

John B. Chomeau  
Coordinator for Academic Affairs  
Central Intelligence Agency

### Strategy and Tactics: The Marxist-Leninist View

Any discussion of the Marxist-Leninist principles of warfare is necessarily predicated on their determinist view of history and the social nature of class struggle. The Hegelian dialectic provides both a scientific interpretation of history and a specific knowledge of the outcome of conflict between competing social systems. A tenet for the Soviet strategist is an eventual war between the progressive (and good) forces of socialism and the repressive forces of imperialism. This will lead to the eventual downfall of imperialism. The victory of socialism is the final step in the dialectic progression toward Communism.

The role of the Soviet military is:

To be prepared to conduct such a war of global dimensions.

This war probably will be initiated by the imperialists in a last ditch effort to preserve their socio-economic system.

The progressive forces of socialism will win (and it is the job of the Soviet military to make sure that this is the case).

This will be a battle to the finish. There will be no negotiated settlements. From this derives a war-winning strategy. The socialist side may lose a few rounds, may have to give up large segments of territory initially, etc., but they will eventually annihilate all vestiges of imperialism.

There are factors other than Marxist-Leninist ideology also shaping Soviet military doctrine. Probably the most of important of these is defending "Mother Russia." This has been the rallying cry of the Russian people whenever they are invaded. From this long history of invasion derives another important factor -- the Russian paranoia deriving from Napoleon, Port Arthur, Barbarossa (all of which were surprise attacks).

There is also a Clausewitz-like perception of a need for rimlands to provide a security buffer against imperialist powers antagonistic to the Soviet State. The Soviets need to surround themselves with friendly states to protect Mother Russia, and when they perceive a threat to their periphery as they did in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan; the Soviet military acts to perpetuate the security belt. The intervention of French, British and American troops to support the counter-revolution in Russia in 1920 is a fresh memory in the Soviet Union.

## Definitions:

This a definitional paper, so let me get on with some Soviet definitions of the principles of warfare. Lenin said that in the study of warfare it is most important that we focus on the historical and socio-economic conditions which cause it. The general essence of warfare derives from a philosophical analysis of the nature of violence in history; especially, its socio-economic foundations. From this perspective derives an interesting theory of just and unjust wars based upon the causes of the war, the aims of the war, and the classes which are waging it. Soviet strategists write extensively on the nature of war and the following categories are a summation taken from several sources.

The first is a war between competing social systems. The conflict between the forces of imperialism and the forces of socialism. This is the Soviet "Case One" scenario.

The second is between an oppressed nation and an oppressing nation. These are the wars of national liberation and particularly wars in which a friendly socialist state has resorted to force to free itself from the oppression of imperialism. These wars are

legitimate from the standpoint of the oppressed party and unjust for the oppressor (regardless of whether it is an offensive or defensive war in a military sense).

The third is a war between two oppressing nations. For example, England fights Germany. This is a plunder for both sides and the Socialists would say: "Two thieves are fighting with each other; let them slug it out."

A fourth is a conflict between two equal systems (usually in the context of a war between two nations in the Third World, but historically this includes most wars of the 19th century -- or until the advent of socialist states). These wars are quite complex in nature and it is best to judge their validity on a case by case basis rather than as a whole.

An important corollary to the second category is that although civil wars against the bourgeoisie are just and contrasting wars waged by the bourgeoisie against the revolutionaries are unjust, this does not necessarily mean that violent revolution is to be carried out everywhere and at all times. There is an appropriate time and place for the resort to arms and if the objective can be reached through peaceful means, then this is the instrument of choice.

From the above descriptions of the types of war derive modern Soviet views of strategy and tactics. In many ways, the Soviets have a more coherent and comprehensive approach to the study of warfare than we do in the West. A word of warning, however. They use many of the same terms as we do in the West, but in an entirely different context. An example is the word "peace." For us peace is the absence of armed conflict, whereas for the Marxist-Leninist it is that status which obtains when all vestiges of imperialism have been eradicated. In other words, the socialist are constantly in a state of conflict--only the means change.

**Soviet Military Doctrine** starts with a philosophical analysis of the essence and content of armed conflict. These are the official views of the Soviet state on the nature of war, the likely opponents in a war, the structure required of Soviet Armed Forces, the coordinated use of these forces in combat, and the preparation of the country for war.

**Military Doctrine** is based on the principles of Soviet **Military Science** and, in turn, provides guidance for military science research.

**Military Science** is the study of the laws and nature of armed conflict and military preparations by the country and the Armed Services for war. Its most important component is **Military Art**, which focuses on how a war is to be fought. **Military Science** is divided into four broad areas of study: the military-political, military-theoretical,

military-technical, and military-historical fields.

Military Art has three principal components:

-- Strategy - The planning and conduct of war as a whole, the training of the armed forces, and the support of combat operations.

-- Operational Art - The planning and conduct of operations by large forces.

-- Tactics - The preparation and conduct of a battle.

#### Ideology vs Praxis:

There are many dilemmas inherent in such a tight theoretical military science based upon an ideology which has been dogmatized. The struggle of competing social systems and the class nature of all conflict dictate to the Soviet strategist the types of war which are to be undertaken, as well as those which are to avoided. Marxism-Leninism which permeates Soviet military thinking from the level of Military Science and Doctrine all the way down to tactics, not only provides clear guidance for a general theory of war, but also places severe restraints on opportunities to seize a military initiative.

One of the quandries of the Soviet military strategist is the doctrine that a war between the forces of imperialism and socialism is inevitable and that the number one task of the Soviet military is to be prepared to win this war. At the same time that Soviet military leaders are preparing for this war, which by the way they are certain will be initiated by the imperialists, they also realize that a nuclear conflict would be more destructive than any war in history. So they face at the same time the necessity of avoiding nuclear war and being prepared to win an all-out war if they are attacked. They are also quite concerned that a small conventional military confrontation might escalate into a global nuclear war.

Another problem faced by Soviet strategists is the use of force and violence to bring about revolutions. This has raised dissension within the World Communist movement since the Bolsheviks broke with Mensheviks prior to the Russian revolution. The current Soviet view is to avoid any direct involvement by Soviet military forces, but to provide economic and military assistance to friendly revolutionary regimes. A more recent development has been the use of proxy military forces such as the Cubans in Angola, Ethiopia, and Nicaragua in support of Soviet goals. In a few cases such as

Cuba, Egypt, and Syria where Soviet combat units have been deployed, Moscow has been very careful to keep a low profile and to avoid any risk of conflict with NATO forces.

Moscow's support for insurgencies has likewise been through indirect channels. There have been Soviet advisors and Soviet military assistance, but no direct involvement of Soviet forces. This has largely been the case as well with Moscow's support of international terrorism. The Soviets provide military training and equipment, but maintain a safe distance from actual terrorist operations. For this apparent lack of commitment to the revolutionary movements in nations struggling for their independence or against the economic and political vestiges of former colonial or imperialist ties, the Soviets have been criticized by some of their colleagues in the International Communist movement.

Present Soviet doctrine favors the traditional approach of defending "Mother Russia" and preserving the gains of the revolution instead of undertaking military adventures in support of revolutionary movements. This doctrine was first formulated by Lenin and dogmatized by Stalin in his "Socialism in One Country." This does not mean that Moscow is reluctant to provide support to such movements, only that Soviet leaders are reluctant to get their own troops involved



in a conflict which might escalate to a superpower confrontation. There is little brinkmanship in Soviet military doctrine, nor a clear component in their strategy calling for distant intervention against determined opposition. Military operations on the periphery of the Soviet Union are a different matter-- but judging from recent combat experience in Afghanistan, the Soviets may be undertaking a reappraisal of these distant operations.

Soviet strategists have had quite a problem trying to reconcile an insurgency against the progressive forces of Socialism with the tenets of Marxism-Leninism on the nature of national liberation movements and local wars. The rebels in Afghanistan have turned the tables on Soviet doctrine, so to speak, and for the first time Moscow is attempting to use conventional Soviet military forces and their traditional doctrine of employment in an effort to control an insurgency which shouldn't even be happening. The Soviets have taken a few pages from the West on how to conduct counterinsurgency operations, but still are not making any major adjustments to in their mode of force employment. If any lesson has been learned from Afghanistan it is a reluctance on the part of the Soviet military to commit troops in similar operations far from Soviet shores. The turn of events in the Third World may, however, dictate otherwise. If so, the conflict between

Marxist dogma and operational necessity may again force a reappraisal of military doctrine.

The Soviets are opportunistic in their support of revolutionary movements and in fomenting insurrection and resistance to anti-socialist or capitalist regimes, but frequently conditions in the Third World are such that they can't use their own conventional military forces in support of their political and economic goals. In the past the Soviets have either used proxy forces or relied on military aid without a commitment of regular Soviet forces. In Soviet doctrine this is all part of a whole, with a resort to armed forces the last step in an ongoing conflict with the forces of imperialism which includes political, economic, propaganda, and subversive means as well.

There is thus an ideological basis for defining just and unjust conflicts and setting a justification, if not a need, for Soviet military intervention. Discussion of some of the other papers presented at this conference has caused me to reflect upon whether the Soviets would ascribe to traditional Western theories of just war as developed by Grotius and others. I am of the opinion that Moscow would be guided by a

combination of ideology and opportunism and that factors such as avoiding collateral damage to non-combatants would have little significance in their war plans. Moreover, Marxism-Leninism drives the Soviets to maintain what has already been won, for there can be no reversals in the inevitable movement toward worldwide socialism and eventually to Communism. This is the Brezhnev Doctrine. Revolutionary movements derive their legitimacy from the class and social nature of their struggle for independence; so the Soviet military must stand ready to defend friendly socialist regimes; to support with equipment and training those regimes which are on the threshold of socialism; and to oppose the forces of imperialism. In these endeavors the Soviets are not necessarily in a zero-sum game. The final victory is presumed theirs so they can afford to take a few losses or temporary reverses along the way. The supreme test of Soviet military dogma would be their response to a counterrevolution in a distant socialist country such as Cuba. Marxism-Leninism can't permit such a reversal of the world order; but Soviet military forces don't have the capability to sustain an intervention so far from Soviet shores.

SOURCES:

The above analysis is drawn exclusively from unclassified Soviet military journals. There is a tendency here in the West to ascribe to the Soviets our strategies and theory of conflict; Soviet writers are quite clear on the point that they have their own goals and national strategy and therefore a unique military science.

An appendix is provided giving some key definitions drawn from the Slovar' Osnovnykh Voennykh Terminov ( Dictionary of Basic Military Terms,) Moscow, 1965, translated by Translation Bureau, Secretary of State Department, Ottawa, Canada and published under the auspices of the U.S. Air Force.

## MILITARY STRATEGY:

The highest level in the field of military art, constituting a system of scientific knowledge concerning the phenomena and laws of armed conflict.

On the basis of the tenets of military doctrine, the experience of past wars, and analysis of the political, economic and military conditions of the current situation, military strategy investigates and elaborates on problems pertaining to the training of the armed forces as a whole and the individual Services and their strategic use in war; the forms and methods of conducting and directing war; and also problems pertaining to comprehensive strategic support to the combat operations of the armed forces.

At the same time, military strategy is a field of practical activity for higher military command in training the armed forces for war and providing leadership in armed conflict. Military strategy exerts an influence on the preparation of a country for war in such a way as to ensure victory.

## STRATEGIC GOAL:

A goal of the hostilities, the attainment of which results in a radical change in the military, political, and strategic situation during a war as a whole, or in a theater of hostilities.

Strategic goals may be assigned to the armed forces of a country or to individual Services. They are achieved in the course of hostilities, in the first nuclear strike delivered by strategic means, or during some period of the war, or during a strategic offensive operation in a theater of operations (a strategic offensive in a theater of operations).

Depending on their nature and on the time they are achieved in the course of hostilities, strategic goals may be intermediate or final. On the way to attainment of a strategic goal, the armed forces fulfill, simultaneously or successively, a number of missions of strategic character and importance.

## MILITARY TACTICS:

A special field in the theory and practice of military art which studies the objective laws of combat and develops methods of preparing for combat and conducting it, on land, at sea, and in the air. Military tactics occupies a subordinate position with respect to operational art and strategy, acting in their interests, and serving to achieve the goals set for it by the operational art. Each Service and each branch, by virtue of its intrinsic peculiarities, has its own theory and practice for the organization and conduct of combat and, consequently, its own tactics too, which are called Service tactics or branch (arms) tactics.

## OPERATIONAL ART:

A component part of military art, dealing with the theory and practice of preparing for and conducting combined and independent operations by major field forces or major formations of the Services. Operational art is the connecting link between strategy and tactics. Stemming from strategic requirements, operational art determines methods of preparing for and conducting operations to achieve strategic goals, and it gives the initial data for tactics, which organizes preparation for and waging combat in accordance with the goals and missions of operations. Besides the general theory of operational art, each Service has its own operational art.



## MILITARY SCIENCE:

A system of knowledge concerning the nature, essence and content of armed conflict, and concerning the manpower, facilities and methods for conducting combat operations by means of armed forces and their comprehensive support.

Military science investigates the objective laws governing armed conflict, and elaborates questions pertaining to the theory of military art, which is the basic component of military science, as well as questions pertaining to the organization training and supply of armed forces, and also deals with military historical experience.

Soviet military science is based on Marxist-Leninist teachings and is guided by the method of materialistic dialectics and historical materialism, taking into account and using the achievements of those other sciences which tend to promote continual development and progress in the military sphere.

## MILITARY ART:

The theory and practice of engaging in combat, operations, and armed conflict as a whole, with the use of all resources of the service branches and Services of the armed forces, and also support of combat activities in every regard. Military art, as a scientific theory, is the main field of military science, and includes tactics, operational art, and strategy, which constitute an organic unity and are interdependent.