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**CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY**

**WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505**

30 November 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director of Central Intelligence

FROM : William W. Wells  
Deputy Director for Operations

SUBJECT : MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Meeting Engagements  
in Offensive Operations 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 provides general guidelines for the conduct of a meeting engagement in offensive operations in the initial period of a war. The author defines two periods of the meeting engagement: the fire period, primarily nuclear, which largely determines the outcome of the engagement, followed by the direct encounter of large units of advancing troops. He points out that under present-day conditions preemptive strikes should be replaced by a series of nuclear strikes, presents guidelines for their conduct, and indicates that operational-tactical missile/nuclear targets will be the most important. This article appeared in Issue No. 3 (76) for 1965.

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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

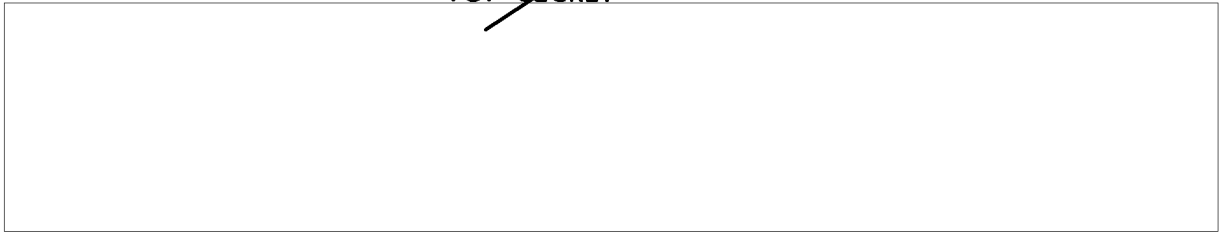
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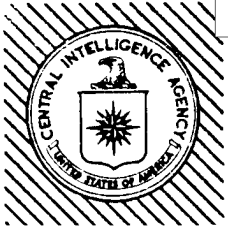
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# Intelligence Information Special Report

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COUNTRY USSR



DATE OF INFO. Late 1965

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SUBJECT

30 November 1976

MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Meeting Engagements in Offensive Operations 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. 3 (76) for 1965 of the SECRET USSR Ministry of Defense publication Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought". The author of this article is General-Leytenant N. Ogarkov. This article provides general guidelines for the conduct of a meeting engagement in offensive operations in the initial period of a war. The author defines two periods of the meeting engagement: the fire period, primarily nuclear, which largely determines the outcome of the engagement, followed by the direct encounter of large units of advancing troops. He asserts that the nature and scope of the meeting engagement has changed and expanded under present-day conditions. In this regard, he points out that preemptive strikes should be replaced by a series of nuclear strikes, presents guidelines for their conduct, and indicates that operational-tactical missile/nuclear targets will be the mc50X1-HUM important. In addition, the role of aviation, operational disposition of troops, and operational maneuvering in a meeting engagement are examined. End of Summary

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Comment:

General of the Army Nikolay Vasilyevich Ogarkov has been identified since March 1974 as a Deputy Minister of Defense.



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Meeting Engagements in Offensive Operations in  
the Initial Period of War

by

General-Leytenant N. Ogarkov

The problem of meeting engagements is the most complex and least investigated one of all. The most contradictory opinions are expressed with regard to the substance of this problem. Thus, in some instances it is maintained that with the advent of nuclear weapons, meeting encounters between large groupings of belligerents are not possible and "to speak of a meeting engagement is hardly justified".\* In other instances, it is maintained that the first offensive operation is, in essence, an aggregate of broad-scale meeting engagements and should be regarded and planned as a "meeting operation".\*\*

\* \* \* \*

We adhere to the point of view that meeting engagements under conditions of a nuclear war will be the predominant type of offensive. This can be explained primarily by the decisive nature of the objectives confronting the armed forces in the initial period of a war, by the desire of the belligerents to gain these objectives by employing the most aggressive operational means, and by the abrupt and rapid changes in the situation. The probability of a frequent occurrence of meeting engagements is confirmed in a number of large-scale operational-strategic exercises held in recent years by our army and by the NATO forces. Meeting engagements can be carried out at the outset of combat operations or in the course of these operations, upon meeting the enemy's counterattack groupings, or when the enemy goes over to a counteroffensive.

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\* The Military Science Conference of the Armed Forces of the USSR.  
Military Publishing House, 1963, page 82.

\*\* Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought" No. 5  
(60), 1961.

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However, all this does not mean that an offensive operation will be only an aggregate of meeting engagements. These engagements must necessarily alternate with the negotiation of a mobile defense, the pursuit of routed groupings, or a defense on individual axes. A modern operation can be viewed only as an aggregate of the most varied operational methods.

In contrast to the past, when meeting engagements usually began when forward units became involved in battle, they now begin, and will continue to begin, long before ground groupings encounter one another with strikes by nuclear weapons and other long-range means of destruction. However, meeting engagements will not consist solely of nuclear strikes, which can force the enemy to abandon an offensive even before the forward detachments encounter one another, as is depicted in an article by General Skvirskiy.\* In these instances, meeting engagements are simply excluded as a type of offensive action.

A modern meeting engagement includes, as it were, two periods: a fire period, which is principally nuclear; and a direct encounter of the large units of the advancing troops. The first period, which earlier could not be decisive, now will predetermine the outcome of the engagement. The second period is meant to bring about the defeat of the enemy. It is precisely here that the essence of the problem lies.

Meeting engagements will be characterized also by the large number of forces and means participating in them. Unlike the past, when they were usually carried out by forces no larger than an army, they now may involve the main forces of a front, especially at the beginning of the first operation in the initial period of a war. And even if a front conducts a meeting engagement with only a part of its forces, it still may employ its main missile grouping, airborne troops, aviation, and the air defense means of the front, all of which have increased sharply in maximum range and capabilities.

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\* Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought" No. 5 (60), 1961, P. 9.

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Meeting engagements will also be characterized by their broad scope. While, for example, in the largest meeting engagement of the Great Patriotic War at Prokhorovka in 1943, the 5th Guards Tank Army operated in a zone up to 12 kilometers wide and 10 to 15 kilometers in depth, under modern conditions an army may conduct such an engagement on a front of up to 100 kilometers or more to the entire depth of the operational disposition of the enemy's meeting grouping; and a front -- in a zone of 400 kilometers or more.

The organization of a meeting engagement will also have a number of special features. A preliminary outline of how it will be conducted must be worked out while the offensive operation is still being planned. In this period, on the basis of a prediction of the probable actions of the enemy and his troops, an approximate determination can be made of the time and area where a meeting engagement will occur. When there are positive signs of an imminent meeting engagement (this can be determined several hours or even a day in advance), the commander of the troops must announce his concept of operations and procedure for the delivery of nuclear strikes and employment of other long-range means of destruction. He must also assign tasks to reconnaissance, aviation, and the rocket troops. These tasks are subsequently refined in such a way that at any given moment the front rocket troops and aviation are prepared upon signal to deliver the appropriate series of nuclear strikes. Thus, there is first organized the fulfilment of the tasks of the first decisive stage of the meeting engagement; and only after this are tasks specified and assigned to the ground troops.

Several words about the so-called preemptive nuclear strike, in which several authors see the essence of a modern meeting engagement. They think that this strike is a guarantee of success. Thus, for example, General P. Stepshin maintains that the "outcome of a meeting engagement always depends primarily on which side will be able to preempt the other in delivering nuclear strikes."\*

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\* Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought " No. 3 (70), 1963, P. 14.

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We believe that the concept "preemptive" nuclear strike, as a one-act phenomenon, is more characteristic of actions on a strategic level, especially at the moment of the outbreak of war. A surprise preemptive nuclear attack by one of the belligerents can actually predetermine the outcome of the war in its favor. But it is another matter with regard to "preemptive" strikes in the course of an offensive operation, especially when the enemy's counterattack groupings have been defeated. Nuclear strikes will be delivered constantly on these groupings, as well as on our own, the moment they are detected, and it will be difficult to judge which side was the first to deliver these strikes. Moreover, nuclear strikes will most often be delivered not in one powerful salvo (a massed preemptive strike), but rather, as important targets emerge, at an advantageous moment and with those means which can conduct fire at the time and at the appropriate range. This is a whole series of primarily grouped and single strikes from the beginning until the end of the meeting engagement.

It should also be taken into consideration that the so-called preemptive strike, if delivered well before the troops engage in an encounter (otherwise it is not "preemptive"), will not completely achieve its objective. The enemy may be able, after this strike, to regroup and move into an engagement in an organized manner. Therefore, the most powerful strikes must, it seems, be delivered at a time which would preclude such a situation and which would provide the ground forces an opportunity to most effectively exploit their results. From what has been said above, it is, in our view, desirable in examining the essence of a meeting engagement to speak not about a preemptive, one-act strike, but rather about a system of nuclear strikes prior to and in the course of an encounter of advancing troops.

When is it advantageous to begin such a series of nuclear strikes? In order to resolve this matter, we think one can be guided by the following general principles.

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It is more desirable to deliver the first series of strikes against the enemy area of concentration at the moment the counterattack grouping is about to move out forward units into the area of the probable meeting, as well as against troops on the march, especially when they are passing through a defile and

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crossing river barriers. If the army is conducting the meeting engagement, then it is desirable to allocate mainly front means for the strike. The bulk of the armies' nuclear warheads should be employed in a second series of strikes, approximately one to two hours before the encounter of the main forces. This is to enable the troops to effectively exploit the results of the nuclear strikes to destroy the counterattack grouping and prevent the enemy from committing to action his numerous tactical nuclear weapons.

With the beginning of the encounter of the main forces of the advancing sides, a third series of strikes (individual and grouped strikes) should be delivered, and at times brief preparatory fire should be carried out (on the scale of large units) and, exploiting their results, one should finally complete the destruction of the enemy counterattack grouping with subsequent troop actions.

In view of the considerable advantages the enemy has in tactical weapons, a large part of the operational-tactical means for delivering nuclear warheads must at this time be directed at carrying out combat tasks, mainly at the request of large unit commanders. All the means of the armies and large units, and partly those of the front, must participate in delivering nuclear strikes at this stage.

Between series, individual nuclear strikes can definitely be made on the most important targets.

Which targets are the most important for nuclear strikes in a meeting engagement? Usually the enemy means of nuclear attack are considered to be the most important targets, followed by the combined-arms large units. Recently this has literally turned into a stereotype used for all aspects of the situation. However, simple calculations show that this recommendation, from a theoretical point of view, is far from always being correct, and in practice can lead to serious errors. To confirm this, we will cite the most elementary example. Let us suppose that a US army corps (three divisions) is deployed for a meeting engagement against an army. Its nuclear grouping, counting the Davy Crockett guns and 155-millimeter howitzers, numbers about 400 pieces. Of these, the Sergeant and Honest John launchers, and 203-millimeter howitzers alone come to about 100 pieces, counting

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reinforcements. Moreover, all operational-tactical launchers are, as a rule, autonomous and are located independently for launches. Under these conditions, even if the army were not restricted to a limited number of nuclear warheads, it would still be impossible to carry out the task of destroying this nuclear grouping, the more so within a short period of time.

Of course, not all these means will have nuclear warheads. However, it is practically impossible to determine this. Consequently, the problem of combating them has to be resolved differently than has been proposed heretofore. Nuclear strikes must now be delivered only on the most important operational-tactical missile/nuclear targets. Tactical nuclear means must be destroyed along with the large units to which they are assigned. The majority of the nuclear warheads and the means for their delivery must be directed at the destruction of these large units in a meeting engagement. Conventional weapons, chemical ammunition, special detachments, sabotage groups, forward units, etc. must be more broadly allocated for combat.

The employment of aviation. In a meeting engagement, when most of the targets are on the move, the most important role in destroying them belongs to aviation, which is capable of quickly destroying mobile targets both with and without the employment of nuclear weapons. Manned and unmanned aircraft will also be the most reliable means of acquiring information about the enemy in the shortest time. On the whole, it is impossible to conduct meeting engagements without the most aggressive activity of aviation. In connection with this, the grouping whose task it is to conduct a meeting engagement must be supported by the bulk of the front aviation.

Inasmuch as offensive operations in the initial period of war will be characterized by high troop mobility, the problem of a sharp quantitative and qualitative increase in modern front aviation is now very acute. Troops will especially need close air support on the battlefield, just as during the Great Patriotic War. Unfortunately, experience in the employment of ground-attack aviation has been undeservedly forgotten. Supporting aviation by its nature should be highly maneuverable, should not require involved servicing, and should be principally of the vertical take-off type; simply put, it should be an arm<sup>50X1-HUM</sup> type of aviation. The creation of this type of aviation will

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permit a sharp rise in the rate of advance of the combined-arms large units. Organizationally it should be part of each combined-arms army.

The operational disposition and deployment of troops. We cannot agree with the opinion that in a meeting engagement, in order to ensure a strong initial attack, the first echelon of troops should, as a rule, be the most powerful, even at the expense of eliminating the second echelons and the reserves. The point is that a meeting engagement is distinguished by exceptional rapidity and abrupt changes in the situation. Under these conditions, without strong reserves and second echelons, it is impossible either to develop significant success or to parry sudden enemy attacks on the open flanks and rear of our troops.

We also differ with the recommendations many authors have made in articles to resolve the problem of a preemptive deployment of forces in a meeting engagement. In our view, premature deployment of troops may result in their becoming an advantageous target for enemy nuclear strikes, their maneuverability will be seriously hampered, and their rate of advance will be decreased. The enemy, being in a march formation, will be capable of quickly changing the direction of his movement and delivering a strike on the most vulnerable places in the disposition of our troops. Therefore, it seems, preemption in the deployment of an operational troop grouping under modern conditions, should be understood first of all as the preemptive deployment of rocket troops, aviation and air defense means, as well as the assumption by large units of an approach march formation or march formation permitting them to penetrate at high speeds into the depth of the enemy disposition, deploy quickly, and deliver an attack against his flanks and rear.

The forms of operational maneuvering. The thought is usually expressed that now, as earlier, the main form of maneuvering in an encounter of advancing groupings is flank attacks. This is mentioned particularly in General Stepshin's article.

We believe that this view does not correspond to the nature of modern operations. Nowadays, to carry out this type of maneuver, it is not enough to move army troops 10 to 15 kilometers to the flank or to make a small enveloping movement,

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things which were relatively uncomplicated to do in the past. It requires carrying out large regroupings of troops, which, under conditions of an expanded front where formations are being deployed, may lead to the loss of valuable time and will not remain unnoticed by the enemy. Therefore, this kind of maneuver, while it is very desirable, will hardly find broad employment on an operational scale. On the other hand, on a tactical level, attacks against the flank and rear may play a decisive role. When combat operations develop in scattered centers, a favorable situation for this will occur rather often.

In our view, under modern conditions, lying at the foundation of maneuvering in a meeting engagement must be the employment of nuclear and chemical weapons, the delivery of deep splitting frontal attacks, exploiting breaks in the enemy disposition and gaps formed by nuclear weapons, as well as a much broader employment of airborne landing forces, sabotage detachments and groups. This, in our view, can render an exceptionally aggressive effect to the entire depth of the enemy operational disposition and ensure his defeat in a short time.

We conclude that the conduct of a meeting engagement would proceed according to this, of course, particularly rough format. As an example, let us take the most probable situation when troops are operating in the depth of the enemy defense. Let us suppose that our troops are pursuing the enemy, and his reserves have prepared to move out to an area of a presumed meeting engagement.

The first series of nuclear strikes in this instance should be delivered principally by the means of the front and the means of the General Headquarters of the Supreme High Command against the counterattack grouping at the moment the latter has prepared to or has only begun to move out forward units. Approximately one to two hours before the encounter of main forces, a second, main series of nuclear strikes is delivered by the army and front means. In this period, airborne landing forces, forward detachments, and advance guards pin down the main forces of the enemy on favorable lines and in areas, while the main forces (principally in regimental and battalion columns) push forward. The third series of nuclear strikes is delivered immediately before the attack. Large units and units are deployed as required into battle formation, and, after the nuclear strikes,

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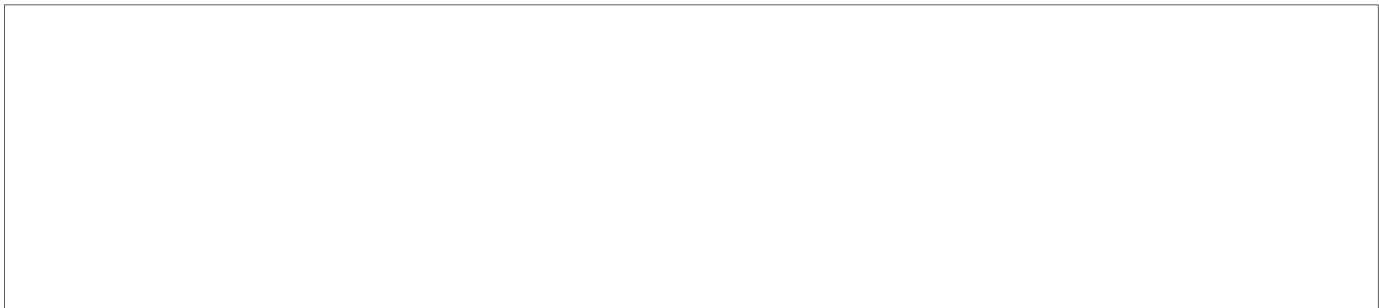


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and sometimes after preparatory fire, attack the enemy, bringing about his final defeat.

In the course of a meeting engagement, on some axes our large units can move deep into the enemy's rear; on others, individual large units or units, having suffered losses or having met with superior forces, will be forced to deploy, and possibly go over to an aggressive defense. On those axes where first-echelon troops get involved in protracted battles, second echelons of regiments and divisions must be committed to battle immediately. It is desirable to send the second echelons of the armies primarily to develop success into the depth, without getting them involved in operations against a counterattack grouping. To parry flank strikes, it is advisable to employ first-echelon troops, aviation, and reserves.

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