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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

14 October 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director of Central Intelligence  
SUBJECT : MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Air Support

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 continues a discussion of air support matters from previous articles in Military Thought, placing the emphasis on the mission of front aviation in joint actions with the ground forces. The author, who characterizes front aviation as the most effective and maneuverable means of supporting troops in operations, dwells at length on the planning of the allocation and centralized employment of aviation resources in support of specific units. This article appeared in Issue No. 3 (70) for 1963.

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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

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William E. Nelson  
Deputy Director for Operations

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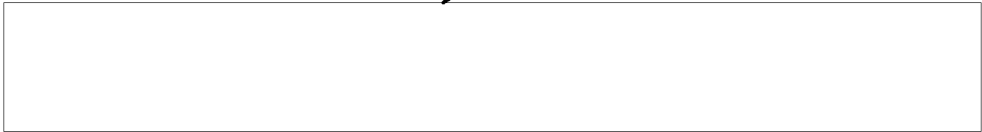
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# Intelligence Information Special Report

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COUNTRY USSR



DATE OF INFO. Late 1963

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SUBJECT

MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Air Support

SOURCE Documentary

Summary:

The following report is a translation from Russian of an article which appeared in Issue No. 3 (70) for 1963 of the SECRET USSR Ministry of Defense publication Collection of Articles of the Journal 'Military Thought'. The author of this article is General-Major of Aviation V. Zinovyev. This article continues a discussion of air support matters from previous articles in Military Thought, placing the emphasis on the mission of front aviation in joint actions with the ground forces. The author, who characterizes front aviation as the most effective and maneuverable means of supporting troops in operations, dwells at length on the planning of the allocation and centralized employment of aviation resources in support of specific units. End of Summary



Comment:

The two 1962 articles to which it refers are: "Actions of Front Aviation in the Initial Front Offensive Operation in the Initial Period of War", by S. Shimanskiy and V. Povarkov in Issue No. 2 (63) and "Air Support of Ground Forces and Control of Combat Actions of Front Aviation" by I. Pstygo, N. Ganichev and N. Reshetnikov in Issue No. 5 (66)

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.

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Air Support  
by  
General-Mayor of Aviation V. Zinovyev

The question of air support of troops has recently become the subject of extensive discussion. However, it still has not, in our opinion, received the proper resolution. In particular, different interpretations of air support continue to prevail, its content and significance have not been fully brought to light, and some authors attempt to deny in general the necessity for such support of combined-arms large units and formations in modern conditions of conducting a war. A differing understanding of air support, naturally, cannot promote the working out of correct views among combined-arms commanders on the role and place of front aviation in the operations of ground troops.

In this connection, we consider it necessary to continue the discussion of this question begun on the pages of the Collection of the Journal 'Military Thought'.<sup>\*</sup> In this article we should like to express our views on certain questions of air support, in the process setting forth its content as it appears to us.

The rapid development of missile technology and the perfection of the means of air defense have, as is known, led to some revision of the role and significance of aviation in a missile/nuclear war. The experience of the large-scale exercises of recent years and the theoretical study of the questions of conducting a missile/nuclear war have firmly established the position of aviation among all of the branches of the armed forces, and it is now clear to everyone that the ground forces, even in a missile/nuclear war, need active air support.

In revealing the essence of the mission of front aviation, as is known, two basic views prevail. The adherents of one point of view consider that the real mission of front aviation is support of the troops of the front in the operations conducted by them and, consequently, that all the tasks which aviation accomplishes on behalf of the troops of the front (with the exception of aerial reconnaissance, the covering of troops, and transport of troops and cargo) are included in the content of air support. Adherents of the other point of view consider that the basic

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<sup>\*</sup>Collection of Articles of the Journal 'Military Thought', No. 5 (60), 1961, No. 2 (63) and No. 5 (66), 1962.

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mission of front aviation is in its joint actions with the troops of the front. By joint actions here are understood both relatively independent actions within the framework of an operation of troops, and actions having direct supporting significance for troop formations or their large units which are part of the front formation. In other words, the defenders of such a view attempt in general to deny air support as such, considering it a factor that has lost its force.

The first opinion, in our view, is clearly incorrect. The second, in the part about the mission of aviation, is more accurate, and it has found its reflection in a whole series of guiding documents of our armed forces. Adhering to the second view on the mission of the front aviation, we cannot agree with the denial of the concept of air support and we consider that assistance embraces both independent actions and actions directly supporting troops, which together constitute air support.

Designating front aviation for joint actions with the ground forces fully meets the requirements of conducting very dynamic and decisive actions on the main axes of armed conflict. Aviation along with the rocket troops is capable of delivering nuclear weapons on a target; and employing them during a front operation, it can accomplish a number of operational and tactical tasks independently and in many cases play a leading, and not at all subordinate, role in accomplishing them. Those who deny this position deliberately accept the erroneous contention that the nuclear weapons of aviation are employed exclusively for the purpose of fire support of troops, i.e., according to the principle of using artillery and aviation in the last war. The employment of nuclear weapons allows aviation independently to accomplish important tasks in crushing part of the enemy forces.

Our military doctrine provides for the employment of conventional means of destruction, too, in a nuclear war. Moreover, it is especially emphasized in it that the final objective in armed conflict is attained by the joint efforts of all branches of the armed forces and branch arms employing both nuclear weapons and conventional means of destruction. Therefore, it is not out of the question that a whole series of important tasks will be accomplished with limited use of nuclear weapons or altogether without them, and that what will have the determining importance in completing the destruction of enemy groupings in these instances will not be nuclear weapons so much as powerful strikes of the motorized troops and, primarily, of their tanks. The other branches of the armed forces (aviation), the navy and the branch arms participating in the accomplishment of this task direct their main efforts toward assisting the

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ground forces.

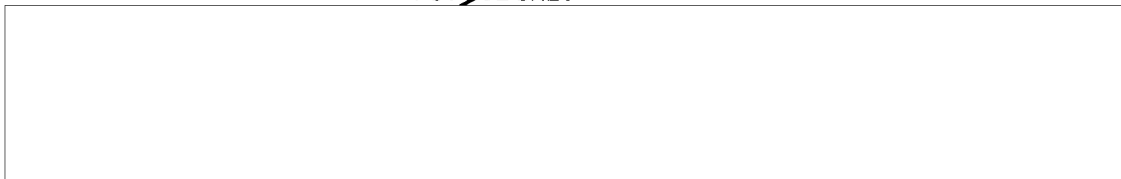
The most effective and maneuverable means of supporting troops in the operations being carried out by them, in our opinion, is front aviation. Its combat characteristics allow it to appear quickly over the battlefield and hit, with great effectiveness and in a short time, small-size mobile targets whose location up to the moment the task is assigned may only be presumed. It can also, without great preparatory measures, switch its strikes from one target to another or quickly switch its actions onto new axes. Consequently, the combat characteristics of aviation give it the capability of accomplishing varied combat tasks in operations of the ground forces in the most varied conditions of the situation. This is quite convincingly confirmed by the experience of the Second World War, and we should not forget it. The experience of postwar exercises, though, serves as a good basis for further working out the theory of the art of employing aviation under the conditions of a nuclear war.

The main efforts of the air army of the front will always be directed toward carrying out the kind of tasks whose successful accomplishment promotes achievement of the goals of the operation of the front in the shortest possible time: destroying the operational-tactical missile/nuclear weapons of the enemy and combating his aviation and deep operational reserves. In the course of carrying out these tasks, aviation will be employed according to the plan of the front in a centralized way and, as a rule, in cooperation with the rocket troops. The method of employing it is successive concentration of efforts against the most important targets and on the main axes. Actions will be conclusive if aviation employs nuclear warheads and expends the greater part of the aviation resources for accomplishment of the assigned tasks. Along with this, the aviation will turn out to be capable of accomplishing other tasks, including air support of separate groupings of front troops.

Air support can be appraised from different points of view, and the depth of understanding of air support itself depends on how comprehensively this category of the operational art of the air forces is viewed. We consider it most correct to conduct research on the question from the point of view of the tasks to be accomplished by the air army in an operation. In this case air support takes on the form of an operational task of the air army in an operation. In fact, if we analyze the assignment of tasks to the air army by the commanders of front troops on the basis of the materials of exercises and war games carried out recently, among the tasks of the air army we will find such ones as support of the offensive of a certain army (corps). Here is usually indicated the time (period) for

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accomplishing this task and the resources to be allocated.

The sense of this task comes down to this, that the commander of the front troops assigns part of the operation to the commander of the combined-arms formation that is carrying out the main or basic task for a definite period of the operation, and the aviation, with its units (large units), carries out combat tasks exclusively on behalf of just the one formation. The striking force of this grouping of troops is thereby strengthened and, by the same token, conditions are created for it to conduct successful combat actions. The necessity of allocating the forces of the aviation directly to the commander of the combined-arms army is occasioned by the presence on the battlefield and in the immediate rear of the enemy of a large number of mobile and small-size targets, which for the time being are effectively destroyed only by aviation.

According to the concept, the aviation resources of the air support are to be expended exclusively to accomplish only particular tasks, only on behalf of the given formation (large unit), and only according to the decision of the commander of this formation (commander of the large unit). Inasmuch as almost no air-delivered nuclear warheads will be placed at the disposal of commanders of armies and corps commanders, air support will begin being carried out, as a rule, without employing them.

Thus, the practice of the combat and operational training of our armed forces confirms not only the existence of air support but also its necessity in modern armed conflict. Therefore, there is no basis to deny it or to replace the term "air support" with something else.

There can be different variants of planning resources for air support. We shall dwell on one of them which appears most correct to us.

Before making a decision, the commander of the front troops, on the basis of conclusions from appraising the situation and the projected concept of the operation, determines the tasks of the aviation and the procedure for the combat employment of the air army in the operation of the front. In the process, a conclusion must be drawn about what part of the aviation resources should be assigned to carry out the overall tasks of the front and what part should be allocated to provide air support to the armies (corps) of the front. Then the air support requirements of each army (corps) of the front and our air capabilities are determined so that it is possible to plan the procedure for carrying out air support, i.e., whether it will be carried out in a centralized way (by the decision of the commander of the front troops) by the process of satisfying requests from

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the armies, or whether aviation resources for support will be placed at the disposal of the corresponding commanders of armies (commanders of corps).

In his decision regarding the employment of the large units of the air army, the commander of troops of the front indicates which armies, when, and with what expenditure of aviation resources, are to be supported by the aviation, and the procedure for carrying out this support. The commander of the air army determines what combined-arms armies of the front will be supported by what specific aviation large units, the time of accomplishing this task, the expenditure of resources, and the procedure for control of the aviation large units allocated for air support. The commander of the combined-arms (tank) army at whose disposal the corresponding air resources are placed assigns specific tasks to the aviation (indicates targets), time of action (strike delivery), and expenditure of resources (composition of forces). In case air support is accomplished by the decision of the commander of troops of the front without previously placing aviation resources at the disposal of the commander of troops of the combined-arms formation (army), i.e., it is accomplished in the process of satisfying requests from the army, the commanders of the armies in their requests must indicate the installation (target) for an air strike, its location, and the time of the strike itself.

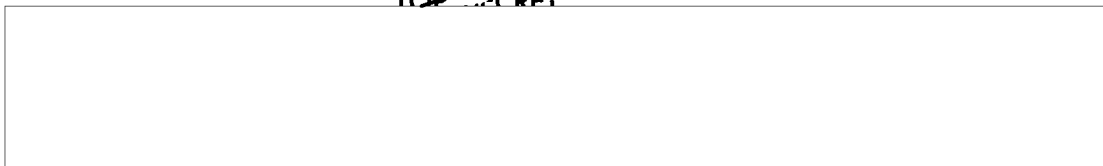
The procedure for carrying out air support depends on many factors, which must be considered in planning the combat actions of the air army in the operation of the front. Basic among them are the aviation capabilities of the front. If they are great and the air army is relatively powerful in strength, then a good part of the resources planned for air support should, in our opinion, be placed at the disposal of the corresponding commanders of armies (commanders of corps) of the front. This will greatly simplify the organization of combat actions of the aviation large units, and guarantee more effective and flexible employment of the aviation and control of it. With a low strength in fighter-bombers (not more than one division in an air army), air support should be carried out in a centralized way, controlled by the decision of the commander of troops of the front on the procedure for satisfying the requests of the armies.

Lately there has emerged the opinion that in placing aviation resources for air support at the disposal of the commander of an army, the resources are to be indicated not for the whole operation, but by parts: a day for the combined-arms army, two or three days for the tank army. The reasoning is that the situation will change drastically during a modern operation and that it is impossible to foresee everything and, consequently, it is not out of the question that the aviation resources

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will have to be redistributed frequently among the armies. One should not, it seems to us, agree with this opinion. It throws in doubt the advisability of planning an operation at all.

No doubt, in the conduct of modern operations, the situation will change drastically and often. This will require introducing the appropriate corrections in the previously adopted decision and plan of operation. It is not out of the question that it will be necessary not only to redistribute aviation resources, but also to transfer combined-arms (tank) large units from one army to another, change the zones of the offensive and the axes of the main strike, as well as redistribute the means of reinforcement among the armies. In spite of this, the armies will still, obviously, plan their operations, and, to counter any eventualities, the reserve in the hands of the commander of the front will be employed. Therefore, we consider that, if the decision is made to place aviation resources for air support at the disposal of the appropriate commander of an army, then it is necessary to assign them to this army for the whole operation and not provide them piecemeal for each day. This will permit the commander and staff of the army in planning the operation to take fuller account of all their capabilities and to employ the aviation against such targets and at such times as its actions will have the greatest effect on the success of the operation of the army. We believe that such an organization of support will also facilitate to a significant degree the conduct of the combat actions of the air army.

The aviation resources allocated for air support of each army of the front are determined by a number of circumstances. According to the experience of exercises of recent years, in a front having within its composition three or four armies, direct air support is usually carried out on behalf of one or two armies. In order to provide direct air support to these armies and accomplish the overall tasks of the front, the air army must have up to two divisions of fighter-bombers and one division of bombers. The aviation resources placed at the disposal of the commanders of these armies must be determined on the basis of the concrete situation and the combat capabilities of the other fighting means available within the composition of the armies.

Under the conditions of the contemporary situation in the Western Theater, the enemy is able to concentrate up to three or four divisions in the first echelon and one or two divisions in the second echelon of the offensive zone of an army. On the second or third day of the operation, the composition of the army may be reinforced with another two or three new divisions. In each of these divisions, there are one or two batteries of

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tactical missiles and nuclear artillery. Besides this, there may be in the army zone up to one or two battalions of operational-tactical missiles. So, in all, among the troops of the army on the offensive, it comes to 13 to 20 batteries (battalions) which will employ nuclear and chemical weapons.

Let us assume that 50 percent of these targets will be deployed in positions and will be destroyed by missiles, but the other half will be on the move and can be destroyed only by aviation. Then combating the missile/nuclear groupings of the enemy will require approximately seven to nine fighter-bomber squadrons.

Other targets in the course of support will be the tactical and immediate operational reserves (in our example, up to three to five divisions). They are best destroyed by the combined efforts of the troops of the army and the aviation (of the latter up to 2.5 to four divisional sorties of fighter-bombers are required). Thus, in the circumstances we have assumed, for an army operation five to six days long it is necessary to allocate up to four or five divisional sorties of fighter-bombers. This may be considered an approximate average norm of aviation forces necessary for the support of an army.

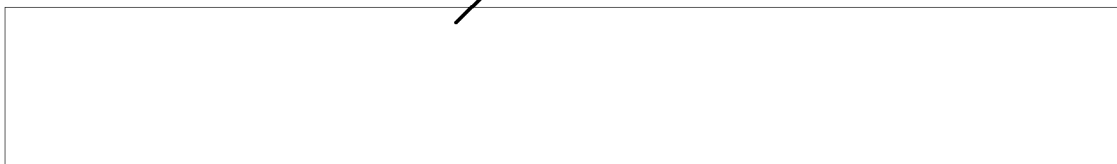
The zone of combat actions of the aviation in air support is defined along the front by the boundaries of the offensive zone of the given army, and in depth by the distance away of the targets against which the aviation must operate. These will be the targets located on the line defining the depth of the day's task of the army and even a little further. Translated into the language of numbers, air support of a combined-arms army must be carried out to a depth of 80 to 100 kilometers, and of a tank army to 100 to 150 kilometers. Hitting more distant targets, which may affect the actions of other armies of the front to an equal degree, is the responsibility of the commander of troops of the front.

Some are inclined to think that the introduction of more powerful weapons, primarily tactical missiles, into the armament of the ground troops excludes the necessity of air strikes in immediate proximity to the troops. One cannot agree with this, either. In a modern war there will be large zones of destruction and contamination, across which missiles and artillery will not be able to move forward to our troops in time to offer the necessary fire support or deliver a strike against the enemy. In such cases, aviation, utilizing its high maneuverability, can and must do that which under ordinary conditions the fire means of the ground forces would do.

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In local wars and in conducting combat actions with limited employment of nuclear weapons, the significance of air support grows substantially. The ground forces will play the main role in crushing the enemy, but their successful actions will depend greatly on air support. Front aviation in these wars is designated for joint combat actions with the troops of the front. Such a mission enlarges the sphere of combat activity of front aviation and more fully reveals its combat capabilities.



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