

THE SOVIET THEORY OF DEEP OPERATIONS

by

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Essentially 'deep operations' involved the solution of problems of the offensive by the use of crushing blows throughout the entire depth of the enemy forces' deployment for the purpose of their complete defeat. The theory of the deep offensive indicated an outlet from the blind alley of position warfare characteristic of the bloody but largely fruitless battles of World War I.

—*History of the Great Patriotic War*¹

The Soviet theory of deep operations was formulated in the early and mid 1930s by a circle of officers most of whom were members of the Red Army General Staff or on the faculty of the War Academy of the General Staff. Not long after the principles of the theory had been articulated and published, they were influencing military thought even beyond the boundaries of the Soviet Union. Some of the principles were tested in the 1936 maneuvers, which were attended by a number of Western military observers. Further, German tank specialist Heinz Guderian knew the theory well enough from the Soviet publications to consider part of it as a possible model for German armor doctrine.²

This 1930s heyday of Soviet military theorizing—if it can be called a heyday—was short, however. The theory was barely conceived before it and most of its authors fell victim to the Great Purge. After 1939, and for as long as Joseph Stalin lived, the theory of deep operations was denied any existence, present or past. Stalin became the living source of Soviet military science. According to his official biography, "At various stages of the war Stalin's genius found correct solutions that took account of all the circumstances of the situation."³ When Raymond L. Garthoff surveyed Soviet wartime and postwar military doctrine in the

early 1950s, he found references to depth on the offensive and in defense but apparently no indication that these doctrinal elements were or had ever been integrated into a general theory.⁴ John Erickson's later comprehensive study of the Soviet high command from the Revolution to the first year of World War II contains random deep operations doctrine, but it too contains no reference to the theory.⁵

The deep operations theory reemerged in the Soviet military literature in the late 1950s, and it has undergone a prolonged and tortuous reassessment since that time. The reassessment began in 1958 with the publication of the *Second World War*, edited by General S. P. Platonov, which asserted, "The greatest [prewar] achievement of Soviet operational art was the development and substantiation of the scientific theory of deep offensive and defensive operations."⁶ In 1960, the first volume of the *History of the Great Patriotic War*, on the other hand, took a distinctly restrained view, describing deep operations as a "new theory . . . in accord with the objective conditions of armed conflict," but one in which "not everything was completely worked out" and "not everything was correct."⁷ Two years later, V. D. Sokolovskiy's *Soviet Military Strategy* did not even mention the theory of deep operations as such, identifying aspects of the

theory only as matters with which Soviet theorists had once been concerned.⁸

As of the mid 1960s, when G. S. Isserson published a memoir of the deep operations theory and the men who had conceived it—of whom he was one of the few survivors—the theory had been resurrected, but its status was indeterminate.⁹ Then, in 1968, the Soviet armed forces congratulated themselves on their golden anniversary in the volume *50 Years' Armed Strength of the USSR*. Among the accomplishments recorded therein, the theory of deep operations stood in the front rank as the “outstanding achievement of Soviet military-theoretical thought” in the interwar period; as the “principal new theory on the conduct of war with mass, technically equipped, armies”; and as having played “a paramount role in the enrichment and creative enhancement of military science.”¹⁰ Two years later, the *History of War and the Art of War* stated, “The very great achievement of Soviet military science, in which it outstripped Western bourgeois theory, consisted in the development of the theory of deep operations.”¹¹ The *Soviet Military Encyclopedia* (1976) ranked the theory as “a qualitative leap in the evolution of the art of war” made possible by the “socioeconomic advancement of the USSR, the progressive character of Soviet military science and technology . . . and accumulated war experience.”¹²

Now, a good half century after its inception, the theory of deep operations has not only been rehabilitated, it is lodged in a position of high esteem in the corpus of Soviet military thought, and it could well be advanced further. After Stalin, of course, the

record on the theory, as on a range of other matters, needed to be set straight. Records, however, can be set “straight” in two ways: in the context of the past or that of the present. Since Soviet historiography favors the latter, a record that has been set as “straight” as that of deep operations theory invites attention.

THE QUALITATIVE LEAP

The problem of the World War I “blind alley” in warfare, which the theory of deep operations is said to have solved, was one neither the Imperial Russian Army nor, later, the Red Army had actually faced. Tsarist Russia had lacked the industrial base, hence the weapons, that had kept the war on the Western Front tied up in the trenches; and none of the forces in the Civil War had the resources to stage battles of materiel. Since the country’s industrial capacity was no greater and probably a good deal less in the 1920s than it had been before 1917, the problem continued to be academic for the Red Army long after it had become urgently real to Western armies. These circumstances have made the Soviets’ “discovery” of deep operations a somewhat awkward proposition for them to substantiate.

Soviet accounts attribute the concept of “operations”—as a stage between tactics and strategy—to a need recognized in all armies during World War I when a markedly increased mass widened the span of control and army groups were created. Operational theory, however, is treated as much less a product of common concerns. References to non-Soviet work are minimal, and the omissions extensive. Isserson wrote, “For the sake of historical accuracy, it should be mentioned that the question of deep battle [the tactical aspect of deep operations] was raised first by the English military theoretician Fuller late in 1918.”¹³ Nothing more is said about World War I. Soviet works do not mention Andre Laffargue’s “The Attack in Trench Warfare” (which advocated the deep offensive in 1916), or its offspring, the German Army’s “The Attack in Positional Warfare” (which gave Laffargue’s proposals doctrinal status), or the German employment

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of combined arms and storm troops in the so-called "Hutier tactics" (which restored depth to the offensive in 1918).¹⁴ The Soviet accounts also let pass the German 1918 offensive—a fair early example of deep battle, one would think—which was projected to have reached operational depth and came closer to doing so than did the subject of Isserson's reference, J. F. C. Fuller's Plan 1919, which did not get past the paper stage.

Marshal M. V. Zakharov, who was a junior faculty member under Isserson at the Frunze Academy in the 1930s, touched briefly on Western deep operations theory of the interwar period in a 1970 article in the *Military-Historical Journal*. The commonly held belief in the "bourgeois" armies, he said, had been that one or two main blows would be made to depths of 90 to 150 miles. Those could have taken about a month to complete and would have been followed by a two- to four-week pause for regroupment. What had been needed, Zakharov concluded, was "a new theory of offensive operations" that would make it possible to "overcome a solid front and rapidly annihilate the enemy's operation groupings." The Soviet approach, he maintained, had been new because it was calculated to meet those requirements with "blows carried to the entire depth of the enemy's operational deployment."¹⁵

Zakharov did not undertake to confirm the deep operations theory as a Soviet discovery by providing the specific dimensions of depth and speed projected in it, but they can be determined from the context of the time and from other Soviet sources. In all military establishments, including the Red Army, thinking on the next war started from the premise that what was needed was a way to conduct deep offensives in a war fought predominantly by mass armies. Although visionaries like B. H. Liddell Hart and J. F. C. Fuller promoted the idea of small professional armies equipped almost exclusively with tanks and aircraft, and thus maneuvering over great distances at high speed, the general staffs did not believe that they could trade men for mobility. While they wanted the mobility, they were convinced the decision ultimately would hinge on man-

power. This was taken to mean by all of them up to the eve of World War II, and by some until well into the war, that the main forces, even in deep operations, would most likely move at infantry speed and that the function of armor and air would be to keep offensives from bogging down completely as they had in the previous war.¹⁶

The Soviet theory of deep operations diverged notably from the general thinking only with regard to the attainable speed, and the figures published on that score vary, the earlier being lower than the later. The initial figures, in the *History of the Great Patriotic War*, work out to a maximum depth of 150 miles—the same as that provided by Zakharov for the "bourgeois" armies—to have been covered in 15 to 25 days.¹⁷ The *History of the Second World War* in 1974 used the same depth, 150 miles, but the time in which that depth would be achieved was reduced to 15 to 20 days.¹⁸ Then, in the *Military Encyclopedia* (1976), the distance increased to 180 miles in 15 to 20 days.¹⁹ The deep operations theory apparently assumed that the Red Army's infantry could sustain rates of advance on the offensive of 9 to 12 miles a day. It is worth noting that the then-accepted rate was three to six miles a day.²⁰ Of course, the sources cited all hedge on either depth or speed in ways that could slow the projected Soviet rate to six to nine miles a day.

The requirement, as the Red Army leadership most probably saw it in the early 1930s, was not to revolutionize military theory but to convert from a cavalry-militia basis to one of technologically advanced weaponry and to acquire an operational doctrine comparable to that prevailing in other armies. The Five Year Plans, begun in 1928, had created an industrial base almost exclusively devoted to military production, and they were rapidly making the Red Army the quantitatively best equipped in the whole world.²¹ In June 1931, M. N. Tukhachevskiy, the Deputy Commissar of Defense, Chief of Ordnance, and later (1935) Marshal, provided the direction for the "technological reconstruction of the Red Army."²² Groundwork had been done over the previous two

years, and the Chief of Operations, V. K. Triandafillov, had already established the basis for an armor doctrine. It proposed to resolve the question that had concerned Western armies since the war—whether to use tanks as infantry support or independently, as cavalry formerly had been used—by setting up two forces, one of light and medium tanks to be attached to the infantry, and the other of fast medium tanks (of a type originally designed by J. Walter Christie, an American) to strike out ahead of the main body after breakthroughs had been made. A third force, of heavy tanks, capable of spearheading assaults on fortified lines would deal with the problem then being raised by permanent fortifications such as the Maginot Line.²³

The deep operations theory was sufficiently worked out by 1936 to be, in substantial part, converted into doctrine and incorporated into field regulations issued that year. In this form, which turned out to be its last in the Tukhachevskiy era, the deep operation featured a four-echelon offensive. The air elements were considered to be the first echelon because they could seek air control and begin bombing before the ground echelons were deployed (though the effects of air power by itself were generally overrated). The second echelon, employing combined-arms shock armies, would make the breakthrough. These shock armies would be composed of tanks, select infantry heavily armed with automatic weapons, and powerful artillery complements. Now claimed as a Soviet invention, the shock armies have obvious antecedents in the German storm battalions of World War I. In the third echelon of the deep operation, tank-supported infantry would exploit breakthroughs, and mechanized corps with about a thousand tanks each would carry the attack to its full depth, possibly assisted by parachute troops. The fourth echelon, the reserves, would lend weight to the advance and consolidate gains. Finally, commanders would be enjoined to develop clear-cut main efforts, employ combined arms, and exploit opportunities to encircle the enemy.²⁴

The mechanized corps and the parachute troops, the first of their kind, aroused in-

terest; but the doctrine of deep operations did not touch off much of a stir among professionals elsewhere, very likely because it centered on desiderata common to most armies and because the fairly public test and demonstration in the Soviet 1936 maneuvers did not show that doctrine to be capable of satisfying the desiderata. Guderian remarked that "it ought to be possible to do something" with the Red Army's large numbers of tanks and aircraft, but he did not see any model to be followed in the way the Soviet armor was organized. Although there was "a certain justification" for the three-way functional division, he concluded, one would have to "take in the bargain" the difficulties engendered by an inventory of diverse tank types.²⁵ A British observer at the 1936 maneuvers, Colonel Giffard Martel, did not detect sophistication, theoretical or otherwise. What he saw were batches of tanks running over terrain virtually as flat and clear as a parade ground. Martel remarked, "There was little skill shown in the handling of these forces, which appeared just to bump into each other."²⁶

In the Soviet view, especially in recent years, the maneuvers "confirmed the correctness of the deep operations theory." A parachute drop of 1800 men—in which the troops rode on the wings of the planes—and 120-mile marches by tank brigades are cited as examples of farseeing operations.²⁷ But such *tours de force* notwithstanding, the Soviet literature itself indicates that the Red Army lacked an actual deep operations capability. The theoretical principles set down in the regulations were not converted into specific guidance for the field commands, and their training did not go beyond the approach march and the meeting engagement.²⁸ The charges in the style of medieval cavalry that Martel saw apparently were examples of the latter. The Five Year Plans provided the machines but not the cadres of trained personnel to run, maintain, and command them. And the technology itself had shortcomings: tanks did not carry radios, and few aircraft did.²⁹ The technological reconstruction of the Red Army was being undertaken in a predominantly nontechnological society, in all of its strata—

including the upper level of the military. In the late 1930s the slogan had to be switched from "Technology will decide all!" to "Cadres will decide all!"

THE INDISPENSABLE THEORY

"Events in the spring of 1937," Isserson wrote, "shook the Red Army to its foundations: the personality cult of Stalin spread arbitrariness and illegality to the most senior command ranks . . . and the army was, in substance, decapitated." Those who had originated the theory of deep operations "were declared enemies of the people," and the theory itself was "disavowed" and "eliminated from all the forms of instruction." The "setback," Isserson continued, "turned out to be temporary." He maintained that the German 1939 campaign in Poland, to some extent, and that against France in 1940, conclusively, showed Soviet military theory "to have been on the right track"; but the "young, honest, and courageous" leaders who replaced those lost in the purge "could not function correctly in the maelstrom of events at the start of the war" (after Germany had invaded the Soviet Union) because they were not "sufficiently oriented in the innovative aspects of deep operations."³⁰

The current "authoritative" approach to the purge and the years immediately following it deplors the loss of experienced senior officers but stresses strength and continuity, which are said to be evident from the reaffirmations and refinements of deep operations introduced into projected field regulations in 1939, 1940, and early 1941.³¹ This view attributes the disasters early in the war to excessive preoccupation with the offensive aspect of deep operations, both before and after the purge. The *History of the Second World War* points out that the military leadership, thinking itself practical, "left a strategic defensive out of consideration."³²

Nonetheless, Isserson's account and the other Soviet accounts are in fundamental agreement that the use of deep operations, as such, was the outstanding innovation of

World War II. In taking this position, they ignore the strong evidence that the deep operation was no longer a novelty in European military thought well before World War I ended and that the chief concern in the interwar period was to devise a sufficiently effective means of executing it. The German blitzkrieg campaigns of 1939-41, the first applied deep operations of World War II, did not so much prove the feasibility of the form as demonstrate the means by which it could be implemented at far greater speed and more decisively, reliably, and cheaply than had been considered possible.

Whether the lesson of the blitzkrieg was absorbed by the Red Army even as late as 1941 is in considerable doubt. Orthodox theory, Soviet included, had expected that deep operations would restore enough mobility and maneuver to the battlefield to reduce the superiority of the defensive but not enough to eliminate it; and this, apparently, was what the French campaign, as Isserson stated, was taken to have "confirmed." Right up to the invasion of the Soviet Union, according to Marshal Georgi K. Zhukov, who was then Chief of the General Staff, "The Peoples Commissariate of Defense and the General Staff believed that war between such big countries as Germany and Russia would follow the existing scheme."³³ The "scheme" assumed an initial hiatus of two to three weeks after hostilities began during which the opponents would feel each other out.³⁴ Subsequently the war would

inevitably take on a character of extended attrition, with battles being decided primarily by the ability of the rear to provide the front with more material and human resources over a prolonged period of time than were available to the enemy.³⁵

The Poles, the French, the British, and, for that matter, the Germans, with the exception of a relative few like Guderian, had believed essentially the same. The Polish Army had been cut to pieces in a week, the British driven off the Continent in 25 days, and France struck down in six weeks. The Soviet Union survived because it could do

what would have been impossible for any of the others: trade lives and territory for time until the enemy was rendered weak in the knees by his own successes. After that happened, which it did for a time in the winter of 1941-42 and for good in the fall of 1942, the rest of the war in fact took on "a character of extended attrition."

The resulting paradox—a disastrous misconception assuming the appearance of a profound truth—is, of course, not recognized as such anywhere in the Soviet literature; yet it is the keystone that with some corrective artifice currently holds the deep operations theory aloft. It enables the theory to rise above dubious and deleterious features in its past and emerge, in the words of the *Military Encyclopedia*, as "highly useful and indispensable" to the Soviet resurgence and victory in the war.³⁶ All that is needed by way of artifice is to divert attention from a couple of facts—specifically, that, after late 1942, growing Soviet superiorities in men and materiel and German declines in both let the Soviet command choose the style in which the war would be fought, and that the Soviets then reverted to a more massive, less sophisticated version of the 1936-model deep operations.

Although the German blitzkrieg had established the encirclement as the most effective maneuver in mobile warfare, and although the Soviet *Provisional Field Regulations 1936* had stated the creation of opportunities for encirclement to be a feature of the deep operation, the pursuit of such opportunities was not standard practice in Soviet World War II operations. Stalin's leading marshals, Zhukov and A. M. Vasilevskiy, indicated in their memoirs that they regarded the encirclement as the maneuver of choice, but Zhukov said, "I knew [in 1943 and after] that J. V. Stalin was disinclined for several reasons to contemplate any large-scale encirclement operations."³⁷ The chief reason was that on the basis of Stalingrad and subsequent operations, Stalin considered the maneuver unsuitable for the Soviet forces. General S. M. Shtemenko, a veteran of the General Staff, made clear that this was not just one of Stalin's quirks when

he wrote, "Experience had shown that, in view of the time factor, the complexity of such an operation, and other considerations, it was not worth encircling every enemy grouping."³⁸ In plain language, the encirclement was not a maneuver the Soviet forces could execute dependably. Although Stalingrad is claimed to have set an example for military art on a par with Cannae, the Red Army undertook few encirclements after Stalingrad and none at all between late winter 1943 and the summer of 1944.³⁹

During the last years of the war, Soviet deep operations primarily employed the "salient thrust" (also called the "splitting" or "splintering blow"), a breakthrough exploited solely to achieve a deep penetration. Executed at fairly close intervals along the front, salient thrusts had the effect of literally dragging the enemy front with them.⁴⁰ Tactical proficiency could be minimal; mass in troops and weapons was the essential. Full success required an enemy willing to stand and be cut to pieces, which the Germans, on Adolf Hitler's orders, were, after 1942. This circumstance also made it possible, as Soviet strength increased and German strength declined, to increase the depths and rates of penetration from 160 kilometers at 15 kilometers per day in late 1942, to 550 kilometers (in one instance) at 26 kilometers per day in 1945.⁴¹

A 'SIGNIFICANCE ALSO FOR THE PRESENT'

The first postwar period (in the Soviet reckoning), from 1945 to 1953—which coincides with the last years of the Stalin regime, it is safe to assume, not by accident—is the most obscure in the whole of Soviet history with respect to military theory and doctrine. Everything published during that time was devoted to fitting the whole of Soviet wartime performance into a framework of generalizations giving credit to Stalin's genius. What absolutely would not fit was ignored or, as in the instance of the 1941 and 1942 defeats, blamed on the perfidy of the enemy and the Soviet Union's former allies. The post-Stalin literature on the period

1945 to 1953 is sparse, and what does exist seems to be an effort to graft a new top on the trunk of the past while continuing to enjoy the fruit of the old. The theory of deep operations is said to have been "perfected" during those eight years with "the support of the wealth of experience acquired during the war." That experience, however, is now somewhat changed. The salient thrust has disappeared, and the "encirclement and annihilation of the enemy's main groupings" is declared to have been the "basic form in the conduct of operations."⁴²

The second postwar period began in 1954 and continues today. It is divided into two phases: one to 1960, in which the Soviet armed forces were "adapted" to nuclear weapons; the other since 1960, in which theory and doctrine along with the entire military establishment have been converted to "nuclear-missile war."⁴³ With regard to the role of deep operations, the *Military Encyclopedia* states,

The term 'deep operations (battle)' has not been used in official documents since the 1960s, but the general principles of that theory did not lose their significance also for the present.⁴⁴

The encyclopedia article ends with that sentence, leaving the reader to draw his own conclusions concerning what the "significance" might be and why a theory having continuing importance in the mid 1970s should have been officially shelved more than a decade earlier, apparently for good. Both questions could be answered simply enough in the context of the nuclear conversion if they did not provoke two others: Why has the deep operations theory received the greatest attention after it and the form of warfare to which it applies were superseded in Soviet military thought? And why has its stature seemed to be sharply on the rise since then? These questions suggest that the significance of the theory "also for the present" could be more than residual significance.

In part the present significance of the deep operations theory no doubt devolves

from the campaign against Stalin's so-called personality cult begun by Nikita Khrushchev in his speech to the 20th Party Congress in 1956. Khrushchev "revealed" that Stalin had pushed his claim to omniscience in matters of national concern, above all in military affairs, far beyond the borderline of the ridiculous. The government, Khrushchev announced, proposed to "correct" the erroneous views widely spread under Stalin by publishing "serious books" on several subjects, among those, the Great Patriotic War, the Soviet part of World War II.⁴⁵ The speech was apparently more spontaneous than such things usually are in the Soviet Union, and the war was subsequently found to require not one but six volumes, the first of which could not be put into print until 1960. Shorter accounts, most notably the *Second World War*, edited by Platonov, provided interim coverage and previews of more extensive disclosures to come.

The multivolume work, as we now have seen, did not make good on the previews as far as the deep operations theory is concerned; the achievement claimed in the Platonov book was toned down in the first volume of the *History of the Great Patriotic War*. The frame of reference within which the war history was being written had changed. By 1960, Khrushchev was fostering his own personality cult, and his generously embellished accomplishments were being made to figure heavily in the war. But he could not assume the mantle of Stalin outright, nor could he share fully in a massive transfer of credit to a theory worked out in the early 1930s—when he was no more than a functionary in the Moscow party apparatus—by men most of whom were long dead. Consequently, the *History of the Great Patriotic War* depicted the mastering of the national crisis as an essentially extemporaneous feat owing more to leaders like Khrushchev, purportedly men whose innate talent the war had brought to the fore, than to the guidance of an inherited theory.

By coincidence, and more significant in the long run, the deep operations theory also could not be made to serve Khrushchev's policy. During the interval between the party

Congress and the publication of the first volume of the *History of the Great Patriotic War*, the Soviet armed forces had begun the nuclear conversion; in January 1960, Khrushchev announced that henceforth the Soviet Union could rely almost exclusively on its nuclear and missile power. He told the Supreme Soviet that conventional forces were becoming obsolete, nuclear firepower would decide any future war, and military personnel strength could therefore be cut by a third.⁴⁶ At that point, the best service the *History of the Great Patriotic War* could perform was to give conventional operations, in both practice and theory, a decent—and restrained—valedictory.

Nuclear doctrine took over in 1960, and, as the *Military Encyclopedia* says, the term “deep operations” passed out of official use. But, from the first, Khrushchev’s contention that conventional arms were dispensable had far less easy going. Whether he was ever entirely serious about it may be questioned, though he insisted in his memoirs years later that he was.⁴⁷ The force reduction did not materialize, and Sokolovskiy’s *Soviet Military Strategy* held the mass army to be as much a necessity in nuclear war as it ever had been. Nevertheless, although *Military Strategy* mitigated the Khrushchev thesis in that respect, it upheld nuclear primacy and assigned the deep missions to nuclear weapons, leaving the conventional forces only “operations on a relatively shallow front where the opponent’s ground forces are concentrated.”⁴⁸

The commitment to nuclear warfare survived Khrushchev’s downfall, having by then been acclaimed as “the [nuclear] revolution in military affairs,” on which *Military Strategy* remained the most definitive open statement, going into its third edition in 1968 almost unchanged.⁴⁹ In other publications, however, as soon as the involvement with Khrushchev’s image ceased, claims of Soviet pre-nuclear attainments in conventional warfare were adjusted sharply upward, and deep operations theory became, as has been noted, an outstanding and original contribution to military thought.

Moreover, the theory began to be presented as the model from which the

German blitzkrieg—the technically most effective form of deep operations yet employed—had been derived. The final volume of the *History of the Great Patriotic War*, published in 1965, the year after Khrushchev’s forced resignation, took another look at the theoretical work of the 1930s and found that work, given “concrete expression” in the 1936 Field Regulations, to have served the requirements of the time better than the regulations of the armies of other nations. The German *Wehrmacht* was said to have borrowed from the Soviet regulations extensively in formulating its own.⁵⁰ Five years later, Marshal Zakharov added:

Before 1936 operational and tactical deep battle were not even mentioned in the publications and official directives of the German and other armies. In the works published by German generals just after 1936, it could be seen how German military thought smugly and in perverted fashion appropriated the Soviet ideas on new forms of armed conflict.⁵¹

The subordination of German doctrine to prewar Soviet operational doctrine has more recently been accompanied by a reassessment of the blitzkrieg in action as well. Formerly dismissed as nothing more than a desperate gamble on a short war and a reckless fixation on surprise, it has come to be regarded—in instances other than its employment against the Soviet Union—as innovative and effective in its operational aspect. As it was used against the Soviet Union, of course, it remains “bankrupt and adventuristic.”⁵² A recent study done at the War Academy of the General Staff credits the early German operations with having introduced “many definite improvements and sometimes also new forms of conducting offensive activity.”⁵³ The 1939 German campaign in Poland is said in the *History of War and the Art of War* to have been “important to the development of the art of war,” in that it demonstrated the “great results” attainable by air and armored forces acting as spearheads for infantry and artillery.⁵⁴

The early German operations in World War II are also now seen as demonstrating the importance of the initial period of a war "to its whole course and outcome."⁵⁵ The *History of War and the Art of War* finds the German campaign in Poland to have disclosed the "growing role of strategic surprise in the opening stage of a war," and the campaign in Western Europe the following year to have instituted trends in the conduct of operations toward larger scale and higher speed. The outstanding lesson of the early period is said to be that "the stronger the military means, the greater the effect they will have at the start of a war, especially in conjunction with an initial surprise blow."⁵⁶ The *History of Soviet Military Thought*, published by the Military History Institute of the Defense Ministry, makes similar observations on the blitzkrieg and adds, "Precisely this was foreseen in the Soviet theory of deep operations, which was formulated already in the early 1930's."⁵⁷

In current Soviet doctrine, the decision of 1960 prevails: nuclear weapons are "the main and decisive means" of waging general war.⁵⁸ The destruction of the enemy in the depth of his deployment would presumably fall to such weapons. On the other hand, as former Minister of Defense Marshal A. A. Grechko put it,

Soviet military science does not absolutize such [nuclear] weapons. It is also not inherent in Soviet military science . . . to give preference in modern warfare to some certain individual service of the armed forces [the Strategic Rocket Forces being one service]. Soviet military science believes that . . . a modern war . . . will include active and decisive operations by all services of the armed forces, coordinated as to goal, time and place.⁵⁹

Grechko also said, however, that the Strategic Rocket Forces are "the basis for the combat might of the Soviet Armed Forces."⁶⁰

It seems, then, that a distinction is still to be drawn between the "main and decisive" forces and the merely "decisive"—the status of the latter, the conventional forces, being

dependent on how closely they can match the capabilities of the nuclear missile forces. Of those capabilities, the outstanding two are war readiness and surprise, which are taken to confer the ability to launch a sudden, overwhelming attack that will devastate and paralyze an enemy as soon as war begins. Others are the high speed and early successful termination of operations. The recent refurbishment of the deep operations theory and the appropriation of the German blitzkrieg serve to demonstrate that all four of these capabilities were at least implicit guiding principles of Soviet thinking on conventional warfare long before the nuclear era. As a result, the Deputy Commandant of the War Academy, Colonel General F. Gayvoronskiy, writing in 1978, could view the development of Soviet operational art from the 1920s to the present as a single continuous process that reached the point, after the 1950s, at which

motorized infantry and armored forces, in collaboration with other elements of the Armed Forces and the Army, could carry exceedingly complicated combat missions with decisive objectives to great depths at high speed."⁶¹

From this, he added, Soviet military-theoretical thought "reached the conclusion that [Soviet] forces must prepare to conduct offensive and defensive operations utilizing all aspects of contemporary armament."⁶²

CONCLUSION

The question raised at the outset—Why has the deep operations theory received prolonged attention and progressively heightened prominence in the Soviet military literature?—appears to have several answers. For one, the theory performs a cosmetic function by providing a rational substitute for the vacuous theorizing of the late Stalinist period, one that can—with some embellishment—be made to sustain the claim that the theoretical principles of modern mobile warfare were, in the words of the *History of Soviet Military Thought*,

"discovered first" in the Soviet Union.⁶³ Also, it has opened an avenue of indirect attack on issues that could not be confronted head-on. Manifestly, the military establishment did not concur in Premier Khrushchev's contention that nuclear explosives and rockets had rendered large conventional forces obsolete, nor did it unreservedly accept the role assigned to conventional forces in the nuclear strategy officially adopted in the early 1960s. History has supplied a safe ground on which to sustain the non-concurrence and develop the counter-argument.

In the most recent literature, the deep operations theory appears to be entering the mainstream of Soviet military thought. According to Grechko, the conventional forces have undergone

great improvement in the fire, shock and maneuver capabilities of the troops, which permits assigning them very decisive missions on the battlefield which they are capable of accomplishing without resorting to nuclear weapons.⁶⁴

Soviet strategy is said in the *Military Encyclopedia* to assume that "a world war could begin and be carried on for a certain period of time" without the employment of nuclear weapons. That strategy is also said to contemplate as a possibility "a continental theater of war" in which the "initial and succeeding operations" could be undertaken primarily by the conventional forces.⁶⁵ In such circumstances, the deep operations theory (plus blitzkrieg) might well have "significance also for the present."

NOTES

1. Institut Marksizma-Leninizma, *Istoriya Velikoy Otechestvennoy Voyny Sovetskogo Soyuz 1941-1945 (IVOV)* (Moscow: Voen. Izdat., 1961), I, 442.
2. Heinz Guderian, *Achtung—Panzer!* (Stuttgart: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1937), pp. 147-49.
3. Institut Marksizma-Leninizma, *Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin* (Moscow: Izdat. Politicheskoy Literatury, 1949), p. 231.
4. Raymond L. Garthoff, *Soviet Military Doctrine* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1953), pp. 69, 101.
5. See John Erickson, *The Soviet High Command* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1962).

6. S. P. Platonov, ed., *Vtoraya Mirovaya Voyna* (Moscow: Voen. Izdat., 1958), p. 171.
7. *IVOV*, I, 442.
8. V. D. Sokolovskiy, *Soviet Military Strategy* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 230, 233, and *passim*.
9. G. Isserson, *Razvitiye teorii sovetskogo operativnogo iskusstva v 30-e gody*, in *Voyenno-istoricheskiy zhurnal (ViZ)* (Nos. 1 and 3, 1965).
10. M. V. Zakharov, ed., *50 let vooruzhennykh sil SSSR* (Moscow: Voen. Izdat., 1968), p. 217.
11. Ministerstva Oborony SSSR, *Istoriya voyn i voyennogo iskusstva* (Moscow: Voen. Izdat., 1970), p. 104.
12. Ministerstva Oborony SSSR, Institut Voennoy Istorii, *Sovetskaya voyennaya entsiklopediya (SVE)* (Moscow: Voen. Izdat., 1976-80), II, 574.
13. Isserson (No. 1), p. 36. In the Soviet practice, deep operations as a form of war usually appears as "deep operations (battle)" (*glubokaya operatsiya [boy]*).
14. On these and other features of World War I doctrine, see Timothy T. Lupfer, *The Dynamics of Doctrine, Leavenworth Papers, No. 4* (Fort Leavenworth, Kans.: US Army Command and General Staff College, 1981).
15. M. Zakharov, "O teorii glubokoy operatsii," in *ViZ* (No. 10, 1970), p. 12.
16. See Hermann Foertsch, *Kriegskunst Heute und Morgen* (Berlin: Zeitgeschichte-Verlag Wilhelm Andermann, 1939), pp. 230-36.
17. *IVOV*, I, 444.
18. Ministerstva Oborony SSSR, Institut Voennoy Istorii, *Istoriya Vtoroy Mirovoy Voyny 1939-1945 (IVMV)* (Moscow: Voen. Izdat., 1973-), III, 414.
19. *SVE*, II, 576.
20. On infantry speed in the mass, see Foertsch, p. 231.
21. At the end of the second Five Year Plan in 1938, the army had 15,000 tanks, over 55,000 artillery pieces, and "had received" close to 25,000 aircraft of various types. See Zakharov, *50 let*, pp. 201-02 and Ministerstva Oborony SSSR, Institut Voennoy Istorii, *Sovetskiye vooruzhennye sily (SVS)* (Moscow: Voen. Izdat., 1978), p. 191.
22. Zakharov, *50 let*, p. 196.
23. Isserson (No. 1), p. 37; Zakharov, "O teorii," p. 13; Guderian, pp. 147-48.
24. This summary of the deep operations doctrine is derived from *IVOV*, I, 442-44; Isserson (No. 1), pp. 42-45; Erickson, pp. 800-01; *IVOV*, III, 414-15; and *SVS*, pp. 200-02.
25. Guderian, p. 148.
26. Giffard Martel, *The Russian Outlook* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1947), pp. 16-24.
27. *SVE*, V, 121.
28. *IVOV*, I, 442-44.
29. *Ibid.*, I, 455.
30. Isserson (No. 3), p. 55.
31. See I. A. Korotkov, *Istoriya sovetskoy voyennoy mysli* (Moscow: Izdat. "Nauka," 1980), pp. 158-61.
32. *IVMV*, III, 415.
33. G. K. Zhukov, *The Memoirs of Marshal Zhukov* (New York: Delacourt Press, 1971), p. 215.
34. Sokolovskiy, p. 134.
35. S. P. Ivanov, *Nachalnyy period voyny* (Moscow: Voen. Izdat., 1974), p. 206.
36. *SVE*, II, 577.
37. Zhukov, p. 479.
38. S. M. Shtemenko, *The Soviet General Staff at War* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), p. 177.
39. See *IVOV*, III, 65; *IVMV*, III, 339 and V, 328; and G. F. Aleksandrov et al., *Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin* (Moscow: Izdat. Pol. Lit., 1949), p. 194.

40. See Garthoff, pp. 103-06.
41. F. Gayvoronskiy, "Razvitiye sovetskogo operativnogo iskusstva," in *ViZ* (No. 2, 1978), p. 21.
42. *Istoriya voyn*, pp. 475-78. See also Gayvoronskiy, p. 24.
43. *Istoriya voyn*, p. 466.
44. *SVE*, II, 578.
45. Nikita S. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers* (Boston: Little Brown, 1970), Appendix 4, pp. 559ff.
46. "Exerpts from the Address Made by Khrushchev to the Supreme Soviet," *The New York Times*, 15 January 1960, p. 2.
47. Khrushchev, p. 515.
48. Sokolovskiy, pp. 232, 305.
49. See V. D. Sokolovskiy, *Soviet Military Strategy* (New York: Crane, Russak & Co., 1975).
50. *IVOV*, VI, 180.
51. Zakharov, "O teorii," p. 19. The following remarks by Giffard Martel (p. 21) concerning British and Soviet armored doctrine in 1936 have a bearing on this claim:

Both we and the Russians had stressed the point that armies had always consisted of two types of troops,

mobile—and slower moving infantry. Neither the Russians nor ourselves had, however, sorted out our ideas very clearly by that date. We had neither of us got as far as the armoured division for the cavalry role.

52. *SVE*, V, 363.
53. Ivanov, p. 224.
54. *Istoriya voyn*, p. 122.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
56. *Ibid.*, pp. 122-31.
57. I. A. Korotkov, *Istoriya sovetskoy voyennoy mysli* (Moscow: "Nauka," 1979), p. 154.
58. Zakharov, *50 let*, p. 522.
59. A. A. Grechko, *The Armed Forces of the Soviet State* (Washington: GPO, 1977, rpt. from Moscow: Voen. Izdat., 1975), p. 150.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
61. Gayvoronskiy, p. 25.
62. *Ibid.*
63. Korotkov, p. 235.
64. Grechko, pp. 147-48.
65. *SVE*, VII, 564.

