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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

DD/I RESEARCH STAFF

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

CIA [Redacted]

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18 January 1962

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SUBJECT: Soviet Military Thought on Large-Scale Nonnuclear War in Europe

1. Last year, signs of an awakened Soviet interest in the possibility of large-scale, nonnuclear war limited to central Europe appeared in an open Soviet publication--a rather exceptional Defense Ministry book entitled "Military Strategy."* Not surprisingly, this event touched off a controversy among U.S. intelligence specialists as to its meaning for Soviet military planning. The controversy does not as yet seem to have been resolved, mainly because the facts in the case are elusive. In this memorandum we have tried to nail down the few pertinent facts which our research has uncovered, in the hope of providing a basis for assessing Soviet intentions regarding limited war in Europe.

2. It should be stated forthwith that available affirmative evidence bearing on the question of Soviet interest in nonnuclear war in Europe is scant, unconfirmed, and ambiguous. It would therefore be premature to infer at this juncture that there has been a change in the strongly negative view which Soviet officialdom has long taken of the possibility of serious limited war in Europe. At the most, what can be stated at this time is that the question of possible nonnuclear war in Europe--conspicuously absent from classified and open Soviet military discourse in 1960-61--has in 1962 been put up

*"Military Strategy," which was signed to press in May 1962 but made available here only last fall, was reviewed in its entirety in a previous memorandum, [Redacted]

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by a group of Soviet military officers as one in need of consideration. Since the release of the book "Military Strategy," there have been only the slightest hints in open sources of renewed interest in the question; we cannot comment on private Soviet discourse, inasmuch as no classified Soviet materials that might be germane to the issue have reached us since the publication of the book.

Background

3. Up until last year Soviet military writings evinced a distinct lack of interest in the question of contained non-nuclear warfare in Europe. Though the Soviets have long enjoyed an advantageous conventional war capability in central Europe, they have been extremely pessimistic about the possibility of keeping any kind of armed conflict there limited in scope and in armaments. They have expected that any major conflict in Europe would either be nuclear from the start or would rapidly escalate into a global nuclear war. Two explicit assumptions underlying Soviet strategic planning have been that a future general war will necessarily be nuclear and that any armed conflict will "inevitably" develop into a global nuclear war should the nuclear powers be drawn into it. Since 1961, these tenets of doctrine have been reiterated many times--even in the book "Military Strategy"--and are almost certainly still in force.

4. Hence, virtually the full weight of professional Soviet military thinking on large-scale combat in Europe has been brought to bear on problems of nuclear war. All large-scale Soviet military exercises to our knowledge have been conducted in Europe in recent years in the framework of a hypothetical nuclear conflict. All discussions of theater war preparations in the classified Soviet documents (1960-spring 1962) have concerned the nuclear battlefield.*

*An article in the secret edition of "Military Thought" released last spring strongly implied that all recent major Soviet exercises have been planned for nuclear war and that all operational training directives concern nuclear war.
(Lt. Gen. V. Mernov, [REDACTED])

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Moreover, there has been no suggestion in any classified Soviet source that it is the possibility of large-scale local or general conventional war that requires the maintenance of strong and versatile ground forces. The classified sources have consistently portrayed the complex requirements of nuclear war as the rationale for maintaining modernized conventional forces.

5. The short shrift made of local or limited war in the available classified Soviet documents is worthy of mention. In the very small number of instances in which local-limited war was discussed, it was treated only as a trigger of a general nuclear war. For example, Col. Gen. Pavlovsky (the late deputy chief of the General Staff) hypothesized in an article published in the top secret version of "Military Thought" in early 1961 that the West might first attack a bloc satellite; the USSR would then enter the war to defend the "friendly country"; and the conflict would turn into a world war. It is noteworthy, however, that the language used by Pavlovsky elsewhere in his article fell short of rigid determinism as regards escalation. An attack against a Soviet satellite, he wrote, could "scarcely" be confined to a local war and would "most probably" lead to a world war. Thus, there seemed to be implicit in his statement the rather weak hope that the conflict could be prevented from spreading to a global war.

6. Khrushchev himself was in 1961 strongly inclined to regard large-scale nonnuclear war in Europe as impossible, and there has been no indication of a change in his thinking on this matter. According to [REDACTED] Khrushchev was widely quoted among members of the General Staff as stating in 1961 that any local war in Europe is bound to turn into a general nuclear war. (He has voiced the same conviction in public statements, which of course, were intended to deter limited military initiatives by the West.) This is not to say that Khrushchev thinks the situation in central Europe so taut as to rule out the possibility of very limited conventional combat which might result from the signing of a separate peace treaty with East Germany. On the contrary, [REDACTED] suggests that Khrushchev in his Berlin planning is

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counting on NATO's not using nuclear weapons in the first phases of a conflict. And he reportedly drew up in 1961 contingency military plans to support his Berlin policy that entail a nonnuclear course of action.*

The New Evidence

7. The book "Military Strategy," which contains the suggested indications of aroused Soviet interest in localized nonnuclear war, appears to be at cross-purposes with itself on this and several other issues. In some places, it seems to stress the improbability of such a war in Europe. Thus the book (on p. 220, Russian edition) recalls Marshal Juin's statement of 4 November 1960 that "nuclear weapons would be used by NATO in case of war even if the enemy did not resort to their use at the start of military operations"; it emphasizes (p. 222) that if nuclear powers are drawn into an armed conflict it will "inevitably develop into an all-out nuclear war"; and it threatens (p. 212) that a "direct attack against the USSR or other socialist countries...will obviously lead to a new world war." But elsewhere the book discusses local war situations and operations, including a hypothetical large-scale nonnuclear "local war" in central Europe, and urges that a place be carved out for local war in Soviet military strategy. (The inconsistencies in the book undoubtedly stem in part from the fact that the work was prepared by a group of officers who represent contending schools of thought in the military establishment.)

8. The "new" element in the book that has caught the eye of specialists here is at once seen when compared with the established line:

[REDACTED] conveys the following opinion of a senior Soviet general: "The USSR would support East Germany with a multitude of tanks, and if necessary with other weapons. We would want any clash to be brief and limited in scope if the West moves up tanks and other weapons to seize and consolidate communications with Berlin." [REDACTED]

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The Line

"In rejecting the peaceful unification of the German nation, the Government of West Germany is contemplating the forcible seizure of the GDR. Only a blind man can fail to see that any attempt to swallow that republic will not go unpunished. Indeed, it is not alone. It has its own true allies who will not leave it in time of trouble. It is also known that West Germany too has its allies, with whom it is linked in the aggressive NATO pact. Under these conditions an attack by West Germany against the GDR would not be a local conflict--it would be the start of thermonuclear war unparalleled in history, in which all states belonging to two opposing camps would take part."

(Khrushchev, interview with Drew Pearson, 24 August 1961; released 28 August 1961)

The Book

"It is possible that West Germany, independently or together with other NATO members, might unleash a local war in Europe by means of a surprise attack against East Germany. At the start of such a war nuclear weapons might not even be used. Military operations in this case might begin for example, with massed attacks by tactical aviation and rocket troops using conventional ammunition against the entire territory of East Germany or some other close socialist country, and by invasion with large tank groups." (p. 325)

9. The striking contrast between the above statements is somewhat deceptive, however. For the paragraph from the book quoted above on the possibility of local war in Europe is almost lost in a quagmire of ambiguity when read in the context of its rather disjointed parent chapter. The paragraph was immediately followed by a statement implying that the local war would be a prologue to a general war: "The imperialists might attempt to unleash a new world war by means of local conflicts in other parts of the world as well." And the text went on in a very general way to stress the danger

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of local war: "Any local military conflict under modern conditions, if it is not nipped in the bud, might become a world war with the unrestrained use of nuclear weapons." What is more, the book in a preceding chapter contradicts the sense of a contained local war involving East Germany, stating that an attack against a satellite "will obviously lead to a new world war."

10. Perhaps a stronger indication of Soviet interest in limited war (not necessarily European) is the appeal made at least twice in the book for a place for such a contingency in Soviet military strategy. (In open Soviet military publications in 1961, there were also a small number of references to the need to study the experience of local war situations, but these bare mentions did not carry the implications of the statements made in the "Military strategy" book.) Thus, the book in one place strongly implied an active role in small-scale war for the Soviet military establishment: "Soviet military strategy calls for the study of the means of conducting such wars in order to prevent them from developing into a world war and to bring quick victory over the enemy." (p. 214) In another place the book called for the study of local war on the grounds that "such a war might also be thrust upon the socialist countries" by "imperialist circles fearing that world war might be completely disastrous for capitalism."

11. The fact that for the first time in a long while the book discusses (even if briefly) types of operations that would be distinctly applicable to limited war, is also suggestive of strong interest in the problem. Geographic areas are unfortunately not mentioned in the context of such discussions, as in the following examples:

"A local war might be another matter. Here, as before, the main events might develop in the areas of military operations near the front, although the methods of armed combat in this case as well have been changed considerably compared with the past war, since the war would be conducted with different weapons and the threat of nuclear war would hang constantly over the warring countries." (p. 329)

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"Each of these types of strategic operations will be manifested in a world-wide nuclear war. In local wars, certain of these types of strategic operations may not be used or will be used on a limited scale. This would be particularly true of military operations deep within enemy territory. Military operations in land and naval theaters acquire decisive significance in such wars."
(p. 335)

12. Since the publication of the book, the open sources have carried only slight hints of renewed interest in large-scale nonnuclear war in which Soviet forces might become involved. The evidence, in this regard, is tenuous and may be subject to different interpretations. The best examples we can muster from the open press are to be found in an article by Col. Gen. S. M. Shtemenko (chief of the main staff of the ground forces), in RED STAR of 3 January 1963. Shtemenko might possibly have had a nonnuclear conflict in mind when he wrote that Soviet tank and motorized infantry troops can "operate successfully under conditions of the use of nuclear weapons as well as of the use of only conventional means of destruction." He also wrote elsewhere in the article in a similar vein that field training of ground troops includes consideration of both the "conditions of a mutual and wide application of nuclear weapons, and of conventional means of combat." But in both instances, the statements could also have referred to isolated situations in a nuclear war in which battles are fought with conventional weapons alone.

Possible Motivation

13. If there has in fact been an awakened interest in the USSR in the possibility of a contained nonnuclear war in Europe--how might such an occurrence be explained? For one thing, a likely wellspring of motivation is the trend in Western strategic thought toward developing military concepts and capabilities suited to controlled nonnuclear warfare in Europe. In the past, Soviet strategy has been importantly influenced by U.S.-NATO doctrine. Thus, it is above all owing to their fear of strong Western reliance on nuclears, in the event of war in Europe, that the Soviets have taken a very dim view of the possibility of limiting the scope of

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armed conflict there. Classified Soviet military documents (released prior to Spring 1962) have pointed out that NATO has no limited war doctrine, that it does not plan to fight any serious conventional war, that the inferior conventional strength of NATO is compensated for (in Western planning) by nuclear weapons, and that all calculations of the NATO command are based on the use of nuclear weapons. Now it is true that the Soviets have for several years closely followed strategic debates in this country and have witnessed the buildup of conventional forces for specialized local war operations. But they have evidently not associated these earlier developments with Western strategy for Europe. In their view, while the U.S. massive retaliation strategy was by 1958 all but dead and buried as far as the rest of the world was concerned, it was still very much alive as a strategy for Europe.

14. However, over the past year or so the Soviets have been witness to a heightened interest among U.S. leaders (as revealed in speeches by the Secretary of Defense among others) in radically altering U.S. NATO strategy for Europe. Soviet publications have observed a tendency among U.S. leaders to favor staged responses to bloc initiatives and to build up NATO conventional forces in Europe in an effort to reduce NATO's dependence on nuclears. Other steps taken by the United States may also have served to confirm in Soviet eyes this trend toward developing concepts and capabilities for nonnuclear war in Europe. (Marshal Vershinin, in IZVESTIA of 23 December 1962, observed that General Taylor, "author of the strategy of flexible reaction," was recently appointed to the post of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and that "this new strategy has now become the official military doctrine of the United States.") In short, some Soviet officers, apparently believing that it would be advantageous to the USSR if a military conflict in Europe could be kept nonnuclear, might have taken encouragement from the perceived trend in Western strategic thought to press for reconsideration of Soviet doctrine on war in Europe.

15. It may also be the case that in calling upon Soviet military strategy to take account of possible large-scale local wars, the authors of the book are expressing concern over the one-sided emphasis on nuclear warfare in Soviet military planning and training. (See para. 4 and accompanying footnote.) There is evidently no Soviet doctrine for

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large-scale nonnuclear war. To be sure, there is extensive training of Soviet troops in the use of conventional weapons but always within the context of nuclear warfare.* It may well have occurred to the Soviet theorists, as it has to some of us, that the overwhelming emphasis in Soviet doctrine on general nuclear war will probably erode the USSR's conventional war-making capability over the long run. (Given the situation of a strategic nuclear stalemate or standoff, this could be disastrous for Soviet foreign policy.) This erosion has already begun. While some changes in Soviet force structure have no doubt improved Soviet conventional war machinery (motorization of infantry and increments to infantry conventional firepower), other measures (such as cutbacks in frontal aviation and tube artillery) have tended to have a detrimental effect on the conventional capability of the troops. The same may be said for the planning of operations: doctrine now demands that nuclear weapons be the basis for planning of all major military operations. In fact, military commanders are sharply criticized for using nuclear weapons as the means of support and reinforcement of infantry and tank operations, instead of vice-versa.

16. Summing up, we find reflected in the literature basic inconsistencies in Soviet thinking on the question of contained nonnuclear war in Europe. No stranger to Soviet military writings, inconsistency has often been the herald of change in doctrine, which for several years now has been in a formative stage of development. The evidence, on balance, still weighs heavily on the side of the entrenched negative attitude

*Thus, in 1961 Major General Gorbatov wrote in the top secret "Military Thought": "Some authors demand that we give up troop training in breaking through an established defense of the enemy because it may be annihilated by nuclears or bypassed....We must train the troops in everything which may be encountered in war....It may be supposed that in the first days of a war, nuclear weapons will be used abundantly, and in the succeeding period in a more limited manner, because the plants producing these weapons will begin to be destroyed more rapidly than they can be restored. With the limited use of nuclear weapons, the role of aviation, tanks, and artillery will be raised...."

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which Soviet officialdom has long taken toward the possibility of serious nonnuclear war in central Europe. The literature has retained the old basic concepts governing Soviet military planning for Europe which, in view of the objective situation, virtually rule out large-scale nonnuclear war in that theater. For in the event of such a conflict, forces of the major nuclear powers are bound to become directly involved in it --unless they were to abandon their announced commitments and responsibilities in the area. Thus, at the present time we can only conclude from the slight evidence at hand that some high ranking military officers in the USSR, perhaps inspired by recent developments in Western strategic thinking, have re-evaluated the risks of engaging in extended nonnuclear combat in Europe under the shadow of escalation to nuclears, and have sought to arouse their colleagues' interest in this question.

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