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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

27 October 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director of Central Intelligence

FROM : William W. Wells
Deputy Director for Operations

SUBJECT : MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Actions of Front Aviation in the First Offensive Operation of the Front in the Initial Period of War

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 presents critical comments on a previous article on the subject, taking particular issue with the operational disposition of air forces and removal of aircraft to dispersal airfields. The author also criticizes the previous article's presentation of air support, stating this concept as a specific group of tasks to be carried out with conventional weapons in cooperation with ground forces. He agrees that air defense should have one overall commander for aviation and surface-to-air missiles and that the air army commander is in the best position to assume this function and reallocate air forces as required. This article appeared in Issue No. 1 (71) for 1964. [redacted]

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 [redacted]

William W. Wells

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SUBJECT

MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Actions of Front Aviation in the First Offensive Operation of the Front in the Initial Period of War

SOURCE Documentary

Summary:

The following report is a translation from Russian of an article which appeared in Issue No. 1 (71) for 1964 of the SECRET USSR Ministry of Defense publication Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought". The author of this article is General-Mayor of Aviation S. Sokolov. This article presents critical comments on a previous article on the subject, taking particular issue with the operational disposition of air forces and removal of aircraft to dispersal airfields. The author also criticizes the previous article's presentation of air support, stating this concept as a specific group of tasks to be carried out with conventional weapons in cooperation with ground forces. He agrees that air defense should have one overall commander for aviation and surface-to-air missiles and that the air army commander is in the best position to assume this function and reallocate air forces as required. End of Summary

[redacted] Comment:

The author also wrote "Operations of a Front Air Army in Support of a Tank Army" in Issue No. 4 (65) for 1962 [redacted] The SECRET version of Military Thought was published three times annually and was distributed down to the level of division commander. It reportedly ceased publication at the end of 1970. [redacted]

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Actions of Front Aviation in the First Offensive Operation of the Front in the Initial Period of War

by

General-Mayor of Aviation S. Sokolov

In their article, Generals S. Shimanskiy and V. Povarkov* speak about the necessity of a new organization of the combat actions of the troops and front aviation in the operations conducted by a front under present conditions. We can agree with this in principle. However, in explaining the content of the combat actions of the aviation, the authors, in our opinion, tolerate inaccuracies and fail to argue certain new propositions sufficiently.

For example, it is indicated that a change in the conditions of carrying out the initial strike will call for corresponding changes in the operational disposition of the air army of the front and therefore, they say, it cannot be stereotyped (p. 54). The thesis is not open to question. But, only one paragraph later, the authors recommend having, regardless of the time of day and weather conditions, the same operational disposition of the grouping of forces participating in the strike.

We cannot, of course, agree with such a proposal. In this case, striving to simplify the organization of combat actions and not change the operational disposition of the air army in accordance with a change in conditions is exactly that stereotyping which the authors themselves have come out against.

There is no need to demonstrate that the grouping of the forces of the front aviation participating in the initial strike will have a different operational disposition depending on the situation, time of day, and weather conditions.

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* Collection of Articles of the Journal 'Military Thought", No. 2 (63), 1962.

Nor can we agree with the reasoning on moving the fighter aviation out from under a strike. The authors propose immediately moving the fighter aviation at the first opportunity, just as the other large units of the air army, to dispersal airfields without awaiting the signal for a sortie to repel the enemy. But such actions, under certain conditions of the situation, may not be desirable. Removal to dispersal airfields immediately reveals the entire airfield network of the front air army, which was not manifest to the enemy to such an extent earlier; and, too, actually determining the moment for removal is not all that simple. In reality, it can be roughly established only when something definite is known about the initial enemy strike (about which the authors express doubt) or when a so-called period of threat has set in, and, incidentally, there may not even be one for the aviation. Thus, determining the moment for moving the aviation to dispersal airfields is just as complicated as determining beforehand the time the enemy will deliver his initial strike. Therefore, we consider it possible to carry out the first sortie of front fighters to repel the air enemy from permanent airfields, and to effect their rebasing to dirt airfields (or dispersal airfields) only after they have fulfilled their tasks. The actions of which the authors speak must be kept in mind as a possible variant, but far from the best one. At the same time, let us note that this is a passive method of combating the air enemy and not always acceptable for fighter aviation. It is supposed to operate aggressively and try to intercept and destroy the air enemy and not to escape his attack, flying from airfield to airfield.

If it is allowed that the fighter aviation be removed to dispersal airfields before a sortie to repel the air enemy, then it is not excluded that the landing on the new airfields may coincide with the beginning of an enemy air raid. In such a case, the situation for our fighter aviation will be less advantageous than that in which an airfield maneuver is not carried out.

Finally, regarding the question of moving the fighter aviation out from under a strike, it is necessary to keep in mind not only the process itself

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whole series of modifications in questions of taking over control, basing, and servicing of the redeployed units. But for this, first of all, it takes time, and, secondly, all the measures being carried out cannot remain unnoticed by the enemy, which will provoke definite countermeasures on his part that will hamper the actions of the aviation.

In respect to the other air large units of the air army, especially those that are not participating in repelling the initial raid of the air enemy and are not allocated to deliver the initial strike, moving them out from under the enemy strike in advance should be recognized as desirable.

Now, concerning air support. In the article being reviewed it is asserted that air support, both as a term in itself, and even more as a task of the air army, has lost its significance under present conditions. Unfortunately, in the final analysis, the authors did not come to a well-founded conclusion on this question. Having begun correctly with the idea that the concept of air support has been preserved among us from the time of the Great Patriotic War, they have not analyzed this phenomenon, but have limited themselves to a mere assertion: air support reflects the character of the operational employment of the aviation of the front. Such a judgment is true in a general way, but its essence is not quite clear and precise. If we recall the recent past, we can find a stricter definition of the concept of air support. Let us quote an excerpt from two 1944 documents (Manual on Combat Actions of Ground-Attack Aviation, and Manual on Combat Actions of Bomber Aviation): "To implement cooperation of the aviation with ground troops on the battlefield, air large units may support the ground troops or be temporarily attached in operational subordination to them," and further: "Support of ground troops is the basic method of using the aviation, ensuring its centralized control

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air army, assisting ground troops on the battlefield."

Thus, by air support was understood cooperation of the aviation with ground troops carried out by the forces of the air army with centralized control. This is, as it were, one form or type of cooperation. The second type of cooperation of the aviation with ground troops which was employed during the Great Patriotic War and is written down in the manuals is when air large units were temporarily attached in operational subordination to combined-arms commanders.

The question arises: just what are the authors denying? If it is cooperation of the air army with the ground troops, which formerly was carried out according to the plan of the air army with its centralized control, then it is possible that they agree with the other type of cooperation, in which aviation was temporarily attached in operational subordination to the combined-arms commanders. But nothing is said about this in the article. And it comes out that, with the loss of the meaning of air support, they deny the possibility of cooperation of the air army

with ground troops altogether. Well, this does not at all agree with the basic tenet of Soviet military doctrine -- success in a battle and an operation is achieved by the joint efforts of all the branches of the armed forces.

We agree that it is really necessary to bring clarity into the concept of air support. We shall try to set forth what, in our opinion, should now be understood by the term "air support".

Under present-day conditions of conducting front operations, only centralized employment of aviation is considered desirable, and its operational subordination to combined-arms commanders may take place only in exceptional cases. However, one must not generalize this and assert that the air army must carry out all its tasks exclusively according to the plan of the commander of the front (according to the plan of the air army). Actually,

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if one analyzes the materials

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for the last five to six years, it can be noted that the commander of the front formulates the tasks of the air army in the following manner:

-- destroy enemy missile/nuclear weapons and aviation in the offensive zone of the front;

-- conduct combat with enemy reserves;

-- cover troops and installations of the rear of the front against enemy air strikes;

-- conduct aerial reconnaissance in the zone of actions of the front troops (depth of reconnaissance is indicated);

-- support the troops of the tank and combined-arms army (it is indicated what flight resources of fighter-bombers and bombers to plan for each of these armies), and other tasks.

We will note that, in the group of front tasks of the air army, under air support is understood precisely the specific group of tasks of the air army which it is going to carry out in cooperation with the tank or combined-arms army. Every commander of a tank or combined-arms army, on learning the quantity of flight resources planned for his army, can determine to which of them air support will be offered to a greater degree.

So, in the practice of military district exercises, the concept of air support exists; consequently, it has not lost its significance. Moreover, all the combined-arms and air commanders in the military districts recognize air support and understand it as the specific combat actions of

the air army (aviation) which are conducted in cooperation with a tank or combined-arms army according to its plan. Therefore, obviously, it will be more correct under air support of the troops of a tank or combined-arms army under present conditions of conducting operations to understand the combat actions of the air army (front aviation) for destroying

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tank (combined-arms) army within the scope of the established flight resources for the given army. It should be stressed that air support combines only those combat actions of the air army that are conducted employing only conventional means of destruction. The purpose of air support is to provide for a rapid offensive by the troops of the combined-arms or tank army.

The employment of nuclear warheads by the aviation is carried out according to the decision of the commander of the front in the form of nuclear strikes for the accomplishment of specific front tasks and may not be regarded as air support. The results of the accomplishment of tasks by delivering nuclear strikes with the aviation according to the plan of the front are exploited by the ground troops exactly the same way as the results of the delivery of nuclear strikes by the rocket troops.

Such a conception of the combat actions of the front aviation makes it possible to understand the content of air support correctly and it corresponds to reality without in any way contradicting the principle of employing nuclear weapons.

Finally, let us dwell on the question of restructuring the organization of the air defense of the front. In examining the activity of the front air defense, the authors are right in saying that one commander must bear the responsibility for the air defense of the front, and not two, as happens with the existing organization. In practice, at the present time, the commander of the air army bears the responsibility for air cover of the front troops against enemy air strikes, but the chief of air defense of the front has the responsibility for the cover of troops with all the remaining surface-to-air missile means. In this, they are both subordinate to the commander of the front and in every individual case they implement cooperation on the basis of his instructions. Such cooperation is rather complex. The rapid changing of the situation or conditions of a nuclear war will be common, and the commander of the front, in order to provide reliable cover of the front troops, will have to be continually giving instructions about cooperation between the aviation and the surface-to-air missile units of the air defense of the front. Such a practice complicates the work of the front command.

The problems of air defense of the front would be solved differently if one commander were to command the fighter aviation and all the surface-to-air means. The organization of cooperation between the various forces of air defense will not require the intervention of the front commander. Everything will be decided by one person, to whom both the aviation and the surface-to-air missile units are subordinated.

We fully agree with the authors' proposal to subordinate all the surface-to-air means of the air defense of the front to the commander of the air army, and here is why.

First, the quantity of fighter aviation necessary for destroying enemy air targets may vary, depending on the air situation, and sometimes it will happen that fighter aviation is not needed at all. In these cases, the commander of the air army has the opportunity to allocate the fighter aviation to fulfil other tasks, namely, to support the combat actions of the bomber or fighter-bomber aviation, and sometimes also for actions against ground targets. In this case, for fulfilling this task, the commander of the air army, in case of necessity, always has the capability of switching over even all the fighter aviation. But if the fighter aviation is subordinated to the chief of air defense of the front (and there is such a view), then it will be difficult to utilize it so flexibly.

Second, in case the enemy carries out a massed air raid, the commander of the air army has the capability, for the time of repelling it, to allocate part of the forces or all the fighter-bomber aviation. This will be out of the question if the fighter aviation happens to be subordinated to the chief of air defense of the front.

Third, the commander of the air army can, to a greater degree, allocate the forces and means of the fighter-bombers, bombers, and cruise missiles for strikes against the airfields and the launching positions of the cruise missiles of the enemy, and consequently, also conduct intensive aerial reconnaissance of these targets in order to increase the reliability of averting strikes of the enemy aviation against the troops of the front. The chief of air defense of the front, though, will not have such capabilities and means at his disposal.