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THE IMPACT OF DESERT STORM AND THE GROWING SOVIET MILITARY DISSATISFACTION WITH DEFENSIVE DOCTRINE

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In the latter months of 1990, Soviet military leaders felt a growing discomfort as the dimensions of the Desert Shield operation were becoming clear. The deployment of large U.S. and U.K. troop contingents was particularly disturbing. In January, the onset of the war intensified the officers' sense of concern. The successful conclusion of Desert Storm has done nothing to calm them. They perceive that a heavily armed, fundamentally NATO, force has essentially outflanked them, destroyed a client power, and thrown doubts on their capability for defending their homeland.

To make matters worse, they are again confronted with questions about the technical quality of their equipment. The rapid Israeli adjustment to Egyptian and Syrian surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems and anti-tank guided missiles (ATGM) in the 1973 campaign, and again to the Syrian SA-6 missiles in the Bekaa Valley in 1982, raised serious doubts about the performance of some of the better Soviet systems. Repeated Israeli destruction of Soviet-built high performance aircraft over the years has reinforced their doubts. Now, even with 1,000 T-72 tanks (most of them the more advanced G and M-1 models), some 60 MIG-25s and 29s, and vast quantities of other Soviet-design materiel and infrastructure, the Iraqis have suffered a colossal defeat while barely scratching the paint on the coalition force.

Soviet speakers and writers have been quick to defend their equipment where they can. Defense Minister Yazov, in an interview on Armed Forces Day, pointed out how well the Syrian forces performed with their older T-62 tanks and Mi-8 helicopters. "The American M1A1 'Abrams' tanks, by contrast," he said, "often had to clean their filters." The Iraqi losses they attribute to the poor quality of the soldiery. "You must remember," wrote Major General Sergei A. Bogdanov, chief of the Center for Operational-Strategic Studies of the Soviet General Staff, "that in the final reckoning the outcome of any war is determined not so much by equipment as by the people who use it."

However, if this were all the Soviet military leaders had to be concerned about, that concern might be expected to melt over time as the coalition forces are reduced and deployed. But the problems have fed upon one another to create a vast sense of inferiority and self-doubt among the top ranks. While they have instituted new courses in their military educational systems to teach young Soviet officers the art of tactical and operational defense, they have been watching as young officers from the NATO countries have been out in the desert actually executing the concepts of offensive AirLand Battle and Follow-on Forces Attack (FOFA). The impact has been very disturbing: so disturbing that the Soviets have begun to question some of the premises upon which their official military doctrine is based.

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In 1987, the Soviets declared that they did "...not look on any state or any people as an enemy." However, now, and particularly since mid-December 1990, there has been a clear return to much Cold War rhetoric in the military journals. U.S. analyst David Beachley, of the Foreign Systems Research Center of Science Applications International Corporation, notes that "the new gloves-off style is reminiscent of writings from earlier, more conservative days." A typical article by Major General Viktor Filatov in the *Military-Historical Journal* referred to American fliers over Iraq as "barbarians." "I thought the Americans had changed after the plunder of [Vietnam]," Filatov wrote, "but no, they have remained true to themselves."

The thrust of an increasing number of Soviet articles is counter to the doctrine as it has been expressed over the last two years. Clearly the military is chafing at the constraints imposed upon them.

Typical has been an article by retired Major General I. Vorobyev in *Krasnaya Zvezda* on January 26, 1991, voicing strong objections to the current drift of thinking on national defense. He particularly attacked as "untenable" the notion that "at the outset of aggression, the main form of military doctrine will be defense." Much better, he argued, would be something closer to "an adequate reaction" — apparently a concept not far removed from the Western notion of flexible response.

Vorobyev is so well known that it is difficult to imagine that his views are not representative of others far more senior and still in positions of importance on the General Staff. His article could, quite likely, be a stalking horse for a significant pocket of disgruntled generals yet to weigh in on the issues. Further, the article may be intended to open the entire matter of defensive doctrine for reexamination and debate, rather than simply to register a dissenting opinion. Other writings point in this direction.

In recent articles in *Military Thought* and the air defense journal *Vestnik PVO*, Colonels Mushkov and Silkin argued that there are ways to improve air defense by reducing the number of "enemy offensive air weapons by destroying them on their bases before they take off." The authors noted that such action would be "possible within the frame work of modern Soviet military doctrine only after repelling a first massive strike," but the implication of preemptive attack is clear.

More authoritative has been an article by Colonel General Evgeny Shaposhnikov, Commander-in-Chief of Air Forces, in *Krasnaya Zvezda* on January 25th, warning his readers of the effectiveness of coalition radio-electronic combat in the air campaign over Iraq. He noted that a significant fraction of the Iraqi air force was destroyed during the first phases of the campaign. While the general made no specific attempt to link the event to anything that might happen in Europe in a larger conflict, the implication, again, was obvious. And equally obvious is the inference that a purely defensive doctrine might doom Soviet aircraft to a similar fate.

In the same paper, a Colonel M. Ponomarev noted the sophistication of American weapons. "Above all," he wrote, "this is reflected in the use of radio-electronic combat which for the first time in the history of warfare is being used in such a wide scale and has seriously complicated the conduct of air defense, aviation and Iraqi command, control and communications."

Colonel General Rakhim S. Akchurin of the Air Defense Forces defended his turf with the comment that, "today our anti-air defenses are capable of repelling the attacks of any air targets." But he betrayed his misgivings when he added, "But what will happen in two or three years? The echo of missile thunder in the desert must put us on our guard."

The new Cold War rhetoric and the sense of inferiority now being exhibited by the Soviet military may be set in juxtaposition with the new hard Soviet line on implementation measures of the CFE Treaty signed in Paris in November. The result is a sobering warning of fundamental shifting of thinking within the military. As long as Gorbachev remains in power it seems unlikely that the doctrinal pendulum will swing very far back in the direction from which it came in the late 1980s, but the pressures are mounting. They are probably not great enough now to break the official policy, but it appears that it would not take much more to cause such a change.

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