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Philip A. Petersen

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*A doctrine for the application of military power does not inhere in the mere possession of military power nor is there universality of acceptance or application of such doctrine as does exist. The most elaborate conceptual framework for considering the development and employment of military force is that of the Soviet Union. Our understanding of that framework permits our better understanding of their objective-means nexus and that understanding is essential to consideration of our own objectives and means.*

## THE SOVIET CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE APPLICATION OF MILITARY POWER\*

by

Phillip A. Petersen

Soviet Military doctrine constitutes that element of political strategy that concerns itself with those specific principles, methods, and forms of preparing for and waging war.<sup>1</sup> While the Soviets have made no secret of the continuing theoretical elaboration of their military doctrine, there is an apparent lack of Western appreciation of the effect of Soviet military doctrine and its components upon practical problem solving. It is hoped that the following exposition will contribute to the eradication of this liability by examining the integrated nature of Soviet war planning.

**Military Doctrine.** Military doctrine is a highly developed discipline in the Soviet Union, and constitutes a sophisticated framework for the examination of

employment and weapon systems development (see Figure 1). It is formulated at the highest levels of Soviet political and military leadership.<sup>2</sup> Military doctrine provides both the accepted view on the nature of future conflicts, as well as guidance for the military to follow in preparing the armed forces for war.<sup>3</sup> Thus, military doctrine is an expression of the political policy of the CPSU as reflected in the military policy of the Soviet Government or, as the Soviets put it, a directive of political strategy. It is distinguished from military science in that doctrine is a unified system of views

\*This article constitutes a continuation of research that produced an earlier article of the same title coauthored with Bruce A. Wallace which appeared in the August 1980 issue of *Journal of Strategic Studies*, pp. 15-18.

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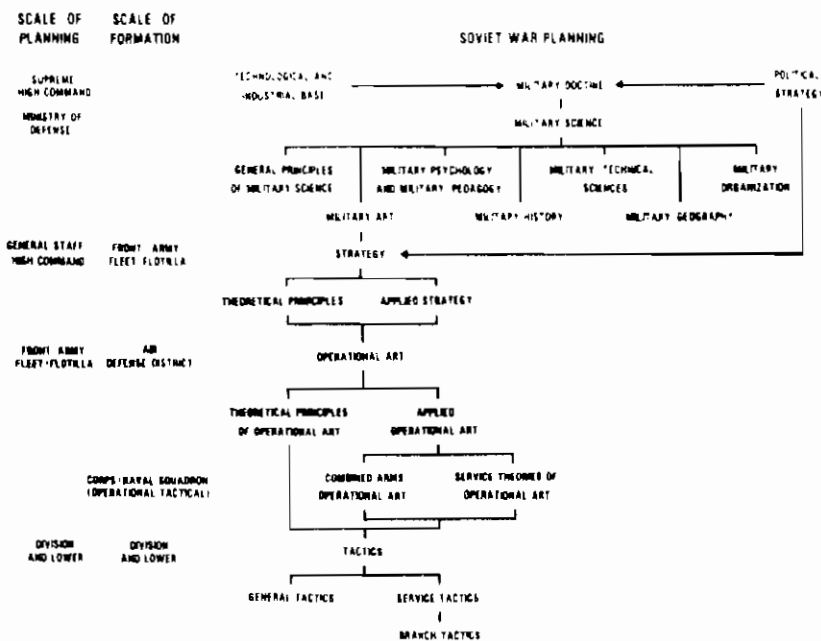


Figure 1

and guide to action elaborated and adopted by the state. By military science the Soviets mean "the aggregate of diverse material and psychological phenomena of armed combat being studied and analyzed for the purpose of elaborating practical recommendations for the achievement of victory in war."<sup>4</sup> While military doctrine is based upon military science, there may exist numerous hypotheses in the system of theories comprising military science that are not selected as doctrine for practical application and thus do not acquire the character of official state views on military questions.<sup>5</sup>

The general theory of Soviet military science defines the interdependence and joint subordination of the relatively independent branches and disciplines within the military field. Classifying military knowledge into various theories, the Soviets regard the theory of military art as the most important element of military science.<sup>6</sup> Military art is defined as that accepted body of thinking on the actual employment of forces in combat.<sup>7</sup> The theory of mili-

tary art consists of strategy, operational art, and tactics, each of which represents a whole field of scientific knowledge.<sup>8</sup> All three are, however, interrelated, interdependent, and supplement each other.<sup>9</sup> Among the three, strategy plays the predominant role.

"Strategy is a division of military art which investigates the principles of preparing for, and waging, war as a whole, and its campaigns."<sup>10</sup> In its applied aspect, it is concerned with the immediate preparation for war of the country's territory and combat theaters, specifically relating to the execution of strategic attack, strategic defense, and other types of military operations on a strategic scale.<sup>11</sup> "Strategic operations are the basic means for achieving the political goals of war."<sup>12</sup> As such, their relationship to political policy "is conditioned by the essence of war as a continuation of the policies of classes and governments by violent means."<sup>13</sup> Thus in "evaluating the strategic content of war, Soviet military strategy believes that war is a complex system of interrelated large simultaneous and

successive strategic operations, including operations in a continental theater of military operations."<sup>14</sup> "Soviet military strategy is the same for all force components, and its principles are the general ones for the conduct of war as a whole and for the conduct of strategic operations with consideration of concrete circumstances in various theaters of military operations."<sup>15</sup> Although each operation has its own characteristic scope, the general goal of each strategic operation will be one of the partial military-political goals of the war.<sup>16</sup>

Within the Soviet framework for the application of military power, the theory of military art is structured so as to provide an operational guide for conducting those activities that support higher level requirements. Thus, "stemming from strategic requirements, operational art determines methods of preparing for and conducting operations to achieve strategic goals, and it gives the initial data for tactics."<sup>17</sup> In essence, "operational art is the connecting link between strategy and tactics."<sup>18</sup> It encompasses the problems of preparing and conducting joint and independent operations by operational-strategic, operational, and operational-tactical field forces of the services of the Soviet Armed Forces.<sup>19</sup> As a determinant of the methods of preparing for, and the conduct of, operations to achieve strategic goals by major field forces, operational art is most often reflected in *front* and army operations.<sup>20</sup>

Tactics concerns the refined laws and principles of actual combat, most often used in conjunction with the operations by military forces at the division level and lower.<sup>21</sup> As such, "military tactics occupies a subordinate position with respect to operational art and strategy, acting in their interests, and serving to achieve the goals set for it by the operational art."<sup>22</sup>

The conceptual framework created by the Soviet theory of military art is applicable to the waging of war

regardless of whether the weapons of concern are primarily nuclear or non-nuclear (either chemical or conventional). This framework is evident in the extensive body of written material discussing both weapon systems and force deployment. Thus combat activities are categorized as one of the following: tactical, operational, or strategic. These terms, along with the terms operational-tactical and operational-strategic,<sup>23</sup> cover the full range of military objectives or goals as well as are weapon systems or means. Their use allows the Soviets to be comparatively precise in their discussions of force employment in any conflict and may, in fact, have a clarifying cognitive effect upon Soviet decisionmakers. Even the concept of surprise, considered to be one of the major principles of Soviet military art, consists of forms that exemplify the sophistication of this Soviet framework.

**The Conceptual Framework Applied.** In order to understand how the Soviet conceptual framework for the application of military power is applied, it is crucial to note how Soviet military geography parallels Soviet military art. Military geography is that branch of military science dealing with political, economic, natural and military conditions in various countries and theaters of military operations from the viewpoint of their effect on the preparation for, and conduct of military operations.<sup>24</sup> Military geography includes naval geography as an independent discipline within its boundaries.<sup>25</sup>

The broadest concept in military geography seems to be that of the theater of war (T.V.).

A T.V. does not have strictly defined boundaries. Normally, it embraces one continent with its contiguous water areas or one ocean with its coasts, as well as the islands and archipelagos located within its confines. In connection with this, the concept of T.V. is

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sometimes used in the sense of the theater of military operations (TVD) . . . .<sup>26</sup>

However, "T.V.s can also be subdivided into TVDs."<sup>27</sup> While the Soviets recognize the concept of a T.V. and admit that it was used in the army of Czarist Russia, they now seem in favor of limiting their own operational considerations to TVDs.

A theater of military operations may be continents or oceans (seas). Although there traditionally were six continental theaters of military operations, the apparent creation of a single command for all of the Soviet Forces along the Chinese border would suggest that the Central Asian TVD has been merged with the Far Eastern TVD. Thus, there now appear to be five continental theaters of military operations: North-western; Western; Southwestern (or Balkan); Near Eastern; and Far Eastern.<sup>28</sup> (See Figure 2.) Of maritime TVDs, there seem to be four: Atlantic Ocean; Pacific Ocean; Indian Ocean; and Arctic Ocean.<sup>29</sup> This leaves four intercon-

tinental theaters of military operations: North American; South American; African; and Australian. "According to their military-political and economic importance, theaters of operations are classified as main or secondary."<sup>30</sup>

As a rule, within each theater of military operations there exists one or more strategic directions.<sup>31</sup> A strategic direction consists of a wide strip of land or sea, and the airspace above it, leading the armed forces of one warring party to the other's most important administrative-political and industrial-economic centers.<sup>32</sup> Strategic directions involve strategic operations, which are undertaken by a combination of fronts, fleets, or independent armies or flotillas.<sup>33</sup> Thus "a strategic sector usually permits operations by many strategic formations of various services."<sup>34</sup>

Strategic directions consist of one or more operational directions. An operational direction is a zone of terrain, water or airspace, and sometimes a combination of these, within which strategic formations conduct their



operations.<sup>35</sup> Within the context of the TVD in which they lie, operational directions may be internal or coastal.

The control of military forces in given geographical areas involves issues that are best resolved during peacetime. The Soviet experience in World War II indicated the value of working out problems of strategic leadership before the outbreak of hostilities. They found that under the conditions of modern warfare "there developed a need for the creation of a radically new and adequately streamlined and flexible organization or organs of operational and strategic leadership on a nation-wide scale."<sup>36</sup> All power in the country was concentrated in a single organ, the State Defense Committee, to supervise all aspects of the war.<sup>37</sup> Under the guidance of this body and the Central Committee Politburo, a Supreme High Command (*Stavka*) served as the highest organ of strategic leadership.<sup>38</sup> Intermediate strategic level commands were used in strategic sectors and theaters of military operations when they were necessary or useful.<sup>39</sup> In their absence, deployed elements of the Supreme High Command were used whenever such strategic level participation in the management of the combat activities of strategic formations was justified.<sup>40</sup>

The point that the Soviet Supreme High Command would, in the contemporary period, find it difficult to exercise the direction of military operations by groups of strategic formations without an intermediate echelon has been a fundamental issue with V.G. Kulikov.<sup>41</sup> Kulikov's concern seems to have been addressed in that Volume 7 of the *Soviet Military Encyclopedia* stated, in 1979, that the control of forces is becoming more complex for organs of strategic leadership, and requires greater flexibility.<sup>42</sup> In addition, he seems to suggest that although in World War II High Commands were created both for strategic directions and for theaters of military operations (TVDs), in a

future war they would most likely be created for TVDs.<sup>43</sup>

Matching Soviet military geography to military art makes it possible to identify the probable command-and-control organization for a Soviet two-front war against NATO and the People's Republic of China (PRC). (See Figure 3) Within the European theater of war, the only geographic areas requiring the control of groups of strategic formations would be in the west and in the southwest. In the northwest, the number of strategic formations is probably small enough to be controlled directly by the Supreme High Command. In central Europe there exists the likelihood that the Group of Soviet Forces, Germany (GSFG), the Northern Group of Forces (NGF), the Central Group of Forces (CGF), and the satellite forces of Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Poland would constitute at least three *fronts*. Three *fronts* and a fleet (Baltic Sea) would undoubtedly constitute a force that would be contained within the boundaries of a strategic sector or a theater of military operations. The same logic can be applied in the southwest, where operations against Turkey and Greece would involve at least three strategic formations in at least three distinctive operational directions. Kulikov's 1975 suggestion that High Commands would probably not be formed as commands of directions of theaters of military operations would tend to indicate that such Western and Southwestern High Commands would cover theaters of military operations rather than strategic sectors. In addition, the creation of High Commands would provide a means to insulate the Soviet decisionmaking process at the top and divide any pressure non-Soviet Warsaw Pact states might attempt to exert while integrating Pact forces above the field formation level. Allegedly, these "unified organs of military leadership on a coalition scale are already being

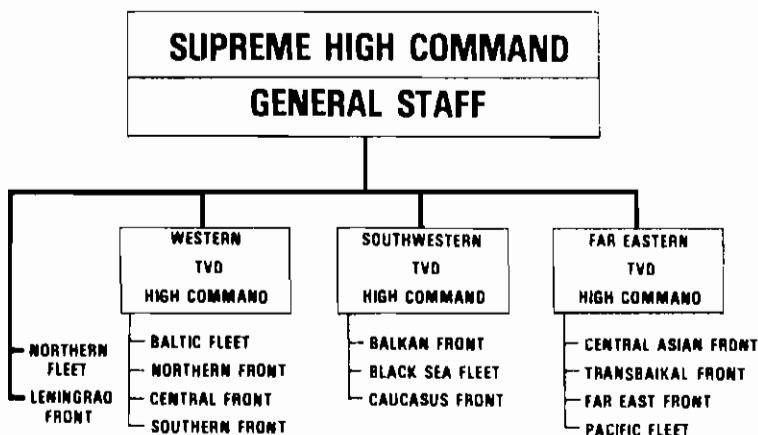


Figure 3

established."<sup>44</sup> The historical precedent for the establishment of a High Command at the TVD level in the Far East was established during World War II. In early 1979 the Western press reported the establishment of just such an intermediate level strategic command.<sup>45</sup>

Although it is possible to identify the probable initial strategic level command-and-control organization for a Soviet two-front war against NATO and the PRC, it must be remembered that the Soviet conceptual approach is extremely flexible. At any point the Soviets deem it necessary, additional High Commands may be established at either the strategic sector or theater of military operations level. The Soviet conceptual framework attempts to insure central control, while insuring sufficient decentralization to obtain the flexibility required for timeliness of operations.

Soviet military thought leads to a view of warfare in which all problems are linked in such a way as to require that they be viewed in totality.

Unlike the one-sided foreign military theories of the "aerial warfare" or "tank warfare," which overestimated the role of the individual arms in the solution of strategic problems, Soviet military strategy firmly supported ideas of the coordinated and massed utilization of all armed forces branches and arms in

the interest of defeating the enemy and reaching set objectives.<sup>46</sup>

From

Soviet military strategy developed the theory of the operational depth, which was based on the simultaneous neutralization by the artillery and aviation of the enemy defense over its entire depth, its swift penetration and the development of a tactical success into an operational success by means of the employment of powerful mobile groups and airborne landings.<sup>47</sup>

The formulation of the "deep operation theory" led to the tactical concept of "all arms" combat.<sup>48</sup> It was only natural, therefore, that the strategic offensive became the main and decisive form of combat.<sup>49</sup>

Strategic offensives are those that can lead to radical changes in the military-political situation and the course of a war.<sup>50</sup> Such operations, which have a potentially decisive effect upon the outcome of a war, involve strategic goals determined by the Supreme High Command.<sup>51</sup> The Supreme High Command probably includes the CPSU General Secretary, the Minister of Defense, the Chief of the General Staff, the First Deputy Ministers of Defense, and the Commanders in Chief of each of the five services. A Council of Defense would serve to unify the military and civilian

leadership so as to insure centralized political direction of the war effort.<sup>52</sup> The contribution of the General Staff, serving as an executive agent for the Supreme High Command, would be to insure the development and execution of a unified military strategy for the operational commands.<sup>53</sup>

When considering the weapon systems, or "means", to be employed to obtain strategic objectives, it is important to note the perceptual problems that arise from military-geographic reality. While American analysts of Soviet military power tend to think in terms of intercontinental missile strikes whenever the term "strategic" is used by the Soviets, the fact that a "Euro-strategic" nuclear exchange in Europe would leave the United States unscathed has led the Soviets to view the military balance differently. It follows, therefore, that Soviet planning for weapons systems application would reflect this difference. Thus, while the Soviets could be expected to allocate MRBMs and IRBMs to contiguous military theaters of operations as would exist in a NATO/Warsaw Pact conflict in Europe, the Soviets might also employ ICBMs and SLBMs against European targets of strategic importance, even though some of these targets might be within the operational range of *front*-based weapon systems.

The terms *operational* and *tactical* are used in reference to objectives and weapon systems that fall under the direct control and responsibility of Soviet *front* or lower level commanders. Operational weapons would consist of those systems, such as *Scud* missiles, clearly not tactical like the comparatively short-range *Frog* systems, artillery, and rocket launchers.

The terms *operational-strategic* and *operational-tactical* serve as the links between the three divisions of military art. They are, as are the three forms of operational art, applicable both in terms of organizational control as well as

objectives and weapon systems. Thus, as with a *front* whose objectives move beyond operational to operational-strategic, *front* or army operational scale objectives may be undertaken by a corps, which is an operational-tactical formation not widely found in Soviet peacetime forces organization.<sup>54</sup> The value of these terms was only reinforced by the extension of the range and destructive power of new weapons that made all command levels more capable of solving problems of greater scale and significance. Essentially then, the terms operational-tactical and operational-strategic simply extend the functional value of the theory of military art in the practical problem solving that receives its guidance from military doctrine, which is based upon the theoretical data of military science.<sup>55</sup>

As can be seen, there exists a fundamental interrelationship and interdependence of military science and military doctrine.

During the course of the evolution of warfare, new conditions and factors of armed combat emerge and acquire full force, as a result of which the old military doctrine lags behind practice and it is necessary to replace it with a new one. The duty of science is to pave the way for practice and to foresee the course of events.<sup>56</sup>

Military doctrine also interacts with strategy in that "the theoretical arguments of strategy influence military doctrine and its scientific evolution. At the same time, strategy implements doctrine directly, and is its instrument in the elaboration of war plans and the preparation of the country for war."<sup>57</sup>

**Military Organizational Development.** "At each historical stage, various states (coalitions of states) developed military strategy in accordance with their policies, their economic capabilities, and the features of their military-geographic position."<sup>58</sup> According to



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the Soviets, the present historical period is no exception.

The availability of a tremendous nuclear missile potential by the Soviet Union and the United States has had a great influence on changing the views relative to the possible character of a war between the two coalitions. There is too great a risk to the destruction of one's own government, and the responsibility to humanity for the fatal consequences of nuclear war is too heavy for an aggressor to make an easy decision on the immediate employment of nuclear weapons from the very beginning of a war without having used all other means for the attainment of its objectives.<sup>59</sup>

Thus, for the Soviets, "... the possibility is not excluded of wars occurring with the use of conventional weapons, as well as the limited use of nuclear means in one or several theaters of military operations, or of a relatively protracted nuclear war with the use of capabilities of all types of armed forces."<sup>60</sup>

Having recognized the difficulty of preventing a theater nuclear conflict from escalating to an intercontinental exchange, the Soviets have attempted to tailor their forces and planning so that they can fight without nuclear weapons. Although the Soviets credit a Soviet-American correlation of nuclear forces with the development of new strategic views in the West,<sup>61</sup> they remain convinced that "... any variant of attack does not exclude destructive retaliatory operations of the other side. Therefore, in any conditions, measures must be taken which would exclude such an attack."<sup>62</sup>

Placing the "deep operational theory" of the strategic offensive into operation in the contemporary period would require the infliction of strikes against the entire depth of a theater of military operations.<sup>63</sup> Although "the infliction

of deep strategic attacks became possible only with the appearance of modern long-range means,"<sup>64</sup> the appearance of special-purpose aircraft (bomber, attack, fighter, etc.) helped make possible the theoretical development of the principal conditions of deep combat. Along with the Strategic Rocket Forces and the bombers of Long Range Aviation, "... operational-tactical missiles and front aviation can also be widely used for inflicting deep attacks in a theater of military operations."<sup>65</sup> In order to free Front Aviation to participate in deep attacks in a theater of military operations, helicopters would have to assume much of the responsibility for aerial fire support of the ground forces. The recent resurrection of the term "army aviation" could suggest that the Soviets have found a solution to the contradictions involved in conducting massed strikes in support of TVD objectives while at the same time providing direct air support to the Ground Forces. Because destruction of NATO nuclear and aviation resources is the principal objective of Frontal Aviation, an army-level aviation force could provide the direct air support required for the advance of ranks and motorized infantry.<sup>66</sup>

Such an event as the re-creation of an aviation force operationally subordinated to the army commander not only makes sense with regard to the fire-support helicopter regiments, but also makes it possible to speculate on the ground-support fighter that Clarence A. Robinson, Jr., conjectured about in the 26 March 1979 issue of *Aviation Week & Space Technology*.<sup>67</sup> Should such an attack aircraft similar in design to the Northrop A-9 (the losing competitor of the Fairchild A-10) be brought into the Soviet aircraft inventory, it might be assigned to army aviation. Certainly a slower-flying or Vertical/Short Take Off and Landing (VSTOL) aircraft could probably be argued for as the price of "giving-up" Frontal Aviation assets

# SOVIET AVIATION ASSETS

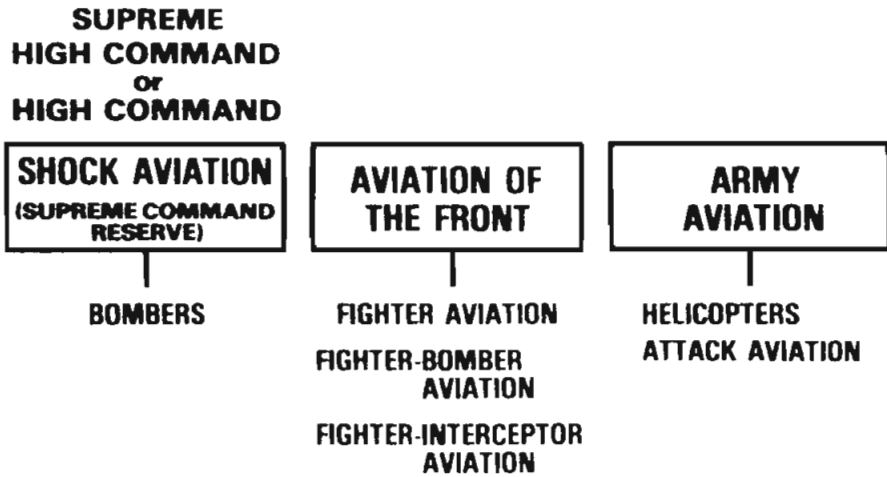


Figure 4

during the conduct of deep theater attacks. With helicopters and any existing attack (ground support) aircraft providing the requisite air fire support of the ground forces, aviation assets in the *front* can be allocated to support an air operation in which "shock action" is obtained through use of bombers held in reserve by the Supreme High Command.<sup>68</sup> In addition, the air defense mission of aviation of the *front* could be supplemented by subordinating APVO fighter-interceptors to the *front* commander.<sup>69</sup> (See Figure 4)

Whatever the evolving operational requirement for success, whether nuclear or nonnuclear, Soviet Forces can be expected to be tailored in an attempt to meet the perceived need. As the present historical period continues to evolve, Soviet doctrine will continue to evolve, and force structure will be shaped to reflect the operational concepts that flow from this effort at adaptation. Thus, as long as military science correctly reflects the evolution of military affairs, and the technological and industrial base can support the changes, Soviet military doctrine will

continue to serve as a practical guide to action.

**Conclusion.** While the Soviets have long recognized the political need for military power, its political value has been maximized by their conceptual framework for the use of military power. In developing a framework that allows for the application of a range of

## BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Phillip A. Petersen was educated at Central Michigan and Western Michigan Universities and is doctoral candidate in political science at the University of Illinois. He is the author or editor of several articles, chapters, and books on Soviet military policy. Mr. Petersen's military service (Army) was as an Intelligence Officer. He has taught at the University of Illinois and in Army schools, has been a research analyst at the Library of Congress, and is now senior analyst for Soviet Doctrine and Strategy in the Soviet/Warsaw Pact Division of the Defense Intelligence Agency.

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means to a range of objectives, the Soviets have insritutionalized flexibility in force use. Should war come, whether nuclear or nonnuclear, the Soviets have conceptually structured their military planning in such a way as to better enable them to seek victory at the lowest possible cost. In doing so, Soviet leaders have made military power appear more usable, which can only enhance its

deterrent value. Thus, although the Soviets remain convinced that true deterrence can only come from the possession of military forces sufficient to win if war occurs, they have, despite the predominant role of nuclear weapons in contemporary warfare, extended the functional value of military force through the continuing theoretical elaboration of their military doctrine.

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### NOTES

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53. The Main Military Council and the smaller and more senior collegium of the Ministry of Defense are peacetime organs whose constituents would provide the wartime leadership of operational commands and strategic planning staffs throughout the armed forces.
54. "Korpus," *Sovetskaya voyennaya entsiklopediya* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1977), p. 372. Note that the term *vyssheye takticheskoye soyedineniye* (higher tactical formation) is also used.
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