

2016/1/4: On operational-strategic thinking in the United Armed Forces of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation

On operational-strategic thinking in the United Armed Forces of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation

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The necessity of operational-strategic thinking has been verified by theorists and military leaders. The matter in question has always been how – with outnumbered forces - to gain local superiority by using the elements time and space, and to change the forces factor in favour of the own forces by destroying the enemy. Since the middle of the 19th century, operational thinking has maintained a form which has remained unchanged in its basic pattern up to the era of nuclear threat. There is a whole host of publications doing justice to both theory and practice of this thinking, such as the works of Carl von Clausewitz, Gerhard von Scharnhorst, August Neidhardt von Gneisenau, Gottlieb von Boyen, Karl von Grolman, Helmuth Johannes Ludwig von Moltke, Alfred Graf von Schlieffen, Erich von Manstein, and many others. Naturally reformers, military theorists and military leaders remained associated with the social conditions. Notwithstanding, however, their military-theoretical legacies have been changeless. The experiences they collected have enriched the knowledge of generations of officers. In the middle of the 1950ies, a qualitatively new stage in the development of the elaborate approach started. At that time fundamental changes happened in the technological and material basis of war. The armed forces got nuclear weapons and much more modern war technology, which resulted in new armament, organisations and various operations. These factors determined higher firepower and punch, manoeuvrability of forces, and better armour-plating. This, in turn, lead to changes in the views of the preparation and performance of wars. Moscow had never made a secret of its military doctrine. The plannings included that a war unleashed by NATO was to take place on the territory of the adversary – the NATO member states – and not on the territory of the allies. In other words, an attack was intended merely as a reaction to the offensive of the adversary. Or, if from different reconnaissance sources an overall picture had been developed, including a deployment of NATO forces without any doubt as to an impending war, a pre-emptive strike would have been possible. In reaction to this situation the US planners in the Pentagon considered the verified readiness for attack of the Warsaw treaty Organisation to be a reason for a "pre-emptive strike", a nuclear first strike, in order to weaken the capacities of the enemy forces, especially those of the Soviet army. For this reason, a war between NATO and the Warsaw Treaty Organisation was ruled out rather than likely, because no one wanted to ride for possible self-annihilation. The education and training of the officers of the Eastern bloc took account of the kind of warfare of that time, and all modern armed forces of the second half of the 20th century had to deal with it. Thus, the understanding of leadership complied with the dimensions of the options of warfare at that time. In order to be able to deter believably, both in the Bundeswehr of West Germany as well as in the Nationale Volksarmee (NVA) of East Germany there existed the motto "Be able to fight in order not to be forced to fight!" This represented rather a high aspiration level, and it determined the fundamental professional self-image of the officers' corps of both sides. Even after the end of the East-West Conflict, the officers of the NVA considered the high level of military thinking in the armed forces of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation to be justified, as it decisively contributed to conflict prevention by military deterrence.

