
Defense Report

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Today's Soviet Tactics?

Recent translations of Soviet military publications have provided, according to Congressional sources, four principles concerning how the Red Army plans to fight modern war, tactically.

—The Soviets consider tactical surprise as the first essential. They want to exploit the great advantage gained by the attacker who gains true surprise.

—Next, the doctrine stresses the importance of preemptive attack, if it is perceived that a potential enemy is improving his position to give him an advantage over Soviet forces.

—The Soviets also embrace the principle of mass which means massing an overwhelming number of troops, tanks, guns, and aircraft and attacking to penetrate the enemy's lines on one or more narrow fronts, then pouring troops through the holes developed. The Soviet's goal is to advance 100 kilometers (63 miles) a day after breakthrough, using massive, sophisticated logistic support.

—Finally, the Soviets will consider the use of tactical nuclear weapons and chemical warfare, either to assist in breakthrough, expedite subsequent advances, or both.

These doctrinal statements do not realistically face up to the situation which would face the Red Army to begin a NATO war. With modern intelligence gathering techniques and high speed communications, tactical surprise would be almost impossible to attain except by limiting the attack to forces already in or near attack positions, and these forces today are insufficient to make serious headway before Allied countermeasures could take effect. A preemptive attack also involves surprise, the difference apparently being that the Soviets might preempt if they perceive they are about to be attacked under unfavorable circumstances, highly unlikely under NATO's purely defensive posture. The use of mass would be most difficult as intelligence could easily pick up the massive troop concentrations which must be assembled in advance.

With respect to the use of tactical nuclear weapons, NATO has over 7,000, and a penetration of NATO's front, using nuclear and chemical weapons should set off a powerful NATO nuclear counterattack which should quickly destroy both the enemy spearheads and the masses waiting to exploit the breakthrough.

To the experienced soldier, the alleged Soviet doctrine sounds as if it were developed by theoreticians assigned to a military think-tank. The doctrine may make sense on paper, but it is suicide in today's situation.