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**"THE SOURCES OF MILITARY DOCTRINE -
A LESSON FROM THE COLD WAR"**

BY

GREGORY DOUGLAS AUSTIN

January 1994

A Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy of the
Australian National University

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is the result of my own original work.

G. D. Austin

Gregory Douglas Austin

ABSTRACT

Military doctrine can be distinguished from political doctrine on the use of military force - that is, a doctrine designed to mobilise political support for the non-military goals of the State. At the same time, one doctrine might satisfy partially or completely each of the two arms of government: the armed forces in pursuit of reasonably structured forces and the political leaders seeking to legitimise or bolster foreign or domestic policy.

American scholarship on Soviet military doctrine to a large degree ignored these distinctions. One group of scholars, the "Armageddon school", took at face value the Soviet claim in political doctrine that the USSR rejected the concept of limited war. This political doctrine probably did not reflect the perceptions of the Soviet General Staff about the USSR's military requirements.

The Soviet General Staff's approach to wars smaller than general war ("local war" in their terminology) was rooted more in the pursuit of a balanced strategic posture which might be moulded to respond to a variety of contingencies, than in the more elaborate strategic concepts developed in the USA for limited war.

The Soviet Ministry of Defence published its first open source studies on local war in 1960, with the General Staff Academy compiling a more formal study in 1963, although this was classified. Since that time, the General Staff undertook and published a variety of studies of local war because it believed the USSR might become involved in such wars. The General Staff had a firm doctrinal view from at least 1963 of the unique military requirements of local war.

This inchoate military doctrine for local war was never accorded the politically acceptable status that was accorded "official" Soviet strategic doctrine for general war, despite clear evidence of the General Staff's desire for that to happen.

The Armageddon scholars in the USA placed undue reliance on textual analysis of open sources and rarely pursued alternative explanations. They paid too little attention to the evidentiary value and limitations of information on Soviet military posture, which came almost exclusively from US Government intelligence sources. Taking the US doctrine of limited war as some sort of universal yardstick did not help either, particularly as it meant different things to different people in the USA and because variations on it had been shaped by domestic American political battles and inter-service rivalries.

The main shortcoming, though, appears to have been the lack of rigour in pursuing a comprehensive account of the sources of military doctrine.

This thesis argues that of three main sources of military doctrine - international circumstance; personal or group interests; and a country's ideological framework - international circumstance provided a strong impetus for a Soviet local war doctrine. There is also room to argue that the group interests of the General Staff favoured a Soviet local war doctrine, but, in the final analysis, these pressures for a comprehensive local war doctrine could not overcome the constraints imposed by the ideological framework in which military doctrine was conceived and expressed.

PREFACE

This thesis documents the development of Soviet military doctrine for local war. It places this documentary work in the broader context of the study of military doctrine and strategy, and evaluates scholarly work on Soviet local war doctrine against that broader context.

The thesis argues that the USSR had a military doctrine for fighting local war that was incipient in Soviet policy from at least 1949, if not 1945, and that it was given some expression in official sources, at least from 1960, although in muted terms.

The end point of the period studied - 1991 - brings the thesis to the time of the final collapse of the USSR and the emergence of Russia as its successor. The political revolution unleashed by Gorbachev, brought to crisis point by the August 1991 coup, had by December of that year left the once powerful Soviet military establishment in an uneasy relationship with the nearly twenty independent countries, including former Soviet republics, it had once helped to control. This uneasy relationship led to a call in late 1991 by the Chief of the Soviet General Staff for a reshaping of Soviet military posture to cope with these small scale wars.

The subject of the thesis is the military doctrine of a now defunct empire. The object of the thesis is to provide a case study in the analysis of the domestic sources of a state's military doctrine and military strategy, particularly political and social features. It provides a case study in support of the proposition that the official military strategy of a State represents a social or political contract between the political leadership and the leaders of the armed forces.

The thesis has been able to use information which has only become available to Western scholars as the result of a new openness - albeit still limited - of military institutions in Russia. The author had access to some previously classified studies of the Soviet General Staff Academy during a period of field work in Moscow in late 1991 and early 1992.

The Introduction of the thesis gives a brief account of why the subject is important.

Part One (Chapters One to Four) outlines the concepts analysed in the thesis and reviews the scholarship on the questions addressed in it.

Chapter One defines key terms - doctrine and strategy - and outlines theoretical approaches to the study of them. Chapter Two addresses "local war" as a unique strategic phenomenon, and its commonalities with American concepts of limited war. Chapter Three provides essential commentary on sources of information on Soviet military policy and interpretation of them, in particular the influential role of US Government intelligence information. Chapter Four reviews scholarly work on Soviet military strategy against two criteria: the degree to which questions of local or limited war were canvassed; and the degree to which political, social or institutional influences were taken into account.

Part Two (Chapters Five to Eight) documents the manifestations of the Soviet General Staff's set of beliefs on local war strategy and Soviet military involvement in local wars.

Chapter Five addresses the published views of the Soviet General Staff on local wars from 1945 to 1969, with Chapter Six looking at 1970 to 1977. Chapter Seven documents some of the efforts made to regularise the study of local war doctrine in the Soviet military establishment between 1978 and 1991. It then

compares the treatment accorded local war doctrine with that accorded general war doctrine, since one of the essential features of this period was the failure of the Soviet General Staff to disseminate a comprehensive doctrine on local wars.

Chapter Eight treads the well worn ground of Soviet force structure and military posture to assess them from the perspective of a multi-variant strategy, designed to cope with a variety of contingencies.

Part Three (Chapters Nine and Ten) offers competing explanations of why local war doctrine developed as it did in the USSR in comparison with general war doctrine.

Chapter Nine reviews possible causes based in personal or group motivations of the General Staff. Chapter Ten examines whether institutional factors - the structures of Soviet ideology and doctrine - had most influence on the General Staff's approach to local war problems.

The Conclusion summarises the main arguments.

Since the thesis refers to the policies of a recently collapsed empire, the convention of using present tense to describe past events has been abandoned to avoid confusion in meaning.

Full citation of a reference is given the first time it occurs in each chapter. In footnotes, the title of a work in Russian is followed by a translation into English for its first citation. Where a Russian work is referred to by name in the text of the thesis, its title is rendered in English.

The Library of Congress transliteration of Russian is used for all referenced titles, but not for proper names where other renderings are more common - for example, Trotsky instead of Trotskii. The names of some Soviet publishing houses are given in modified transliteration. For example, the Ministry

of Defence publishing house is rendered "Voenizdat".

Australian usage is observed for spelling. Where citations from texts written with American usage occur, the spelling of the original source is retained.

I would like to thank Mr Geoffrey Jukes, chairman of the supervising committee, for his guidance in preparation of this thesis. His experience of the Western intelligence community, on which this thesis has some comment, and his work as a historian on the Soviet armed forces and Hitler's military decisions, provided important perspectives which inspired the approach in the thesis.

Dr Robert Miller and Dr Leszek Buszynski, members of the supervising committee, also provided valuable comments in the development stages of the thesis.

I would like especially to acknowledge the practical assistance of General Dmitrii Volkogonov, former Director of the Military History Institute of the Ministry of Defence of the USSR, and the following members of the Institute: Captain Valerii Nikolaevich Vartanov, Colonel Boris Gavrilovich Putilin, Lieutenant-Colonel Yurii Leonidovich Tegin, and Lieutenant-Colonel Yurii Evgenevich Rybalkin. The period of research spent in Moscow from November 1991 to January 1992 provided important documentary sources and direct experience of an organ of the Soviet General Staff. The assistance of Mr Bill Burr of the National Security Archive in Washington DC during my research there was timely at a formative stage of the thesis. Professor Des Ball of the Australian National University gave useful pointers to sources on questions of nuclear strategy and force structure.

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INTRODUCTION

The study of the military policies of the USSR was one of the most important intellectual endeavours of the entire Cold War period from 1948 to 1991. The same can be said of the study of US military policies.

The reason is that in those years both countries actively developed military plans involving the devastation of each other and Europe with nuclear weapons. Parts of Asia, especially China, would have been targeted by both countries as well, albeit at different times. Chemical weapons were developed by both superpowers, but with considerably different approaches, and the USSR spent considerable effort developing biological weapons.

But the Cold War years were above all else years of nuclear peril. This peril existed because of the strategic rivalry between the USSR and the USA, but their respective arsenals grew to such extreme proportions that the attendant strategies served to redefine the nature of the superpower confrontation.

While the record now shows, as Churchill predicted in 1955, that safety was the "sturdy child of terror" and "survival the twin brother of annihilation",¹ the distinct possibility existed that a nuclear war could have broken out. Scenarios were numerous, but one of the commonly identified causes of the possible outbreak of a new world war was an erroneous assessment by one side of the other's intentions or actions.²

One would not expect unanimity in assessment by scholars or governments of any country's strategic intentions, especially where high levels of

¹ Quoted in McGeorge Bundy Danger and Survival: Choices About the Bomb in the First Fifty Years Schwartz and Wilkinson, Melbourne VIC, 1990, p198

² Bruce G Blair The Logic of Accidental Nuclear War Brookings, Washington DC, 1993, p1