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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

14 January 1977

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director of Central Intelligence

FROM : William W. Wells
Deputy Director for Operations

SUBJECT : MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Conducting Offensive Operations Without Employing Nuclear Weapons

1. The enclosed Intelligence Information Special Report is part of a series now in preparation based on the SECRET USSR Ministry of Defense publication Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought". This article examines the conduct of offensive operations without nuclear weapons in which readiness to employ them is maintained, based on perceptions of NATO intentions. The author provides an account of the offensive: artillery preparation, breaking through the different echelons of the enemy defense, repelling counterattacks, developing success, providing close air support of the ground troops with tactical aviation, maintaining nuclear weapons in constant readiness while observing the principle of dispersal, and making the transition to the use of tactical nuclear weapons. A table is included which cites the capabilities of a coalition field army, a US army corps, and a West German army corps. This article appeared in Issue No. 1 (83) for 1968.

2. Because the source of this report is extremely sensitive, this document should be handled on a strict need-to-know basis within recipient agencies. For ease of reference, reports from this publication have been assigned

William W. Wells



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# Intelligence Information Special Report



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SUBJECT

MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Conducting Offensive Operations Without Employing Nuclear Weapons

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Summary:

The following report is a translation from Russian of an article which appeared in Issue No. 1 (83) for 1968 of the SECRET USSR Ministry of Defense publication Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought". The author of this article is Colonel P. Simonok. This article examines the conduct of offensive operations without nuclear weapons in which readiness to employ them is maintained, based on perceptions of NATO intentions. The author provides an account of the offensive: artillery preparation, breaking through the different echelons of the enemy defense, repelling counterattacks, developing success, providing close air support of the ground troops with tactical aviation, maintaining nuclear weapons in constant readiness while observing the principle of dispersal, and making the transition to the use of tactical nuclear weapons. A table is included which cites the capabilities of a coalition field army, a US army corps, and a West German army corps.

End of Summary

[redacted] Comment:

Some figures in the enclosed table are uncertain due to the poor quality of the original document.

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## Conducting Offensive Operations Without Employing Nuclear Weapons

(Based on the views of the NATO command)

by

Colonel P. Simonok

During recent years the US and NATO command has focused a great deal of attention on researching problems involved in the preparation for and conduct of offensive operations in which nuclear weapons are not employed.

It is believed that combat operations in the European theater will be conducted under the constant threat of employment of nuclear weapons. Consequently, it is the opinion of the NATO command that the basic principles of preparing for and conducting offensive operations will remain the same as when means of nuclear attack are employed. However, the nature of these operations and the way in which the different branches of the armed forces, branch arms, and combat equipment are used will have a number of specific features.

The main role in offensive operations in which conventional means of armed combat are employed is assigned to the ground forces. It is believed that they should cooperate closely with tactical aviation, which is assigned an important role as the main striking means in the theater of military operations.

It is believed that the conduct of offensive operations when the belligerents do not employ nuclear weapons but are in a constant state of readiness to employ them entails a whole series of difficulties. Meticulous and flexible planning and all-round materiel support are required for the success of such operations.

The principal difficulty in conducting offensive operations using only conventional means of combat, (according) to the estimation of the NATO command, consists of the fact that it is not possible to form sizable troop groupings for an extended period of time on the axes where it is essential to achieve decisive superiority of forces and means over the enemy.

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There are two reasons why it is impossible to form such groupings: first, the danger of subjecting them to a massed enemy nuclear strike, and second, insufficient forces and means.

According to the estimation of the NATO command the combat strength of army groups, field armies, and army corps in offensive operations in which conventional means of combat are employed will not differ from the combat strength of these formations and large units when they conduct such operations using nuclear weapons. Therefore, more time will be needed to carry out combat tasks during offensive operations in which conventional means of destruction are employed than when nuclear weapons are employed. Consequently, the depth of the operation and combat tasks and the rates of advance under these conditions will be less than during a nuclear war.

When nuclear weapons are not employed, an offensive operation of an army group usually is planned to a depth of 250 to 400 kilometers or more, and that of a field army -- to 150 to 250 kilometers or more. The large units may be assigned combat tasks to the following depth: a US army corps -- 50 to 80 kilometers or more; an army corps of the Federal Republic of Germany -- 50 to 60 kilometers or more; and a mechanized (motorized infantry) division -- 25 to 40 kilometers.

The forces may have a rate of advance of 10 to 15 kilometers per day during the breakthrough of the tactical zone of defense and of 25 to 50 kilometers per day in the operational depth. The duration of a field army operation increases to seven to 12 days, and that of an army group to 10 to 14 days.

Since it is planned that the principle of dispersal be most strictly observed, the width of the offensive zones obviously will remain the same as in operations in which nuclear weapons are employed.

Judging by past exercises, the Central Army Group usually operates within a zone having a width of 380 to 450 kilometers, and the Northern Army Group -- within a zone 240 to 300 kilometers wide. A US (coalition) field army is assigned a zone of operations that is 180 to 300 or more kilometers wide. The field armies of the other member countries of the NATO bloc and the NATO (coalition) field armies may be assigned zones that are

80 to 150 and 100 to 200 kilometers wide, respectively.

The width of the offensive zone of an army corps may fluctuate within the following limits: a US army corps -- 40 to 80 kilometers or more; a West German army corps -- 50 to 60 kilometers or more; a British army corps -- 40 to 60 kilometers.

Mechanized (motorized infantry) and armored divisions are assigned offensive zones that are up to 20 to 30 kilometers wide.

According to the views of the NATO command, the operational disposition of an army group and of a field army and the battle formations of army corps and divisions when conducting offensive operations employing conventional means of destruction will consist of the same elements and will have the same strength as during an offensive employing nuclear weapons.

Based on the experience of exercises, an army group and a field army as a rule have a single-echelon operational disposition. In the first echelon of an army group there may be two field armies or one field army and several separate corps. One to two army corps and two to four separate divisions remain in the reserve. During the offensive, the large units in the reserve are resubordinated to one of the field armies, usually one that is operating on the axis of the main attack.

The operational disposition of a field army includes the first echelon, the reserve, the army artillery, the tank reserve, and the reserve of engineer troops. Depending on its composition, the first echelon of the army may consist of two to four army corps or three to four divisions.

As a rule, one or two divisions remain in the reserve of a field army. Occasionally three divisions or an army corps are allocated to it.

The army artillery of a US field army may have a group of Pershing guided missiles (composed of two to three battalions) and an antiaircraft artillery brigade (five to six battalions of Nike-Hercules surface-to-air missiles and four battalions of Hawk surface-to-air missiles). In individual instances the army artillery may also contain one or two Sergeant guided missile battalions.

As a rule, the battle formation of first-echelon army corps is made up of two echelons, with an armored (tank) and one or two mechanized (motorized infantry) divisions in the first echelon, and a mechanized (motorized infantry) division in the second echelon. When the corps has a two-echelon battle formation there may also be an armored (tank) division in the second echelon.

The battle formations of the first-echelon divisions of a corps usually are made up of two echelons.

For the purpose of rendering effective fire support, a field artillery group composed of three to four tube artillery battalions and one Honest John free-flight missile battalion may be attached to each US army division operating in the first echelon. In individual instances a division may be reinforced by two similarly composed field artillery groups.

Since under these conditions the operational disposition of the troops of the formations, the disposition of the battle formations of the large units, and also the width of the offensive zones will be the same as when conducting offensive operations employing nuclear weapons, the army group, the field armies, and army corps, and even the divisions, in order to achieve superiority of forces and means on the most important axes, will be compelled to form somewhat larger groupings for a short period of time, but not to the detriment of the antinuclear protection of the troops.

It is planned for the greatest density of forces and means to be on those axes where terrain conditions permit the principal branch arms and their combat equipment to operate.

Enemy formations and large units will begin offensive operations at the same strength they will have at the beginning of the war. However, one must take into consideration that within several days the strength of these formations will be increased by five to seven divisions from large units which had been under national subordination during peacetime. In the Northern Army Group, a total of 11 to 16 divisions take part in the exercises of the NATO armed forces, and in the Central Army Group, a total of 14 to 21 divisions participate.

25 – 37 divs

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Depending on its assignment, a field army may either be a coalition-type army or may combine the forces of a single country. The combat strength of a field army will vary.

The capabilities of a US coalition field army and of the army corps of the principal armies of the member countries of the NATO bloc are cited in the attached table. It is obvious from the table that a coalition-type field army and the army corps of the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany, in spite of the wide offensive zones, are capable of setting up fairly substantial densities of personnel and fire means. Accordingly, we must take it into consideration that when terrain conditions permit the use of all branch arms on the most important axes, the density of forces and means may be increased 1.5 to two times by decreasing their density on the secondary axes.

During offensive operations in which nuclear weapons are not employed, an army group will deliver a strike on two axes, concentrating its main efforts on one of them. Depending on its composition, a field army may deliver an attack on two to three or three to four axes. An army corps usually operates on each axis. The army corps of the first echelon of a field army (army group) may carry out an offensive either from the march or from a position of close contact with the enemy. When going over to the offensive from the march, the main forces of the army corps move out of the concentration areas in dispersed march formations using previously selected routes. Each division uses two to four routes for its advance. As a rule, the attached and organic artillery of the first-echelon divisions occupies fire positions in advance on the axes of the advance of the divisions and participates in the artillery preparation and the fire support of the offensive of the divisions. In contrast to a nuclear war, the preparatory fire may last from one to two hours. Under these conditions, the first echelons of the divisions advance to the deployment line in company columns (three to five kilometers from the enemy) 20 to 30 minutes prior to the beginning of the attack.

If the offensive begins from a position of close contact with the enemy, the artillery preparation begins one to two hours prior to the beginning of the attack.

Not only the entire artillery of the corps of the first echelon of the army (army group), but also a substantial portion

counterattacks (counterthrusts) and of supporting the commitment of the reserve of the corps to develop the success of the offensive. It is considered desirable to commit the reserves of the army corps to battle at a depth of 20 to 40 kilometers.

It is planned that counterattacks made during the offensive be repelled either from position or from the march. During offensive operations in which only conventional weapons are employed, tanks, antitank guided missiles, and artillery are considered the principal means of repelling counterattacks. All the forces of the army corps may be used to repel a counterattack, or only the divisions operating on the flanks, in order to preserve a high rate of advance.

The same procedure is used to develop success as during a nuclear war. When developing success, the armored (tank) divisions constitute the main striking force of the army corps. The task of the mechanized (motorized infantry) divisions consists of ensuring the freedom of actions of the armored (tank) divisions and of increasing the speed of their advance.

The field army develops success on two or three axes, concentrating its main forces on one of them. All or some of the divisions in the army reserve may be subordinated to the army corps that is operating on the main axis. It is planned that in some cases one or two divisions from adjacent corps of the first echelon of the army be transferred to that corps. Consequently, this corps will be composed of three or four divisions, and occasionally even more.

In order to build up the efforts of the field armies during an operation, it is planned that large units from the reserve of an army group be made subordinate to the field armies, which usually operate on the main axes, and divisions that have suffered great losses will be withdrawn from these armies. As a result, the field armies, having partially renewed their strength, will be able to attack to the entire depth of operations of the army group.

It is not to be ruled out that during the operation the army group will receive reinforcements drawn from the reserves of the commander of ground forces in the theater of military operations or from the large units of adjacent army groups. For this

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purpose, usually after an army group has completed one of the stages of the operation, it is planned that it will regroup its forces in order to reinforce the grouping on the axis of the main attack or to shift its efforts to a new axis.

The flight resource for close air support of the ground troops is increasing. Based on the experience of exercises, 35 to 43 percent of the aircraft sorties are expended for this purpose, while no more than 10 percent are expended when nuclear weapons are employed. The principal task of tactical aviation is combat for air supremacy, on the achievement and retention of which up to 50 percent of the aircraft sorties may be expended. A comparatively small number of aircraft sorties are used to isolate the battlefield under these conditions (10 to 15 percent).

Judging from the experience of exercises, under the conditions examined five to six tactical fighter wings usually are allocated for close air support of a field army. An army corps may be allocated 100 to 160 aircraft sorties per day for air support, while a first-echelon division operating on the main axis may be allocated up to 30 to 50 sorties, and in individual cases up to 70 to 80.

When providing close support to the ground forces, the aviation operates at low altitudes (less than 1,500 meters) and, as a rule, in small groups. Groups of four to eight aircraft are allocated to neutralize subunits the size of a company or motorized rifle battalion, and groups of eight to 16 aircraft are allocated to neutralize a tank battalion or a motorized rifle regiment.

The most important requirements, which must be fulfilled without fail when conducting offensive operations employing conventional means, are the maintenance of nuclear weapons in a state of constant readiness and the observance of the principle of dispersal.

First and foremost, the strategic offensive forces are in a state of constant readiness to employ nuclear means. Among the means that are in immediate subordination to the commander of the armed forces in the European theater of war, operational-tactical missiles and delivery aircraft of tactical and carrier-based

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aviation may be kept in a state of constant readiness. Based on the experience of exercises, almost all delivery aircraft units and subunits of the 2nd and 4th Allied Tactical Air Forces were at 15-minute readiness. The missile units and subunits of the field armies, army corps, and even of the divisions were also in a state of readiness to employ nuclear means. Thus, guided missile battalions were kept at readiness no. 2 and 3 (the Pershing guided missile at 15 to 30-minute readiness, and the Sergeant guided missile at 25 to 45-minute readiness). At the special warheads supply and storage posts for the Sergeant guided missile and the Honest John free-flight missile, reserves consisting of 40 to 50 percent nuclear warheads and 50 to 60 percent conventional warheads are set up.

These, briefly, are the views of the NATO command on the conduct of offensive operations in which nuclear weapons are not employed. It is taken into consideration that at the very beginning of the war combat operations may be conducted using only conventional means of combat. Subsequently, the armed forces will go over to limited employment of only tactical nuclear weapons (warheads with a yield of up to 500 kilotons), and next to the unlimited employment of nuclear means of attack.

It must be observed that there may be completely unlimited use of nuclear weapons at the very beginning of the war.

According to the NATO command, the transition to the use of tactical nuclear weapons may take place in the event that their armed forces are not able to carry out their assigned tasks in a limited armed conflict. Under these conditions it is planned that tactical nuclear weapons be used for strikes against missile and artillery launching and firing sites, troops, control posts, strong points, depots, road junctions, air and naval bases, etc., in so doing, not subjecting important strategic targets and large population centers to destruction, even if they are located in the geographical zone of the limited war.

It is characteristic that operational-tactical and tactical missiles, the nuclear artillery, and air defense means be the principal means allocated to deliver nuclear strikes under these conditions. Accordingly, judging by the experience of exercises, up to 80 percent of the nuclear warheads will be employed by army corps and division means. The use of the indicated means to

deliver nuclear strikes is explained, apparently, by the large quantity of them in the large units and formations, and also by the endeavor of the NATO command to maintain its delivery aircraft in a high degree of readiness in case there is a transition to the unlimited employment of nuclear weapons. However, it must be kept in mind that in the first instance not only the enumerated means, but also the delivery aircraft of tactical aviation and even of carrier aviation may be used to deliver nuclear strikes.

As has already been said, the non-nuclear war may escalate into a general nuclear war immediately or after a short period of combat operations during which tactical nuclear weapons are used. In the field manual of the US Army it is pointed out that: "It is very difficult to determine in advance the moment when a limited war may escalate into a general war. It may occur whenever one of the adversaries comes to the conclusion that the fate of his nation is at stake."*

When the non-nuclear war escalates into a general war, the NATO command will endeavor to deliver the first nuclear strike in the theater of military operations suddenly, using all its available means of nuclear attack. The procedure for delivering this strike may vary. However, it is quite obvious that it will be carried out to achieve surprise and to preserve the NATO forces and means. It is therefore most probable that missiles will be launched and aircraft will take off simultaneously, following the launching of strategic ballistic missiles in conformity with a common plan for a global nuclear offensive. It is not to be ruled out that the first nuclear strike in the theater of military operations will not coincide with the first nuclear strike using strategic means.

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* US Army Field Manual. The Conduct of Combat Operations (FM 100-5), p. 9.

Table

| Type of Forces and Means | Coalition Field Army (11 divisions) from US - 8 from FRG - 3 | | | US Army Corps (mechanized divisions - 2, armored divisions - 2, armored cavalry regiment - 1) | | | FRG Army Corps (motorized infantry divisions - 2, tank divisions - 1) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | total for field army | density per km of front during operations in a zone | | total for army corps | density per km of front during operations in a zone | | total for army corps | density per km of front during operations in a zone | |
| | | 120 km | 250 km | | 45 km | 90 km | | 30 km | 60 km |
| Motorized infantry battalion | 70 | 0.38 | 0.23 | 20[a] | 0.5 | 0.25 | 19 | 0.36 | 0.3 |
| Tanks | 3,325 | 18.4 | 11 | 983 | 24.7 | 12.3 | 786 | 15.8 | 15 |
| Guns and mortars | 2,380 | 13 | 7.7 | 723 | 18.2 | 9 | 454 | 9 | 7.6 |
| Antitank Defense Means | | | | | | | | | |
| Antitank guided missiles | 608 | 3.3 | 2 | 170 | 4.2 | 2.1 | 113 | 2.3 | 2 |
| 88.9-mm and 90-mm antitank rifles | 4,280 | 23 | 14 | 1,800 | 39 | 19.6 | 150 | 3.2 | 20(sic) |
| 106 antitank recoilless guns | 400 | 2.2 | 1.3 | 102 | 2.5 | 1.2 | 100 | 2 | 1.5 |
| Air Defense Means | | | | | | | | | |
| Surface-to-air missile launcher | 528 | 2.9 | 1.7 | 96 | 2.4 | 1.2 | 24 | 0.48 | 0.4 |
| Antiaircraft guns | 171 | 0.9 | 0.5 | -- | -- | -- | 171 | 3.4 | 2.5 |
| Launcher-Pershing guided missile | 12 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Launcher-Sergeant guided missile | 12 | -- | -- | 4 | -- | -- | 4 | -- | -- |
| Launcher-Honest John free-flight missile | 70 | -- | -- | 24 | -- | -- | 16 | -- | -- |

[a] Including three reconnaissance battalions from an armored cavalry regiment

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