

Books

Windows on the Soviet Military

By John Erickson

EDITORS' NOTE: The volumes reviewed are the first four works in an open-ended series entitled *Soviet Military Thought*, a selection of Soviet military writings translated (in most cases) and published under the auspices of the US Air Force. The Russian titles below are reprinted as transliterated by the publishers. *Problems of Communism* hopes to carry reviews of further volumes in the series (two of which have recently appeared, with more in production).

A. A. SIDORENKO: *The Offensive (A Soviet View)*. Washington, DC, US Government Printing Office, 1973. A translation of *Nastupleniye*, Moscow, Voenizdat, 1970.

Marxism-Leninism on War and Army (A Soviet View). Washington, DC, US Government Printing Office, 1974. A reprint of *Marxism-Leninism on War and Army*, revised edition, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1972 (in turn a Soviet translation of *Marksizm-Leninizm o voyne i armii*, 5th edition, Moscow, Voenizdat, 1968).

N. A. LOMOV, Ed.: *Scientific-Technical Progress and the Revolution in Military Affairs (A Soviet View)*. Washington, DC, US

Government Printing Office, 1974. A translation of *Nauchno-tekhnicheskii progress i revolyutsiya v voyennom dele*, Moscow, Voenizdat, 1973.

V. YE. SAVKIN: *The Basic Principles of Operational Art and Tactics (A Soviet View)*. Washington, DC, US Government Printing Office, 1974. A translation of *Osnovnye printsipy operativnogo iskusstva i taktiki*, Moscow, Voenizdat, 1972.

IF, PERCHANCE, some bibliophilic Martian should stroll through our bookstores, he could be forgiven for concluding that the most pressing preoccupation of Western students of the military remains the grim *Wehrmacht* and the terrifying knights of *Bushido*. His confusion would be compounded upon learning that these military organizations were long ago crushed to bits, while there is still in existence a massive, formidably organized and inimical force, the Soviet military machine. It is strange, he might muse, that there are reams of paper on *SS Leibstandarte* and the like, yet not a Soviet divisional history in sight; or that there is minute discussion of each nut and bolt of the *Panzerkampfwagen III (Pz Kw III)* and its variants, yet little or nothing about Moscow's armored

force, with its stockpile of 40,000 tanks. Surely there should be compelling interest in Soviet armor designed for CBR (Chemical-Biological-Radiological) warfare in general and for tactical nuclear warfare in particular — tanks designed with minimum cross-section and low silhouette, tanks equipped with radiation attenuation liners of lead and plastic for gaseous and neutron shielding, tanks with special ventilation systems and with automatic control units to provide sealing against blast effects. Yet in simple statistical terms there is more avid and exact discussion of the long-defunct *Jagdpanzer Elefant*, with rear drive but with both sprocket and idler cogged, or the *Pz Kw III Ausf N* with its 7.5 cm L/24 gun.

The point here is not to belittle the many fine and sometimes superb historical enquiries conducted by specialists into the foreign armies of the past; the problem—and the pity—is that there is nothing comparable in the field of Soviet military studies, at least in open publications. That we know more about *Wehrkreise* than about Soviet military districts—the military anatomy of the Soviet Union—is a reflection of the poor state of current research into the Soviet military. Few if any writers

on the subject ever seem to turn to the materials amassed by the Joint Publications Research Service (JPRS) of the US Government, to cite just one source, on subjects ranging from the latest tank features to military pensions. From time to time, treatises appear on "strategy" or such themes as "the nature of Soviet military power/organization," but discussions of this sort are all too often hampered by a lack of basic knowledge about the Soviet system: not infrequently, they also betray a lamentable ignorance of Soviet military history, not to mention Imperial Russian precedents. (Fortunately, there are exceptions. The relevance and enormous value of broad background perspective is well demonstrated in US Army Colonel William E. Odom's brilliant 1973 study, *The Soviet Volunteers*.)

THE DEARTH of published Western research on the Soviet military underscores the great importance of the volumes under review and the US Air Force project of which they are a part—an informational venture aimed at making available to English-speaking specialists and the public at large the cream of recent Soviet writing on military subjects. The first four volumes in the series seem to have been chosen in conformance (at least in principle) with the logic that in investigating Soviet military theory and practice, we should study what the Soviet armed forces are themselves studying. The pedigree of authors and books alike is not just impressive but impeccable. The books so far translated have been itemized as "recommended reading" in *Kalendar voyna* (a basic handbook for recruits and service personnel), or are part of the use-

ful series *Biblioteka ofitsera* (texts for officer use and study), or have been recommended for Frunze Prizes (honorary awards in the name of the early Soviet military leader, Mikhail Frunze). The authors, contributors and editors—including Colonel-General N. A. Lomov, Major-General M. I. Cherednichenko, Colonel A. A. Sidorenko, and (most famous of all) Colonel V. Ye. Savkin—are in many cases established authorities in their own right.*

Though by no means unrepresentative as a general sample, these four volumes break down—quite fortuitously for the purposes of this review—into two basic categories, one comprising tactical-technical disquisitions (the Sidorenko and Savkin works) and the other, broader politico-phi-

losophical treatises (*Marxism-Leninism on War . . .*, *Scientific-Technical progress . . .*). For obvious reasons, the works in the latter category are the more durable—if the duller—for they are expositions of general principles and are less tied to the immediate tactical and operational environment. Since they are a significant part of the pabulum of Soviet soldiers, officers and their men-

* Of interest, the more recent volumes of the US Air Force series translate the Soviet ranks of "general-major," "general-leutenant," and "general-polkovnik" as "general-major," "general-lieutenant," and "general-colonel," respectively—i.e., in reverse order from the more customary designations, "major-general," etc. This decision is explained as an effort to achieve a more exact terminology for Soviet general officer ranks and thereby to avoid certain ambiguities that could raise problems of protocol.—Eds.

Reviewers in This Issue

JOHN ERICKSON—Professor and Director of Defense Studies at the University of Edinburgh (Scotland); presently at work on a two-part history, *Stalin's War with Germany, 1941-45*, the first volume of which has just been published under the title, *The Road to Stalingrad* (the second will appear in 1976).

SIR FRANK K. ROBERTS—Senior British diplomat whose many posts of distinction included two tours of duty in the USSR, as Minister in 1945-47 and as Ambassador in 1960-62; currently Vice-President of the Great Britain/USSR Association.

JIRI VALENTA—Research Associate Professor, Center for Advanced International Studies, University of Miami (Coral Gables, Fla.); currently engaged in preparing studies of Soviet foreign policymaking; contributor to this and other scholarly journals specializing in Communist studies.

JANE P. SHAPIRO—Associate Professor of Political Science at Manhattanville College (Purchase, N.Y.); co-editor of *Communist Systems in Comparative Perspective*, 1974; also co-editor of *Change and Adaptation in Soviet and East European Politics* and *From the Cold War to Détente*, both forthcoming in spring 1976.

MICHAEL Y. M. KAU—Associate Professor of Political Science at Brown University (Providence, R.I.); editor of *Chinese Law and Government* (White Plains, N.Y.); author of *The People's Liberation Army and China's Nation-Building*, 1972, and *The Lin Piao Affair: Power Politics and Military Coup*, 1974.

CHRISTOPHER HOWE—Reader in Economics and head of the Contemporary China Institute at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London; author of *Employment and Urban Growth in Urban China, 1949-1957*, 1971, and *Wage Patterns and Wage Policy in Modern China, 1919-1972*, 1973.

tors, they must be read with some attention, if only to catch a glimpse of what goes into the making of the *mirovozzrenie*, the ideological outlook (Frunze called it *politicheskoe nastroyenie*) of the Soviet officer and soldier. If they have to sweat through it, so should we—even as an act of silent sympathy.

As instruments of indoctrination and tools of political education, these two works must be regarded as received doctrine, if in a rather formalistic sense. They are part of the “moral-political preparation” of the Soviet soldier, a process of preparation that has shown no signs of any concession to the notion of *détente*. In these volumes and other recent Soviet military writings (samples of which are available, *inter alia*, in *Soviet Press Selected Translations* issued by the aforementioned JPRS), the same ideological building-blocks have been repeatedly elaborated and reinforced. Yet while it seems clear that such works represent official thinking and constitute a sustained ideological thrust, it is harder to determine what real validity they have within the military system. In short, how much attention do Soviet soldiers pay to them (and, thus, what heed should we pay)? The reviewer has found it instructive in this respect to visit a Soviet military bookstore in the company of a Soviet officer and to see what he bought, even more to listen to his sardonic injunction about what *not* to buy. Does *Marxism-Leninism on War* . . . appreciably improve the Soviet soldier’s perception of contemporary war? The answer is probably not, though it gets him through his course work. *Scientific-Technical Progress* . . . might be of limited use in promoting an under-

standing of and interest in armed forces management, which is an increasingly important theme in Soviet military education but produces a kind of “politico-technical” analysis that is not always easily digested.

NO SUCH obfuscation pertains to the works of the two colonels, who deal with the sharp specifics of the battlefield encounter. Colonel Sidorenko’s study, *The Offensive*, first appeared in the Soviet Union in 1970 (in an edition of 13,000 copies almost certainly representing a set distribution for military academies and military schools). It essentially embodies the credo and practice of the all-out, high-speed nuclear *Blitzkrieg*, attempting to collate the operational experience of the Great Patriotic War (and the Second World War at large) with the implications of tactical nuclear weapons and the consequences of the technological “revolution in military affairs.” Sidorenko’s volume was avowedly designed to contribute to “broadening the officer’s tactical horizons” in the conduct of operations “with and without nuclear weapons”—but the nuclear impress was pronounced indeed. In appraising Sidorenko, therefore, it is necessary to note the date of publication, 1970, and to look at subsequent (and contemporary) developments within Soviet theater forces in Europe.

While maintaining its tactical nuclear war-fighting capability, the Soviet command has latterly evinced growing interest in the conventional mode of military operations, *even with respect to the initial phase of engagement and for some sustained period thereafter*. Organization (changes in tank and motor-rifle divisions), equipment (new self-propelled

guns), as well as logistics and tactical training, all suggest this shift of emphasis toward interest not only in the nuclear *Blitzkrieg* but also in the conventional breakthrough operation in its own right, with many features derived (or revived) from the latter days of the Great Patriotic War. It is not by accident that a new series of handbooks—also designed to “broaden operational-tactical horizons”—has recently begun to appear, detailing tactical handling at regimental, battalion, company and section levels in terms of wartime (1941-45) experience. Thus, there is a case for being ultra-cautious in relying on Sidorenko or citing him too extravagantly as *fons et origo* of the current Soviet operational outlook.

Colonel Savkin’s work is a prize gem; the specialist and non-specialist alike must be grateful to the US Air Force for making this volume available. Two things about it are of immediate interest: the title and the publisher’s nervous disclaimer (the Soviet publisher, that is). As the title suggests, Savkin’s work restores to current operational-tactical thinking a very interesting Soviet (and Imperial Russian) concept—“operational art,” *operativnoe iskustvo*, the connecting link between strategy and tactics—an approach that impelled Voenizdat to apprise the readership, officially prescribed as “officers and generals of the Soviet Army,” of the controversial nature of the book. The Colonel’s reputation for controversy and originality both precedes and follows upon this work: his basic thesis—advanced first in a 1965 monograph, *Tempo nastupleniya* (the Pace of the Offensive), then in a highly controversial article on “maneuver” in *Voennyi vestnik* in April 1972, and

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again in an analysis of the characteristics of modern warfare in *Voennyi vestnik* in March 1974—centers on the principle of mobility. Savkin's lesson for his fellows is plain: gentlemen, please study and properly understand military doctrine, as opposed to paying mere lip service to accepted terms. What *is* mobility and how does effective maneuver differ from simple movement? True mobility is essentially accomplishing "the assigned task with maximum effect": to take one example, executing all the involved stages of an encirclement operation is a negation of true mobility when the final elimination of the enemy can be accomplished more effectively with tactical nuclear weapons. In short, mobility (including maneuver and movement) augments fire, or it should, rather than fire simply supporting movement.

Colonel Savkin argues *inter alia* for the surprise employment of massed tactical nuclear strikes on

a narrow front, followed by high-speed penetration in depth by armored forces in conjunction with large-scale airborne landings in the rear. The third chapter of Savkin's book is disingenuously labeled "According to views prevailing 1953-59" but really hammers home his arguments that are relevant to contemporary conditions. This emphasis on mobility and maneuver—on battlefield effectiveness in the strictest terms—could become even more pertinent as the Soviet command re-appraises conventional operations, and here Savkin's theorems in relation to the tactical breakthrough may have some unexpected consequences. In a word, events and the pressure of superiors may force the redoubtable colonel to eat a few—if just a very few—of his own words.

THE US AIR FORCE deserves the plaudits and the gratitude of many, whatever specialist interest is involved, for launching this

major enterprise, which is long overdue. Even those uninterested in the tactical niceties and technical operation of the Soviet military can—and should—pay heed to the ideological throbbing that pervades the broader politico-philosophical works. Perhaps the US Air Force editors might now consider enlarging their introductory note to each volume, presently models of scrupulousness and restraint, in order to delineate context in greater detail: it would be a woeful outcome if this vital educational mission were to lead in the end to further confusion and consequently to a reciprocal dogmatism among some people in the Western military specialist community.

In any event, with these volumes now so auspiciously on the shelves, that Martian can now take himself to his own leader and report that at last the *Panzerkampfwagen III Ausf N* has real competition in the battle of the books.

The Soviet Colossus under Scrutiny

By Frank K. Roberts

FOY D. KOHLER and MOSE L. HARVEY, Eds.: *The Soviet Union: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow. A Colloquy of American Long Timers in Moscow.* Coral Gables, Center for Advanced International Studies of the University of Miami, 1975.

AS A BRITISH "Long Timer in Moscow," I read this colloquy with increasing fascination, absorption, and admiration. The timing of publication is fortunate, in view of the guidelines adopted in July at the Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe which are now to be put to the test. The sage caution of the dozen participants—all distinguished names in the American community of specialists on Soviet affairs—should help to reduce any overoptimistic expectations in the West based on misunderstanding of fundamental Soviet positions.

In my own career, I have known and worked with a number of these men. I owe a debt of gratitude to George Kennan, from whom I learned much about Russia and the Soviet Union when I was still an amateur in the field in 1945 and 1946. Foy Kohler was a trusted friend and colleague in Moscow, as was Loy Henderson in India. The other participants in the colloquy were Mose Harvey (co-editor of the printed report),

Frederick Barghoorn, Jacob Beam, Elbridge Durbrow, Robert Kelley, Earl Packer, John Scott, Henry Shapiro, and Thomas Whitney. Needless to add, I join them all in regretting that those two outstanding operators in the Soviet field, the late US Ambassadors Llewelyn E. Thompson and Charles E. Bohlen, were no longer available to contribute their wealth of wisdom and practical experience to the discussions. (I never had the pleasure of working closely with "Chip" Bohlen but met him in Moscow before the war and at many wartime and postwar conferences. "Tommy" Thompson I first met in Moscow in December 1941, with the Germans just outside the city, and I highly valued my association with him when we were dealing with Khrushchev in the early 1960's.)

Because of my past concern with the problem of developing Soviet expertise in the British Diplomatic Service, one of my first reactions on reading this volume was gratitude to the veteran specialist Robert Kelley for having conceived and successfully executed a plan to establish a fund of Soviet expertise in the American Foreign Service some 50 years ago, long before the United States assumed its present responsibilities as one of the two superpowers and leader of the Atlantic Alliance and of the whole free world. It is

fashionable nowadays in and outside the US to criticize this or that aspect of American international behavior. But it would be hard to fault the overall American handling of the key postwar issue for all of us, Western relations with the Soviet Union, or to exaggerate the contribution of the American experts on Soviet affairs in the Department of State and elsewhere.

TO TURN FROM the participants to the substance of the talks, I was delighted to find that the emphasis was not on the past, except in the sense of interpreting its lessons for the present and immediate future. Nor was there an attempt to engage in guessing games about the succession, presumably in recognition that even short-term speculation on the Soviet leadership after Brezhnev and Kosygin is of little value (few people, after all, would have forecast the rise of either Khrushchev or Brezhnev to the top). There was, however, a valuable and stimulating discussion on the likely mood of the rising middle generation from whom the new leadership will come. The consensus seemed to be that while the members of this group are much less international and intellectual in their outlook than the early Soviet leaders around Lenin, they are better-educated, tech-