press in 1987, Army General Anatoliy Ivanovich Gribkov, then chief of staff of Warsaw Pact forces, interpreted the same doctrinal principle somewhat differently. When queried in an interview as to whether the Pact had adopted a passive stance in the face of NATO offensive capabilities, he replied that Pact armies would act with “exceptional decisiveness” if attacked:

In the course of repulsing aggression, they will also conduct counteroffensive actions. This does not contradict the demands of military doctrine, for, as the experience of the Great Fatherland War and local wars demonstrates, such actions are not only possible, but necessary in the bounds of defensive operations and battles on separate axes.¹⁵

Thus, Gribkov viewed counteroffensive actions as coincident with the conduct of general defensive operations, strongly suggesting that he was speaking of counterattacks, counterstrikes, or perhaps limited counteroffensive action. Unlike Yazov, Gribkov included no prospect of decisive offensive actions aimed at the “defeat” of an aggressor in his elaboration of the military-technical side of the new doctrine.

SEPARATION OF DEFENSE AND COUNTEROFFENSE

Only days after publication of Gribkov’s remarks, however, Gareyev, by then a deputy chief of the General Staff and the USSR’s leading military theorist, sent to press a monograph on Soviet military science. In a chapter on the military-technical aspects of the new doctrine, Gareyev said little beyond what was published in the May document.¹⁶

In discussing the governing principles of military art, however, Gareyev divided war into two discrete phases—the repulsion of aggression and that which follows:


¹⁶Gareyev asserted that Pact forces would be maintained at a level “sufficient for the defense of the countries of socialism, and in retaliatory actions, the decisive repulsion of imperialist aggression.” Gareyev, Sovetskaya voyennaya nauka (Soviet Military Science), Seriya zashchita otechestva, No. 11, Moscow, 1987, p. 15.
At the beginning of a war, in repulsing enemy aggression, the basic method of combat actions for our army will be defensive operations and battles. However, it is impossible to achieve the complete destruction of the enemy with the defense alone. Therefore, in the course of the war (after repulsion of the enemy aggression), the basic methods of combat action, in the transition to the counteroffensive, will be counteroffensive actions in combination with the defense, according to the situation.  

Gareyev envisioned the conduct of operations at “high speeds and to great depth, often in the absence of a continuous front,” and asserted that all the fundamental principles of military art still pertained, i.e., constant readiness, resolute actions, decisive concentration of forces on key axes, timely creation and use of reserves, and surprise. These principles, as well as the aforementioned “complete destruction of the enemy” by means of decisive counteroffensives were all deemed to be in accordance with the defensive doctrine. Such statements indicated, by late 1987, a high-level Soviet military effort to interpret the “defensiveness” of the new Warsaw Pact military doctrine so as to preserve as much as possible of established military art.

Defensive action was in effect “contained” by limiting it mainly to an indeterminate period at the beginning of the war. At the same time, such statements as some of those cited above suggested that offensive concepts and capabilities would be substantially maintained. Up to the time of the 1989 upheavals in Eastern Europe, the defensive doctrine never excluded counteroffensive and possibly offensive operations of indeterminate scale in the context of delivering a “devastating rebuff” in retaliation against an attack on the Soviet Union from the West.

Marshal Kulikov, then CinC of Pact forces, while purporting to “elucidate” the positions of the new doctrine, only perpetuated the confusion already generated by his colleagues. Kulikov reinforced the impression of a two-part military-technical doctrine created by his direct superior, Defense Minister Yazov. Yet at the same time, he

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17 Ibid., pp. 36–37.  
18 Ibid.  
19 As a RAND colleague has written, “this critical caveat that offensive operations are fully consistent with a defensive doctrine allows the Soviet military to develop offensive concepts and capabilities despite their alleged devotion to a ‘particularly defensive’ doctrine.” Edward L. Warner III, “New Thinking and Old Realities in Soviet Defense Policy,” Survival, January/February 1986, p. 25.  
seemed to circumscribe the expected scale of counteroffensive action in the manner of his direct subordinate, Gribkov.\textsuperscript{22}

Kulikov described the goal of the defensive period as the “defeat of attacking groupings” while simultaneously preparing for a counteroffensive.\textsuperscript{23} Defense alone, Kulikov said, could not ensure a “devastating rebuff” to aggression, whereas “counteroffensive actions within the bounds of defensive operations” possessed a demonstrated effectiveness.\textsuperscript{24}

In essence, both Kulikov and Gribkov had honored the language and thrust of the May document in their interpretations of a “devastating rebuff” for attackers. By contrast, Gareyev and Yazov, by envisioning the “complete destruction [and] defeat of the aggressor,” propounded an interpretation which, in fact, had many parallels to the offensive-oriented Soviet doctrinal thinking of the early 1980s.\textsuperscript{25}

Thus, by the end of 1987, the Soviet military had offered little substantive evidence that its concepts of conventional military operations had evolved in accordance with the apparently radical reformulation of military doctrine. Past contentions in the West about the divergent thrusts of the two sides of doctrine—political and military-technical—remained, at least for the moment, unrebutted.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{22}See Gribkov, 1987, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{23}Kulikov, \textit{Doktrina} . . . , 1988, p. 79.
\textsuperscript{24}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{25}The following two citations from 1981 epitomize that thinking. “Soviet military doctrine has served and will continue to serve the interests of defense of the socialist Fatherland. ‘Our strategic doctrine,’ said L. I. Brezhnev, ‘has a strictly defensive thrust.’ Of course, one cannot confuse the defensive thrust of our doctrine with the principles of Soviet military art, which are characterized by aggressiveness and decisiveness of combat actions carried out in the interests of the defense of our Fatherland.” Lieutenant General Pyotr Zhilin, “Krasheniye fashistskov doktriny blitzkriiga i yevo sovremennoye posledovatel’” (The Downfall of the Fascist Blitzkrieg Doctrine and Its Contemporary Successors), VIZA, October 1981, p. 50. In a similar vein, after citing the same Brezhnevism, Ogarkov wrote: “At the same time, [doctrine] envisions decisive actions of the Soviet Armed Forces in the case of an attack by an aggressor upon the USSR or its allies, which, in full measure, have mastered the art of conducting not only defensive, but also modern offensive operations.” Ogarkov, “Na strazhe mirnogo truda” (On Guard for Peaceful Labor), Kommunist, October 1981, p. 85.

\textsuperscript{26}For example, Yazov’s lengthy discussion of the new doctrine in \textit{Pravda} seemed to echo earlier doctrinal formulations: “The defensive military doctrine of the Warsaw Pact, which reckons exclusively on repulsion of a military threat, by no means signifies that our actions will possess a passive character. . . . In case of aggression, our Armed Forces, together with fraternal socialist armies, will defend the gains of socialism with complete decisiveness.” Yazov, “Voyennaya doktrina Varshavskogo Dogovora—doktrina zaashchity mira i sozializma” (The Military Doctrine of the Warsaw Pact Is the Doctrine of the Defense of Peace and Socialism), \textit{Pravda}, July 27, 1987, p. 5.
IV. PARTY ELABORATION OF MILITARY
DOCTRINE: 1988

On June 25, 1987, only weeks after the publication of the new War-
saw Pact doctrine, Gorbachev criticized the military in his report to a
Central Committee meeting. Using the Rust incident as a point of
departure, the General Secretary accused the army of “strong and tena-
cious . . . negative phenomena,” including indiscipline, mismanagement,
and irresponsibility.¹

CRITICISM OF THE GENERAL STAFF

Such shortcomings became the “special concern” of the General
Staff after that plenum. According to the report of a conference of
General Staff party cadres in December 1988, the military had failed in
other areas and had initiated a large-scale effort to bring military
plans, documents, and policy into line with the new doctrine.² Accord-
ing to the conference report, although the theoretical bases of many
existing concepts had changed fundamentally, some General Staff per-
sonnel continued to hold outdated notions and stereotypes.

The report indicated that the conference had specifically criticized
Generals Omelichev and Gareyev, both responsible spokesmen in the
realms of military operations and military science.³ Speakers at the
conference referred to a “psychology of perestroika” in the General
Staff under which “slightly reworked, old methods” had been put for-
ward as new work. They censured the General Staff for “pseudoeffi-
ciency,” i.e., the incorporation of “old approaches” in new directives.⁴

Our examination of authoritative military operational writings from
1987 and 1988 indicates that the same inertia and bureaucratic

¹On May 28, 1987, Mathias Rust, a 19-year-old West German amateur pilot, had
flown a light plane from Finland on a 900-kilometer course across Soviet airspace
and had landed in Red Square, Moscow. Two days later, Yatsov replaced Marshal of
the Soviet Union Sergey Leonidovich Sokolov as minister of defense. See Materiały plenum
teatral’nego komiteta KPSS, 25–26 iyunya 1987 goda (Materials of the Plenum of the
²“Kursom obnovleniya: zametki s partiynoy konferentsii general’nego shtaba vooru-
zhennykh sil SSSR” (By a Course of Renewal: Notes from the Party Conference of the
General Staff of the USSR Armed Forces), KZ, December 28, 1988, p. 2.
³Ibid.
⁴Soviet sources have indicated that General Staff operational plans and directives are
subject to an annual review and revision process.
impediments criticized by General Staff party cadres retarded the
development of military art along new defensive lines. During 1988,
the pace and nature of the evolution of defense policy and military
doctrine began to outstrip the capacity and proclivity of General Staff
bodies to respond with appropriate changes in operational concepts.

In February 1988, Army General Grigoriy Ivanovich Salmanov, then
director of the General Staff Academy, laid the foundation for the revi-
sion of military science when he wrote: "Among the types of strategic
action, first place has been assumed by the strategic defensive and the
counteroffensive, which is undertaken after repulsing the enemy's
strike." At this time, the General Staff was still grappling with the
new doctrine and, more significant, was beginning to reexamine (1) the
linkage between its political and military-technical sides and (2) the
implications of that linkage for Soviet military art:

Beside working out methods for preparing and conducting armed
struggle in case war becomes a fact, strategy, in theory and in prac-
tice, is working out how to determine a sufficient level and the
appropriate structure for the armed forces to ensure its prevention.

Thus, military writing began to consider the defense and the coun-
teroffense together as a single entity, the second systemically related to
the first. The linkage poses some problems for our analysis, the most
serious of which is the determination of a satisfactory method for dis-
tinguishing between defensive, counteroffensive, and offensive postures
and concepts.

Not until late 1988, however, did the General Staff journal
emphasize defensive and counteroffensive themes. This apparent lag
in dealing substantively with defense, that is, going beyond historical
analogies and focusing on the evolving shape of future defensive war-
fare in all its aspects, may have evoked the party criticism later leveled
at Gareyev and Omelichev.

The General Staff's delay may also have been politically awkward.
Gorbachev's surprise announcement in December 1988 of unilateral
force reductions, in an address to the UN, might have lost some of its

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5Salmanov, "Sovetakoye voyennoye iskusstvo za 70 let" (Soviet Military Art after 70
Years), VM, February 1988, p. 32.
6Ibid.
7The Voyenno-istoricheskiy zhurnal, the other major Defense Ministry publication
dealing with military art, also began to devote more space to defensive themes in the
second half of 1988, especially to discussions of the initial period of World War II.
8This suggestion is developed in Theodore Karsak and Thomas Nichols, Novoe
Myslenie and the Soviet Military: The Impact of Reasonable Sufficiency on the Ministry
intended effect had the Soviet military’s professional discussions failed to reflect the party’s dramatic diplomatic initiatives.9

Before the Gorbachev announcement, military spokesmen had continued to subject the Warsaw Pact’s statement of doctrine to a range of interpretations.10 Army General Ivan Moiseyevich Tret’yak, CinC of Air Defense Forces, perhaps typified those in the military averse to rapid change when he said in an interview:

We must not forget the main thing when dealing with a problem—the country’s defense must be absolute. . . . Therefore, any changes in our army should be considered a thousand times over before they are decided upon.11

Tret’yak interpreted the concept of defensive sufficiency literally, in terms of an ample amount of defense: “We must have as much force as is necessary to guarantee reliably the security of the USSR and our allies.”12

Strictly speaking, such views as Tret’yak’s did not contradict the letter of the Pact doctrine as announced in May 1987. The Berlin document had proclaimed that Pact forces had never exceeded the size needed to give a “devastating rebuff to an aggressor” and that such

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9The attempt to coordinate foreign and military policy reached unprecedented levels following Gorbachev’s UN address. The remarkable speech of Foreign Minister Shevardnadze at a meeting of the Foreign Ministry party aktiv (active members), only days after Gorbachev’s, indicated that his ministry was assuming a leading role: “And the main thing: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs bears direct and immediate responsibility for [ensuring] that everything announced at the highest political level is implemented, realized, and fulfilled. Of course, not everything depends on us. But, we have an obligation to honestly report on the state of affairs to the Politburo . . . and to inform it of delays and where something is not being done completely or is not being done in the way that follows from our statements. . . . In the military area it is necessary, in conjunction with the Ministry of Defense, the Gosplan [State Planning Commission], and other departments, to elaborate detailed plans and measures for fulfilling all those tasks set by M. S. Gorbachev.” “Vystuplenie E. A. Shevardnadze na sobranii aktiva MID SSSR” (Address by E. A. Shevardnadze at the Meeting of the Active Party Membership of the USSR MFA), December 15, 1988, Vestnik Ministerstva vnuternnykh del SSSR, hereafter Vestnik MID, No. 23, December 15, 1988, supplement, pp. iv–v (emphasis in the original). See also John Van Oudenaren, The Role of Shevardnadze and the MFA in the Making of Soviet Defense and Arms Control Policy, The RAND Corporation, R-3886-USDP, July 1990.


12Ibid.
forces therefore “strictly complied with the limits of sufficiency for defense, for rebuffing possible aggression.”

The document had proposed—as a goal for the future—the reduction of forces to a level where neither side possessed the means for surprise attack or for “conducting offensive operations in general.” In September 1987, Gorbachev had seemed to reinforce the position that this force posture, while desirable, remained a matter for mutual negotiation rather than unilateral action. Thus, by inference, existing Pact force levels sufficed for the initiation of offensive operations. In effect, during late 1987 and early 1988, the Soviets were attempting to propound the untenable thesis that their existing offensive capabilities contradicted neither the policy of sufficiency for defense nor the “purely defensive” thrust of the new doctrine.

SHIFTS IN THE PARTY LINE

The interpretation of doctrine, however, is not simply an exercise in semantics. As noted above, military art, while not a subset of doctrine, should be guided in important respects by doctrine’s main points. And as has been the case in other areas of Soviet policy, the party “line” on doctrine and force building under Gorbachev has continued to evolve. Conceivably, this indeterminacy reinforced the military’s predisposition to delay both major revisions of its military art and substantial reductions in offensive capabilities.

Gorbachev’s announcement of unilateral force reductions in December 1988 finally shattered the pretense that the new doctrine was “strictly defensive” despite the offensive capabilities of deployed Soviet forces. As Army General Petr Georgiyevich Lushev, the CinC of Pact forces, admitted later, the structure of force deployments in 1987 “did not fully accord with the doctrine’s demands.” He then declared that “by 1991, the groupings of Soviet forces in Europe will be unambiguously defensive in nature.”

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14 This level and posture of forces had been called by various names in the period following the doctrine’s publication; by 1989, it was generally referred to as reasonable sufficiency.
15 An agreement on ‘defense strategy’ and ‘military sufficiency’ could impart a powerful impulse in this direction. These notions presume a structure of the armed forces of a state that would be sufficient to repulse a possible aggression but would be insufficient for the conduct of offensive actions.” Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev, “The Realities and Guarantees of a Secure World,” Pravda, September 17, 1987, p. 1.
17 Ibid.
This change of direction represented an important amendment to the new Warsaw Pact military doctrine. Sometime in mid-1988, a variant of "reasonable sufficiency" (i.e., a force posture incapable of surprise attack or large-scale offensives) seems to have evolved from a Soviet proposal (in the May 1987 document) into the guiding principle of Soviet nonnuclear force-building policy. Reasonable sufficiency thus replaced the defense sufficiency of the May 1987 statement of Warsaw Pact military doctrine.\(^{18}\)

According to Marshal Akhromeyev, then chief of the General Staff, that body "took part in preparatory work on the decision to cut 500,000 men right from the start. I mean in summer 1988, not two or three days before Gorbachev's UN speech."\(^{19}\) An analysis of Soviet military periodicals in the latter half of 1988 seems to confirm Akhromeyev's assertion. The effect of this "preparatory work" showed up in the pages of Military Thought in the latter part of 1988.

Earlier in 1988, when Salmanov had introduced the strategic defensive and subsequent counteroffensive as the main operational forms in the case of enemy attack, he had treated as negotiable the idea of force reductions down to a level excluding offensive operations. Salmanov's position implied that the Pact would maintain existing capabilities "until such time as the imperialist states reject war as a decisive instrument of policy and . . . preparations for a surprise unleashing of war and offensive actions against the Warsaw Pact member states."\(^{20}\)

Similarly, a year after the 1987 declaration on doctrine, Marshal Kulikov was still repeating its message. Pact armies, in his view, were already within the bounds of "sufficiency for defense."\(^{21}\) He too treated the concept of reasonable sufficiency for defense as a matter for reciprocal action: "A reduction should not be instituted in a unilateral

\(^{18}\) "We shall maintain the country's defense capability at a level of reasonable and dependable sufficiency, so that no one is tempted to encroach upon the security of the USSR or its allies." This December 1988 formulation by Gorbachev represented what could be called the "reliable variant" of reasonable sufficiency, which the Soviet political leadership seemed to envision as a transitional stage on the road to a full-fledged nonoffensive defense. This interpretation of reasonable sufficiency does not constitute a full break with defense sufficiency, because the manner in which it is to be implemented still depends to an extent on the capabilities of the likely opponent. At the UN, Gorbachev asserted that "the principle of excessive arms stockpiling is giving way to the principle of reasonable sufficiency for defense." Gorbachev, Address at the United Nations, New York, December 7, 1988, Moscow, 1988, pp. 25–27.


\(^{20}\) Salmanov, February 1988, p. 37.

\(^{21}\) Kulikov, "O voyenno-strategicheskom paritete i dostatochnosti diya obrony" (On Military-Strategic Parity and Sufficiency for Defense), VM, May 1988, p. 6.
manner, and not only by us. It also demands concessions and compromises from the U.S. and NATO political leaderships.\textsuperscript{22}

According to Kulikov, the Pact was said to require “an equal correlation of forces with capitalism, i.e., it should preserve military-strategic parity.”\textsuperscript{23} He defined parity as an “approximate equality in the nuclear and other strategic means of armed struggle that have decisive significance for conducting war.”\textsuperscript{24} Kulikov’s statements had a clear implication: Because existing Pact forces ostensibly were capable only of “repulsing an aggressor,” any unilateral cuts would upset the existing theater-strategic parity and thereby threaten Soviet security.

The party leadership, however, soon began to undermine arguments, such as Kulikov’s, that emphasized caution, numerical parity, and strict reciprocity. Thanks to the general warming of East-West relations, the political climate seemed conducive to bold action. At the end of May, the Party Central Committee approved and published theses for the impending 19th Party Conference. The tenth thesis strongly endorsed new thinking in foreign and security policy.

Specifically, the tenth thesis condemned past unbridled pursuit of military-strategic parity as the epitome of old thinking. While acknowledging the continuing “militarist danger” of imperialism, the thesis stated that, henceforth, force development would emphasize “qualitative parameters” rather than the continued accumulation of numbers.\textsuperscript{25} Directly rebutting Kulikov, the document also asserted that purely military correlations were becoming less relevant to security.\textsuperscript{26} One major conclusion was unqualified: “The burden of military expenditure will decline.”\textsuperscript{27}

Gorbachev reiterated all of these points in his report of June 28 to the party conference. Furthermore, he noted that the new emphasis on qualitative parameters would affect not only hardware, but military science and the composition of the armed forces as well. Force development, while ensuring a reliable defense, he said, would proceed “in strict accordance with our defensive doctrine.”\textsuperscript{28}

Addressing the party conference several days later, Colonel General Boris Gromov simply noted that Gorbachev’s demands clarified the

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., p. 9.
\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., p. 4.
\textsuperscript{24}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{25}\textit{Theses of the CPSU Central Committee for the 19th All-Union Party Conference}, Moscow, 1988, pp. 26–29.
\textsuperscript{26}Ibid., p. 29; Kulikov, May 1988, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{27}\textit{Theses}, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{28}\textit{XIX Vesnyoyuznaya konferentsiya KPSS, stenograficheskii otchet} (19th All-Union Conference of the CPSU, Stenographic Record), Vol. 1, Moscow, 1988, p. 44.
goals of perestroika in the armed forces. Following Gromov to the podium, Yevgeniy Primakov, one of Gorbachev’s closest advisers on foreign policy, drove home the party’s primacy over defense when he forcefully asserted that the USSR would henceforth pursue the military aspect of security on the basis of reasonable sufficiency. This meant, he said, guaranteeing security while diverting as little as possible from the civilian economy.

Although the published resolutions of the party conference did not repeat Primakov’s assertion that reasonable sufficiency had become state policy and a principle of military doctrine, subsequent developments that summer would point to this conclusion. Only weeks after the party conference, a Warsaw Pact meeting produced a declaration on conventional force reductions:

The Warsaw Pact member states consider that the interests of European and general security urgently demand the transition to substantial reductions of armed forces and conventional armaments in Europe—from the Atlantic to the Urals.

Calling for an immediate opening of talks, the declaration asserted that

The priority task of the negotiations [would be] the radical reduction of the military potentials of both sides and the attainment on the continent of a situation in which the NATO and Warsaw Pact countries retained the forces and means necessary for defense, but insufficient for carrying out a surprise attack and conducting offensive operations.

The Pact declaration outlined a three-stage process for implementing radical reductions. The first stage would concentrate on “the mutual elimination of imbalances and asymmetries in certain types of weaponry and armed forces.” Only after a series of subsequent large-scale reductions would NATO and Pact force postures assume a “strictly defensive character.”

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29Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 27.
30Ibid., p. 34. Primakov’s influence and political role have continued to expand. In 1989, he was first elected to head a chamber of the newly elected Supreme Soviet, and in September he was made a Politburo candidate member in a major leadership shake-up. In March 1990, he was appointed to the new Presidential Council.
31“Zayavlenie goсударств-участников warshavskogo dogovora” (Declaration of the Warsaw Pact Member States), Prawda, July 17, 1988, p. 1.
32Ibid.
33Gorbachev had laid out this three-part sequence earlier in his book, Perestroika (Restructuring), Moscow, 1987, p. 213.
34Ibid. The second stage would achieve large-scale reductions in troops and the main types of weaponry; in the third stage, residual forces would be further reduced and restructured so as to be incapable of surprise attack or large-scale offensives. This result was defined as reasonable sufficiency.
statements seemed unremarkable when first published, events later in the year showed that military policy decisions with far-reaching significance had been adopted around the time of these meetings.

THE GENERAL STAFF UNDER PRESSURE

The party’s evolving political-military policy in summer 1988 presented the General Staff with new and more specific conditions for the development of strategy and force structure. Still, some confusion remained. Only days after the party conference, an article by Colonel General Nikolay Fedorovich Chervov, a senior General Staff officer, appeared in a Czechoslovak newspaper. Chervov reiterated that “the main thesis” of Pact military doctrine was war prevention:

In the buildup of our military forces we adhere to the principle of reasonable sufficiency. What do we understand by this term? This is a state of the country’s defense capability and of its armed forces that ensures the reliable defense of the state (or alliance of states) against aggression with the minimum of armed forces.35

Chervov’s understanding of reasonable sufficiency, however, confused this concept with defense sufficiency. In characterizing the latter term, Chervov gave the accepted definition of the former, dutifully noting that “unilateral implementation of defense sufficiency is practically impossible” and that it had to be “a mutual, bilateral process.”36

As Marshal Akhromeyev reported, the General Staff was brought into high-level discussions on unilateral Soviet force reductions in mid-1988.37 Remarks of Akhromeyev and other senior officers at a meeting of the General Staff party aktiv in the second week of August strongly suggest that the Staff was already involved.38 According to Krasnaya zvezda:

36Ibid. Well into 1989, some military leaders still seemed unable to grasp the actual meaning of the term. For instance, in expressing his reservations about reductions in the military budget, Navy CinC Chernavin noted that “the reduction in appropriations for defense must be within reasonable bounds, [and] I would say that it is necessary to display reasonable sufficiency in the approach to this matter.” Fleet Admiral Vladimir Nikolayevich Chernavin, “Otvetstvennost’ za perestroiku” (Responsibility for Restructuring), KZ, June 9, 1988, p. 2.
37Akhromeyev, interview, March 11, 1989.
38A report from the meeting noted that “General Staff directorates are preparing proposals for military-political and strategic measures and are taking part in the elaboration of military aspects of the foreign policy initiatives of the USSR.” “Perestroika trebyuet del: Sobraniye partynogo aktyva General’nogo soveta voennoy sluzhby SSSR” (Restructuring Demands Deeds: Meeting of Active Party Members of the General Staff of the USSR Armed Forces), KZ, August 13, 1988, p. 2.
On the agenda is a continuation of work to impart a defensive orientation to the structure of the Armed Forces. This work is under way and its outlines have been defined. In continuing it, we must find new methods of maintaining combat potential at a proper level guaranteeing reliable security for the country under conditions of possible reductions of both nuclear and conventional arms.\textsuperscript{39}

The tone of this report suggested that the General Staff was having difficulty adapting the military-political imperatives of evolving party guidance on doctrine to the specifics of strategy and operational art.\textsuperscript{40} Force-development guidelines, said to be “the primary and most complex question in the practical realization of military doctrine,” suffered from bureaucratic indecisiveness.

The General Staff party aktiv also criticized the procedures for forecasting the nature of a future war. The report admitted that

not all political and strategic problems have been analyzed with sufficient thoroughness, and on a number of points we are often prisoner of old notions. The meeting stressed that errors in assessing the likely nature of aggression are always dangerous. And when the strategy is defensive in character, they are fraught with grave consequences.\textsuperscript{41}

What seems apparent from the above is that the General Staff, in the months between Salmanov’s article in February and the meeting of its party aktiv in August, had been either unsuccessful or irresolute in its effort to put forward force-development and operational concepts appropriate to the new doctrine and associated party strictures. According to the report, “there is some clarity on this issue in theory, but when it comes to practice many directorates are elaborating new decisions slowly and timidly.”\textsuperscript{42}

As noted at the beginning of this section, when the General Staff aktiv next met in December, the charges of foot-dragging had continued, and key figures involved in operations and military science had been criticized. In addition to the rapidly evolving nature of the party’s defense policy, habitual secrecy also may have hampered or

\textsuperscript{39}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{40}At the gathering, Marshal Akhromeyev and other speakers “were unanimous in the view that the restructuring of the activity of the General Staff’s communists is still proceeding in a contradictory fashion and with difficulty. It has not been easy for new thinking to enter our life. Old stereotypes are making themselves felt.” Ibid.

\textsuperscript{41}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{42}Ibid.
postponed Soviet military scientists' discussion of key problems in defensive and counteroffensive theory.43

By late 1988, however, as the date of Gorbachev's UN address approached, the tide seemed to turn. Discussions in Military Thought indicate that the Soviet military had abruptly launched into a substantial examination of key aspects of modern defensive warfare. Yet, despite this evidence of redirection, charges that foot-dragging and bureaucratic inertia continued to hamper the elaboration of defensive concepts by Soviet military science were still being heard into 1989.44

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43 Just after the August meeting at the General Staff, leading military scientists and military educators also met at the Defense Ministry. Defense Minister Yagov, and his deputy for armaments, Army General Shabanov, addressed the assembly. The report of the proceedings gave no indication of the preparations for dramatic reductions and force restructuring being conducted by the political leadership in consultation with the General Staff. On the contrary, the report continued to describe the party line as the "reduction of arms and armed forces on a mutual basis" and "the mutual reduction of the levels of confrontation while observing reciprocity, equality, and identical security for the sides." "Povyshat' odachu voyennoy nauki" (Increase the Return from Military Science), KZ, August 14, 1988, pp. 1–2.

44 In February 1989, the new chief of the General Staff came down hard on Soviet military scientists for their apparently unsatisfactory response to what he portrayed as dramatically new conditions in military affairs: "At the same time, one cannot overlook the fact that the military-scientific organizations which were charged with ensuring the initial, thorough, theoretical study of these issues often procrastinate. In particular, one of those which was insufficiently theoretically studied was the question of the organization and conduct of combat actions of a defensive character." Moiseyev, "Na strazhe mira i sotsializma" (On Guard for Peace and Socialism), KZ, February 23, 1989, p. 2. Moiseyev's criticism seemed far more urgent than Yagov's in August (see the immediately preceding footnote), which had focused on bureaucratism in the profession.
V. FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS OF SOVIET OPERATIONAL CONCEPTS

To help in our critical task of discriminating between different operational postures and concepts, we summarize below four Soviet scenarios of conventional warfare. These "hypothetical variants" appeared in June 1988 in a much-discussed article by Andrey Kokoshin, deputy director of the USA and Canada Institute, and Major General Valentin Larionov, a consultant at that institute and formerly a professor at the General Staff Academy. The Soviet authors proceeded from the premise that "one of today's central questions is how the political directives on the prevention of war and the strengthening of strategic stability find expression in the military-technical side of military doctrines." More specifically, they asked:

In strategic and operational concepts, force development, deployment, industrial mobilization plans, etc., how will the transformation and the development of the military-technical side of doctrine be carried out in the process of arms control and disarmament?\(^1\)

The four variants, each of which represents a specific mix of troop deployments, fire assets, operational plans, and expected battlefield interactions, offer a useful yardstick with which to evaluate recent authoritative Soviet military thinking.\(^2\) In particular, the scenarios allow us to assess the extent to which this thinking is defensive in its assumptions regarding force structure, force levels, and the conduct of operations in the initial and subsequent stages of a conflict.

\(^1\)Kokoshin and Larionov, June 1988, p. 24.

\(^2\)Unlike many Soviet civilian analysts, Kokoshin and Larionov appear to possess a level of competence and literacy in military affairs which some institutichiki (institute members, in contrast to military officers) lack. Both have published articles in Military Thought.
KOKOSHIN AND LARIONOV'S FOUR VARIANTS
OF WAR COMMENCEMENT

First Variant

An attacked side responds immediately with decisive offensive operations, attempting rapidly to carry the battle to the opponent’s territory. The objective is complete victory—“the final defeat and annihilation of enemy forces” (p. 24). The strategy initially leads to a series of meeting engagements between forward-deployed forces, which the two sides have maintained at a high level of peacetime readiness for rapid offensive action. This deployment posture makes it exceptionally difficult for the enemy to ascertain whether forces are designated for preemptive offensive action or only for repelling an attack.

As war approaches, the presence of reconnaissance-strike complexes [long-range, precision-guided weapons] on both sides increases the urge to preempt, as each side fears the early first use of these weapons against its reserves. Because second echelons and reserves play an essential role, they are most likely to be deployed at great depth so as to lessen the risk of early destruction by deep fires.

The early stage of the conflict is marked by massive troop movements and regroupings and, as reserves are committed, by a rapid buildup in the scale and intensity of warfare. As countries are overrun, communications destroyed, and stunning operational reverses occur, political control will unravel and an irreversible escalation to tactical nuclear use may begin.4

Second Variant

In the initial period of a conflict the defender employs a strategy and operational art that intentionally postpone the offensive in favor of aggressive defensive action. As in the 1943 battle of Kursk, the defender relies on a deeply echeloned, fortified positional defense while holding “previously prepared forces for a counteroffensive” (p. 26) temporarily in abeyance.

3This subsection summarizes Kokoshin and Larionov’s June 1988 article. Page references to the article are given in parentheses in the text; Hines and Mahoney’s comments appear in footnotes.

4Although the authors do not say so, this first variant, which they consider highly unstable, in fact closely resembles previous Soviet strategy for conducting the theater-strategic offensive operation in the Western TSMA. For further elaboration of this strategy, see Phillip A. Petersen and John G. Hines, “The Conventional Offensive in Soviet Theater Strategy,” Orbis, Fall 1983, and Ogarkov, October 1981, pp. 85–87.
After repelling the offensive in the course of defensive engagements which permit retreat and the loss of some territory, "the capability is preserved—using reserves brought up from the depth—for a transition to a decisive counteroffensive (in the case of necessity, even a general offensive) right up to the complete defeat of the enemy on his own territory" (p. 26). The counteroffensive action may range from the operational-scale (army group and front) to the strategic (group of fronts in a TSMA).

This variant is useful mainly because it incorporates the concept of an intentional initial defense, which is relatively more conducive to theater stability and conflict localization than the first variant. It has a liability, however: the difficulty each side would have determining and monitoring the capability of the other to conduct preemptive offensive operations as opposed to an intentional defense followed by a counteroffensive. The key criteria for this determination—density of forces, disposition of forces in the depth, and the combination of positional and aggressive operational forms—may appear similar in this and in the first variant.

Like the first variant, the second is also "unstable" (p. 26). A high probability of escalation to nuclear use remains, "especially in the case of both sides' maintaining the capability for counteroffensive actions that can escalate to a strategic-scale general offensive" (p. 26). Such a capability would derive mainly from the presence of a large-scale strategic reserve deployed forward in peacetime and kept at a relatively high level of readiness.\(^5\)

**Third Variant**

Both sides possess only the capability to restore the status quo ante following an attack; that is, they have no capability to carry a counteroffensive to enemy territory. Ideally, offensive capacity is limited to operational-scale counterstrikes (by an army or army group) aimed at defeating an attacking grouping.\(^5\) Thus "victory is permitted only at the operational and tactical scales, but excluded at the strategic" (p. 27).

This variant has a precedent in Soviet military history: in the 1939 Soviet victory at Khalkhin-Gol against the Japanese force invading Mongolia. There, a Soviet army group 57,000 strong and with 500 tanks surrounded and destroyed a larger but armor-deficient Japanese

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\(^5\)For this reason, as we indicated in Sec. I, above, any examination of evolving Soviet operational concepts must pay close attention to the missions assigned to reserves and second echelons deployed in peacetime.

\(^6\)Offensive capability might also include an operational-scale counteroffensive, although the authors do not discuss this option.
grouping in the Mongolian desert. Although further action against the Japanese in occupied China was feasible, the Soviet political leadership accepted the Japanese offer to cease hostilities, largely because of the uncertain military-political situation in Europe following the German invasion of Poland. This variant also has a precedent in the intentional limitation of military actions in the final stage of the Korean war, most notably the unwritten agreement to contain fighting to the region adjacent to the 38th Parallel and the American decision not to bomb Chinese territory (p. 27).

The problem with variant three in modern European conditions stems from the difficulty of limiting the objectives of an attacked side to mere restoration of the status quo ante, particularly after the destruction and occupation of territory far more developed than the Mongolian desert. The quest for “compensation” might impel the victim of aggression to strive for objectives beyond liquidation of the invasion grouping (p. 28).

Fourth Variant

The force posture, strategy, and operational art of each side allows only defensive action, that is, the sides lack “the material possibility for conducting offensive or counteroffensive operations” (p. 28). Highly mobile forces exist only at the division level and below, thus allowing the execution of counterattacks and/or tactical counterstrikes. Specifically, neither side has strike aviation, precision-guided munition (PGM) systems with deep-strike capability, or tank and airborne divisions. The concept of victory would obtain here only at the tactical level.

Although variants two and three contain elements of a “nonoffensive defense,” only the final variant fully accords with that concept (p. 28). Besides being the most strategically stable variant, this one

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7The Soviets also held air superiority.

8Under the relatively lower peacetime force levels of variant three, however, expanded objectives would evidently require some degree of mobilized reinforcement.

9This restriction would exclude the presence of tank armies and corps, and presumably fully motorized combined-arms armies and corps.

10This fourth variant would achieve one of the principal goals of the May 1987 Pact declaration on doctrine. That document stated that the Pact members were “pressing for” the reduction in Europe of armed forces and conventional armaments to a level at which neither side, in ensuring its defense, would have the means for a surprise attack upon the other side or for conducting offensive operations in general. Prouda, May 30, 1987, p. 1. It also partially resembles the policy course outlined by Gorbachev in his UN speech on December 7. Gorbachev announced the reorganization of Soviet divisions in Eastern Europe: “Their structure will be changed—a large number of tanks will be withdrawn and they will become strictly defensive.” However, even after the announced
accords fully with the doctrinal demand of war prevention. Thus, it is the variant most likely to prevent war after the start of hostilities, that is, the one most likely to allow the localization of a conflict. The task of preventing war “should not be limited only to the period before the commencement of actual military actions—D-day” (p. 29).\textsuperscript{11}

A NOTE ON THE KOKOSHIN-LARIONOV VARIANTS

In advocating variant four, and in contrast to their discussion of the preceding three, Kokoshin and Larionov fail to point out some of its more obvious shortcomings, for example, the problems presented by out-of-area forces and by the relative mobilization potentials of the sides. Depending on the final force levels reached, fulfillment by both sides of many more conditions than those suggested by the authors might be required before any reliable defensive stability would obtain under variant four.\textsuperscript{12}

Despite these lacunae, the Kokoshin-Larionov paradigms possess sufficient analytical utility (because of their combination of clarity and historical relevance) to recommend them for our purposes. And because we endeavor, to the extent possible, to assess Soviet concepts for conventional operations in the same context in which they were presented, we find additional reason to use a Soviet-developed methodology.

TARGETS OF ANALYSIS

Using this analytical approach, we now examine Soviet writings on military art from the two-year period between mid-1987 and mid-1989 with specific attention to three criteria:

- Reserves and second echelons
- Fire assets
- Position versus maneuver in defense.

\textsuperscript{11}In fact, military discussions during the period examined lead one to conclude that once battle is joined the military would consider the imperative of war prevention no longer binding or germane. More recently, however, we have seen indications that considerations of war prevention or, more precisely, war termination, have begun to shape the development of strategy.

\textsuperscript{12}For a considered discussion of these factors, see Paul K. Davis, \textit{Central Region Stability in a Deep-Cuts Regime}, The RAND Corporation, P-7610, December 1989.
Because of their practical military implications, these terms of reference determine the overall characterization of evolving Soviet operational concepts.

The analysis that follows focuses mainly on the second and third variants. Neither the first (strategic offensive) nor the fourth (nonoffensive defense) captures the shape of then current Soviet military art, although the fourth seemingly represents the direction of the evolution of military art in the 1990s. Thus, the second and third variants will best serve our purposes insofar as the key parameters of those two postures appear to have bounded the discussion in *Military Thought* in 1988–1989.

Nonetheless, these two variants contain more than sufficient scope to permit a wide variety of potential threats to NATO. For example, at one extreme, the second variant can be indistinguishable from a preemptive offensive posture. The third, by contrast, excludes the capability for strategic offensive operations, at least before mobilization. Under variant three, peacetime forces could conceivably possess a limited counteroffensive potential; the deployments, however, would best support the delivery of operational-scale counterstrikes aimed at destroying an attacking enemy formation that had penetrated the defender’s territory. Unlike variant two, three lacks the notion of unconditional victory. Without mobilization, victory is limited to operational-scale success.

The three indicated criteria—reserves, fire assets, and comparative defensive forms—offer a set of straightforward, comprehensive categories for characterizing force capabilities and concepts independent of Soviet political declarations and assurances. Addressing these three in turn, in Secs. V–VII, we will endeavor to measure the “defensiveness” of evolving Soviet operational concepts, using the analytical framework laid out by Kokoshin and Larionov and summarized in Fig. 2.

**Reserves and Second Echelons**

To a greater or lesser extent, all successful military operations—be they general offensive, counteroffensive, or defensive in nature—require reserve and second-echelon forces. During the summers of 1941 and 1942, when the Red Army was conducting strategic defensive operations, strategic reserves played the dominant role in stabilizing the front. At the same time they, more than any other formations, determined the success of large-scale counteroffensives.\(^{13}\)

\(^{13}\)See Major General P. T. Kunitskiy, “Esli oborona provrana...” (If the Defense Is Breached), *VZh*, December 1988, pp. 5–7; also see his “Vostanovleniye prorvannogo strategicheskogo fronta oborony v 1941 godu” (Reestablishment of the Breached Strategic Front in 1941), *VZh*, July 1988, pp. 56–58.

\(^{14}\)Army General Mikhail Mikhaylovich Kozlov, “Osobennosti strategicheskoy oborony i kontrnastupleniya i ikh znacheniye dlya razvitiya sovetskogo voyennogo iskusstva” (Par-
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Fig. 2—Framework for analysis of Soviet operational concepts

Size, composition, disposition, and mobility determine whether reserve and second-echelon forces are best suited for conducting defensive operations or for decisive counteroffensive and general offensive operations. The key characteristics and readiness levels of reserve and second-echelon formations are therefore probably the most useful discriminators in assessing their offensive and defensive capabilities. Likewise, the types of missions assigned to these formations in the initial period of a conflict are probably the best indicator of the intent and thrust of an operational concept.

Fire Assets

Differentiation of postures or concepts with regard to the role of fire assets is more complicated. As the Soviets readily admit, many fire systems have multiple uses in both offensive and defensive operations. An important Soviet article on military art emphasized that

The growing decisiveness of combat actions is leading... to the disappearance of sharp distinctions between the types of combat action and to the convergence of methods for conducting them in the offensive and the defensive. . . . Modern operations more and more are acquiring the character of fierce, offensive-defensive, ground-air engagements and battles having as their objective not so much the repulsion of enemy strikes as the disruption of his actions, and then his complete destruction, as well.15

The increased lethality of fire assets appears to be one of the cardinal factors shaping Soviet defensive theory. The same author held that a turning point in military affairs was at hand, concluding:

Our forces are obtaining the potential not only to parry strikes, but also—skillfully using firepower, electronic warfare means, and the maneuver of armored groupings—to disrupt (as in nuclear war) enemy offensive operations and to inflict decisive destruction on him in the course of repelling aggression.16

In discussing the warfare variants, Kokoshin and Larionov recognized the problems presented by the convergence of operational methods and fire means used both in offensive and defensive operations. Indeed, for them, multipurpose capability was the main impediment to the classification of hardware. By way of a solution, they recommended considering such contextual issues as the type of force organization, deployed distance from a future front, and quantity of systems fielded, arguing that “even an obviously offensive weapon system, in combination with such limiting factors as small quantity and deployment far from the area of possible future combat actions, etc., is less dangerous.”17

16Ibid., p. 29.
17Kokoshin and Larionov, June 1986, p. 29.
Position Versus Maneuver

The relative combination of positional versus maneuver forms of defensive action is likewise complicated, although perhaps by less daunting factors than in the case of fire assets. The characteristics of a positional defense, such as fortifications, echelons of defensive zones or lines, and reliance on engineer activity, are important indicators of a defensive concept. Of course, because they are so generally understood as such, they can be used to deceive.18 For this reason, indications of a positional defense concept should also be compared and correlated with other analytic indicators for overall consistency.

A positional defense relies on prepared lines of defense. To a greater or lesser extent, these are fortified and equipped with engineering obstacles. A series of these prepared zones allows for a deeply echeloned positional defense and provides defensive stability (ustoychivost'). According to Soviet military art, however, a stable defensive line of any substantial length can be ensured only by an adequate level of maneuver reserves and by aggressive maneuver actions.

Writing in Military Thought, Major General V. V. Larionov concluded that while the Soviet deployment at Kursk was the “classic example” of a positional defense, it was at the same time highly aggressive (aktivnaya).19 Its aggressiveness stemmed from the exceptionally large number of reserve maneuver formations readied beforehand and then employed, first, to reinforce threatened sectors of the defense and, later, to launch a powerful counteroffensive.

Thus, while an operational concept that calls for a highly positional defense or for serious preparations for conducting one can indicate a side’s initial intention to conduct defensive warfare, it by no means constrains or counterindicates a capability or intention to execute a subsequent counteroffensive. This is a main lesson of Kursk. The ambiguity illustrates once again why our first analytical criterion—the nature and disposition of reserves—is such a critical indicator of initial operational intent.

VI. RESERVES AND SECOND ECHELONS IN DEFENSE

In summer 1988, in the midst of thinking through an appropriate force structure in light of the May 1987 doctrine, the General Staff received a new demand from the political leadership: to work out qualitative force-development parameters for a unilateral force-reduction package. As economic and political imperatives had increased, some variant of reasonable sufficiency had begun to emerge as state policy for force development.1

The policy of reasonable sufficiency would affect the General Staff's plans involving operational reserves and second echelons. By their nature, these forces represent a quantitative parameter of defense. Their deployed strength and disposition, however, can decisively restrict the range of possible initial military actions and, specifically, the possibility for early counteroffensive or offensive operations.

Indications of increasing force constraints began to appear in late summer 1988 in discussions in Military Thought. In August, an article on the strategic regrouping of ground forces argued that the increasing destructiveness of conventional weapons and the maneuver capability of modern battlefield systems, fires, and formations would result in much higher losses and would necessitate reinforcement on some strategic directions. Nevertheless, the author wrote, "One cannot be strong everywhere. The maneuver of large-scale forces and their regrouping in the course of the war will be unavoidable, and it is necessary to be ready for this."2

In World War II, strategic reserves maneuvered mainly by rail. In 1941, at least 12 Soviet armies regrouped in the first two months of the war in successive efforts to stabilize and reestablish the defensive front west of Moscow and to create an echeloned defense.3 Armies moved by

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1As we argued previously, this variant seemed to contain important elements of both reasonable sufficiency and defensive sufficiency. While, on the one hand, Soviet forces deployed in Europe were to be restructured and reduced so as to remove their capability for surprise attack and general offensive operations, on the other hand, the level to which they were to be reduced and the weapons which they were to maintain would continue to depend on assessments of the capabilities and intentions of the probable enemy.


3Lieutenant General A. I. Yevseyev, "Manyovy strategicheskimi rezervami v pervom periode velikoy otechestvennoy voyny" (Maneuver of Strategic Reserves in the Initial Period of the Great Fatherland War), VIZh, March 1986, pp. 10-12,16; Marshal Matvey
rail from areas as distant as the Arkhangel'sk, Transbaykal, and Siberian military districts. Contemporary conditions differ, according to the author.

In the period that we examine here, the Soviet military expected NATO to concentrate on the destruction of rail nodes, bridges, etc. to interdict the movement of reserves. Moreover, the military recognized that railroads have only a limited transport capacity and require substantial time to move large-scale reinforcements. This prompted the Soviets to conclude that

The primary method of strategic regrouping over great distances will be the movement of forces under their own power. At present, the divisions and regiments of the Ground Forces are fully motorized, and their march capability has increased significantly.4

The Soviets probably did not intend for reinforcements to move under their own power from the interior Soviet military districts to destinations in the Western TSMA. More likely, they expected to deploy divisions and armies from western and interior military districts as far as possible by rail, and then by road march, to destinations in Eastern Europe or along the Soviet frontier.

In September 1988, Defense Minister Yazov offered his thoughts on the principles of force building in light of the new qualitative demands. The composition of the Soviet Armed Forces, he wrote, had to ensure “the very fullest realization of existing combat potentials and unconditional fulfillment of assigned missions in conditions of minimal outlays of means and resources.”5 Force development, Yazov noted, should proceed not only with due regard to ongoing arms control efforts, but also with a view to future prospects. We now know that by this juncture operational planners in the General Staff knew of the “future prospects” to which Yazov referred.6

On December 7, Gorbachev announced massive unilateral reductions of Soviet conventional forces. By then, Soviet military science had reached more substantial conclusions about the evolving defensive strategy and its implications for reserves and follow-on forces.

Vasiliyevich Zakharov, General'nyy shtab v predvyennoye gody (The General Staff in the Prewar Years), Moscow, 1988, pp. 259-264.


6At a meeting of the General Staff party aktiv in August 1988, it was admitted that “the troops and fleets will probably receive less in the way of arms and equipment, but the combat effectiveness and quality must be higher,” and that “we must find new methods of maintaining combat potential at a level guaranteeing reliable security for the country under conditions of possible reductions of both nuclear and conventional arms.”

“Perestroika trebuet del . . .,” p. 2.
Army General Salmanov, then Director of the General Staff Academy, in a major article in the December Military Thought, examined important military-technical aspects of a future war involving the Soviet Union. Salmanov stressed that the USSR must, above all, ready itself for "a prolonged world war" that would be conducted on "an enormous scale" and involve use of "all types of weapons."\(^7\) The initial period of such a war, even given no nuclear use, he wrote, would feature a surprise NATO attack, followed by a strategic offensive having the possible objective of reaching the Soviet frontier.\(^8\)

According to Salmanov, Soviet forces would conduct defensive operations from the outset. Some TSMAs would defend for a prolonged period with "comparatively small forces along previously prepared lines."\(^9\) In the West, "even given an approximately equal correlation of forces before the start of military actions," NATO would strive to attain decisive superiorities in several sectors by means of fire, maneuver, and surprise.\(^10\)

Salmanov considered Soviet peacetime force groupings an indispensable component of the defense. They would need to be properly trained, well shielded against fires, and able to increase their readiness. Moreover, if necessary, they would have to be able to deploy in an orderly fashion in response to a perceived threat. Salmanov argued that

In these circumstances, our peacetime groupings, and especially the first operational echelon, in case of enemy attack must be able to conduct—indepently and without reinforcement—the first defensive operations, not allow the enemy to penetrate deep into [the defender's] territory, and create conditions for the successful conduct of subsequent actions for his defeat.\(^11\)

In this challenging demand, "first operational echelon" referred to Soviet fronts forward-deployed at the outset of a conflict. In the case of the Western TSM, the first operational echelon would consist of the Soviet armies making up the first-echelon fronts deployed in the forward area (East-Central Europe), in peacetime.

Because of its influence on postwar Soviet thinking, the experience of defensive operations in World War II is instructive. In these

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\(^7\)Salmanov, "Sovetskaya voyennaya doktrina i nekotorye vzgledy na xarakter voyny v zashitbu sotsializma" (Soviet Military Doctrine and Some Views on the Character of a War in Defense of Socialism), VM, December 1988, p. 8.

\(^8\)Ibid., p. 9.

\(^9\)Ibid.

\(^10\)Ibid.

\(^11\)Ibid., p. 10. Salmanov does not specify whether he means Warsaw Pact or Soviet territory.
operations, second echelons and reserves of Soviet armies and fronts were maneuvered from the depth against German strike groupings. This maneuver and force concentration required significant front reserves.12

In the defensive operation at Kursk, the Soviet commander of the Voronezh Front, on the axis of the main German attack, disposed of 35 rifle divisions, 18 of which were designated as second echelons of armies or as front reserves. In addition, this front held a large number of tank brigades in its second echelon and reserve. Yet even with such formidable front reserves, further reinforcement from the strategic reserve of the General Headquarters (Stavka) of the Supreme High Command proved necessary, and the Stavka therefore dispatched a tank army and a combined-arms army to head off a threatened breakthrough of the front’s rearmost defensive zone.13

In the first days of the Great Fatherland War, with Soviet formations forced onto the defensive and faced with significant breaching of operational and strategic positions, forward-deployed fronts immediately committed their second echelons and reserves to battle. Although this response slowed German advances in a few cases, it failed to reestablish a continuous defensive front.14 The inability of the first operational echelon to contain the massed German strikes meant that the second operational echelon—armies readied in peacetime and deployed forward from the strategic rear—had to reestablish a stable front.15

Salmanov’s demand that forward-deployed forces “not permit the loss of a significant part of the territory” did not necessarily ignore the bitter historical experience of mid-1941.16 In his view, several conditions, not met in 1941, had to obtain in order for a modern defensive operation to succeed.

- First, training had to focus on defensive operations and on orderly deployment in the initial period.
- Second, the first operational echelon had to be guaranteed the potential “to increase its combat readiness commensurate with the buildup in the enemy’s readiness for a possible attack.”17

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13Ibid., pp. 16, 20–21.
15Ibid., p. 19.
16Salmanov, December 1988, p. 11.
17Ibid., p. 10.
• Third, NATO’s second-echelon strike forces had to be substantially weakened by fire strikes.
• Fourth, Soviet second echelons and reserves would require reliable protection against the enemy’s air-land operation.

Given the fulfillment of all these objectives, Salmanov argued, the defense “not only proves to be a means enabling the repulsion of the enemy attack, but it also creates the prerequisites for seizing the initiative and conducting subsequent actions for his defeat.”

Thus, first-echelon fronts had to be able independently to contain a concerted NATO offensive, using as reserves the armies, corps, brigades, and regiments assigned to them in peacetime. Under this strategic paradigm, strategic reserves from the western USSR and from other Warsaw Pact states would maneuver forward, by road if necessary, and would be available for large-scale counteroffensive action on arrival in the forward area. While these forces were being readied, loaded, transported, and supplied, forward-deployed fronts would have to defend with available units.

Divisions and armies produced by mobilization—constituting the second strategic echelon—would come into play even later. From a planner’s point of view, practical military considerations would dictate their mobilization and regrouping to TSMAs before the commencement of combat actions. A 1986 article concluded that

the creation and preparation of strategic reserves must be carried out beforehand . . . so that before the beginning of the war the Supreme High Command has at its disposal the quantity of forces and means . . . required to exert a decisive influence on the course and outcome of military actions.

The General Staff probably could not have counted on this prospect even in 1986, not to mention in the wake of the official Soviet elevation of war prevention to the paramount doctrinal position in 1987. Gareyev, as chief of the General Staff’s military science directorate, had admitted as much in his influential 1985 work on military art:

Because of military-political considerations, we cannot always carry out the strategic deployment of the armed forces before the commencement of war, despite its strictly military advantages. Mobilization, not to mention the whole complex of measures relating to strategic deployment, has always been considered equivalent to a state of

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18Ibid., p. 11.
19In addition, other forces allocated to a high command of forces in the Western TSMAs might have been available, depending on the course of defensive operations, the peacetime location (depth) of those forces, and their mobility and readiness.
war, and it is very difficult to turn away from it to achieve a peacetime posture.\footnote{Gareyev, M. V. Frunze . . ., 1985, p. 242.}

The Soviet military therefore had to consider other, less favorable, variants enabling a flexible and orderly strategic deployment in any condition of war commencement.\footnote{Ibid.} Nonetheless, as recently as June 1988, Kir’yan was still restating the requirement for early mobilization and deployment.\footnote{Kir’yan, June 1988, p. 17.} But while this conclusion flows naturally from the analysis of June 1941, it was evidently not part of the defensive concept worked out in 1988 and 1989.

In late 1988, Salmanov called for “a broad complex of measures for the timely (still in peacetime) preparation of the defense.”\footnote{Salmanov, December 1988, p. 11.} In the context of his discussion, these steps appeared to include the timely operational forward deployment of forces in defensive positions in peacetime and the protection of troops against expected enemy deep fires. The steps did not, however, include a preemptive mobilization and deployment of strategic reserves.

Based primarily on the evidence contained in high-level discussions of defensive strategy, we may conclude that, for the period examined, the General Staff had begun to plan the disposition of forward-deployed follow-on forces in anticipation of operational action more resembling variant three than variant two of the four Kokoshin-Larionov scenarios. This choice implies that the Soviets were structuring forward-area deployments in a manner best suited to conducting an initial defense; however, such deployments would also have a capability for operational-scale counterstrikes within the context of general defensive operations.

Before the 1989–1990 revolution in East-Central Europe, Soviet planners might have viewed second echelons and reserves of forward-deployed fronts as possessing a capability for an early operational-scale counteroffensive (involving perhaps one or two armies). This capability would have depended, however, on the successful resolution of several challenging operational tasks associated with a successful strategic defense. Not least of these was winning the deep-fire exchange with NATO.\footnote{Some of these tasks are discussed in greater detail in Sec. VIII, below, under “Counterstrikes.”} Counteroffensives aimed at strategic or operational-strategic depths would require reinforcement by armies and divisions located in peacetime on Soviet territory. This requirement would
substantially delay a sustained counteroffensive; the length of the delay would have depended on the peacetime readiness and manning level of mobilization units.

Soviet planners appeared to regard an early counteroffensive by the second echelons and reserves of fronts in contact with the enemy as a somewhat unlikely option.\textsuperscript{26} In operational calculations, the depth of an early operational-scale counteroffensive would depend in large part on a series of contingent variables, chief among them the depth, quantity, and significance of actual or threatened NATO breakthroughs in the Pact's main defensive zone. This variable in turn would have determined the quantity of reserves Soviet front commanders would have needed to prevent or close breaches. The quantity and types of uncommitted reserves would then have determined whether a counterstrike or a counteroffensive was the more feasible option.

Apparently heeding Yazov's admonition to develop force structure plans with future arms control constraints in mind, Soviet military thinking on defensive operations began to accept the notion that large-scale NATO offensive actions would demand a correspondingly larger commitment of forward-stationed reserves to stabilize the defense. As one discussion of defensive maneuver under attack emphasized:

\begin{quote}
The stability of the defense must be built up by increasing the density of forces and means in endangered sectors and by maneuvering into these sectors forces from the depth and from axes where enemy pressure is lighter. Thus, at this juncture, the objective of maneuver will amount to strengthening resistance to the enemy on the main belt, increasing the stability of the defense, depriving the attacker of the possibility for a breakthrough into the depth and its expansion on the flanks, and maximally weakening his strike power.\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}

This discussion also underscored the competing demands for a front's second-echelon and reserve units during a defensive operation. In World War II, according to the author, a front's second-echelon forces only occasionally moved up to reinforce the defense, as the preservation of their strength was considered fundamental to the success of subsequent counterstrikes. By the period examined here,

\textsuperscript{26}Discussion of an early counteroffensive also would have cast considerable doubt on the relevance of the new military doctrine. By themselves, professional Soviet military discussions of the transition from defensive to counteroffensive operations in the initial period of the war did not allow the reader to judge precisely how long after the war began this transition was expected to occur. Other statements by Soviet spokesmen, however, did shed some light on the expected time frame.

\textsuperscript{27}Major General A. B. Zlobin and Major General S. L. Lushchan, "Manyovy v oboronitel'noy operatsii" (Maneuver in a Defensive Operation), VM, January 1989, p. 22 (emphasis in the original).
however, the husbanding of a front’s maneuver reserves in this manner was considered less possible:

In modern conditions, the role of second echelons and reserves as the foundation of aggressive actions in the defense has greatly increased. This increase is due to many factors, chiefly, the manifold increase in the strike power of forces.\textsuperscript{28}

During this period, Soviet operational planners seem to have decided not to plan on early front counteroffensive operations. The decision was probably based on the expectation that forces available following the repulsion of NATO attacks were unlikely to suffice for the purpose.

\textsuperscript{28}Ibid., p. 26.
VII. FIRE ASSETS FOR DEFENSE

Although Soviet operational concepts were proceeding from an assumption of initial stringency with regard to reserves available during the initial period of a war, the opposite seemed to hold true for fire assets, our second indicator of differentiation. Precisely with regard to fires, Soviet military art had most clearly drawn the line in its demand for an aggressive defense. In so doing, Soviet operational thinkers seemed to be compensating for perceived inadequacies of defensive actions in defeating an attacker holding the initiative. The mission for fire assets under this defensive concept was thus to capture fire supremacy "from the very beginning of the war."¹

Two related phenomena drove the demand for fire supremacy: Soviet assessments of the enormously expanded destructive capabilities of nonnuclear fires and NATO’s incorporation of this development into its own operational concepts. Soviet military science has long recognized these phenomena, and Soviet writings have evinced relatively comprehensive and categorical positions on the role of fires in the defensive operation. The ambitious firepower requirements and objectives of Soviet theater strategy of the early 1980s appear to have carried over, in a somewhat modified form, to the development of concepts for defensive actions after 1987.²

As noted above, these firepower requirements did not contradict the defensiveness of military doctrine as Soviet military scientists understood it. The revolutionary improvement of fire-strike technologies during the 1980s and the prospect of the large-scale incorporation of the resulting advanced-technology strike systems into the armies of the two alliances affected Soviet thinking on defense at least as much as on offense.³ As one military scientist argued in Military Thought:

In contemporary conditions, as the experience of operational training demonstrates, the intermingling of offensive and defensive actions is assuming an even more marked character. Thus, in defensive operations, offensive forms of combat are acquiring increasing weight. And this is logical because without aggressive actions, which are most fully manifest in counterstrikes, it is impossible to achieve the

¹Salmanov, December 1988, p. 10.
²For Soviet theater strategy of the 1980s, see Petersen and Hines, 1983, pp. 707-715.
³The Soviets expected the changes to occur within the next decade; see Salmanov, December 1988, p. 10.
decisive goals of frustrating the enemy offensive and ensuring conditions for one's own forces going over to the counteroffensive.4

As one can readily see from such statements, the evolving military art for the defensive phase of a conflict put forward a far more decisive objective for combat actions than just holding a relatively stable defensive line. Using primarily fire assets—such as tactical missiles, artillery, multiple rocket launchers, air-to-surface munitions, antitank missiles, heavy mortars, and remote mining—Soviet defenders were tasked with wearing down and even incapacitating an enemy offensive grouping so as to facilitate a successful counteroffensive.

Discussions in Military Thought in 1988 and 1989 suggested three main defensive objectives for fire assets: target NATO strike assets before attacking forces approach the Warsaw Pact defensive zone; prevent NATO strike groupings from breaching Soviet defensive positions; and weaken NATO's second-echelon strike groupings before they join the battle.

EARLY DESTRUCTION OF NATO STRIKE ASSETS

Enemy strike assets were to be targeted with fires before attacking forces approached the prepared defensive zone. The discussions implied that early fires would help to offset the disruptive effect of aggressive NATO fire strikes expected at the outset of a conflict. Although the discussions did not rule out the possibility of preventive fire strikes against NATO forces before an expected attack, most of the discussions gave the impression that the enemy would begin the hostilities:

The most decisive measures are necessary, not with the goal of parrying his strikes, but rather of destroying the main strike groupings at the very start of combat actions. Their main content in modern defensive operations, it is apparent, is powerful fire destruction and aggressive counterstrikes by defending forces aimed at creating the prerequisites for a definitive rout of the invading enemy groupings.5

The discussions did not specify the precise moment at which fires were to begin in the context of the initial period of a war. However, given the consistent urgency attached to the mission of early incapacitation

4Major General I. N. Manzhurin, "Nekotoryye voprosy podgotovki i naneseniya kontrudarov v obronitel'nykh operatsiyakh" (Some Issues in the Preparation and Delivery of Counterstrikes in Defensive Operations), VM, January 1989, p. 15.
5Ibid., p. 12.
of enemy precision fire systems in such discussions, we may have grounds to believe that fires were to be preemptive.\textsuperscript{6}

In the initial period, before any significant contact of ground forces, Soviet analysts postulated weakening enemy maneuver, and especially fire, units to the extent possible. Meanwhile, tactical-level formations were to prepare defensive fires and to designate zones of fire destruction for likely enemy approach axes: “The beginning of combat actions in modern conditions may take the form of fierce, long-range fire engagements even before the combat contact of the sides.”\textsuperscript{7}

According to Major General I. N. Vorob'yov, the General Staff’s most authoritative theorist, the defender has distinct advantages:

Defending forces in prepared positions, deployed with lesser forces and means than the attacker, may obtain definite superiorities stemming from their potential to ensure more effective protection of personnel and weaponry during the period of massed fire strikes and thereby to preserve the combat capability of defending armies and divisions.\textsuperscript{8}

The attacker’s maneuver units, the author asserted, would “encounter a powerful hurricane of fire and increasing fire opposition” as they drew nearer to the tactical zone of the defense.\textsuperscript{9}

In this initial fire-exchange phase, tactical defenders would deliver “retaliatory-meeting” (otvetno-ostrechnyye) fire strikes against enemy fire and maneuver units to disrupt or derail offensive plans; this objective would require close coordination with operational-level fire assets.\textsuperscript{10} The defenders would engage approaching NATO maneuver units with remote mining and fires from helicopters, artillery, and other long-range fire-support platforms; NATO fire assets would receive uninterrupted fire.

Another article added that “seizing and holding fire superiority” had become the primary battlefield embodiment of two important principles of Soviet military art: aggressiveness and decisiveness. In modern defensive warfare, the author said, conformity to these principles demands the fulfillment of new fire destruction tasks, such as

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\textsuperscript{6}In raising at least the possibility of preemptive Soviet fire action, such discussions recall Gareyev’s demand that enemy precision-guided weapons be destroyed “immediately,” even before the gathering of his major attack groupings at forward assembly areas. Gareyev, M. V. Frunze . . . , 1985, p. 245; see also Sec. VIII below, “Preemption and Counterstrike.”

\textsuperscript{7}Manzhurin, p. 14.

\textsuperscript{8}Vorob'yov, “Takticheskaya obrona” (Tactical Defense), VM, January 1989, p. 42.

\textsuperscript{9}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{10}Ibid.
weakening (or, in a favorable situation, disrupting) the enemy’s first massed fire strike, the destruction of his missile groupings, PGM systems, automated reconnaissance systems, and field computer networks at the division and army levels.11

The fire-support tasks in the period immediately preceding an enemy offensive seem to us operationally analogous to, yet far more ambitious than, those associated with the historical Soviet practice of artillery “counterpreparation” (kontrpodgotovka)—i.e., massed surprise artillery strikes against an enemy preparing an offensive. Employed during World War II, counterpreparation served to weaken or delay an impending German offensive.12 Discussions during the late 1980s indicated that if Soviet surprise fire strikes were to be executed preemptively, the priority targets undoubtedly would be NATO precision fire systems and important components of command and control.13

At the operational level, the Soviets, as defenders, expected to be “more limited in forces and means” than NATO. Although firing from protected positions would partially compensate for this limitation, the strike and fire means that the Soviets attributed to NATO were so varied that, according to one writer, it would be “unrealistic to count on the reliable destruction of not only all, but even a large part, of the forces and means supporting the strike potential of the opposing side.”14 A prioritized Soviet fire plan was therefore required, he continued, one that would focus on “knocking out one or several” of NATO’s fire and maneuver components. “In all cases,” he concluded, the plan would include “the means of fire destruction, and first and foremost, high-accuracy weapons.”15

This was no small admission. The Soviets did not consider the targets thus relegated to secondary priority—airborne and heliborne

12“Kontrpodgotovka” (Counterpreparation), VES, p. 353.
14Colonel V. N. Andriyenko, “Ot oborony k kontrastupleniyu (Istoriya i sovremennost’),” (From Defense to Counteroffense [History and the Present]), VM, December 1988, p. 29.
15Ibid., p. 24. The Russian military-technical term “high-accuracy weaponry,” can also mean precision-guided munitions; however, the Russian term has the specific meaning of a guided weapon possessing a system of external or self-guidance that enables the destruction of a target by a single round with at least a 50 percent probability. The term encompasses a range of advanced conventional systems, including cruise missiles guided by terrain contour matching (TERCOM), “reconnaissance-strike complexes,” TV- or radio-guided ordnance, bombs, rockets, shells, and submunitions that hit their targets using internal or external guidance systems. “Vysokotochnoye oruzhiye” (High-Accuracy Weaponry), VES, p. 172.
assault forces, armor attack groups, and electronic warfare (EW) systems, which they also include in the NATO offensive lineup—easy threats to manage. The admission demonstrated unequivocally the centrality and urgency of the threat to the defense that Soviet military art attributed to PGMs during the very earliest period of a war in Europe.

PREVENTING BREAKTHROUGH OF NATO STRIKE ELEMENTS

Under the Soviet concept, the second fire mission would begin when NATO maneuver strike groupings attempted to breach Soviet defensive positions. The Soviets planned to re-concentrate deep fires on these maneuver formations. At the same time, they would bring to bear the full firepower of the tactical defense, particularly direct fire from short-range systems, on the attackers. With the defender’s operational reserves initially deployed well to the rear to escape the attacker’s first fire strikes, Soviet military planners looked to the maneuver of massed fires as the primary means to blunt expected NATO armored “battering rams”:

In the period of the battle to hold the main defensive belt, . . . building up the stability of the defense on the main enemy strike axes will become the main objective of maneuver. . . . Consequently, the foundation of the defender’s countering forces will be those that possess the greatest speed of action and, first and foremost, obviously, fire means. The basic method of their maneuver will be maneuver of trajectories.16

Herein lay the critical importance of winning the earlier long-range fire battles. As the Soviets saw the situation, their loss of fire superiority then would diminish the potential later to redirect massed fires to attacking armor. Thus, it would threaten the basic operational requirement to maintain defensive stability until the arrival and commitment to battle of army and front maneuver reserves.

As a department head at the Frunze Academy argued in Military Thought, “the subsequent course of the defensive operation and its outcome will depend, in my view, on how successfully the defending side resolves its tasks” in the period immediately following the enemy’s initial surprise attack.17 Given this judgment, we may conclude that the Soviets considered fire assets and firepower most critical at this

16Zlobin and Lushchan, pp. 21–22.
17Ibid., p. 20.
juncture, when attacking formations would first attempt to overcome
the tactical defense. It was the initial deep deployment of the Soviet
maneuver reserve, a measure necessitated by the threat from NATO
deep fires, that made defensive fires vital at this phase of the battle.

The Soviets believed, however, that during this battle for the tactical
zone of the defense they would find an ideal opportunity for decisively
altering the correlation of forces. They considered such a change a
prerequisite for launching a powerful counteroffensive. At this stage,
the majority of the NATO strike force would expose itself to the
greatest proportion of Soviet fire assets. Therefore, the Soviets con-
sidered counterstrikes by fire support the chief means for achieving a
rapid change in the correlation:

It is most advantageous to counterstrike in the battle for the tactical
zone of the defense when the attacker's combat formations are
becoming dense and favorable conditions are created for massed fire
strikes on the wedge of the enemy grouping, and also for cutting off
his reserves by fires.

In Soviet operational thinking during the period considered, the
stage during which counterstrikes support the battle for the main
defensive zone created the necessary conditions for launching the
counteroffensive. By combining a stiff defense with aggressive fire and
maneuver counterstrikes, Soviet fronts were expected to break the back
of the enemy offensive and pave the way for counteroffensive opera-
tions.

In analyzing Western operational planning, Major General I. N.
Vorob'yov observed that NATO would commit "up to 80 percent of
men and equipment" in the first echelon of an offensive. On the one
hand, this assessment aroused grave concern among Soviet operational
planners, especially given their expectations on NATO's employment
of surprise. On the other hand, it offered a prospect for inflicting mas-
sive attrition on the bulk of the attacker's forces during the opening
period of a war.

In any case, Soviet writers during 1988 and 1989 clearly believed
that the outcome of the battle for the tactical defensive zone had en-
normous ramifications. Vorob'yov put it as follows:

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18Soviet positional defenses generally are organized around company and battalion
strong points, often with tank reinforcement. The most important feature of tactical
defense at this level is the system of defensive fire and fortifications created. For a
detailed description of a battalion defense exercise, see Colonel Yu. Morenko et al., "Na
rubezhakh oborony, alia-v ognye" (On the Lines of the Defense, Strength in Fire), VV,
The Great Fatherland War graphically demonstrated that while the defense employed by the divisions of the first operational echelon was tactical in content, its significance went well beyond the bounds of tactics. The attainment of operational-strategic goals, not only in the initial period but in the course of subsequent operations, depended in large part on the extent of success frontier divisions had in fulfilling their task of repelling the enemy's first strike.\textsuperscript{21}

Moreover, the Soviets believed that armor would make up the "basic strike echelon" of a NATO offensive thrust. Vorob'yov estimated that a Soviet division on the defense might face as many as 900 armored units in an attack, that is, up to 70 tanks and armored personnel carriers (APCs) for every kilometer of a division's defensive frontage.\textsuperscript{22} In these circumstances, changing the correlation of forces translates into a demand for massive antitank fires.

Vorob'yov thus stressed the need to create "zones of complete destruction," essentially antitank firetraps.\textsuperscript{23} Some traps would be readied beforehand and integrated into the tactical defenses.\textsuperscript{24} Others would be developed after the direction of an enemy thrust became apparent. For these traps, mobile engineer units would create obstacles, and mobile fire assets—such as remote mining, antitank helicopters, artillery, and rockets—would destroy enemy armor. Another option was the creation of "fire ambushes" using mobile infantry units armed with antitank missiles. In every case, coordination with fire assets of the operational command would be required to hit second echelons and reserves of tank groupings. This last requirement brings us to the third mission for fire assets suggested by Soviet discussions.

**HALTING NATO SECOND-ECHELON STRIKE GROUPINGS**

In the words of Army General Salmanov,

[Soviet defenders] should be able to create in a short time a system of fire under which, in response to the commencement of aggression, the enemy would receive an undelayed and shattering retaliatory massed fire strike that would sharply weaken the offensive potential of his second-echelon strike groupings prior to the moment of their entry into battle.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., p. 40.
\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., p. 43.
\textsuperscript{23}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{24}For a depiction of a static antiarmor firetrap, see Morenko et al., pp. 20–21.
\textsuperscript{25}Salmanov, December 1988, p. 10.
Salmanov's demand will sound familiar to Western readers. The director of the General Staff Academy was informing his military colleagues that to secure a stable forward defense, Soviet troops had to inflict a shattering fire strike on NATO's follow-on forces.

This third task, in combination with the other two (early destruction of NATO deep-fire capabilities and concentrated antitank fires) demonstrated the ambitiousness and aggressiveness of the fire concept being developed for Soviet defensive operations after the 1987 revision of doctrine. But even Soviet military scientists acknowledged the difficulty of characterizing the overall fire mission as "defensive." Moreover, the above discussion of Soviet strikes and counterstrikes during defensive operations in the opening phase of war focused solely on their fire components.

Strikes (and counterattacks) by ground force maneuver units were an integral part of Soviet thinking on counterstrikes, but we have postponed discussion of these until the following section, which deals specifically with the balance between positional and maneuver actions in Soviet defensive theory. Separating the fire and maneuver components of counterstrikes is warranted on several grounds.

First, as the above analysis has attempted to show, in the most critical initial hours of an attack, Soviet concepts called for the use of mainly fire assets, not maneuver units, to weaken NATO's massed fire strikes and to disrupt and destroy attacking armored echelons. The Soviets anticipated a NATO attack that would rely on the surprise use of massed deep fires and the concentration of most of NATO's maneuver assets in the first attacking echelons. They therefore considered early attainment of fire superiority the primary means for stabilizing the defense and the sine qua non for the success of any subsequent counteroffensive action. Such operational thinking led to their emphasis on immediate, perhaps even preemptive, massive fire strikes.

Second, conventional deep fires, in the view of Soviet military science, approached nuclear weapons in their battlefield results. Assertions to this effect, considered revolutionary only a few years ago, have become the norm in more recent Soviet discussions. Within a decade,

Note 26: The U.S. follow-on forces attack (FOFA) subconcept "is designed to attack with conventional weapons those enemy forces which stretch from just behind the troops in contact to as far into the enemy's rear as our target acquisition and conventional weapons systems will permit.... Allied Command Europe can prevent the attacker from maintaining the momentum of his assault by targeting these follow-on forces before they hit our General Defensive Position." General Bernard Rogers, "Follow-On Forces Attack (FOFA): Myths and Realities," Parameters, Summer 1985, p. 76.

Note 27: The aggressiveness of this "defensive" fire concept probably relates in part to evidence that the first round of unilateral Soviet reductions (during 1989) resulted in no substantial decrease in deployed Soviet artillery strength in the forward area.
according to Salmanov, NATO would field long-range, high-accuracy fire support systems in sufficient numbers to enable rapid destruction of not only tactical subunits and units, but also of entire elements of the tactical combat order and the operational disposition. In a short period, junctions and extensive components of communications, takeoff and landing strips at airfields, deep reserves, etc., may be knocked out.\textsuperscript{28}

Although Salmanov did not say so, such a capability would belong not only to NATO but to whoever fielded the relevant systems in significant quantity.\textsuperscript{29} His demand that Soviet fire assets be able to place devastating fires on NATO follow-on forces suggested a need for just such a capability, as did the larger requirement of achieving overall fire superiority. In the same month that Gorbachev announced a 500,000-man reduction of Soviet forces, Salmanov wrote: "The potential for simultaneous destruction of troop groupings through the entire operational depth is becoming, it is apparent, one of the basic methods of military actions in a conventional war."\textsuperscript{30}

One may conclude from the above analysis that in 1988 and 1989 Soviet defensive theory was, in effect, compensating for reductions in forward-deployed maneuver forces by upgrading the missions and roles assigned to fire support assets in conventional defensive operations.\textsuperscript{31} Soviet analysts by no means dispensed with the decisive role of maneuver in the defense; the focus of maneuver simply shifted from actions by armored and motor-rifle formations to strikes by long-range-fire support systems.

\textsuperscript{28}Salmanov, December 1988, p. 11.

\textsuperscript{29}Whereas Salmanov referred to the urgent threat from "new enemy weapons... planned for introduction into his armed forces in the next 10 to 15 years," Andrey Kokoshin, a civilian analyst, wrote that "analysis of the aggregate of varied assessments of the appearance of such weaponry in NATO armed forces leads to the presumption that this will occur in approximately 5 to 10 years." See Salmanov, December 1988, p. 10, and Kokoshin, "Razvitiye voyennogo dela i sokrashcheniy voruzhennykh sil i obychnykh voruzheniy" (The Development of Military Affairs and the Reduction of Armed Forces and Conventional Arms), \textit{MEMO}, January 1988, p. 29. See also Notha Trulock III, Kerry L. Hines, and Anne D. Herr, \textit{Soviet Military Thought in Transition: Implications for the Long-Term Military Competition}, Pacific-Sierra Research Corporation, Arlington, Va., PSR Report No. 1831, April 7, 1988, pp. 46–50, 85–110.

\textsuperscript{30}Salmanov, December 1988, p. 10.

\textsuperscript{31}A later article by two students of the General Staff Academy, while not from the period examined, tends to confirm this assessment. The authors, both major generals, asserted that "in modern conditions, fire destruction surely must be considered the basic factor in the content of a counterstrike (counterattack). Combined-arms tactical formations and units are a means maximally to exploit, reinforce, and increase its results." A. S. Kulikov and A. D. Nefedov, "Pozitsionnyye i manevrennyye deystviya: rol'i mesto v oboronitel'noy operatsii" (Positional and Maneuver Actions: Their Role and Place in a Defensive Operation), \textit{VM}, March 1990, p. 129.
Although Kokoshin and Larionov’s fourth variant for warfare prohibited both strike aviation and precision-guided, deep-strike systems so as to ensure a nonoffensive defense and to obviate preemption, neither the second nor the third variant was specifically differentiated by fire capability. In the second variant, counteroffensive forces were ready in peacetime; the third limited the capacity for early offensive counteraction to counterstrikes by an army or army group. The fire support missions in a counteroffensive and in an operational-scale counterstrike, however, are basically similar, with the two being distinguished more by the scale and duration of maneuver actions than by mode of employment of fire assets.

Defense Minister Yazov’s injunction that force development plans take into account “future prospects” in arms control did not seem to have in any way restricted subsequent discussion in *Military Thought* on the employment of fire assets. On the contrary, Soviet military art in this period seemed to proceed from the assumption that fire assets had to be capable of highly decisive tasks in the defensive, regardless of arms reductions.

This may imply, more speculatively, a Soviet assumption that the fire systems most likely to be limited by future treaties were not those possessing qualitatively new deep-strike capabilities. In other words, restricting artillery tubes, airframes, and missile launchers would not negate the revolution in firepower. The munitions and ordnance themselves, together with the reconnaissance and control systems that support them, rather than the fire platforms that launch them, give the new weapons their extraordinary lethality. A PGM able to destroy a target with a single round means that a substantial reduction in existing numbers of launch systems would not significantly curtail the new weapon’s revolutionary effect on warfare.

Thus, Soviet thinking on force and weapons development in this period may have been directed toward qualitative breakthroughs in fire systems rather than toward the maintenance of many launch platforms. This more sobering interpretation of the party’s line on “qualitative parameters” for force development appeared to have some high-level military support. Interviewed in 1989 by *Kommunist*, the CPSU Central Committee journal, Army General Aleksey Dmitriyevich Lizichév, chief of the Main Political Administration of the Army and Navy, said:

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32Kokoshin and Larionov, June 1988, p. 28.
The task consists of ensuring the transition from the “evolutionary” path of improving models of weaponry (whereby, in the replacement of a generation of any sort of weapon, only an improvement of its combat characteristics was planned) to a path marked by qualitative leaps (whereby the weapon acquires principally new combat capabilities).\textsuperscript{33}

One cannot discern, however, whether or to what extent such an approach had been adopted as official policy.\textsuperscript{34} In any case, none of the contextual factors (such as quantity fielded, mode of basing, and location) suggested by Kokoshin and Larionov for distinguishing offensive from defensive deployments of multipurpose systems influenced the presentation of “defensive” fire concepts in the General Staff’s journal.

We must conclude, therefore, that during 1988 and 1989 authoritative Soviet military discussions of the use of fire assets in the defense made no substantive distinction between capabilities and concepts for defensive as opposed to offensive (counteroffensive) operations. In fact, Soviet military art accepted the position that, in the near future, fire tasks for defensive warfare would resemble those in offensive warfare, have equally decisive effect, employ the same range of systems, and possibly serve simultaneously as the initial stage of a counteroffensive.


\textsuperscript{34}The commentary on qualitative parameters offered by Lizichev’s superior, Defense Minister Yazov, contained no reference to “qualitative leaps” in weaponry. Yazov called for a “radical increase” in reliability and “improvements” in combat characteristics, yet stressed that no increase in overall combat might was envisioned. Yazov, September 1988, p. 5.
VIII. POSITIONAL AND MANEUVER FORMS IN DEFENSE

A defensive operation, depending on its concept and on available forces and means, combines positional elements (such as fortification and prepared lines and positions) with maneuver actions (such as the movement of mobile reserves, counterattacks, and counterstrikes). A positional defense suggests a static, somewhat passive operational concept. Maneuver actions connote a more aggressive defensive plan. The correlation between positional and maneuver components in a defensive concept will help us to determine the extent to which an operation will be "defensive."\(^1\) We assess below this correlation in Soviet defensive concepts in 1988–1989.

In the battle of Kursk, the defense was weighted heavily in favor of maneuver (or countermaneuver). In fact, the tempo and scale of Soviet defensive countermaneuver built rapidly into counterstrikes, which thanks to the availability of sufficient reserves, quickly and easily escalated into countercorpses by several Soviet fronts. In short, Soviet defensive maneuver was so aggressive that the defensive phase of the overall operational concept essentially became the premeditated prelude to the counteroffensive. We associate this relationship between position and aggressive maneuver with the second of Kokoshin and Larionov's four variants.

Under the third Kokoshin-Larionov variant, the concept of operations and the absence of large-scale reserves in the forward area limit defensive countermaneuver, making the action less aggressive and unlikely to create conditions favoring an early countercorps. This variant includes counterstrikes by front reserves and second echelons. The launching of a large-scale countercorps, however, depends on

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\(^1\)For purposes of this analysis, we distinguish between maneuver actions in a defense and a maneuver defense. We define maneuver actions in a defense as aggressive counteractions to an enemy attack or offensive—including counterstrikes (by fire assets and maneuver formations, separately or in combination), counterattacks, and the movement (from the depth or along the line of a front) of second-echelon, reserve, or other defending maneuver units—to reinforce or otherwise support sectors under attack or offensive penetration by enemy forces. The Soviets define a maneuver defense as "the organization and the successive conduct of defensive battles and engagements on previously selected echeloned-in-depth lines in combination with counterattacks and counterstrikes, a broad maneuver of forces and means, and the employment of various obstacles." Colonel General V. M. Gordienko, "Manyovremennaya oborona" (Maneuver Defense), VM, September 1988, p. 26. Maneuver defense is discussed at greater length below, in this section, under "Maneuver Defense Concept."
the regrouping of strategic reserves, a process requiring perhaps several weeks. Thus, the defender must rely more on a staunch positional defense and the maneuver of fire strikes to rebuff the attacker.

Following the announcement of the new defensive doctrine in May 1987, Army General Salmanov summed up then current Soviet military thinking on the appropriate correlation between positional and maneuver actions in a defensive operation as follows:

In Soviet operational art . . . special attention is being directed to the creation of a staunch, previously prepared, intentional defense. At the same time, questions of ensuring its insurmountability are directly connected to preserving a potential for aggressiveness in the form of counterattacks and counterstrikes.²

Others, including Marshal Kulikov, then CinC of Pact Forces, also called for an aggressive defense, with special attention to fire destruction, counterattacks, and counterstrikes, but avoided language suggesting a passive, “hold-the-line” posture.³

A year later, however, the evolving Soviet defensive concept included substantial elements of positional warfare. Major General Vorob’yov, writing in Military Thought, criticized earlier dogma for regarding the defense as “a sort of satellite of the offensive” and excluding the possibility of “a prolonged, thoroughly prepared, positional defense.”⁴ The Soviets define a positional defense as

a method of defense, the basic objective of which [is] the staunch and prolonged holding of areas (lines) occupied by a defender. It [is] characterized by continuous, extended fronts, by a system of defensive lines (positions) developed to great depth and well fortified, and by the concentration of a substantial proportion of forces and means in the first echelons.⁵

Vorob’yov’s statement raises the question of whether positional and more aggressive maneuver actions in a defensive operation are mutually exclusive. The above quotation from Salmanov suggests, however, that Soviet military art posits no contradiction between these components of defense; rather than contradict, they are seen to complement one another.

Aggressiveness in the defense demands continuous action against an attacker, “not only to hold territory, but mainly to exhaust and bleed

²Salmanov, February 1988, p. 35.
³See, for example, Kulikov, May 1988, p. 10.
⁵"Pozitsionnaya obrona" (Positional Defense), VES, p. 566. The VES, published in 1986—i.e., before the new, defensive strategy—described positional defense as a historical concept in the USSR, but one still used by some NATO armies.
white large-scale enemy forces." In World War II, this involved "firmly holding prepared lines (positions) in combination with counterstrikes and counterattacks and with the large-scale employment of antitank and other reserves." Thus, the maneuver of fire and forces provides the requisite aggressiveness to a positional defense. Conversely, a staunch positional defense ensures aggressiveness by facilitating the maneuver of forces and means from the rear area.

The maneuver of forces—the primary focus of this section—can serve purely defensive tasks, such as the reinforcement of a sector threatened with breakthrough by enemy armor. As the aggressiveness and scale of the maneuver increase in a defensive operation, however, the maneuver objectives become harder to distinguish from those more characteristic of offensive action. The battle of Kursk provides

a classic example in organization of a positional defense: deeply echeloned and firmly outfitted in the antitank and antiaircraft senses. But despite its position nature, the defense of the Soviet forces at Kursk was exceptionally aggressive. The reserves created beforehand in armies and in fronts proved strategic—on the one hand, they increased the depth of the defense and its stability, while on the other, they supported the potential of the counteroffensive.8

In the analysis that follows, we identify the chief elements of aggressive maneuver in the 1988–1989 defensive concept and analyze the extent to which these maneuver forms corresponded unambiguously to defensive goals for initial operations or could instead support the conduct of a swift counteroffensive, as at Kursk. To this end, we examine Soviet thinking during this period on the roles, scale, and objectives of counterstrikes, counterattacks, and counterassaults by maneuver units.

ELEMENTS OF POSITIONAL DEFENSE

We begin, however, with the role played by the static components in Soviet defensive theory: Did Soviet military analysts in 1988–1989 consider a staunch positional defense an option or a necessity? An analyst at the Defense Ministry’s Institute of Military History apparently thought it an option:

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7"The most important condition that serves the purpose of operating with activeness is a firm holding and retention of key areas and lines on the axis of the enemy attack." "Lectures from the Voroshilov Academy, Book II. Front Operations," compiled by Ali Jalali, Goulham Wardak, John Sloan, and Curt Johnson, draft, n.p., n.d., p. 7.
8Larionov, July 1988, p. 21.
The most favorable conditions for the transition to the counteroffensive exist when the defending side has managed to stabilize the front. However, in modern conditions, it is hardly possible to count on this. Under the circumstances, we consider it necessary to concentrate efforts above all on holding lines favorable for the delivery of strikes as well as sectors of the front covering the flanks of counterstrike groupings.⁹

Salmanov, however, seemed to argue against withdrawal in the course of defense (at least in the Western TSMA), thus implying the need for a fixed positional defense:

In case of enemy attack, it is very important not to permit the loss of a significant amount of territory. Toward this goal, all measures for increasing the firmness [of the defense] must be undertaken. In any case, the defense must be aggressive.¹⁰

This statement did not specify what quantity of lost territory was considered “significant.” Salmanov’s additional demand that the forward fronts prevent the attacker from passing “into the depth of the territory” avoided the question of how much, if any, operational depth could be ceded in a NATO attack.¹¹

All writers agreed, however, on the need for stability (устойчивость) in a defense.¹² They knew from Soviet experience in World War II the cost of losing operational stability in the initial period of the war, as well as the difficulty and unpredictability of the strategic situation when the defense is breached to operational depth.¹³ “The most important demand” for any defense is stability, “the capability to defend forces against the strikes of an enemy, to repel his offensive, and to

¹⁰Salmanov, December 1988, p. 11 (emphasis in the original).
¹¹Ibid., p. 10.
¹²The discussions in this period referred to the Western TSMA, the main Soviet theater of war. In mountainous, or mountain-desert TSMA, the principles for deploying a defense, according to Vorob’yov, could be “fundamentally different” from the “usual” conditions. In such TSMA, the correlation between positional and maneuver defense tilted toward the latter, a shift, according to Vorob’yov, that allowed “ceding a certain amount of territory to win time, exhaust the enemy, inflict losses on him, and draw him into be the “prolonged tying down” of an enemy using “comparatively small forces along previously prepared lines.” The implication of these above statements was that in a major war counteroffensives could be omitted, or delayed indefinitely, in some southern and eastern sectors, with mobilized reserves instead largely directed to the west. Vorob’yov, January 1989, p. 45; Salmanov, December 1988, p. 9.
¹³For a good account of the events of summer 1941, see Yevseyev, March 1986, pp. 9-11. These events framed the debate on defensive operations in a substantial and obvious way during the period examined.
hold an occupied area, sector, or defensive line."\textsuperscript{14} The remarks of a General Staff Academy instructor served to clarify Salmanov's idea:

As the experience of past wars and also exercises demonstrates, the stubborn holding of the main defensive belt, first of all, is a determining condition for preserving its operational stability.\textsuperscript{15} As a central historical example, the defensive operation at Kursk also shaped the definition of the depth to which enemy penetration was militarily permissible. On one of the fronts of that battle, holding a positional defense densely occupied to a depth of 30 kilometers required the timely maneuver of one-third of 35 rifle divisions, 18 of 20 tank brigades, 21 of 51 antitank artillery regiments, and 4 of 10 independent tank regiments onto threatened sectors in the front's primary defensive belt.\textsuperscript{16} Figure 3 shows the echelonment of a Soviet front defense of 1943–1945; Fig. 4 shows echelonment as explained in lectures at the Voroshilov General Staff Academy in 1973.

Of course, the battle of Kursk took place in the middle of the war, after mobilization, whereas Soviet fronts defending at the beginning of any future war (according to the NATO surprise attack scenario) evidently would have to make do with whatever reserves they disposed of in peacetime. The Kursk experience, however, enables us to understand, in a concrete battlefield context, what Soviet planners might consider a significant or operationally critical loss of territory.

According to Larionov, the genius of the Soviet plan at Kursk was its allowance for

losing some part of the defender's territory so as to give the enemy an opportunity to commit to battle not only the main first-echelon forces, but the reserves as well, and then, by delivering powerful counterstrikes, to crush his principal grouping.\textsuperscript{17}

The limit of this allowance was reached when, despite the enormous maneuver of Soviet front reserves, repeated mass German tank attacks finally succeeded in penetrating the primary (tactical) defensive zone of the Voronezh Front (reaching a depth of 35 kilometers) and thereby threatening the operational stability of the front’s defense.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{14}"Uстойчивость" (Stability), VES, p. 770.
\textsuperscript{15}Zlobin and Lushchan, p. 22 (emphasis in the original).
\textsuperscript{16}Zlobin and Lushchan, January 1989, p. 22. These proportions far exceeded initial operational plans developed for the defensive phase at Kursk.
\textsuperscript{17}Larionov, July 1988, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., pp. 16–17. The Soviet front commander was able to tolerate such a deep penetration thanks to the presence of ample Stavka reserves in the form of a tank and a combined-arms army, which were ordered to counterstrike after the front’s own substantial reserves were fully committed.
Fig. 3—Soviet front defense, 1943–1945
Fig. 4—Soviet front defense, 1973

Not to scale.
Thus, in an operational context, some part of a defender’s territory becomes significant when the rearmost positions of an echeloned defense begin to be overcome despite the commitment of available reserves. At Kursk, while fronts constructed as many as eight fortified lines to a maximum depth of 180 kilometers, primary efforts apparently were concentrated in fortifying the three forward defensive zones assigned to first-echelon armies, i.e., to a depth of no more than 40 kilometers. Having breached these positions on one front, German armor briefly had an opportunity for rapid open maneuver and encirclement in that front’s rear. The presence of vastly superior strategic reserves, however, prevented a possible Soviet disaster.

Radical improvements in present-day deep-fire capabilities have prompted some revision of Soviet thinking, which had favored focusing maximal effort in the tactical zone. In the mid-1980s, the Soviets began to talk about deploying somewhat stronger secondary echelons and reserves in the operational depths of armies and fronts. The depth of a modern Soviet operational defense increased up to 300 kilometers, as did the number of separate defensive belts and the distance separating each of them.

During 1988 and 1989, the Soviets devoted serious and sometimes urgent attention to ensuring the stability of a defense, using the traditional language of position, with its emphasis on fortification, force density, mutual support of units, and defensive fire support. Despite calls for strengthening reserves and second echelons, Soviet theorists clearly still believed in the cardinal importance of the tactical defense. Vorob’yov wrote, for example:

Special demands present themselves . . . in regard to the choice of belts, positions, and sectors of defense, strong points, and their engineer preparation. At the foundation of the system of their disposition, as with the deployed battle order of a tactical formation (unit), lies the principle of creating a staunch defense, reliably able to resist

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20Soviet thinking has by no means abandoned this basic tenet of a positional defense. A recent article stressed the importance of concentrating efforts in the tactical zone of a positional defense as a means of preventing the linking of NATO’s ground forces with air-mobile elements acting in the defender’s rear during an offensive. Kulikov and Nefedov, p. 28.
21Rachok and Tolmachev, pp. 21–22.
23Although the trend toward reevaluation of the potential of the defense has been manifest at least since 1980, the focus had been on the defensive potential of high-technology fire systems rather than on the positional elements of defensive operations. Trulock et al., pp. 105–110.
enemy attempts to split the defensive grouping, as well as to counteract his repeated envelopments.

The staunchness of a defense increases significantly with the placement of positions at a comparatively small distance from one another, so as to ensure their close tactical and fire coordination, as well as to ensure that second echelons and reserves are able to supplement the combat efforts of the first-echelon tactical subunits (podrazdeleniye).24

These lessons were entirely relevant to the present, Vorob'yov argued, as their application, in combination with modern defensive technology, could maximize defensive stability while wearing down an attacker:25

In this case, the entire tactical depth of the defense is turned into a kind of fortified area (ukrepnyonny rayon), saturated with fire means including permanent, as well as mobile, fire emplacements in the form of rowing tanks, BPMs [infantry fighting vehicles], as well as various engineer fortifications and obstacles.26

This new defensive concept sought to change the correlation of forces by bogging down the enemy and imposing upon him a costly battle of attrition. A “continuous defensive zone” was to facilitate this goal by

- drawing the enemy into exhausting battles, pinning down his maneuver, making it necessary for him to storm each height, populated area, road junction, and pass, and, by means of fierce battles, to “gnaw through” the defensive positions in the frontier zone.27

Soviet military strategy from the early to mid-1980s had emphasized highly mobile theater-strategic offensive operations in continental TSMAs. Now, in contrast, a General Staff tactician was lauding such defensive traits as “skillful fortification.” Yet, while the positional defense never played a significant role in postwar Soviet military art, its possibilities were apparently never entirely forgotten.28

24Vorob'yov, January 1989, p. 45.
25Vorob'yov provides a useful tactical criterion for the dispersion of motor-rifle and artillery Platoons based on ensuring that not more than one platoon is destroyed by a single Lance II missile or single guided munition. Ibid., p. 45.
26Ibid. (emphasis in the original).
27Ibid.
28Citing the experience of summer 1941, Vorob'yov recalled that “in cases where from the very beginning of combat actions our divisions managed to preempt the enemy in occupying a fortified position, they possessed the capability to hold back (oderzhivat’) his superior forces for a prolonged period.” For example, in one rare instance, a rifle division that had managed to occupy a prepared defensive sector after the German attack of June 21 was able, in cooperation with a nearby fortified area, to beat back the attacks of
MANEUVER DEFENSE CONCEPT

Like the editors of Military Thought, Vorob'yov in January 1989 called for a broad discussion of defensive theory to “root out stereotypes and to fight dogmatism mercilessly” in military affairs. One issue that apparently had elicited considerable controversy was maneuver defense, about which Vorob'yov wrote: “The study of methods for organizing and conducting a defense in all its forms—positional and maneuver, in the most varied of conditions, and first and foremost, in conformity with the beginning of a war—is acquiring exceptional urgency.”

The concept of maneuver defense had virtually disappeared during the years of Stalinist military science. Apparently rehabilitated sometime in 1988, maneuver defense usually consists of a series of organized, contested withdrawals by units to successive defensive lines, in combination with aggressive actions (fires, counterattacks, ambushes, and steadfast holding of intermediate positions) by a portion of the force covering the withdrawal.

Conceptually, a positional and a maneuver defense do not greatly differ. In a maneuver defense, units engage in positional battles while progressively yielding ground; as a last resort, they conduct a stubborn positional defense without withdrawal at the rearmost line. In that it intentionally permits the loss of territory, a maneuver defense is considered even less aggressive than a staunch positional defense. Vorob'yov, however, assailed those who rejected maneuver defense as mere “retreat” and who based their thinking on the defense mainly on the hackneyed motto “not a step back.” Maneuver defense should not be set off against positional,” he argued. “Both these types of defense must be used in close interconnection.”

In this spirit, Vorob'yov outlined a maneuver defense variant combining positional and mobile actions. Units as large as brigades and

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four German divisions in the course of four days. Vorob'yov, January 1989, p. 45. One must be cautious, however, in generalizing from Soviet historical discussions. There was no indication, for instance, that the Soviet military during the period considered was pondering the construction of a new Stalin line somewhere in East-Central Europe. Fortification and engineer preparation need not be so extensive to have defensive utility, and this becomes especially true in combination with a dense, well-planned defensive system of fire. In any case, indications of peacetime engineer preparations, such as plans to construct static fortifications, would have been significant.

30Gordiienko, p. 25. After World War II, “defense was no longer divided into positional and maneuver.” VES, p. 420.
32Vorob’yov, September 27, 1989.
divisions, he wrote, could conduct covering battles, while the main body
of defending forces withdrew to prepared positions to a staunch posi-
tional defense. Like the NATO covering force concept, Vorob'yov's
would seek to create more favorable conditions for the main defending
force to repel enemy attacks. In any variant of a maneuver defense,
ground would be traded for time, but under no conditions would ground
be yielded without a fight.

Earlier in 1989, Lieutenant General V. Khazikov, deputy chief of the
Ground Forces training directorate, had revealed that Soviet tactical
theorists had only just begun to revisit the maneuver defense concept.
A newly formed tactical development group in his directorate, he said,
was examining such questions as the proper ratio between withdrawing
units, holding units, and counterattacking units in a maneuver defense.
In September, Vorob'yov described a maneuver defense concept that
had already been incorporated into a Soviet field exercise in 1988:

The "Fall-88" exercise played out a variant in which the main
defending forces withdrew to a primary position in the rear, where
they were to occupy a positional defense while a portion of the first-
echelon forces were designated to delay and exhaust the "enemy" in
the space between defensive zones, making use of a maneuver
defense.

In the Soviet view, conditions clearly can exist under which a
maneuver defense is neither the preferred method nor a feasible one.
The fact that only so many defensive lines can be prepared ahead of
time restricts the depth of withdrawal by forward-deployed forces.
Also, given the Soviet perception of NATO operational concepts, an
unyielding Soviet positional defense would have the advantage of iso-
lating NATO air-mobile formations landed in the defensive rear from
armored forces attacking from the front, thereby disrupting NATO's
air-land offensive.

Moreover, because of the complexity of successfully executing a
series of withdrawals under enemy attack, the Soviets evidently do not
consider a maneuver defense feasible for formations larger than

33Ibid. See also Rachok and Tolmachev, p. 23; Yazov, February 1987, p. 25.
34For an elaboration of maneuver defense concepts employing two and three echelons,
see Gordiyenko.
35V. Khazikov, "Vozrodit' kak iskusstvo" (To Revive as an Art), KZ, January 7, 1989,
p. 2.
36Vorob'yov, September 27, 1989.
37A maneuver defense can, however, have a depth three times greater than a posi-
tional defense for the same tactical formation. For an extensive discussion of operational
considerations affecting a maneuver defense, see Gordiyenko.
38Kulikov and Nefedov, p. 29.
divisions or corps. Nevertheless, Gordiyenko asserted that in several important cases—for example, immediately following an enemy surprise attack, on axes where the enemy enjoys substantial numerical superiority, and in the case of exposed flanks—a maneuver defense is not only possible but often preferable.\textsuperscript{39}

What significance should we attach to the increasing prominence of the maneuver defense concept during 1989? If the battle of Kursk exemplified a staunch positional defense concept that relied on highly aggressive use of maneuver forces to destroy powerful attacking formations as a precursor to a rapid counteroffensive, then a defensive concept that included the substantial use of maneuver defense should be viewed as far less aggressive and, thus, more unequivocally “defensive.” A maneuver defense is indicated when the attacking enemy holds substantial numerical superiority and the defender, in contrast to Kursk, lacks large-scale second echelons and reserves in the forward area.

Soviet writings from the period considered did not portray maneuver defense as the chief form of defensive action in the main theater. Nevertheless, the increased attention paid this concept, particularly in the context of the initial period of the war, suggested that the Kursk paradigm—Kokoshin and Larionov’s second variant—was becoming less relevant.\textsuperscript{40}

COUNTERASSAULT PROBLEM

Soviet defensive theorists were convinced that NATO plans for offensive operations called for a prodigious “air echelon” that would be able, in effect, to jump over Soviet defensive positions, wreak havoc in the rear, and thus threaten the operational stability of the defense. This perception clearly worried them. Several writers referred to then current NATO exercises that in their view indicated plans for new airborne brigade groups that combine “airmobile infantry battalions” and “one or two motor-infantry (tank) battalions” with other organic helicopter and antitank assets:

\textsuperscript{39}Gordiyenko, p. 30.

\textsuperscript{40}Significantly, the exercising and increased discussion of the maneuver defense concept coincided with the planning and initial implementation of Soviet force reductions in East-Central Europe. Faced with the prospect of planning to conduct a forward defense with a less favorable ratio of forces, Soviet theorists may have perceived the maneuver defense option as a necessary complement to the aggressive, positional defense concept developed during 1988. As Soviet forces leave Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and eventually eastern Germany and Poland, we should expect increasing discussion of maneuver defense variants.
In this way, air and ground echelons are created. It is expected that the air echelon will be landed to a depth that ensures its support by artillery (10–15 kilometers). With the approach of battalions of the ground echelon, the air echelon will execute the next leap.41

During the period considered, as well as more recently, Soviet discussions portrayed the threat from these “air-echelon” forces in consistently alarming terms.42 The Soviets saw this NATO “air echelon” as an especially grave threat to the defense because it drastically reduced the time between the delivery of shattering, pinpoint deep fires and their exploitation by heliborne maneuver forces.43

To defeat NATO’s putative attempt to create a maneuver front in the defensive rear, Soviet writers called for appropriate, aggressive countermaneuver. Vorobyov demanded that “the tempo of the defender’s maneuver must exceed the tempo of the attacker’s advance.”44 And, of course, aside from the maneuver of fires, airmobile and airborne forces permit the most rapid forms of defensive countermaneuver. A major article on the evolution of Soviet military art, in addressing the principle of maneuverability, asserted apropos that:

Actions in the air and through the air will acquire special significance for the attainment of success in modern operations. . . . Exercise experience, in particular, shows that counterassaults may find wide use for decreasing the durations of maneuver by, and for placing strikes on, assaults.45

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41Zlobin and Lushchak, p. 19 (emphasis in the original).

42For instance, Vorobyov wrote that “exercise experience shows that up to one-fourth of the general composition of strike grouping forces may be allocated to [the air echelon]. Based on analysis of NATO troop tactics, it must be expected that at the start of an invasion, 2 or 3 tactical air assaults, each with a force of up to battalion strength, and 10 to 15 or more division-reconnaissance groups may be landed in the defensive zone of a division, and in addition, 1 or 2 air-assault detachments composed of combat helicopters and ground attack aircraft, and 1 or 2 antitank helicopter strike groups may operate.” Vorobyov, January 1989, p. 44. Likewise purporting to base their data on NATO exercises, Kulikov and Nefedov (p. 30) wrote that “in the 48 hours following the commencement of combat actions, within the zone of an enemy front, the employment of up to 20 or 30 airmobile, airborne, and marine assaults was planned. Their depths of landing were, for tactical assaults (strength as much as a battalion)—15 to 60 kilometers; for operational-tactical assaults (in brigade strength)—80 to 100 kilometers; and for operational-scale assaults (by airmobile and airborne divisions)—150 to 200 kilometers. Add to this the forces of diversion-reconnaissance formations—whose number may reach 300 to 400 in the critical moments of an operation—and it becomes clear that the struggle with these forces and means is becoming one of the most urgent tasks in a defensive operation.”


45Korotchenko, p. 27 (emphasis in the original).
Soviet discussions of enemy air mobility revealed exceptional urgency at this time. One had the impression that while military planners had identified an important vulnerability in their defensive concept, the development of an effective solution was at a relatively early stage.\textsuperscript{46} According to Vorob’yov, the threat from NATO air assaults “demands taking appropriate measures of counteraction. . . . A system of combating air assaults must become a component element of a modern tactical defense.”\textsuperscript{47}

During late 1989 and early 1990, however, the Soviets began to treat the counterassault issue more thoroughly. An article in Military Thought indicated that any substantial landing in the Soviet defensive rear would have necessitated, for a certain time, the retargeting of a significant portion of fire support onto enemy assault groupings. As any prolonged diminution of fire strikes against enemy fire-support systems and/or maneuver forces might quickly have undermined the defense of the tactical zone, the complete liquidation of enemy airborne landings would have been the mission of designated second-echelon forces, together with highly mobile special-forces and airborne units.\textsuperscript{48}

Gordiyenko described counterassault organization and planning for a defensive by a corps-scale formation as follows: First, likely targets of attack in the rear would be posted with motor-rifle companies tasked with rebuffing assaults. Second, fire-support and mining would be preplanned against likely assault objectives. Third, a dedicated antiassault reserve and a special-forces reserve would provide a fast-reaction force. Fourth, the corps combined-arms reserve, as well as a portion of its second echelon, would be assigned to block or liquidate larger enemy assaults.\textsuperscript{49}

Soviet theorists viewed the threat to tactical and operational defensive stability from the NATO air echelon as second only to the threat posed by NATO advanced conventional fires. Thus, we may expect them to devote increasing attention to the counterassault problem in the context of conducting extended defensive operations. An effective solution to the counterassault problem will in all likelihood involve

\textsuperscript{46} Sharply increasing the quantities of mobile, low-level antiaircraft systems throughout the main defensive belt would be one effective solution to perceived vulnerability to air assault and, in fact, the Soviet military had announced that it would increase antiaircraft systems as part of its 1989-1990 force reorganization in Eastern Europe.

\textsuperscript{47} Vorob’yov, January 1989, p. 44 (emphasis in the original). Vorob’yov describes appropriate antiassault measures at various tactical levels, such as the emplacement of ZSU-23/24 air defense systems, the creation of company air defense strong points, and the preparation of antiassault ambushes.

\textsuperscript{48} Kulikov and Nefedov, p. 31.

\textsuperscript{49} See Gordiyenko, pp. 33–34. While the author specifically addressed counterassault planning for a formation conducting maneuver defense, most of the points apply equally to a positional defense.
highly capable maneuver units of the types mentioned above. Thus, future Soviet defensive concepts—even where they stress positionality and the staunch holding of the tactical defensive depth—should at the same time feature the aggressive maneuver of forces and means in the operational depth in response to the threat from assaults.

COUNTERATTACK AND DEFENSE

While Soviet thinking on counterassault maneuver developed rapidly during 1988 and 1989, some differences arose on how best to ensure defensive aggressiveness against enemy ground forces. At the tactical level, criticism mounted with regard to a practice long identified with defensive aggressiveness in the Soviet military: the ingrained bias favoring counterattacks by first-echelon ground units. While military theorists appeared to agree on the wisdom of not deploying defending maneuver formations outside prepared positions during the initial fire exchanges, the question of their subsequent employment prompted a debate.

At least one senior tactician, Major General A. B. Zlobin, argued that counterattacks could still be effective—if supported by fire counterstrikes. His interlocutor, Major General S. L. Lushchan, an instructor at the General Staff Academy, questioned the pervasive hold of existing tactical dogma “expressed in particular in the requirement for counterattacks by (tactical) second echelons and reserves”:

What would be the result of counterattacks conducted by each battalion and regiment given four- to sixfold enemy superiority on the axis of his main strike? Would this not undermine the stability of the tactical defense, since forces would be removed from fortified positions having a prepared system of fire? At the tactical level (especially at the battalion-regiment level), in the majority of cases it is more rational to employ the second echelons and reserves for repelling the attack of the penetrating enemy groups by fire from well-prepared positions.

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50 General Staff planners may have had a problem planning effective counterassaults during the period examined, given Gorbachev’s somewhat vague inclusion of “assault landing troops” in his announced reduction package. At the time of his announcement in December 1988, the Soviets had three assault brigades and a larger number of battalions deployed in East Central Europe. This planning problem, of course, has since been overshadowed by the events of late 1989 and early 1990.

51 Kulikov and Nefedov, pp. 30–31, make this contrast.

52 Zlobin and Lushchan, p. 27.

53 Ibid., p. 26 (emphasis in the original).
Commenting on the above exchange, the editors of *Military Thought* recommended further debate within the staffs of armies, divisions, regiments, and military academies, urging them "to reject decisively the existing stereotypes."\(^{54}\)

The message to reexamine long-standing operational biases evidently reached field commands. The CinC of the Southern Group of Forces noted in spring 1989 that training and exercises in his command had shifted their emphasis to defensive fires from prepared positions and away from small-scale counterattacks.\(^{55}\)

Vorob'\'yov similarly recounted the sad experience of the pell-mell counterattacks made by divisions and regiments following the 1941 German invasion. Conceding that counterattacks by ground units manifested defensive aggressiveness, he nonetheless urged caution:

> In conditions of the initial period of the war—when the troops have the task of bleeding an enemy white and not allowing him to move into the depth by means of a stubborn, fierce, and insurmountable defense—commanders and staffs must approach the organization of counterattacks especially carefully. It is important to remember that if, in the defense, a battalion is capable of repulsing the attack of a brigade, then in a counterattack, in the best case, it can defeat only an enemy company.\(^{56}\)

Vorob'\'yov did, however, envision a tactical maneuver role for designated armor units (companies and battalions). Because of their considerable antitank capabilities, he recommended that some of these units be included in "the first echelon of the defenders."\(^{57}\) As a mobile component of the defensive fire-support system of a motor-rifle battalion or company, "roving tanks and BMPs [infantry fighting vehicles]" would supplement fixed-fire positions, engineer fortifications and obstacles, helicopter fires, and mining.\(^{58}\)

Alternatively, designated ground units might serve as a mobile tactical reserve, able to maneuver rapidly in the area between defensive positions to reinforce sectors threatened with enemy penetration and to

\(^{54}\)Ibid., p. 29.

\(^{55}\)Interview with Colonel General M. Burlakov, "V novykh usloviyakh" (In New Conditions), KZ, April 26, 1989, p. 1.

\(^{56}\)Vorob'\'yov, January 1989, p. 46.

\(^{57}\)Vorob'\'yov pointed out that "the antitank capabilities of motor-rifle subunits (i.e., battalions or companies) in BMPs are three or four times higher than those of subunits in BTRs [armored personnel carriers]." Ibid., pp. 43–44.

\(^{58}\)Ibid., p. 45; see also Moreiko et al.
set up direct fire ambushes and fire traps. Counterattacks by this antiarmor reserve would need the support of a fire counterstrike from division fire-support assets or, in some cases, from those assigned to higher-echelon commands.

In addition to actions by these specially designated tactical subunits (as well as counterassault actions in the operational rear), Soviet military theorists, especially during 1989, recommended the maneuver of fire strikes as the chief means to ensure defensive aggressiveness. With the maneuver of fire strikes, the substantial maneuver of ground forces could be deferred until conditions for well-planned actions by second-echelon and reserve formations—rather than hasty counterattacks by first-echelon divisions deployed in positional defenses—were secured.

COUNTERSTRIKES

Thus, for the first day or two immediately following an expected attack, Soviet operational planners envisioned defensive counteraction by tactical-scale maneuver units, rather than by large-scale formations. The more aggressive forms of defensive countermaneuver, aside from heavy reliance on fires, were to be conducted by small but highly mobile units maintained at a high state of readiness. Such units might include tactical BMP and armor reserves, as well as heliborne counterassault and special-forces groups subordinated to corps, armies, and fronts. But as the combined-arms reserves of fronts and armies maneuvered from the depth, military theorists foresaw the potential for more aggressive action:

The struggle for winning the initiative does not hold promise if it is based mainly on the parrying of strikes. The aggressiveness of the defender’s actions must grow constantly, not only to halt the enemy, but also to resolve the primary task—to create conditions for his complete defeat.

A later article in fact noted the need for a specially designated antiarmor reserve in the organization of a division- or corps-scale maneuver defense; see Gordiyenko, p. 33.

As one text on military art observed, maneuver actions of forces without the suppression of the enemy’s fire system and without “constant fire support and fire accompaniment” are either “impossible in general” or accompanied by “enormous losses.” See Gayvoronskiy, p. 208.

Kulikov and Nefedov, pp. 28–29.

Zlobin and Lushchan, p. 20 (emphasis in the original).
During the period examined, front-level second echelons and reserves, even with the high proportion of front resources perceived as necessary to create a staunch first-echelon defense, probably still consisted of detached regiments and brigades of various designations, along with several divisions (or corps), or possibly an army-scale formation. Whatever their precise configuration, these forces, unreinforced, would have possessed a potential for operational-scale maneuver, i.e., counterstrikes and, perhaps, a limited counteroffensive.

We do not know, given the postulates of Soviet defensive thinking at that time, whether the Soviets considered counterstrikes or a counteroffensive the more likely. As noted above, the course of action in the first days of the war would have determined the capacity to launch an early counteroffensive (within a week after D-day) using only forward-deployed forces.

The following factors would have directly affected the decision of the front commander on how, where, and when to employ his second echelon and reserve: the timely occupation of fortified defensive positions at the outset of hostilities; substantial fire destruction of enemy deep-fire systems and his approaching maneuver formations; the successful repulsion of enemy armor and air assaults by tactical defenders; the preservation of Soviet second echelons from enemy deep fires; and the staunch retention of the main defensive belt.

The failure to accomplish the above tasks might have resulted in one or more breaches in the tactical defensive zone. To prevent or eliminate these, reserves would have been committed to the endangered sectors. Some front reserves might have occupied a stopgap army defensive zone to the rear of the main tactical belt(s).

Alternatively, reserves might have been deployed within the tactical defensive zone to boost defensive density and firepower. To localize and block an enemy airmobile assault in the rear, more mobile reserves might quickly have occupied a hastily prepared defense line constructed by mobile engineer units and shielded by remote mining. Every unit thus committed would, at the same time, have decreased the number and power of subsequent defensive counterstrikes and markedly diminished the feasibility of an early front counteroffensive.64

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63See "Lectures from the Voroshilov Academy," p. 4.

64Soviet operational thinkers appeared to believe that substantial reserves would have to be committed to stabilize the defense, rather than husbanded for subsequent offensive strikes. According to Zlobin and Lushchan (p. 28), the importance of the maneuver of second echelons in stabilizing a tactical defense had "greatly increased" since World War II.
PREEMPTION AND COUNTERSTRIKE

In contrast, the successful fire destruction of enemy fire-support assets, the weakening or breaking up of his attack groupings, and the staunch retention of the tactical defense zone would have permitted a much more aggressive plan for using the front maneuver reserve. The principal role in defensive counteraction was assigned to the counterstrike (kontrudar), defined as

the aggregate of massed fire strikes, coordinated in objective, place, and time with strikes by the combined-arms armies and divisions of the ground forces and other branches and services, with the objective of defeating enemy forces penetrating the defense or preparing an offensive, and executed from a single plan in close cooperation with forces conducting combat actions in the enemy rear.\textsuperscript{65}

Despite the oft-repeated Soviet assurances of the “strictly defensive thrust” of Soviet military doctrine, high-level operational thinking in 1989 and 1989 continued to recognize an option for preemptive Soviet military action, particularly by fires.\textsuperscript{66} The operational mode of preemption was the counterstrike:

If in the course of a fire engagement one succeeds in destroying the attacker—[thereby] changing the correlation of forces and means to a significant degree—a real possibility arises for the defending side to deliver powerful surprise counterstrikes on enemy groupings getting ready for the offensive, or on his main forces in the period of deployment before the forward line of the defense.\textsuperscript{67}

In this case, the preemptive action considered included fire and troop strikes against enemy forces ostensibly preparing a ground offensive. The preemptive counterstrike followed the initiation of hostilities, which took the form of a fire exchange, and thus could not be characterized as a “bolt from the blue.”

Although such preemptive action was an “if-then” proposition contingent on several hard-to-predict variables, it evidently provided enough operational advantages in certain circumstances for Soviet mili-

\textsuperscript{65}Manzhurin, p. 15.

\textsuperscript{66}As one Western analyst pointed out, the military’s defensive concept “allows for preemption and could lead to escalation should NATO precautionary actions be misinterpreted as preparation for attack. Of course ‘allowing for’ preemption is different from earlier writings where it is portrayed as a crucial element of military success.” Jeffrey Legro, “Soviet Crisis Decision-making and the Gorbachev Reforms,” Survival, July/August 1989, p. 349; see also Trulock et al., pp. 109-110.

\textsuperscript{67}Manzhurin, p. 14 (emphasis in the original).
tary planners to have retained it as an option. According to our analysis above, any counterstrike conducted as early as during the preparation and concentration of enemy attack groupings would have relied heavily on fires and much less on strikes by maneuver units. This conclusion accords with authoritative Soviet writings. Because of this limitation, the scale of any preemptive counterstrike probably would not have exceeded the operational-tactical level, and the maximum depth of action of any ground force units taking part would have been likewise limited.

In the initial period of a European war, a less contingent variant would have involved the employment of front second echelons and reserves in a large-scale counterstrike(s) several days or perhaps a week after any attack. Our survey of writings from 1988 and 1989 strongly suggests that the Soviets considered this the main and most likely variant of action. And given the approach of these forces—without significant delay and substantially intact—to the battle area, their incorporation into a powerful operational-scale counterstrike might have marked the beginning of the end of the defensive phase of the initial period of a war. In the words of one Soviet military writer,

A situation may develop in which counterstrikes undertaken by the forces of the operational reserve may exceed the bounds of resolving purely defensive tasks and may be the initial stage of the counteroffensive operation.

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68 The literature gave no indication, however, that preemptive counterstrikes incorporating large maneuver units were either so advantageous or so feasible as to be considered the main variant. Manzhurin noted that later counterstrikes, in the battle for the tactical zone, were "most advantageous," thanks to the maximal concentration of enemy forces expected to result from their attempts at penetration. Early fire strikes against NATO fire assets, on the other hand, seemed central to the Soviet defensive concept in this period. Ibid.

69 The immediate destruction of enemy nuclear missiles and his high-accuracy weapons, even before the advance of the main grouping of his forces to forward assembly areas for an offensive or for delivering counterstrikes, is acquiring enormous significance." Gareyev, 1985, p. 245.

70 The maneuver units available for a preemptive strike would have lacked strong follow-on forces for developing offensive success into the enemy depth. If larger maneuver formations—brigades, divisions, or an army—from the front reserve succeeded in advancing quickly, however, they might have served as an effective exploitation echelon. Such an employment scenario, if it existed, did not appear in published Soviet discussions.

71 It also may have been the most aggressive variant that the military was permitted to contemplate, or at least discuss, under the constraints of the new doctrine. Moreover, in a time of ambitious but politically sensitive Soviet security initiatives, any signs that the military was seriously entertaining more aggressive preemption options could have undermined these diplomatic efforts.

72 Andriyenko, p. 23 (emphasis in the original).
THE NATO CHALLENGE

The reserves and second echelons of Soviet fronts represented the only larger ground units likely to be available for offensive counter-maneuver in the first two weeks of a war. In the Soviet view, NATO operational plans constituted a fundamental challenge to the Soviet concept for the maneuver and aggressive use of these front follow-on forces. In December 1988, Salmanov effectively elevated to a doctrinal demand the task of shielding reserves and second echelons from enemy deep fires.\(^73\) Fulfillment, however, hinged on fire superiority:

The problem of preserving the combat capability and survivability of the counterstrike groupings is highly urgent in a defensive operation. . . . At present, in our view, the fire destruction of the most effective enemy means of armed struggle is acquiring priority significance.\(^74\)

The attainment of fire superiority, in turn, depended on the successful completion of several challenging subtasks. Andriyenko listed the most important of these:

The concentration of reconnaissance efforts on the detection of the attacker's means of armed conflict whose range enables the delivery of strikes on second echelons and reserves . . . and also the discovery of their command and control system; the effective counteraction, first and foremost, of the attacker's deep reconnaissance means; the placing of massive strikes on the enemy's means of deep destruction and the knocking out of their command and control systems.\(^75\)

Any one of these prerequisites for preserving Soviet follow-on forces presented daunting operational, not to mention technological, problems.\(^76\) The Soviets expected the offensive threat that they then attributed to NATO to be extremely difficult to counter: so difficult,
in fact, that they could not with any certainty depend on being able to aggressively employ their larger combined-arms units deployed in the forward area in peacetime in, say, an early counteroffensive.

Drawing together all the elements of the analysis in this section, we can make some judgments about the correlation between position and maneuver in Soviet defensive concepts from the period examined. First, the Soviets devoted serious attention to ensuring an effective positional defense. They emphasized using fire support from protected positions, rather than counterattacks, to hold the tactical defensive zone. In the tactical depth, but especially in the operational rear, they called for using small, specially designated antiarmor, antiassault, and combined-arms reserves for aggressive countermaneuver. The maneuver of these units would have the objective of localizing and liquidating enemy assaults and penetrations so as to preserve the stability and integrity of the positional defense.

Second, while the Soviets did not rule out the possibility of early, or even preemptive counterstrikes, including by ground units, their main variant developed during this period viewed such counterstrikes as less likely. Given a perceived need to maneuver second-echelon and reserve forces to reinforce or localize areas threatened by enemy fire strikes and armor attacks, Soviet theorists apparently were not counting on being able to husband the bulk of their maneuver formations in anticipation of some devastating early counterblow deep into the enemy rear. Because a staunch positional defense requires the deployment in its first echelon of a substantial proportion of a front's manpower and firepower, second echelons and reserves of fronts would be of a scale best suited to powerful operational or operational/tactical counterstrikes.

In the main, high-level Soviet military discussions during 1988 and 1989 accorded with these points. The Soviet concept of defensive operations that could be traced from these discussions relied heavily on positional forms, while the aggressive use of maneuver action was to be of a scale and form consistent with preserving a stable defense rather than launching an early counteroffensive. Thus, with regard to the correlation between position and maneuver, the 1988–1989 defensive concept corresponded to the third of the four variants described by Koko shin and Larionov.

In the best case, as General Staff specialists saw it, a positional defense that turned out to be substantially impenetrable—thus demanding only minor reinforcement—might have permitted a far bolder employment of maneuver reserves in an operational-depth counteroffensive, perhaps in the first week of a war. But Soviet assessments considered the latter option scenario-driven and contingent on
the outcomes of a series of hard-to-predict operational subtasks, first and foremost, the struggle for fire superiority.

CONCLUSION: DEFENSE AND THE INITIAL PERIOD

What, then, are the overall conclusions of our examination of Soviet military thinking after May 1987 on defensive operations? Put somewhat differently, how did the new defensive military doctrine influence the General Staff in its development of military art?

First, we must stress that the analysis in Secs. VI–VIII encompasses only the defensive phase of the defense-to-counteroffensive progression. Soviet military art recognized this initial period of war as a special case, differing in critical respects from subsequent phases. But while the military viewed this phase as a prelude to counteroffensive action, they nonetheless considered it fraught with danger and tremendous operational challenges. They expected the fronts to assume a defensive posture and to conduct defensive action until the attacker had been worn down. They portrayed defense not as a fleeting contingency, but as a serious eventuality for which the armed forces had to be trained and equipped.

Despite what appeared to be damage-control efforts and eyewash in the initial months following the publication of the new defensive doctrine, the Soviet military were unable to resist for long the party leadership’s increasing pressures in the military policy area. The holdout ended in summer 1988, after the 19th All-Union Party Conference in June insisted on the application of “qualitative parameters” in both force building and the development of military art.

Faced with the determination of the political leadership unilaterally to cut Soviet manpower and weaponry, based on a less pessimistic assessment of the threat from the West, the General Staff seems to have realized that it had to accept the changes. Despite decades of conditioning, authoritative military scientists by the end of 1988 were earnestly and sometimes urgently thinking through the special demands of modern defensive warfare, then characterized for the first time as the main form of military action.77

The defensive operations envisaged by these thinkers, many of whom were generals with ties to the General Staff, could be

77Thus, while it is true that the evolving Soviet defensive concept includes aggressive counteraction, particularly by fire assets, and that a potential for preemption inheres in this concept, it is not correct to suggest—in the context of a war’s initial period—that current Soviet strategy is merely a modification of previous offensive strategy. The Soviet sources analyzed in this report envision the initial period as a somewhat frantic effort to regain the strategic initiative from a formidable and unpredictable foe. Subsequent sections will examine the counteroffensive period in current Soviet thought.
distinguished in essential ways from operations that were expected to be conducted in the early stage of a war under the former doctrine. Where earlier strategy called for defensive action in response to an attack, such action was to be brief, followed rapidly by operational/strategic-scale counteroffensives with decisive encirclement objectives.  

The new doctrine led to the development during 1988 and 1989 of a strategy for conducting more prolonged defensive operations punctuated with powerful counterstrikes, the objective of which was the destruction or disruption of NATO’s main offensive grouping. The operational context suggested by the Soviet discussions examined indicated that the authors did not expect these counterstrikes to have the potential for deep penetration into enemy territory. In this paradigm, preemption appeared to be linked mainly to early fire counterstrikes against NATO deep-strike assets.

In terms of our framework of analysis, the preponderance of evidence suggests that General Staff theorists were developing a concept of defensive operations more resembling variant three of Kokoshin and Larionov than variant two. This conclusion applies especially to the employment of reserves and the balance between position and maneuver in the defense.

Again, the concept of prolonged defensive operations and occasional powerful counterstrikes was then considered the main and most likely variant of initial operational action. It conformed to a Soviet military assessment that portrayed NATO as an aggressive, offensive threat. These published military discussions, however, consistently omitted one variant: that of unhindered Soviet occupation of their forward defensive positions, no enemy preemptive mass fire strikes, and no large-scale offensive by NATO.

The four-part paradigm of Kokoshin and Larionov is a useful tool for analysis, but its assessments of crisis stability are likewise driven by a pessimistic and simplistic military-political scenario: aggressor attacks, defender responds. Again, based on what we can see, during 1988 and 1989 the Soviet military’s operational thinkers labored under a similar methodological constraint.

More realistic variants, such as those based on NATO military preparations short of attack, or NATO counterpreparations in response to perceived danger, must exist in the files of the General Staff.

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70Sectors opposite strong NATO corps might defend for a prolonged period, launching tactical or operational-tactical attacks to tie down the maneuver of these NATO forces while other fronts executed the encirclement. John G. Hines, “Soviet Operations in Europe—Planning for Surprise and Encirclement,” paper presented to the Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, Toronto, May 5, 1987.
Discussion of these in the pages of Military Thought would tell us a great deal. The Soviet military would have had to pay a high price in 1988–1989 for a more realistic scenario: Its contrived ideological image of the enemy as uncompromisingly aggressive would have been shattered irreparably. Although this image was already fast fading in the unaccustomed light of “new thinking” and the unprecedented attention and exposure being given Western countries, evidently many in the top ranks of the armed forces continued to hold and to use it to forestall rapid changes in military strategy.

Or perhaps serious consideration of crisis scenarios, in contrast to war scenarios, does not fall within the purview of the General Staff. General Staff operational planners may not handle the particulars of military-political decisionmaking in a crisis, because of both the sensitivity of these matters and the requirement for civilian control of the armed forces. In the past, the General Staff has dealt primarily with war and only secondarily with how the USSR might get into or avoid war. Nonetheless, given the stunning developments of 1989, the Soviet military undoubtedly cannot continue to use tendentious, stereotyped assessments of the military-political threat from the West to preserve previously existing forces and operational concepts.
IX. COUNTEROFFENSIVE: WHERE DEFENSIVE DOCTRINE ENDS

The foregoing analysis concluded that Soviet military art for the initial period of war, as developed in 1988 and 1989, conformed in the main to the key positions of the new Warsaw Pact military doctrine. We judged it "defensive" because the main concepts of action that it considers and the force posture implied by those concepts best suit defensive, albeit aggressive, initial operations in the Western TSMA.

As the following analysis indicates, however, the General Staff had planned that early in a war Soviet forces would switch, perhaps suddenly, from general defensive operations to a counteroffensive. The transition of Soviet fronts to counteroffensive operations would mark the end of the initial period of the war and, simultaneously, the activation of an operational concept seemingly far removed from the "strictly defensive thrust" of the enunciated Soviet doctrine.

STRATEGY SUPERSEDES DOCTRINE

Throughout 1988 and 1989, senior Soviet command and staff personnel implied that defensive actions would predominate only in the initial period of a war. Fleet Admiral Chernavin, the Navy CinC, wrote, for example: "The defensive character of Soviet military doctrine influences the content of operations and combat actions first and foremost in the initial period of the war."¹ According to Gareyev, "the basic type(s) of combat actions in the repulsion of aggression at the beginning of a war, should one be unleashed upon us, will be defensive battles and operations."²

Even after the announcement of the new defensive military doctrine in May 1987, however, the military continued to preserve the counteroffensive as a central and indispensable part of Soviet theater strategy. By revamping military art and force posture so that the counteroffensive period follows, rather than coincides with, the initial

¹Fleet Admiral Vladimir Nikolayevich Chernavin, "Vysokaya bditel'nost' i boysovaya gotovnost'—veleniye vremenii" (High Vigilance and Combat Readiness—the Call of the Time), Morskoy sbornik (Naval Collection), February 1988, p. 5.
²Gareyev, interview, "Vozrashchennye sily v usloviyakh glasnosti" (The Armed Forces in Conditions of Openness), Argumenty i fakty, No. 39, June 1988, p. 4; Salmanov made a similar assertion, December 1988, p. 9.
period of a war, the General Staff could argue that their new strategy met the demands of war prevention.

By maintaining the counteroffensive as an integral component of strategy, the General Staff was able to preserve elements of the earlier, offensive-oriented strategy and, to some extent, the forces and armaments required to implement that strategy. The General Staff used highly pessimistic threat assessments to buttress its argument for maintaining a powerful counteroffensive capability. Moreover, the military during this period may have successfully argued that decisive counteroffensive actions were needed to fulfill the doctrine’s deterrent threat “to give a devastating rebuff to an aggressor.”

Discussion in Military Thought in 1988 and 1989 tended to confirm the impression of doctrinal duality suggested by Yazov, i.e., of a defensive strategy “in repelling aggression,” and of a more offensive one “after the repulsion of an attack.” This discussion did not, however, substantially support earlier contentions that the counteroffensive should expand into a decisive general offensive aimed at the “complete destruction” of the enemy.

In fact, as noted in Sec. II, published discussions during the period examined contained no substantive information on the intended scope and final objectives of counteroffensive operations, the forces to be included in it, and the likelihood of transition to a theater-strategic conventional offensive operation. We do not know whether these omissions indicated secrecy, diplomatic concerns, or continuing debate in military circles.

FROM DEFENSE TO COUNTEROFFENSIVE

The Soviets thought of the strategic defense and the subsequent counteroffensive almost as two sides of the same coin. In one view, the “maximal weakening of the enemy offensive groupings and a change in the correlation of forces to the defender’s advantage [determined] the possibility of preparation and transition to a counteroffensive.” The second required condition for this transition was “the preparation and

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3“Underestimation in assessment of the enemy and the character of a possible war, and exaggeration of our potential to repel aggression is now highly dangerous. The enemy is sufficiently strong, and to defeat him will be by no means simple, although any other outcome, naturally, is impermissible.” Salmanov, December 1988, pp. 8–9 (emphasis in the original).


5Yazov, Na strazhe . . . , pp. 32–33.

6Khor’kov, p. 12.
concentration beforehand of operational reserves” and the creation from these of strike groupings on the main axes of attack.\textsuperscript{7}

The Soviets could consider these two tasks—weakening the enemy and the preparation of reserves—as more or less independent. The first involved the seizure of fire superiority and the placing of aggressive front counterstrikes; the second required the readiness, mobilization, regrouping, and protection of operational-scale reserves. Soviet thinking on fire superiority and counterstrikes in defensive operations was discussed in Secs. VII and VIII, above. This thinking is best summarized by the postulated “convergence of methods for conducting operations” in both the offense and the defense and by “the blurring of the borders” between many key tasks and methods employed in operations involving nuclear or conventional weaponry.\textsuperscript{8}

The upshot of this new principle of Soviet military art was that defending forces—combining conventional firepower, electronic warfare, and strikes by maneuver forces—might be able to completely disrupt enemy offensive operations and “inflict decisive destruction” on attacking formations even before the transition to a full-scale counteroffensive or offensive.\textsuperscript{9} The expectation that aggressive initial defensive operations conducted by forward-deployed forces should result in a decisive change in the correlation between attacker and defender appeared throughout discussions in 1988–1989.\textsuperscript{10}

According to this thinking, a thoroughly prepared, intentional positional defense by Soviet armies and fronts was required to exhaust and halt the maneuver component of an attacker’s strike force.\textsuperscript{11} However, the sought-after capability for more determined actions—“powerful fire destruction and aggressive counterstrikes by defending forces” that target enemy follow-on forces and, most crucially, his deep-fire systems—led to a sharp escalation in defensive objectives. The fulfillment of these objectives was to facilitate the transition to a counteroffensive by

\textsuperscript{7}Ibid., p. 13; Khor’kov also points to air superiority as “an indispensable prerequisite for a successful transition to the counteroffensive.” Like most other writers in recent Military Thought discussions, however, he devotes little attention to this challenging requirement. While Salmanov, for instance, identifies NATO’s tactical aviation as the backbone of its current deep-strike capability and urges “intensive search” for effective countermeasures, he, like the others, seems to concentrate far more on the danger from advanced-technology PGMs under development than on winning air superiority. These authors do not discuss, for instance, the role of the Soviet strategic air operation (ozdushnaya operatsiya).

\textsuperscript{8}Korotchenko, p. 29.

\textsuperscript{9}Ibid., p. 29.

\textsuperscript{10}See, for example, Salmanov, December, 1988, pp. 9–10; Manzhurin, pp. 12–13; Andriyenko, pp. 23, 27; Zlobin and Lushchan, p. 20; Korotchenko, p. 25.

\textsuperscript{11}Salmanov, February, 1988, p. 35; Vorob’yov, January, 1988, p. 45.
destroying the enemy forces and means in his rear that might have threatened the success of the counteroffensive.

The failure to obtain fire superiority from the beginning of a conflict, Soviet sources implied, would critically undermine the stability and aggressiveness of a defense and might thereby threaten the goal of launching the counteroffensive. Such a failure also would place counterstrike groupings formed from the second echelons and reserves of forward-deployed fronts at grave risk from enemy deep fires.

Counterstrike groupings that nonetheless managed to maneuver forward would lack effective fire support, and their efforts could well end in disaster. Together, the inability to conduct effective front counterstrikes and the failure to neutralize enemy deep fires could easily undermine the operational stability of the defense, thereby threatening its collapse. Such failures could easily derail plans for a counteroffensive. The cumulative negative effect explains why Soviet operational thinkers considered the early seizure and retention of fire superiority so crucial.

Mobilization, Strategic Reserves, and Counteroffensive

The issue of mobilization, whether partial or general, overt or covert, is complex but vital to the transition from defense to counteroffensives. Army General Stanislav Ivanovich Postnikov, CinC of the Western Strategic Direction, pointed to the creation, concentration, and skillful use of strategic reserves as a factor in the success of the battle of Kursk.13

According to a Western analyst who has examined Soviet mobilization-related issues, political considerations seriously constrain mobilization processes—overt and covert—in the crucial western military districts. Soviet military theorists appeared to believe that covert mobilization would quickly give way to the outbreak of war and

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12 According to Salmanov, December 1988 (p. 11), the capability for rapid conventional fire destruction of entire echelons of tactical and even operational-sized formations is beginning to emerge.

13 "Razvitiye sovetskogo voennyogo iskusstva v Kurskoy bitve" (Development of Soviet Military Art in the Battle of Kursk), VIZh, July 1988, p. 17.

wide-scale mobilization under attack.\textsuperscript{15} Salmanov’s demand that forward-deployed fronts be able to conduct—without reinforcement—the first defensive operations of a future war further supported this assessment.\textsuperscript{16} Thus, unlike in the battle of Kursk, the initial strategic defense would proceed by necessity without the immediate presence of large-scale forces designated for a subsequent counteroffensive.\textsuperscript{17}

Soviet discussions in \textit{Military Thought} did not specifically link the mechanics of mobilization and the planning of a counteroffensive. Western assessments suggested that although the Soviet Union could have mobilized prodigious numbers of men in a short period, many units would have required several weeks to attain battle readiness. The mobilization, preparation, and regrouping of large-scale reserves from the Western military districts of the USSR would have required close to two weeks.\textsuperscript{18} Soviet theorists consider the duration of the initial period of the war a complicated issue; however, they accepted the experience of World War II as a more or less valid indicator, assuming no nuclear use.\textsuperscript{19}

\section*{TIMING THE COUNTEROFFENSIVE}

The statements of several senior Soviet military officers supported the above evaluation of the duration of the initial period of the war. Akhromeyev said, for example: 

\textsuperscript{15}Yurechko, “Soviet Reinforcement . . .,” p. 77.

\textsuperscript{16}Salmanov, December 1988, p. 10.

\textsuperscript{17}This view of initial strategic defense without major reserves is apparently the current one, despite the fact that many past Soviet analyses of the initial period of the war argued for the need to maintain or deploy strategic reserves before the onset of future hostilities. See Kozlov, p. 35; Yevseyev, “O nekotorykh tendentsiyakh v izmeneni soderzhaniya i kharaktera nachal’nogo perioda voyny” (Some Trends in the Content and Character Changes of the Initial Period of War), \textit{VIZh}, November 1986, p. 20, and March 1986, p. 19; Kir’yan, June 1988, p. 17; Colonel General V. N. Karpov, “Sozdaniye i ispol’zovaniye strategicheskikh rezervov v gody voyny” (The Creation and Employment of Strategic Reserves in the War Years), \textit{VIZh}, July 1985, p. 67.

\textsuperscript{18}See, for example, Thomson, pp. 16–17.

\textsuperscript{19}Kir’yan, the Soviet military’s foremost student of issues relating to the initial period of the war, considers its duration following Germany’s attack on the Soviet Union in 1941 to have been approximately three weeks. This was the time required for the first seven armies of the \textit{Stavka} strategic reserve to regroup forward and unite into a “front of reserve armies.” In the last week of July 1941, a month after the surprise attack, 14 divisions of this front conducted a “powerful counterstrike” before Smolensk. Kir’yan, June 1988, p. 17; Kunitskiy, July 1988, pp. 57–58. See also Marshal Ivan Khristoforovich Bagramyan, “Kharakter i osobennosti nachal’nogo perioda voyny” (The Character and Particularities of the Initial Period of the War), \textit{VIZh}, October 1981, p. 27.
We are planning for long defensive operations to repel a possible aggression, if it proves impossible to end this aggression by political means. Then, and only after around three or four weeks, we might launch a counterattack.²⁰

Akhromeyev is reported to have made similar assertions during his visit to the United States in summer 1988.²¹ According to a Soviet General Staff officer, “clear lines by time” distinguish a force with a counteroffensive capability from one structured for an immediate offensive; a force needing extensive preparation or movement time could be used only for a counteroffensive.²²

Larionov pointed to counteroffensive timing as the historical lesson of the battle of Kursk most valuable for the present day:

The exact time of the commencement of large-scale aggressive actions was not fixed beforehand. The skill of the Soviet command consisted in its holding the initiative even in the period of repelling the offensive of the German fascist forces and choosing the moment most critical for the enemy and advantageous for us to make the transition to the counteroffensive.²³

According to Larionov, German forces attacking on the north face of the Kursk salient, despite great efforts, managed to penetrate only to a depth of 12 kilometers into the sector of a Soviet front defending there. When the remaining German forces clearly could not breach the front’s defense, two adjacent Soviet fronts commenced a planned counteroffensive.²⁴ As a recent discussion of counteroffensive timing in modern conventional warfare emphasized,

_The transition to the counteroffensive is . . . possible, in our view, in conditions where the attacker, expending his forces and means, hastily begins to cross over to the defense in order to obtain breathing space and to bring up forces from the depth. . . . In these conditions, it is extraordinarily important not to permit the fortification of a defense hastily occupied by the enemy. First and foremost, [so as] not to give him the opportunity to organize a system of fire and artificial obstacles._²⁵

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²³Larionov, p. 18.

²⁴Ibid., p. 19.

²⁵Andriyenko, p. 27.
During the period examined, Soviet discussions of the counteroffensive underscored the importance of the Kursk experience, particularly in light of doctrinal changes in 1988–1989 favoring initial defense. Army General Postnikov, examining the execution of the defensive/counteroffensive concept at Kursk, noted, as had Larionov, the decisiveness of timing the counteroffensive to coincide with the cessation of effective German assaults, yet to begin before the enemy had managed to create coherent defensive formations.

In modern war, this “window of opportunity” might soon close. At Kursk, the opportunity arose on the north face of the salient a week after the German offensive there began. Several armies and the Bryansk Front, which were not participating in the defense, immediately launched a surprise strike. Within days, the forces of three Soviet fronts were involved in this planned counteroffensive, designated “Operation Kutuzov.”

Despite being of “exceptional significance for the success” of a counteroffensive, the prior preparation of large-scale reserves and “their stationing in accordance with the concept of conducting aggressive actions” is unlikely to be possible in a modern war. Most Soviet military discussions during the 1988–1989 period appeared to acknowledge this situation, which in effect greatly restricted the utility of the Kursk paradigm. Coordinating the regrouping of strategic reserves to coincide with the optimal moment for the start of counteroffensive operations would have posed daunting logistic and operational problems for Soviet planners. The window of opportunity for a counteroffensive might have closed before Soviet forces were able to strike effectively.

DEEP FIRES AND COUNTEROFFENSIVE

The above analysis indicates that Soviet operational planners preparing for a counteroffensive were likely to face circumstances that differed greatly from those at Kursk in July 1943. The Soviet High Command, after developing the operational concept in April 1943, had

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26Postnikov, p. 18.
27Ibid., p. 15.
28Ibid., p. 15.
29Khor’kov, p. 16.
30Political constraints would create further problems. If, as Akhromeyev implied, political negotiations affected the decision to initiate a counteroffensive, the optimal time for its launching could pass, despite the presence of the necessary forces. Any strategic pause occasioned by political rather than military concerns might well undermine the success of an otherwise carefully planned counteroffensive operation.
three months in which to fortify the Kursk salient and to concentrate enormous strategic reserves.\textsuperscript{31} Thus, by July 12, 1943,

at the moment of the offensive on the Orel axis, the forces of the Bryansk Front, the Central Front, and the left wing of the Western Front possessed an overall superiority over the enemy of twofold in personnel, threefold in artillery and mortars, more than twofold in tanks, and almost threefold in aviation. In all, 22 combined-arms, 5 tank, and 6 air armies... took part in [the operation].\textsuperscript{32}

Our discussion of the counterstrike in Sec. VIII, above, indicated an alternative variant that Soviet operational thinkers have considered for the transition to a counteroffensive. In this variant, counterstrikes by the reserves and second echelons of forward-deployed fronts meet with such success that they are able to serve as the “initial stage of the counteroffensive operation.”\textsuperscript{33} Forces from the strategic reserve, given their timely movement, would then presumably be committed to exploit the successes achieved by these early front counterstrikes.

Attractive as this option must have seemed to Soviet planners—given its robust combination of surprise, maneuver, and decisiveness—it probably could not, as we saw, have been implemented without fire superiority. In Soviet thinking, counterstrikes and counteroffensives have similar fire objectives. Enemy deep-fire systems and reconnaissance must be destroyed so that maneuver formations are not rapidly detected and targeted.\textsuperscript{34}

Discussions in \textit{Military Thought} during this period also showed that Soviet operational thinkers knew of the targets and methods in NATO deep-fire concepts, realized their operational implications, and were formulating measures to protect Soviet counterstrike and counteroffensive groupings in case of a failure to quickly win fire supremacy.\textsuperscript{35}

Specifically, in the placing of front counterstrikes, the Soviets recognized that any concentration of forces in compact groupings, “even at a substantial depth and for a comparatively brief time,” put them at high risk from enemy fire strikes. They expected to concentrate their forces instead “in the course of the movement” of tactical formations and units from the rear and from other sectors toward one of several

\textsuperscript{31}Andrey A. Kokoshin and Valentin V. Larionov, “Kurakaya bitva v svete sovremennoy oboronitel’noy doktriny” (The Battle of Kursk in Light of Contemporary Defensive Doctrine), \textit{Mirovaya ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya}, March 1987, p. 38.

\textsuperscript{32}Postnikov, p. 15.

\textsuperscript{33}Andriyenko, p. 27.

\textsuperscript{34}Soviet deep-fire thinking focuses on the “counterbattery” mission, whereas NATO deep-fire concepts concentrate on killing armor.

\textsuperscript{35}Andriyenko, p. 30; Manzhurin, p. 15; Zlobin and Luahchan, p. 26; Salmanov, December 1988, p. 11.
preplanned areas. In launching counteroffensives, in contrast, the assembly of strike groupings “in the course of their approach” followed by their “introduction into battle from the march” was seen as less feasible:

They [the forces] may require refueling, replenishment of ordnance, correction of objectives, etc. In any case, forces must be located in compact groupings and in restricted spaces for a minimal period. . . . For these purposes, for example, materiel can be concentrated beforehand in designated areas. . . . Force deployment areas [will facilitate] the movement of forces to the lines of their engagement into battle without having to overcome serious, natural obstacles, and, moreover, should ensure the possibility of rapid escape from the enemy’s probable massed fire strikes.

Nevertheless, given four primary methods for protecting counteroffensive groupings from fire destruction—reducing the duration of their preparation and concentration, air defense, camouflage (maskirovka), and aggressive counterfires—these discussions clearly indicated that the Soviet military had given top priority to the neutralization of NATO deep fires.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS: COUNTEROFFENSIVE SCALE AND OBJECTIVES

During 1988 and 1989, high-level Soviet discussions of strategy clearly indicated that counteroffensive operations were designated to follow the strategic defensive. These writings also provided a more-or-less comprehensive treatment of problems relating to the preparation, protection, and timing of a counteroffensive. The decision to launch a counteroffensive, these sources suggested, would be a military one based on an assessment of strategic, rather than political, factors. But beyond these areas of relative certainty lay many unanswered questions.

An otherwise informative article on the counteroffensive, for example, provided little substantive information on important operational parameters, such as the number of armies and/or fronts expected to be employed in future counteroffensives in the European theater, the required depth of objectives, and the expected duration of these operations. The author asserted, however, that “a series of successive and

36Manzhurin, p. 16; he admits, however, that this on-the-go concentration poses a “rather more complicated” problem of troop control.
37Andriyenko, p. 51.
simultaneous offensive operations” might follow an initial counteroffensive to increase its depth.38

The ultimate objective—to break the enemy's strategic front—could be achieved, the author suggested, by continuous reinforcement with fresh reserves and by the transition of neighboring fronts to the counteroffensive.39 He managed, if only in passing, to suggest the possibility of a group of fronts conducting a general offensive, but he failed to explore the obvious strategic and military-political implications associated with such a campaign.

Indeed, the abrupt cessation in 1988 of substantive discussions of problems of the strategic offensive in Soviet military publications suggested that debate on offensive topics had been artificially limited to the counteroffensive. Under “new thinking,” the General Staff and military science in general may well have been directed to confine their remarks to the defense/counteroffensive theme, at least in open discussions.

The new military doctrine mandated answering an attack on the Warsaw Pact with “a devastating rebuff.” One could not surmise, however, whether this “rebuff” would have been limited to a counteroffensive or might have expanded into a strategic offensive operation. Defense Minister Yazov, who had called in 1987 for a decisive offensive to follow the counteroffensive in a future war, by late 1989 had retreated from this position: “Until recently, we planned to repel aggressions with defensive as well as offensive operations. Now, however, we are planning defensive operations as the basic form of our combat action.”40

Clearly, however, by 1988 the counteroffensive had become one of several focuses in the debate between Soviet military and civilian analysts on the proper direction for the development of Soviet military strategy and force posture.41 The military favored a robust counteroffensive capability, while civilians argued that this contradicted the demands of the new military doctrine:

“Success” in the defeat of the enemy’s armed forces will lead unavoidably to escalation to the nuclear level, with all the resultant consequences. . . . This is why the transformation of the stated task to the task of repulsion of attack at the level of conventional weapons and the renunciation of immediate counteroffensive

38Ibid.
39Ibid.
actions—reinforced with an appropriate structure and deployment of forces—will correspond in the greatest degree to the defensive principles proclaimed for the development of the armed forces.\(^{42}\)

We concluded above that current Soviet operational thinking for the initial period of war corresponded, in the main, to the third of Kokoshin and Larionov’s four variants of war commencement. In the period examined, variant four—nonoffensive defense—remained a hypothetical future option for General Staff strategists, well outside the realm of the presently possible.\(^{43}\)

As Kokoshin and Larionov had argued, however, the problem with variant three relates to the difficulty of limiting final wartime objectives to a restoration of the status quo ante bellum. In their view, the defender against an initial attack might not limit his objectives to the defeat of the attacking enemy grouping; a desire for “compensation” might impel him to expand his efforts beyond operational-scale objectives and to undertake a full-scale counteroffensive into enemy territory.\(^{44}\)

Some Soviet civilian analysts apparently believed that, behind their reticence, Soviet military planners still harbored visions of rerunning the victorious offensive campaign of 1945, using the modern form of the theater-strategic offensive. General Staff forecasts of future conflict—which still stressed the need to prepare for a prolonged world war—lent credence to the suspicion that the military considered the defense/counteroffensive concept alone as inadequate for extended warfighting in modern conditions.\(^{45}\)


\(^{43}\)As for the essence of defense and methods of waging it on any scale, from tactical to strategic, this cannot exclude elements of attack, including counterattacks and counterstrokes undertaken in order to stop the advance of the aggressor. ... We can hardly talk seriously of ‘nonoffensive defense,’ which is consciously weakened by limits on the range of weapons, the nonuse of highly mobile formations, the loss of one’s territory, and excessive dispersion of troops and armaments. All this contradicts the objective logic of military operations, including defense.” Army General Grigorii Ivanovich Salanov, “Rejecting the Sword,” \(\textit{Soviet Military Review}\), May 1989, p. 7.

\(^{44}\)Kokoshin and Larionov, June 1988, pp. 27–28. A General Staff Academy representative attempted to convince members of a U.S. congressional delegation that the aim of a Soviet counteroffensive would be limited to restoration of the status quo ante bellum and that the USSR had no plans for ground forces to cross into enemy territory. See U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, \textit{Report of the Committee Delegation to West Berlin, East Germany and the Soviet Union, August 6–18, 1989, October 16, 1989}, p. 9.

\(^{45}\)“It is evident that the USSR and the countries of the socialist commonwealth must be ready for all the enumerated [types of] wars. In our view, the main stress should be placed, in this case, on reaching the country and their armed forces for the gravest variant—a \textit{prolonged world war}—should it be unleashed by imperialist militarism. . . .
Military discussions of Soviet military strategy in this period avoided the word “victory” (pobeda). They did, however, use the term “defeat” (razgrom), which, in the military context, was defined as one side’s inability to continue to fight in a particular battle or operation, but which could also be applied to the large-scale defeat of one side’s armed forces in a war. Note, for example, the ambiguity of the following fairly typical statement:

Our military doctrine proceeds from the position that the basic method of action for the Soviet armed forces will be defensive operations with subsequent offensive actions directed at the defeat of the enemy.

One unique discussion of the relevance of victory under the new doctrine unambiguously rejected this concept in the context of a nuclear war, but glossed over its validity in a conventional war. The authors argued that if, in the past,

the possibility and inevitability of victory as a feature of social development applied to any war, a different approach is required today. The traditional concept of victory, from the social-political viewpoint, is entirely unacceptable for a modern world war, a global nuclear conflict.

But whereas they deemed complete defeat and forcible political reorientation of another state unacceptable, they apparently accepted the idea of lesser victories over its armed forces:

[The] military side of victory is not being discarded at all its levels. Therefore, the duty and obligation of military cadres and of all army and navy personnel is to be at highest readiness for the repulsion of aggression and the defeat of an enemy, and to be intent on victory in battle.

Well into 1989, some statements emanating from the top echelons of the armed forces reinforced the notion that the military sought to maintain a robust, rather than a restricted, interpretation of the con-

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[A]ll types of weapons, including nuclear, may be employed, and military actions will be conducted on an enormous scale . . . with substantial losses and devastation.” Salmanov, December 1988, p. 8.


47Ibid., p. 12.

48Ibid.

49Ibid., p. 13.
cept of victory.\textsuperscript{50} Civilian analysts, in contrast, called openly for a drastic review of the notion of victory at the conventional level, as well as the nuclear, and for the restriction of counterattack/counteroffensive capabilities to the operational-tactical level.\textsuperscript{51}

The debate over the counteroffensive continued until late in 1989.\textsuperscript{52} In contrast to their behavior with regard to unilateral force reductions and moving to a professional army, the military did not publicly advocate their position on issues related to the counteroffensive, despite the apparently fundamental differences over the size, shape, and overall capability of counteroffensive action.\textsuperscript{53} Civilian defense analysts, however, continued to deal with the full range of issues and uncertainties associated with counteroffensive operations.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{50}The Warsaw Pact chief of staff pointed out in a recent interview that the purpose of defensive operations was to stop the enemy offensive, wear down his forces, hold territory, and “provide conditions for a complete defeat of the enemy troops.” He added that such a defeat was impossible without the launching of a “decisive counteroffensive.” Colonel General Vladimir Nikolaevich Lobov, “Towards More Security,” New Times, No. 29, July 1989, p. 9.


\textsuperscript{52}In mid-1989, an unattributed article on defensive doctrine distributed by the Novosti press agency appeared in a Warsaw paper. Its contents, which purport to describe changes in the military-technical side of Pact doctrine, seem sharply at odds with mainstream Soviet military thinking, but resemble that of some civilian analysts: “From the point of view of military art, defensive operations are becoming the central feature of the strategy of the Warsaw Pact armed forces. This strategy completely rules out the possibility of any preemptive strike, regardless of the political circumstances in favor of such a strike. New views about the nature and effects of modern warfare have led to the abandonment of planned wide-scale strategic operations in order to achieve ‘victorious results.’ Counteroffensive action is viewed in more realistic terms. Its purpose is to halt the aggressor, reestablish the status quo ante, and prevent an escalation of military action and a loss of control by both sides over this action.” “The Defensive Doctrine of the Warsaw Pact States,” Zolnierz Wołności, Warsaw, June 26, 1989, p. 4, FBIS-EEU-89-124, June 29, 1989, p. 46.

\textsuperscript{53}See Collins. One rather interesting exception was an article by a military academic who attacked Western “distortion” of the content and significance of Soviet military doctrine, in particular, the attempt to prove that “a doctrine that acknowledges the possibility of offensive actions cannot be defensive. And since this is so, no matter how much the Soviets renovate their doctrine, it still remains offensive, and consequently aggressive.” He derided attempts to present “the purely military, operational-tactical term ‘offensive’” as a political category to “distort the essence of Soviet military doctrine in one’s own way.” V. Rodachin, “Pri chem zdes’ ‘yazyk Oruela?’” (Why the Orwellian Language Here?), KZ, February 7, 1989, p. 3.

The military's reticence may have stemmed from the atmosphere of uncertainty and fluidity that characterized Soviet military affairs after the December 1988 announcement of unilateral force reductions. The General Staff may well have feared yet another policy surprise—similar to the unexpected declaration of a defensive doctrine, the elevation of qualitative criteria in force development, the major reassessment of the military threat from the West, the unilateral reduction, and the adoption of reasonable sufficiency—and was therefore pursuing a course of flexibility and prudence in the meantime. In any event, after the revolutionary changes that swept through the Warsaw Pact states in late 1989, the unanswered questions surrounding Soviet counteroffensive strategy seemed to matter less and less.
X. CONCLUSION

Soviet military policy was already in a state of flux, even disarray, well before the upheavals in Eastern Europe effectively deprived the Soviet Armed Forces of their first strategic echelon. The statements of senior Soviet military leaders during 1989 indicated that military scientists were struggling to regain their bearings, especially in the area of Soviet military art.

THREAT ASSESSMENT AND SOVIET MILITARY STRATEGY

Differing Soviet assessments of the military threat to the USSR probably made a major contribution to the indeterminacy evident in Soviet operational thinking during 1988 and 1989. Soviet military doctrine closely links threat assessment and military strategy:

The military-technical side of the doctrine deals with at least four groups of questions—an evaluation of the nature of the military threat to the USSR and its allies, the composition of the armed forces necessary to rebuff aggression, what to train them for, and how to employ them.¹

A greater military threat requires more capable forces and a more aggressive strategy. A reassessment of the military threat, then, should trigger appropriate changes in force structure and operational concepts. The Soviet military, and particularly its General Staff, have had enormous influence on the specifics of the reassessment process because they have the greatest professional competence in this area.

In the period considered here, however, the final word on threat assessment in all likelihood belonged to the Soviet political leaders, who were compelled to consider broader issues than the purely military, i.e., diplomacy and the Soviet economy. Under the circumstances, the political leadership may have consulted individuals and bodies outside the Soviet defense and security apparatus as part of the threat assessment process.²

Throughout 1989, the top Soviet military leaders sought to buttress their contention that the Soviet Union continued to face a serious

¹Moiseyev, March 1989, p. 5.
²For more on the issue of civilian influence, see Lambeth, pp. 1–4.
military threat and thus, implicitly, that it still needed robust forces and aggressive operational concepts. The frequency and urgency of the military's public statements on this question increased steadily during 1989. To a significant degree, the debate on the threat represented the front line of the more momentous debate over military art and force posture.

A major reassessment of the threat had taken place in 1988, however, probably around the time of the 19th All-Union Party Conference. Marshal Akhromeyev confirmed in a television interview that

By the middle of 1988 our state's political and military leadership arrived at a unanimous view that the situation was becoming less tense; that a military and political situation had taken shape in which the Soviet Union could unilaterally reduce its armed forces.\(^3\)

In effect, one key element of military doctrine had changed, thereby necessitating the revision of other doctrinal categories, most notably force structure, and probably operational concepts as well. A month before Gorbachev’s announcement of unilateral force cuts at the UN in December 1988, Foreign Minister Shevardnadze had said:

Today there is no doubt that the new thinking in foreign policy has led to breakthroughs of a profound qualitative character. The conclusion that it has been possible to put aside the threat of war is not disputed by anyone in the world. It is a reality felt by every Soviet person.\(^4\)

Speaking in Vienna on March 6, 1989, Shevardnadze linked the unilateral Soviet actions to “a new approach to assessing the probability and degree of the military threat from the West.”\(^5\) In a July 1989 address to the Council of Europe, Gorbachev attributed this reassessment to one of the chief principles of new thinking, namely, the declining capacity of military means to provide security:

We began with a critical reexamination of our notions on the military confrontation in Europe, on the scale of the external threat, and on the relevance of the factor of force in strengthening security. This has not come easily; indeed it has sometimes been painful. But

\(^3\) Marshal Sergey Fedorovich Akhromeyev, Interview, Vzglyad (Viewpoint), Moscow Television Service I, October 9, 1989, FBIS-SOV-89-197, October 13, 1989, p. 97.


as a result, decisions were adopted which enable the removal of
East-West relations from the vicious circle of "action-reaction."\(^6\)

Whether for reasons of security and the arms race, or for other
equally compelling reasons, the political leaders were willing to take
unilateral steps to reduce force levels and to revise operational con-
cepts. They seemed aware that bold policy initiatives in the military
area create positive impressions and responses in the West, thus per-
mitting further downward revision of the military-political threat sup-
posedly emanating from NATO and the United States.\(^7\)

In a January 1989 meeting with members of the Trilateral Com-
mission, Gorbachev again alluded to this reactive approach to threat
management: "When we speak of defensive sufficiency of the armed
forces, one must keep in mind that this is a changing concept. Its con-
tents depend on how the West conducts itself."\(^8\)

The need for close coordination of defense policy and diplomacy
apparently led to increased participation by the Foreign Ministry in
the formulation and implementation of policy in such areas as threat
assessment, force reductions, and doctrine.\(^9\) The military's apparently
uncooperative stance during the Defense Council's deliberations on
unilateral force reductions in 1988 may have contributed to the Foreign
Ministry's rising influence.\(^10\)

In general, the political leadership's threat assessments grew steadily
more optimistic during 1989. In a major policy speech to the Supreme
Soviet on May 30, Gorbachev said: "Despite deep differences in the
social systems, in each of them objective possibilities have arisen for
movement to a fundamentally new peaceful period in the history of

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\(^6\)"Rech' M. S. Gorbacheva" (Speech of M. S. Gorbachev), Pravda, July 7, 1989, p. 2.

\(^7\)Shevardnadze said on May 31 in Paris: "We are satisfied that our line of conducting
matters 'from a position of strength,' the strength of initiative, is proving effective—the
peace offensive is giving results." Shevardnadze, "Velikaya tsel'—obespechit' prava
cheloveka" (The Great Objective—To Ensure Human Rights), Pravda, June 1, 1989.


\(^9\)At a conference of Ministry of Foreign Affairs party members in November 1988,
Shevardnadze said: "In addresses to the conference, it has been justifiably pointed out
that we are still not everywhere acting with sufficient consistency. Indeed, we are over-
due in elaborating and firming up the military doctrine and imparting to it a strictly
defensive thrust. This issue is always on our agenda. It is receiving in-depth,
comprehensive work." Shevardnadze, December 1, 1988, p. 13; see also "Criticism of the

\(^10\)In his appearance on Vzglyad, October 9, 1989, Akhromeyev revealed that, in the
months preceding Gorbachev's UN announcement, the Defense Council had rejected
several General Staff force reduction packages. See Akhromeyev, FBIS-SOV-89-197,
mankind." Although "forces" and "contradictions" remained from
the past, he said, "the fever of international tension has passed," while
"Europeans have set about reducing the most dangerous military con-
frontation in the world."12

The Soviet military, in contrast, argued that a genuine military
threat to the Soviet Union remained. At times, high-ranking figures in
the military leadership seemed almost oblivious to threat assessments
offered by the political leadership. Hardly a week after Gorbachev’s
UN address, Army General Lobov declared that "indeed, the real threat
from the powerful NATO groupings is not decreasing."13 This conclu-
}sion underlay the military’s insistence that Soviet forces be maintained
at a level that ensures "a guaranteed repulse to an attack and a crushing
rebuff to an aggressor under any conditions of war unleashed by
him."14

When pressed to justify Soviet disarmament initiatives, Akhromeyev
was willing to admit that the threat of war has waned.

In the West, this question is often put in this way: Do you believe,
Mr. Akhromeyev, that the United States would launch a war against
the Soviet Union? My personal opinion is no. Today they have no
such intention. By the way, this is the result of the hard work of the
past four years. In 1984, I would not have answered this question in
this way.15

Like his colleagues, however, Akhromeyev continued to warn of the
persistence of "imperialist sources of wars and aggressions."16

11Gorbachev, Ob osnovnykh naprawleniyakh vneshney i vneshney politiki SSSR (On
the Basic Directions of the Domestic and Foreign Policy of the USSR), May 30, 1989,
Moscow, 1989, p. 38.
12Ibid., p. 39.
13Colonel General Vladimir Nikolaevich Lobov, "Iakhodya iz printsiapov
oborontel’noy doktriny" (Proceeding from the Principles of Defensive Doctrine), Prauda,
December 17, 1988, p. 2.
14Major General Yu. Lebedev, "Bezopasnost’ ukrepiatsya doveriyem" (Confidence
Strengthens Security), Sovetskaia Rossiia, December 23, 1988, p. 5.
15"Interview with Marshal S. Akhromeyev from the Panorama Program," Budapest
1984 Akhromeyev had warned that "as at the end of the 1930s, a military threat more
and more hangs over the world. It was created by imperialist circles in the USA and its
allies." He accused the United States and NATO of planning to "decide the historical
dispute between capitalism and socialism with the help of force." Akhromeyev, "Rol’
sovetskago soyuza i yevo vvooruhennykh sil v dostizhenii korennogo pereloma vo vtoroy
mirovoy voyne i yevo mezhdunarodnye znachenie" (The Role of the Soviet Union and
Its Armed Forces in Achieving a Fundamental Turning Point in the Second World War
and Its International Significance), VIZh, February 1984, p. 22.
16Akhromeyev, "General’nyy shtab—peremeny" (Changes in the General Staff),
Moskovskije novosti, No. 5, January 1989, p. 5. The military’s discourses on the continu-
ing threat still relied heavily on this formulation, which is taken verbatim from
Gorbachev’s report to the 19th All-Union Party Conference in June 1988. See also
Addressing the Central Committee Plenum in September 1989, on the eve of the peaceful revolutions in the Soviet bloc, Defense Minister Yazov still pointed to continuing intensive military “preparations” in the West and warned ominously that “we have no right to forget 1941.”

In practice, this ideological line routinely put military leaders in the position of downplaying the significance of improvements in East-West relations. Moiseyev, for example, said: “Of course, there have been changes. But we also perceive something else. Imperialism’s policy retains its aggressive orientation.”

Especially in 1989, even the most senior figures in the Soviet military seem to have had trouble avoiding self-contradiction. In the course of a single interview, Akhromeyev, for example, first had to explain the nature of the military threat to the USSR and then to defend substantial unilateral or asymmetric reductions in the Soviet Armed Forces:

One always encounters various contradictions everywhere in life…. Actually, the military threat has significantly diminished over the last 4 years. … However, … the threat of war continues to exist for the Soviet Union…. Only as long as we are quite strong ourselves can we talk as equals to a partner whose relations with us are guided by a policy based on strength.

The Soviet military’s attempts to generate the impression of a military threat from the West relied on three main arguments. The first held that NATO military doctrine is unabashedly offensive and is directed almost exclusively at the Soviet Union. Moiseyev, among others, argued that

All U.S. plans are based on conducting military actions on someone else’s territory and allow preventative strikes “on suspicion” and massive strikes in order to suppress resistance “in the initial stage of a war.” The armed forces of the United States and its allies are trained and equipped accordingly.

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Yazov’s address to the September 1989 CPSU Plenum, “Armiya druzhby i bratstva narodov” (Army of Friendship and Fraternity of Peoples), Kommunist vooruzhennykh sil, No. 20, October 1989, p. 4.

17Ibid., p. 5.


19Akhromeyev, November 9, 1988; see FBIS-SOV-89-221, November 17, 1989. He had encountered the same problem in an appearance on the Vzglyad program on October 9, which opened with the question: “Tell us, how real is the military threat to our country today; does it exist?” See Akhromeyev, FBIS-SOV-89-197, October 13, 1989.

As we saw in the analysis above, NATO concepts were consistently turned on their head in an effort to paint them as predatory schemes. In a July 1989 interview, Lobov declared that in NATO

Offensive actions feature prominently in the training of troops, and this is confirmed by the concept of “fighting against second echelons.” It is designed to make the Warsaw Treaty Organization incapable of repulsing aggression. It is tailored for a surprise attack.\(^{21}\)

The second line of argument held that the overall size, geographical location, and military-technical capabilities of U.S. and NATO armed forces represent an undeniable military threat to the Soviet Union and its allies. The partially ideological foundations of this assessment in tone and content often suggested a military application of the thesis of “capitalist encirclement.” Akhromeyev, for example, wrote in Pravda in October 1989:

In the course of 40 years, having encircled the Soviet Union with military and naval bases and having deployed ships, aircraft, command and control organs, and stores of material means, the USA, it appears, intends to exert further pressure on us and to threaten the Soviet Union by means of these forces.\(^{22}\)

The third line of argument, which became increasingly prominent in the military’s threat assessments, averred that the threat from U.S. and NATO forces was more political than military. Akhromeyev, for example, argued that NATO forces were less for war than for intimidation through the conduct of a “policy of strength”:

What are these forces for? If we conclude that the United States and the NATO bloc as a whole really do not intend to unleash war on the Soviet Union in the near future, then there can only be one answer—in order to conduct a policy of pressure with regard to the Soviet Union and secure political concessions from us with the help of force. That is the reality. It must be reckoned with.\(^{23}\)

According to Yazov and Akhromeyev, “bellicose” statements by Western leaders confirmed the fact that this policy of strength continued in effect.\(^{24}\) Analysts cited American and NATO procurement plans

\(^{21}\) Lobov, July 1989, p. 10.


for strategic nuclear as well as advanced conventional weaponry as evidence of the NATO countries’ intention to “continue the arms race along many avenues.” Over and over, military figures charged that the United States

has not abandoned and does not intend to abandon a single one of its military-technical programs. . . . This is why we must continue to maintain our country’s defense capability at a level of reasonable and reliable sufficiency.26

Senior military leaders, by insisting on “not only sufficient but unconditionally reliable” sufficiency, appeared during 1989 to be advocating a kind of no-fault military insurance policy.27 Reliability, in their minds, meant the preservation of military forces able to repulse “any attack” against “any member of the Warsaw Pact” in “any conditions of war” and to inflict such damage on an attacker as would preclude his invasion.28 Posing such requirements allowed the military to generate worst-case scenarios and to develop strategy and force-building plans appropriate to those scenarios, regardless of benevolent assessments of NATO or U.S. political intent.

The military’s efforts to make its case for reasonable and reliable sufficiency occurred at a time when military-political analysts at civilian institutes had begun to examine the question of attaining reasonable sufficiency on a unilateral basis.29 The military leadership, led by the General Staff, was united in its categorical rejection of any such approach.30

Although Soviet civilian analysts believed that existing levels of troops and weapons in Europe posed great dangers, they tended to focus on the potential dangers of two huge, overarmed alliances facing one

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26See, for example, interview with Lobov, “Nadezhnyy oplot mira” (Dependable Bulwark of Peace), KZ, May 13, 1988, p. 5; see also Moiseyev, “Sokrashcheniya vooru-zhennykh sil i vooru-zhennoy—garantiya bezopastnosti diya vsekh i diya kazhogo” (Reduction of Armed Forces and Armaments—Guarantee of Security for One and for All), Mekhanarodnaya zhizn’, August 1989, p. 8.
28See Yavoz, October 1989, p. 5.
29See Lebedev, p. 5; Luhev, March 1989, p. 3; Moiseyev, August 1989, p. 10.
another, rather than on NATO's supposedly nefarious motives. A civilian analyst specializing in U.S. defense programs argued, for example, that

The military potential and level of military preparations of a country like the USA should not be underestimated. But it is no less harmful to overstate them, as was frequently done during the period of stagnation and is still being done to a certain extent at present.

Another analyst, in advocating a radical restructuring of the Soviet military system, maintained that

To begin with, we should seriously assess the reality of the military threats directed against us without going to extremes. I must say bluntly: In my view, there is now no need for us to be frightened. The present situation in Europe differs radically from the situation in the early 1940s or the mid-1950s. The world has changed.

Yet another argued that no meaningful definition of sufficiency was possible until the Soviet Union once and for all dispensed with the cold-war concept of enemy encirclement:

Indeed, if we continue, even subconsciously, to perceive other countries as bitter enemies, simply awaiting the moment to attack, then the political decision to ensure military-strategic equality, and better yet predominance over them simply has no reasonable alternative.

The military grew noticeably defensive in the face of these criticisms, and the stridency of its assessments of the military threat escalated as domestic criticism of the Soviet Armed Forces increased. In April 1989, Marshal Ovarkov warned against persistent "imperialist militarism" and "revanchist forces." Lobov later offered an equally alarmist assessment:

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31 In a recent poll of 120 Soviet international affairs specialists, only 43 percent believed that an "American threat" existed; the remainder either said that a threat did not exist (33 percent) or were undecided (24 percent). Of those who believed that a threat existed, 73 percent thought that the threat was of a military nature. Thus, out of 120 persons polled, only 38 were relatively certain that the United States posed a military threat to the USSR. The sample included some members of the military. A. Melvil and A. Nikitin, "Soviet Experts on World Politics," SSHA (USA), June 1989, pp. 3–17.

32 G. I. Svyatov, "Tretyi poslevoenny pik militariizma v SSHA" (Third Postwar Peak of U.S. Militarism), SSHa (USA), January 1989, p. 28.


34 G. F. Kunadez, "Ob oboronnoy dostatochnosti voyennogo potenciala SSSR" (On Defense Sufficiency of the USSR Military Potential), MEMO, October 1989, p. 70; Malashenko, pp. 119–121, makes a similar criticism of threat assessment "through the prism of ideological guidelines."

35 Ovarkov, "Podvig, revnogo kotoromu ne znala istoriya" (A Feast Unequalled in History), Zarubezhnoye voyennoye obозрение, April 1989, pp. 7–9.
We must not forget for a single moment that the political foundation of contemporary U.S. theory and practice is the policy of "direct confrontation" with the USSR . . . a policy envisaging the maximum weakening of socialism's positions in our country, right up to its liquidation through the use of military force.\textsuperscript{36}

This jarring cold-war hyperbole seemed decidedly out of tune with the declarations of the political leadership at this time. Shevardnadze's October foreign policy report to the Supreme Soviet offered a pointed contrast in both tone and content. According to the Soviet foreign minister, "conditions [were] ripe for taking a new and major step forward. The agreement on a summit is a result of this."\textsuperscript{37}

By all indications, a major debate continued in the Soviet Union regarding the actual military threat from the West and the forces needed to meet that threat. In fall 1989, a Soviet English-language weekly revealed that the Soviet Peace Committee was planning to cosponsor "an independent public evaluation of the degree of the war threat and the activities of the Soviet Armed Forces" and to submit their report to the Supreme Soviet.\textsuperscript{38} Should the political leadership conclude, as it did in mid-1988, that the time had come for a major reassessment of that threat, Soviet military doctrine would require yet another revision.

To a great extent, however, the historic events of late 1989 and 1990 in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union have overtaken any formal threat reassessment.\textsuperscript{39} The changes that have taken place have virtually stripped the Soviet Armed Forces of their first strategic echelon; by 1991 or 1992, the changes will have undermined and rendered obsolete the current concept of a stalwart forward defense and subsequent counteroffensive. Together, these events will compel a near-total break with the former positions of Soviet military strategy. Soviet military theorists will have to start essentially from scratch in redefining the nature and level of the military threat.

\textsuperscript{36}Lobov, "Pokusheniye na chest" (An Assault on Honor), \textit{Sovetskaya Rossiya}, October 18, 1989, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{37}Shevardnadze, Speech to plenary session of USSR Supreme Soviet, October 23, 1989, "Vneshnaya politika i perestroika" (Foreign Policy and Restructuring), \textit{Pravda}, October 24, 1988, p. 2.


\textsuperscript{39}The equivalent of an official threat assessment probably accompanied or preceded the Soviet decisions to agree to (and in two cases to begin) the complete withdrawal of their forces from Eastern Europe.
SOVIET MILITARY ART IN TIME OF CHANGE

Even before the revolutionary upheavals of late 1989, the military leadership appeared dissatisfied with the capacity of key armed forces institutions to respond promptly and effectively to the rapid evolution of Soviet defense policy and to the changing military-political milieu. When the General Staff and other Soviet military science institutions were being called on to demonstrate positive leadership, they showed evidence of indirection and uncertainty. According to Chief of the General Staff Moiseyev,

We have now essentially embarked upon a new stage in the building of the armed forces. The previous stage, which we linked with. . . . the massive introduction of nuclear missile weapons, must be considered completed. Since 1985-1986 we have embarked on a new stage linked with a defensive military doctrine and a phased arms reduction. These conditions require new approaches to the solution of defense tasks. . . . Nearly all the tenets of strategy, operational art, and tactics are undergoing radical changes, under the influence of not only military-technical, but also military-political factors. Basically a new theory of military art is being created.40

"By virtue of its position," Moiseyev asserted, the General Staff had to play a decisive role in armed forces restructuring. Exhibiting great prescience, he foresaw 1989 and 1990 as an "especially crucial and tense" period for the General Staff because of forthcoming "important military-political and strategic decisions."41

Although such circumstances would seem to have demanded a redoubling of efforts to meet the new doctrinal and military-technical challenges, Moiseyev complained that

the military-scientific organizations that have been called on to provide the initial in-depth theoretical study of these questions often procrastinate. In particular, one of these. . . . is the question of the organization and conduct of combat actions with a defensive character.42

Another "difficult task" facing military science was the development of (1) a strategy for preventing war, which Moiseyev claimed required further study, and (2) concrete recommendations to the command organs. But the "main thing," according to Moiseyev, was

41Ibid.
to decisively increase the role of military science and research in working out prospective directions for the development of military art, force development, and training and to focus efforts on an in-depth analysis of the most characteristic features of armed struggle, operations, and combat actions in the initial period of the war.\(^{43}\)

Moiseyev attributed the slow progress in these crucial areas to bureaucratic inertia in the military's research institutes and in the General Staff.\(^{44}\) Yazov also alluded to this problem.\(^{45}\) Vorob'ev complained that many officers continued to hold tenacious stereotypes and outdated notions, especially in regard to defensive warfare.\(^{46}\) Moiseyev demanded

a restructuring of internal relations in military science itself, their democratization, the establishment of a situation of openness (glasnost') in scientific collectives, the free exchange of opinions, constructive criticism, and self-criticism.\(^{47}\)

He also implied that the General Staff apparatus lacked “initiative” and “inquisitiveness”:

An atmosphere should be created in all our subunits that will ensure the profound, creative study of problems, the quest for the best solutions, free discussion and the clash of opinions. Officers should not be afraid to discuss their views frankly. And that is possible only if senior chiefs are respectful toward their subordinates’ proposals. . . . The new tasks require a clarification of the structure of the General Staff and a partial reorganization. We have acquired many unnecessary bodies.\(^{48}\)

At the same time, Moiseyev revealed that “in the near future, a whole range of major scientific research studies” would address crucial problems in military affairs.\(^{49}\) In July, addressing the Supreme Soviet, Yazov reported that new military service regulations had been drawn up:

\(^{43}\)Ibid.

\(^{44}\)In a May interview, Moiseyev stated that “old habits, stereotypes, and excessive caution in the search for untraditional solutions” still hampered General Staff work on important questions. “Mikhail Moiseyev, Nachal’nik Gensha” (Mikhail Moiseyev, Chief of the General Staff), Nedelya, No. 18, May 1989, p. 13; also see Moiseyev, February 23, 1989.

\(^{45}\)See Yazov, “S nakazom partii i naroda” (With Instructions from the Party and the People), KZ, July 5, 1989, p. 2.


\(^{47}\)Moiseyev, February 23, 1989.


\(^{49}\)Ibid.
In accordance with the new defensive doctrine that we are carrying out and implementing, we have worked out the bases of the groundwork for conducting strategic, front, and army operations, and we have drawn up the field manuals in which all the questions connected with the defensive doctrine are posed as priority questions. In the first place are front and army defensive operations, followed by counteroffensives and others.50

Perhaps because of security concerns, these manuals (unlike the main army garrison and service regulations) were never published. For that reason, they have not been publicly debated or discussed. Also, these documents may not have settled central questions pertaining to defensive and counteroffensive operations by fronts and armies, such as those discussed above.

One may only speculate on whether the Soviet leadership might eventually decide to authorize the publication of these operations manuals, or even sanitized versions of them. Their publication, in today's conditions of Soviet pluralism, would represent an invitation to debate and might force the military to state their assumptions and conclusions for the conduct of operations in the period of the counteroffensive and afterwards with more exactitude. Questions of scale, timing, and strategic objectives would presumably come to the fore. General Staff thinking on the complex but crucial issues of readiness, mobilization, and reinforcement and their bearing on the conduct of military operations in Europe could then be assessed more concretely.

COLLAPSE OF THE FORWARD-DEFENSE PARADigm

The events of late 1989 and 1990 rapidly undermined the strategic and military-political foundation of the concept for conventional operations that had emerged in 1988 and early 1989. Even if clear answers to the aforementioned questions suddenly emerged, their relevance to present-day conditions would be sharply diminished.

The reason for this loss of relevance is clear: The operational concept for a strategic defense and subsequent counteroffensive that emerged under the new Soviet defensive doctrine, like the four variants of operational action developed by Kokoshin and Larionov, was based on the continued existence in Central Europe of two hostile armed groupings in close proximity to one another. Even so, a critical discussion of the modal features of operational concepts designed after 1987 for a strategy of forward defense nevertheless might provide a con-

venient point of departure for explorations of new strategic forms suitable for a homeland defense of the USSR.

The time for such discussions has clearly come. Forward-deployed Soviet armies continue to quit Eastern European bases and to abandon or remove their infrastructure for theater war opposite NATO. This process began in early 1989 and has accelerated since the January 1990 agreements on complete Soviet withdrawal from Czechoslovakia and Hungary by June 1991. Thus, previous General Staff calculations about fire preemption, reserves and second echelons, mobilization, regrouping of forces, and counterstrikes and counterosensives have become outmoded in the context of the initial period of any future European war.

These realities, irrespective of any formal reassessment of external military threat, will force a revamping, in all likelihood dramatic, of Soviet operational concepts and the overall defensive posture. With or without the acquiescence of the military leadership and its expert assessments, the Soviet Union now faces the prospect of completely revising its old strategic model. It must now determine, in its internal councils, what structure will take its place. Historical models exist to aid this process, but it is not yet clear that they can adequately account for the military, technological, and international political realities of the present day.

Furthermore, one must consider the prospect that the strategic posture and operational concepts adopted by the Soviet military during the 1990s may to some extent rely on new mutual security arrangements and on some form of military cooperation with East European or even NATO countries. The further development of Soviet military art in these conditions would demand a near-total reversal of the previous modes of threat assessment practiced by Soviet theorists. Such assessments, based on a deterministic equation of ideological strife and military conflict, exaggerated enemy capabilities and thus produced highly unrealistic worst-case estimates.

Future development will likewise demand a thorough shakeup of the procedure for the development and elaboration of military strategy, long the prerogative of the conservative General Staff apparatus. As events following the publication in May 1987 of the new defensive doctrine demonstrated, the military organs charged with translating political guidance into the language of military operations, force structure, and war plans display the same bureaucratic inertia and conservative inflexibility apparent in other Soviet state bodies.

Responding to new strategic realities will require the resurrection of the intellectual boldness that characterized Soviet military art during the 1920s and early 1930s. When the dust finally settles after an
agreement on conventional forces in Europe (CFE), German unification, and the Soviet troop withdrawals from bases abroad, the military and political leaderships of the USSR will have to carry out an honest strategic reassessment of such questions as:

- What is the nature of the military threat to the USSR at present and in the foreseeable future?
- What sorts of military conflict are likely to involve the Soviet Union?
- What force posture and operational concepts are appropriate for ensuring Soviet security in these contingencies?

Given the scale of strategic changes, the categories and approaches typical of the post-1945 era are unlikely to provide the answers to these first-order questions. Moreover, the answers that eventually emerge will need to conform to the economic development and other societal imperatives that will continue to redefine the Soviet polity in this decade. And, as suggested above, the solutions finally adopted must comport with the new all-European security environment of the 1990s. Specifically, they will have to accord with peace, stability, prosperity, and mutual trust in all parts of Europe. Soviet military theorists will soon have to face the development, yet again, of a new military art.
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