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MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director of Central Intelligence  
FROM : John N. McMahon  
Deputy Director for Operations  
SUBJECT : MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): With Nuclear  
Weapons or Without Them?

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". The author of the article states that although the Western powers and the Soviet bloc have both acquired nuclear weapons, it is still possible that a war between them could be fought with only "classical" (i.e., conventional) weapons. While acknowledging that nuclear weapons have changed the nature of ground combat and that the armed forces of the Soviet bloc must be flexible enough to wage war or conduct combat actions with both nuclear and "classical" means, he is of the opinion that "classical" weapons will continue to play a decisive role in any future war. This article appeared in Issue No. 2 (72) for 1964.

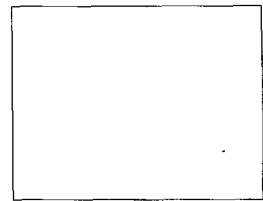
2. Because the source of this report is extremely sensitive, this document should be handled on a strict need-to-know basis within recipient agencies. For ease of reference, reports from this publication have been assigned

John N. McMahon



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# Intelligence Information Special Report

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MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): With Nuclear Weapons or Without Them?

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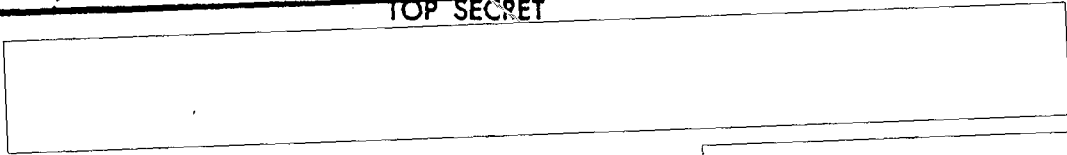
Summary:

The following report is a translation from Russian of an article which appeared in Issue No. 2 (72) for 1964 of the SECRET USSR Ministry of Defense publication Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought". The author of the article, Colonel Imre Gabor, states that although the Western powers and the Soviet bloc have both acquired nuclear weapons, it is still possible that a war between them could be fought with only "classical" (i.e., conventional) weapons. While acknowledging that nuclear weapons have changed the nature of ground combat and that the armed forces of the Soviet bloc must be flexible enough to wage war or conduct combat actions with both nuclear and "classical" means, he is of the opinion that "classical" weapons will continue to play a decisive role in any future war.

End of Summary

Comment:

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.



With Nuclear Weapons or Without Them?

by

Colonel Imre GABOR  
Chief of the Operations Directorate of the General  
Staff of the Hungarian People's Army

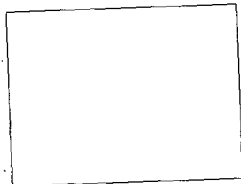
Eighteen years ago, after the first American atomic bombs were exploded, in the West there were many specialists and non-specialists who, in their enthusiasm over the new weapon, were ready to abandon the means for conducting battle which had been hitherto known. "The atom bomb," wrote one of the most authoritative British newspapers just a few days after the raid on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, "has very definitely relegated all other weapons of modern warfare to the museum: tanks, ships, guns, hand weapons, and along with them, even the warring masses."\* The practice of the next 18 years was basically guided by opinions of this sort.

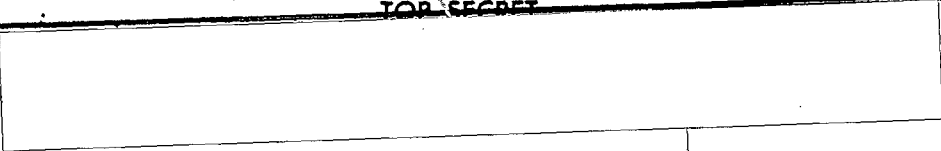
In scientists' laboratories, in carefully guarded offices of general staffs, and on army testing grounds in the course of these 18 years, there have been frantic searches for new means, new theories, and new methods. And all this in the name of nuclear weapons, about which it has been said and written hundreds of times that they have revolutionized the conduct of war. However, classical weapons\*\* have not been abandoned. On the contrary, they very often resound throughout various parts of the world. During those 18 years, wars have been conducted with classical means.

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\* The Times, August 14, 1945.

\*\* In the practice of our military-theoretical work, the term "classical weapons" is not used. This concept is more accurately expressed by the term "conventional weapons." Ed.





This simple fact alone should be a sufficient basis for us, in the course of the combat training of our armed forces, to devote serious attention to war conducted with classical means and to the study of battles and operations conducted without employing nuclear weapons. But this is not the only reason.

Nuclear War is a Continuation of What Policy?

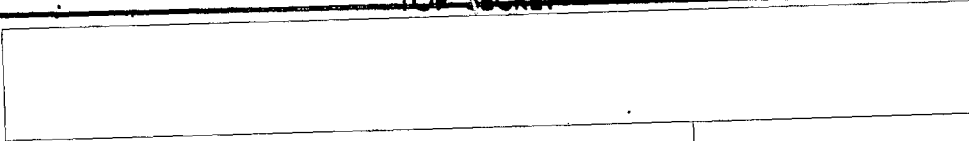
Marxism-Leninism teaches us that war is the continuation of a policy through forcible means. Consequently, the selection of these means is a very important political matter. In other words, the use or non-use of nuclear weapons in a given war is first of all a political, and then a military matter. }

The position of the Warsaw Pact member states on the question of nuclear war is clear and consistent. We feel that with the balance of forces which has arisen in the world, war is not a fatal inevitability; we want to resolve the argument between capitalism and socialism once and for all, not by force of arms but in peaceful competition; we are consistently striving for the prohibition of nuclear weapons, for general and complete disarmament, and for peace throughout the world without weapons and wars.

However, we are not shutting our eyes to the fact that as long as imperialism exists, the danger of war will not disappear.

If nuclear war breaks out, it will be a continuation of imperialist policy by the most brutal means. The socialist states have repeatedly stated that they will not begin a war first, nor will they be the first to resort to nuclear weapons. Neither will we capitulate to imperialist threats. If they attack us, then we will answer an enemy strike with strikes, and a nuclear strike -- with nuclear strikes. Comrade KADAR said at the VIII Congress of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party: "It is fortunate for all mankind that the Soviet Union, standing at the head of all peaceloving humanity, has the most powerful military means at its disposal to restrain the imperialist aggressors, and should it become necessary, then the Soviet Union





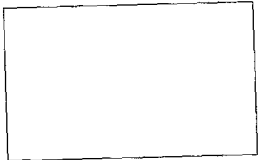
together with the entire socialist camp will deliver a destructive counterstrike against the aggressors."

A consistent peaceful policy, naturally, is reflected in our military doctrines and in our strategy. Soviet military science has never relied on the exclusiveness and strength of any one type of weapon or branch arm, neither before the appearance of nuclear weapons nor after. The principle of Soviet strategy, that victory can be achieved only through the combined and coordinated employment of all means and branches of the armed forces, has never lost its strength.

The theory of an unlimited and exclusively nuclear war is the "achievement" of imperialism. American military doctrine triumphed while the nuclear monopoly was in the hands of the imperialists and while they were confident that decisive superiority in regard to nuclear weapons was on their side. That period is already past. Now it is wholly apparent to the American leadership that the balance of forces is at least equal. Under these circumstances, the mechanism of "mass intimidation", which has arisen over the course of many years, may become the means of suicide for imperialism, if it comes to a world war. If we are speaking about local wars, then this mechanism simply cannot be employed: it "intimidates" no one, and, at the same time, it is worthless for conducting such a war, since it carries with it the danger of a world war.

Based on these views, an American doctrine was created which seeks a way out of the dilemma of "a nuclear world war or nothing" and which has set for itself the goal of making the armed forces of imperialism capable of delivering such concentrated strikes, that they would not lead to the unleashing of events fraught with the danger of the final defeat and demise of capitalism.

Imperialism, of course, has not renounced its basic purpose, that is, the destruction -- even by means of nuclear weapons -- of the world socialist system. However, in the interests of achieving that goal, it seeks new alternatives (from a political point of view) and capabilities for gradually, step by step, supplanting the socialist system or even for leaving the existing balance of forces in the world just the same as it is at present. This political concept is reflected in the new American doctrine.





Consequently, the question is simply to form a flexible strategy to attain these same goals.

This means that the armed forces of the socialist states must be prepared for a fitting reply to the imperialist aggressors, no matter what weapons they may employ. The history of wars bears witness to the fact that those hypotheses suggested by military theoreticians before the onset of a war are only partially proved in combat practice. War is always more complex and more varied than the established theory concerning it. It would be a mistake to prepare our armed forces for one type of war only and according to one given plan.

In recent years, the danger of this type of planning has arisen among us. It forces us to devote a great deal of attention to conducting combat actions with classical weapons, while commanders, staffs and troops must be prepared to organize and conduct operations and battles both with the employment of nuclear weapons as well as without them.

Classical War or Nuclear War with the  
Employment of Classical Weapons?

During research on the problem concerning under what conditions and in what instances there can be discussion about conducting war with the employment of classical weapons alone, it would be necessary to correspondingly distinguish the strategic and operational-tactical sides of the matter.

From the point of view of strategy in researching the matter of the capability of conducting war without employing nuclear weapons, we are speaking about local wars or wars of national liberation, especially if they are conducted by states which do not have nuclear weapons at their disposal. In the past two decades there has been a sufficient number of examples of this type of war (in Vietnam, Algeria, and Laos). But the period following the end of the Second World War attests also to the fact that the forces of peace -- and mainly within the countries of the socialist camp -- were in a position to prevent the spread





of wars and the employment of nuclear weapons even in those cases where the nuclear powers participated in wars (the war in Korea and the one in Egypt).

The problem becomes complicated when it comes down to the matter of a third world war and of a general attack against the world socialist system. In accordance with our military doctrine, the next world war -- if the imperialists force us into one -- will be a war of decisive concentrated strikes on the part of both world systems -- a war of coalitions. This international missile/nuclear war, threatening the world with unforeseen destruction, will in the final analysis mean the death of capitalism. And this will not be because we want it thus, but because imperialism, which consistently believes the best form of achieving maximum success in conducting combat actions to be a surprise massed nuclear strike against the socialist countries, is preparing for it. But, this is not the only possible method of unleashing a war.

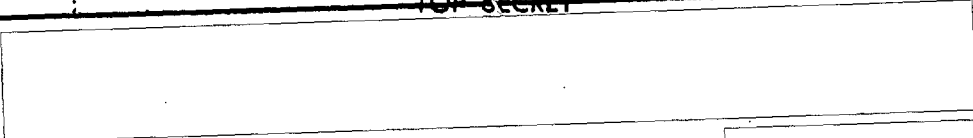
A world war can begin from a local conflict or spread from a local war. And under these circumstances, it is not at all imperative that the imperialists plan on employing nuclear weapons from the very outset of the war (conflict). This means that it is highly possible that combat actions in a specific period of a world war will be conducted without nuclear weapons. And, in the specific circumstances resulting from the strategic situation, this is an advantage for American imperialism, in that it can in this manner guard against the swift destruction of its rear, the American continent. It is also not ruled out that even in a war where nuclear weapons are employed in individual theaters of military operations or in territories of individual countries, they will not be employed for political reasons.

This, in brief, is the strategic side of the matter.

From the operational-tactical point of view, the possibility of conducting operations and battles on separate axes or in specific periods of a nuclear war, where only classical means are employed, is even greater than what was mentioned above. And this is for an exceptionally prosaic reason: the shortage of nuclear warheads. Nuclear weapons are a very expensive means which must be employed en masse to carry out the main tasks. Besides this, both sides will strive in every way possible to







destroy the launching means and the nuclear warheads of the enemy. In view of this, it is a real possibility that individual armies or divisions -- especially in secondary theaters of military operations and on secondary axes -- will be obliged over the course of several days to conduct combat actions with classical means only and probably against an enemy who, at a given moment, has the capability of employing nuclear means.

If, on the basis of what has been said above, we draw the conclusion that war -- a specific period of it or separate operations (battles) -- can be conducted without even employing nuclear weapons, then it will have far-reaching consequences from the standpoint of the structure of the armed forces, their training for war, and the planning of their combat employment. These consequences naturally affect the methods for conducting combat actions by all branches of the armed forces.

In this article we will touch upon certain matters relating to the conduct of ground operations.

Whoever takes it upon himself to investigate the features of carrying out operations and battles with classical means, should first of all not lose sight of the role of two decisive factors: first -- the specific classical armament with which it will be necessary to do battle, and second -- the constant danger of employing nuclear weapons.

How "Classical" is Classical Armament?

Whoever thinks that conducting a battle with classical means signifies a return to the military art of the time of the Second World War and subsequent years is greatly mistaken. Undoubtedly, we must devote greater attention to the last world war, especially to the operations of 1944-1945, and to a study of their characteristic features. True, we are now in a better position to study that enormous experience, which we were inclined to regard as obsolete. But in the history of wars nothing is repeated -- in any case, not on the same level. If the development of armament is an incentive to develop the



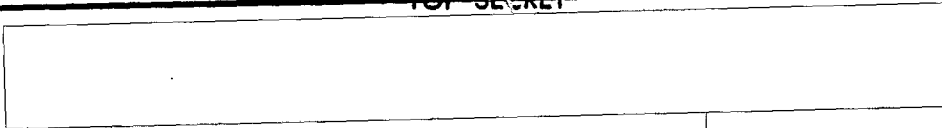
operational art, then in this instance the question is unavoidable: Is that armament which we call classical because of the lack of a more appropriate word really "classical"?

Since the Second World War, nuclear means and their main delivery vehicle -- the missile -- have become the focus of the development of military equipment. But along with the development of nuclear weapons, the so-called classical armament and equipment have been developed to an even greater extent under its influence. The arming and equipping of troops is at present at a higher level than it was during the Second World War and in the first years following it.

First of all we should speak about missile equipment, which even without a nuclear warhead is a qualitatively new and very powerful weapon, especially in air defense, in combat with tanks, and in air support of troops. The number of tanks entering the complement of large units has grown many times over, their quality has been greatly increased, and with this the striking power of divisions has also grown. The infantry, formerly moving at a rate of four to five kilometers per hour, has been put into vehicles and even armored personnel carriers, and is equipped with automatic weapons.

Radar equipment and improved engineering and water crossing means have made their appearance in the armament of the ground forces. Front aviation is supplied with high-speed aircraft, air transport has been greatly developed, and helicopters are widely used. Today's divisions and armies are not those that took Berlin. And if they have become different, then they must fight differently.

The combat capabilities of divisions, armies, and fronts, even without nuclear weapons, are now much higher than they were previously. Their armament represents a fire power (here the increase in the number of tanks plays a major role) which could only be achieved previously by considerable artillery strength. Their mobility, maneuvering capability, and independence have increased many times over. Therefore, even if they are not able to attain such rates of advance as in conditions where nuclear weapons are employed, then motorized rifle large units are at least already in a position to advance with speeds equal to or even greater than those with which armored and mechanized large



units carried out an advance in the final period of the Second World War.

The Sword of Damocles

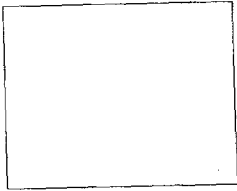
Certain people cite the fact that the chemical weapons which were employed in the First World War were not used in the Second World War. And that for years the soldiers carried gas mask cases on their backs, but there were no gas masks in them, just bread.

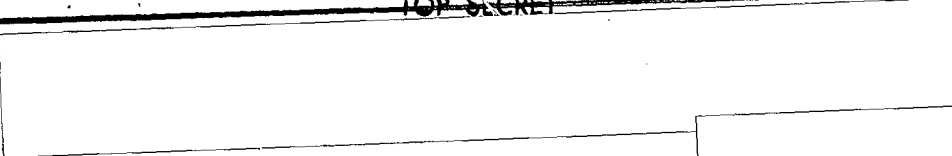
This is a bad example. In spite of the terrible consequences of their employment, chemical weapons in the First World War were not the means deciding the fate of engagements nor, to an even lesser degree, were they capable of influencing the outcome of the war. Nuclear weapons can decide not only the fate of battles, but also the outcome of a war.

Under whatever circumstances operations and battles are conducted with classical weapons, it is constantly necessary to be prepared at any moment to employ nuclear weapons and to protect against their effects. This means that in the period of organizing operations and battles, it is necessary to be prepared for fulfilling tasks both with nuclear weapons and without them. But this is far from all.

The fact that there is the constant threat of the employment of nuclear weapons means at the same time that it is, in essence, necessary to join battle with classical weapons just as in conditions where nuclear weapons are employed. No matter how paradoxical this arrangement may seem, it is the crux of the matter.

Can we abandon the principle of dispersing troops under conditions where enemy nuclear missiles or nuclear weapons delivery aircraft may appear over the field of battle at any moment? If we did, we ourselves would be tempting the enemy to employ nuclear means. Consequently, we cannot considerably increase the number of divisions on a given operational axis or





significantly reduce the width and depth of the zone of their operations. We cannot set up a density of forces and means in an offensive which would support a classical superiority of forces. In other words, it is impossible with classical means to even come close to approximating the fire power contained in nuclear means. But, it is nevertheless necessary to fulfil the task.

Is there a solution to this contradiction, and if there is, what is it? It lies in the fact that the enemy will find himself in the exact same situation as we are in. If the attacking side is not in a position to concentrate the necessary forces and means for breaking through the defense (in the classical sense of the word), then there will be no need to do this, since the enemy will likewise not be in a position to carry out a thorough and solid defense for the very same reasons. With little exaggeration we can say that nuclear weapons are changing the picture of battle, even in the case where they hang over the field of battle like the sword of Damocles.

The Dilemma of the Initial Period

Since the appearance of nuclear weapons, the initial period of a war has become one of the key points of military art. The attention which we devote to this period is fully justified: the initial period of a missile/nuclear war has a decisive influence on the course and outcome of a war.

In accordance with our military doctrine, the initial period of a modern war for the armed forces of the socialist countries will consist mainly of aggressive armed combat for the achievement of immediate strategic goals: breaking down imperialist aggression, seizing the strategic initiative, and setting up conditions which support the further successful conduct and conclusion of a war.

In the interests of achieving these goals, and by maximally exploiting the results of nuclear strikes of the Strategic Rocket Forces and aviation, ground troops must completely rout enemy groupings operating in the ground theaters of military



operations, they must remove individual states of an enemy coalition from the war, disrupt enemy mobilization, and also seize the most important strategic areas and targets in the theater of military operations.

Simultaneously with this, the Strategic Rocket Forces, aviation, and the navy are to destroy strategic nuclear means in the ground and naval theaters of military operations (including transoceanic theaters of military operations) and disrupt the rear areas of imperialism. The Air Defense of the Country is to repulse strikes directed at the rear areas of the socialist camp.

Thus, we picture the initial period of a missile/nuclear war as a repulsing of imperialist aggression.

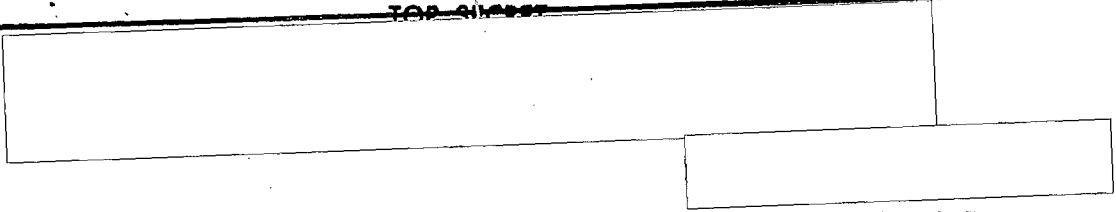
A pertinent question arises: What will the significance, nature, and content of the initial period be if war is begun with classical weapons?

And again, we cannot take it upon ourselves to provide a complete answer to this question.

We set as our goal the investigation of the special features of ground operations, recognizing along with this that combat in the ground theater of military operations cannot be divorced from the situation created in the air, on the sea, and in the rear area of the countries (coalitions) waging war.

Undoubtedly, the picture of war at its very base will be different if a war or its specific period is conducted only with classical means. Although the political and strategic goals will remain the same, the ways of achieving them will be different, and it will possibly take more time to achieve the set goals. When nuclear weapons are not employed (even temporarily), the role and significance of the branches of the armed forces are altered.

Strategic tasks set for the ground forces in the initial period of a war may also be carried out without the employment of nuclear weapons, but this will be more complex and will require more time. At the same time, from the standpoint of the strategic situation, the significance of ground operations increases on the whole.



The significance of the initial period of a war will be great even without the employment of nuclear weapons. The history of the Second World War confirms that in conditions where classical weapons were employed the initial period had a decisive influence on the course and outcome of the war. Years and an unprecedented effort of forces (the Great Patriotic War, and the American-Japanese War) were necessary for counterbalancing the successes which were achieved by the aggressor in the initial period and for seizing the initiative.

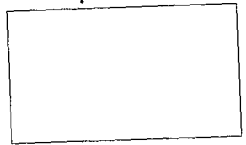
Without doubt, the appearance of nuclear weapons has greatly enhanced the role of the initial period. However, this does not mean that the refusal to employ nuclear means (primarily, when it will only be temporary) would reduce the significance of this period.

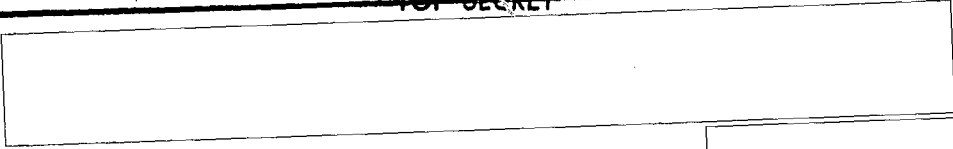
In the case where classical weapons are employed, conditions also arise which result from the employment of nuclear weapons. Even in peacetime, imperialist military forces stand in readiness, and without mobilizing they are in a position to begin operations; consequently, there is the possibility and danger of an unexpected attack. Naturally, our strategic first echelon, the establishment of which was forced upon the socialist states by the danger of imperialist attack, stands in readiness. Hence, even without the employment of nuclear weapons, the initial period of a war will be a period of decisive and aggressive armed conflict, rather than simply a period of mobilization as it was in the First World War.

The content of immediate strategic goals, for the achievement of which a battle is conducted, may be changed, but the concept of the initial period of war has not yet been changed.

The Means May Be Changed, But Not the Goals

The next matter for which we seek an answer is how the nature of modern operations of ground troops will be changed if these operations are conducted with the employment of classical





weapons alone.

From what has been said above it follows that the goal of these operations is fundamentally inalterable. But conditions of the operations can become partially different, and specific operational tasks and procedures of battle may be changed.

The initial missile/nuclear strike does not precede operations, and in the course of an operation the enemy does not have the main means of destruction -- nuclear weapons -- at his disposal. Consequently, the main task in the course of an offensive operation will be not to complete the destruction of demoralized enemy groupings with a nuclear strike, but rather to rout them by means of classical weapons. The capabilities for hindering the mobilization and forward movement of troops are reduced, and, consequently, much larger masses of forces and means can be included in an operation than would be the case if nuclear weapons were employed. Without nuclear weapons the balance of forces can be changed only gradually; therefore, the initial balance of forces will have greater significance, as well as the fact that enemy groupings will be destroyed in detail. In the interest of achieving the latter, it is advisable to simultaneously employ the maximum number of forces and means in order to increase the strength and speed of the initial strikes.

Offensive operations (even without nuclear weapons) should be planned to a great depth and carried out at high speed. Of course, in this instance the rate of advance will be slower than when nuclear weapons are employed, but precisely as a result of the increase in troop mobility and the number of tanks it is, actually possible that the rate will be 2.5 times higher than the average rate of advance in operations of the Great Patriotic War. As a result of a lower rate of advance, depending on the specific goal of the operation, it is possible to increase the standard amount of time for fulfilling the set tasks.

We have already mentioned that due to the constant danger of the employment of nuclear weapons, the zone of troop actions cannot be substantially constricted. The number of troops in individual theaters of war and on operational axes does not make this possible. The efforts of the forces will increase on the most important axes. Consequently, in a case where only classical weapons are employed, the absence of a continuous front and a





dense battle formation, the presence of open flanks in the combat disposition of both sides, extensive maneuvering in order to take advantage of this type of disposition, and centralized battles will be characteristic. During an offensive, encirclement of the enemy groupings will occur more often than in operations where nuclear weapons are employed. The meeting engagement will also occur frequently.

At the same time it is necessary to consider the increase in the strength of defense. Again, the matter of breaking through a defense can be of prime importance, although for this the necessary fire power will systematically be lacking, namely because the concentration of forces and means needed for the breakthrough is practicable only in a relatively narrow area and not on a continuous front. For this reason it is necessary to strive with all means, in order not to give the enemy the time and capability to organize a defense, to extensively employ outflanking and envelopment of his defense, and only in an exceptional case to break through it. At the same time, the use of defense can be brought into play again, for example in repulsing enemy counterthrusts.

The capability of employing nuclear weapons at any period of the operation must be ensured by the constant readiness of the rocket troops. This requires the careful working out of a wide range of organizational and technical problems. The matter of the advisability of employing tactical and operational-tactical missiles with conventional warheads deserves special attention.

In the absence of nuclear fire power, the significance of artillery increases extraordinarily, and here the fire power of tanks, a great number of which are at the disposal of modern troops, plays an important role. Close air support of troops, the limits of which are determined by tactical-technical capabilities and by the number of modern high-speed aircraft, again may come to the forefront due to these considerations. At the same time, it is necessary to take into consideration that, in the case of employment of classical means alone in the contest between aviation and air defense, in time the balance may be shifted in favor of air defense.

The significance of combating enemy nuclear means with classical means will be unchanged, as well as the protection of





our own rocket troops and their constant combat readiness. One of the basic tasks of reconnaissance is to determine the enemy's preparation for employing nuclear weapons, excluding the possibilities of a surprise strike.

Until such time as nuclear weapons are employed, each operation and battle and each day of combat must be planned and organized essentially along two variants: with classical weapons alone and with the employment of nuclear weapons.

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These few thoughts are intended to offer help in studying the theory of an operation and battle under conditions where only classical weapons are employed. Working out these matters is the earnest task of commanders and staffs in their military theoretical work and in the practice of troop combat training.

One of the most important prerequisites of its successful resolution is a correct understanding by commanders and staffs of the political and military aspects of the problem. The fact that we are broadening combat training in this direction in no way pushes into the background the study of operations and battles conducted with the employment of nuclear weapons. And this will be the main task of combat training in the future and will remain so until such time as nations succeed in prohibiting and destroying nuclear weapons.

The conclusions drawn here are rough in outline, not only by reason of the limited scope of the article, but also because the study of this circle of problems is still in the embryonic stage. Further work can still provide a wide variety of theoretical and practical conclusions concerning the organization of troops, the mobilization system and the system of combat training, and also other matters of training the armed forces.