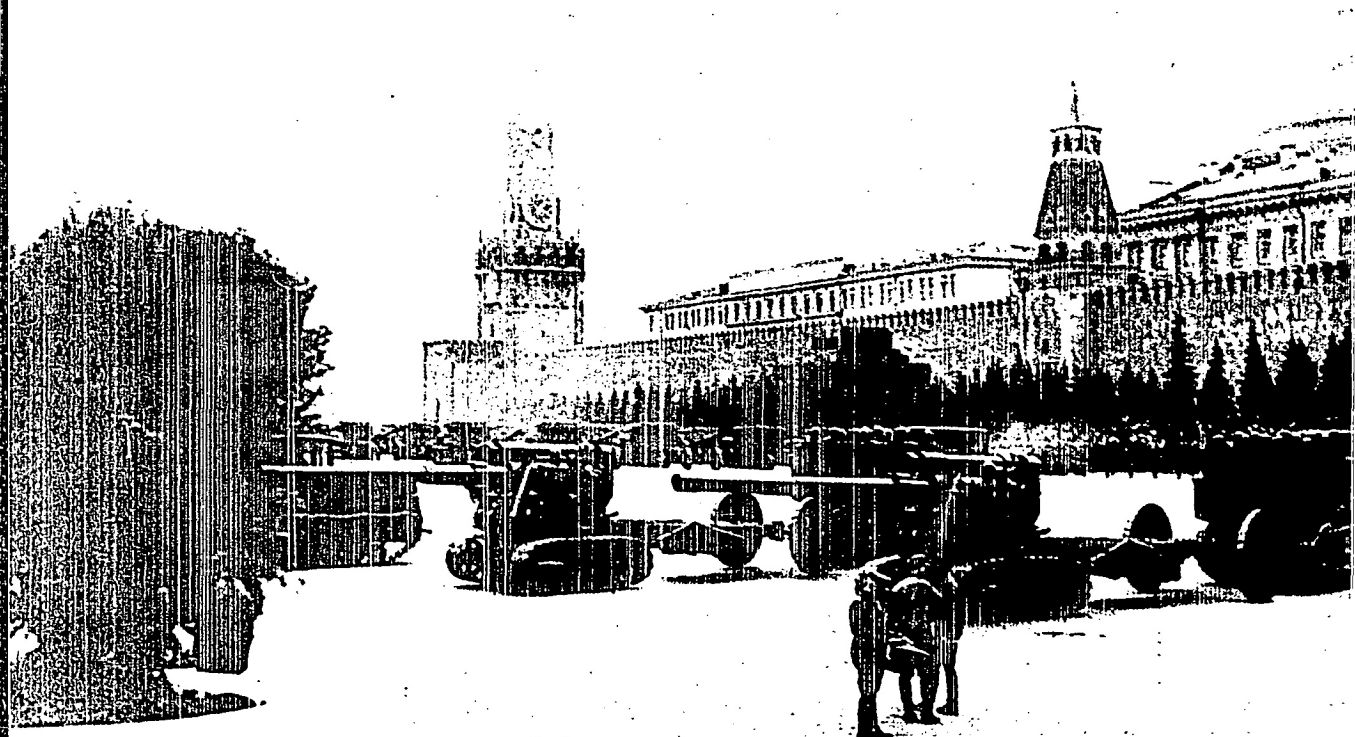


SOVIET POLITICAL-MILITARY STRATEGY



By Maj Richard F. Staar, USMCR



Maj Staar is currently intelligence officer for the 6th Staff Group USMCR in Atlanta, Georgia, where he is professor of political science at Emory University. A graduate of Yale (M.A., 1949) and Michigan (Ph.D., 1954), he recently occupied the distinguished C. W. Nimitz Chair of Social and Political Philosophy at the Naval War College.

"The facts show that lessons of the past have taught little to the chieftains of the imperialist camp, particularly the USA. They again are threatening mankind with war."

Marshal Malinovskii (9 May 1965)

SURVEYING the past twenty years, one may distinguish three phases in the development of Soviet military thought. During the first stage (1945-53), Stalin's five permanently operating factors to achieve victory were binding on all writing in this field: a stable rear, high morale, quantity of divisions, quality of troops, and skillful command. All writers cited the Stalinist prescription in dogmatic fashion and tended to ignore the postwar revolution that was taking place in military affairs. The dictatorial straitjacket thus stymied growth.

After the death of Stalin, however, military doctrine soon liberated itself; the next phase witnessed a beginning of strategic planning for the nuclear age, with the greatest development during the tenure (1955-57) of Marshal G. K. Zhukov as defense minister. This was apparently launched on the initiative of the military rather than the political leadership. Although no major revision in

doctrine occurred, a rapid adaptation of the new atomic weapons and of jet aircraft to World War II concepts of strategy did take place. Unusually large sums were allocated for specialized technical training, military hardware, and Research and Development.

But the fundamental concept in organization remained unchanged, namely that of balanced armed forces capable of operating under conditions of total nuclear war as well as the limited variety. Unqualified acceptance of the military revolution and efforts to adapt it to the requirements of Communist dogma and strategy mark the current stage. The old idea of maintaining a balance among the various services has been definitely upset by a radical concentration of USSR military effort on Strategic Missile Forces.

Although this new policy precipitated a broad discussion among senior officers and a more thorough analysis of military strategy, by and large the

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military elite showed a strong conservative inclination. For example, during 1960 two senior marshals who had failed to support the new program in public were retired. The first to go was Marshal V. D. Sokolovski, Chief of Staff until April. He was followed three months later by Marshal I. S. Konev, CO of the Warsaw Pact forces. Both officers had been first deputy defense ministers and holdovers from the Zhukov administration. Neither was ostracized, but there seems to have been a direct connection between lack of enthusiasm for Khrushchev's military policies and their retirement.

Since that time, eleven top positions within the high command have been held by members of the so-called Stalingrad group. These generals and marshals, including Defense Minister R. Y. Malinovskii, served on southern fronts during World War II and developed close ties which did not include the senior officers at supreme headquarters far behind the lines in Moscow. Ten of the eleven are also members or candidate members of the Communist Party's Central Committee. The person who replaced Khrushchev as First Secretary, L. I. Brezhnev, served as a political commissar for the 18th Army in the Caucasus. The officer who became Chief of Staff at the same time, Marshal M. V. Zakharov, fought with the 64th Army at Stalingrad. Khrushchev himself had participated in the Battle of Stalingrad as a political commissar and member of the military council for that front, but his close ties with the southern group of officers did not prevent differences over military requirements.

The New Look and Cuba

The third and current doctrinal phase followed a secret debate at the December 1959 plenary session of the Soviet Communist Party's Central Committee. The policy apparently agreed upon at that time was enunciated in public by Khrushchev during his speech to the Supreme Soviet the following month. This major decision reflected Khrushchev's victory over the military leaders. He desired to retrench by cutting back the conventional forces one-third and rely more on nuclear missile counter-deterrence; i.e., neutralizing the American deterrent to indirect Soviet challenges. The military seem to have preferred ground troops at their previous levels.

"Military aviation is being replaced almost entirely by missiles," Khrushchev asserted in his speech, and "surface vessels can no longer play the role they have played in the past." In this address, the Soviet leader also displayed confidence that the USSR would achieve a decisive technological breakthrough. The new policy was of course devised primarily for reducing military expenditures to avoid the cost of a large standing army

while introducing more sophisticated weapons systems, including the new Strategic Missile Forces. The latter reportedly number about 200,000 men and comprise a separate command within the military establishment.

A cut of some 1.2 million troops over the following two years, which would have reduced the armed services to about 2.4 million, was officially announced early in 1960. Khrushchev justified this move on the basis of relaxed international relations and increased Soviet ICBM firepower. But then the U-2 crash near Sverdlovsk in the middle of the USSR on 1 May 1960 gave the military an opportunity to seek reconsideration. Khrushchev insisted on his program, however, and by the end of that year about 600,000 men had been released from military service.

During the summer of 1961, a tense atmosphere developed with the confrontation over Berlin and the attendant armed demonstrations by both sides in that divided city. Hence, in July, the USSR suspended further reduction of its armed forces. Men were held in the service even though due for routine discharge; sizeable numbers were called up from the reserves; and finally overt defense expenditures increased by almost fifty percent, from some 9.2 to about 13.4 billion rubles. The Soviet Union also resumed the testing of nuclear weapons in September, climaxing its series with a fifty-seven megaton super hydrogen bomb explosion.

All of these steps must have been supported by the military leaders. Defense Minister Malinovskii justified the army build-up by accusing the United States of attempting to achieve its goals through local wars and the use of conventional weapons. On certain points, his speech appeared to modify some of the precepts laid down by Khrushchev the previous year. For example, Malinovskii mentioned the Air Force in terms of its capability for long-range delivery of nuclear weapons. Neither did he condemn surface vessels as being obsolete. Reference to "all of our armed forces" included the Strategic Missile Forces as only one among several commands in a state of constant readiness.

Despite clever propaganda, conjuring up the image of a "missile gap," from which the United States was to suffer through the mid-1960's, America had always been superior to the Soviet Union and today has at least a four-to-one advantage in ICBMs alone. This ratio does not include Polaris missiles or SAC bombers. On the other hand, the USSR's Strategic Missile Forces must have encountered difficulties, since they had four COs in as many years (Marshals M. I. Nedelin, K. S. Moskalenko, S. S. Biryuzov, and now N. I. Krylov).

Soviet military leaders apparently always understood their inferior position *vis-a-vis* the United States and must have become concerned over the growing American superiority in missiles. Since it



"Military aviation is being replaced . . . by missiles," Khrushchev asserted, "and surface vessels can no longer play the role they have played. . ."

failed, nobody of course has claimed any credit for originating the idea of IRBM's in Cuba. A forty-page document distributed among Soviet propagandists as a guideline for explaining Khrushchev's ouster reportedly criticized him both for putting the missiles in Cuba and for taking them out again.

Although the scheme probably was Khrushchev's, nevertheless, from the standpoint of the Soviet military, the Cuban gambit would have created *ersatz* ICBMs out of Russian IRBMs available in some quantity. If successful, the maneuver would have made more difficult or even impossible the defense of North America. Such a sudden and dramatic improvement in the Soviet Union's military-strategic posture in relation to the United States would have given the USSR immense prestige throughout the world. Even more important, by reducing West European confidence in the NATO alliance system, Moscow would have achieved much greater political leverage. Indeed, this may have been the basic reason for the venture. But as one expert pointed out, while "Khrushchev cut his diplomatic losses fairly effectively, he certainly did not realize either the political or the military aims that led to the missile gambit." And this, more than anything else, probably contributed to his forced retirement two years later.

Literature on the Military Revolution

Not until 4 April 1962 did the daily journal of the Soviet Defense Ministry, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, begin to use the term "military revolution." This occurred for the first time in response to a question from a certain Lieutenant E. Martynov, who allegedly had asked the editors for an explanation of the concept. Nine years had elapsed since the first hydrogen bomb explosion and five years since the successful launching of a Soviet ICBM. The mere fact that nobody in turn asked this young of-

ficer where he had slept all these years would indicate that his query may have been inspired from above. At any rate, the question was answered by a full colonel and has been exploited ever since in the form of a very extensive enlightenment campaign on the subject.

Articles by Soviet experts and important military leaders have appeared over the past three and a half years under this identical heading: "The Revolution in Military Affairs, Its Significance and Consequences." They are all didactic, intended for the instruction of officers and senior NCOs. Recently, a Soviet admiral repeated in this series the old cliché that "a new world war will definitely become the last, decisive conflict between two contradictory social systems—capitalism and socialism [i.e., communism]. Such a war will be conducted with unheard of ferocity, in accordance with the classic principle of *kto kogo?* [i.e., who will finish off whom?]."

In general, however, Soviet military writing no longer holds a global nuclear war inevitable. On the other hand, it is still considered possible as a result of five different sets of circumstances. Some writers envisage a surprise attack by the United States against the Soviet Union, perhaps as an act of desperation to recover sources of raw materials that are disappearing into an expanding worldwide Communist camp. Thus, an article co-authored by a former Chief of Staff outlining the most distinctive features of Soviet military doctrine declared that:

"The aggressive imperialist bloc of NATO is holding on an alert basis large numbers of ground troops and tactical aviation, which are equipped with nuclear weapons; [these units] are being prepared to launch military operations with the use of such weapons."

But Khrushchev himself may have come close to

accepting the existence of mutual deterrence. He probably saw that no nuclear exchange could achieve a clear-cut victory. This thesis could not be accepted by the professional military leadership or at least not in public.

And even Khrushchev never minimized the possibility of war by accident. According to Soviet writers, such an accident could result from human or mechanical error. An irresponsible leader might come to power in a country possessing nuclear weapons and missiles. Too, a misreading of intelligence, a faulty warning system, or even a temporarily deranged pilot might precipitate war. World-wide campaigns have been launched by the Kremlin's agitation and propaganda apparatus against these "dangers," in an effort to foment anti-American feeling. Just how real Soviet political and military leaders consider the "dangers" is another matter.

A third case would be a limited or civil war escalating into a global thermonuclear conflict. Although specific examples are lacking in Soviet literature, one can think of a conflict between the Arab states backed by the USSR and Israel supported initially by France. Another possibility is war in a single Middle East country, such as Iraq, with so-called volunteers or even regular armed forces coming in from the outside. These states are mentioned because none is covered by a CENTO or Warsaw Pact guarantee. Viet-Nam represents a possibility in this same category.

Not all causes of war remain outside of Moscow's control. Thus, Soviet commentators have even discussed a preemptive strike by the USSR against the United States or one of its allies. As far back as a decade ago, General of the Army P. A. Kurochkin and MajGen N. A. Talenskii had mentioned this as a possibility. They claimed, of course, that preemption should be distinguished from "preventive" war, because a Soviet strike allegedly would depend upon accurate intelligence of an imminent attack against the USSR; e.g., by manned bombers. Ten years later, Kurochkin, who is now Commandant of the M. V. Frunze military academy, still complains that "ever more frequently [American] voices are heard about the 'right' of the USA first to launch a nuclear strike against the USSR."

Even today, with ICBMs operational in significant numbers and a warning time of only four minutes if launched from Western Europe and twenty minutes from North America, the situation has not changed radically. The book *Voennaya Strategiya* (Military Strategy) by fifteen Soviet military experts, published in May 1962, definitely emphasizes the global aspects of strategy. Current development of space satellites to detect operational launchings also would appear to make a Soviet preemptive strike even more applicable in

the future.

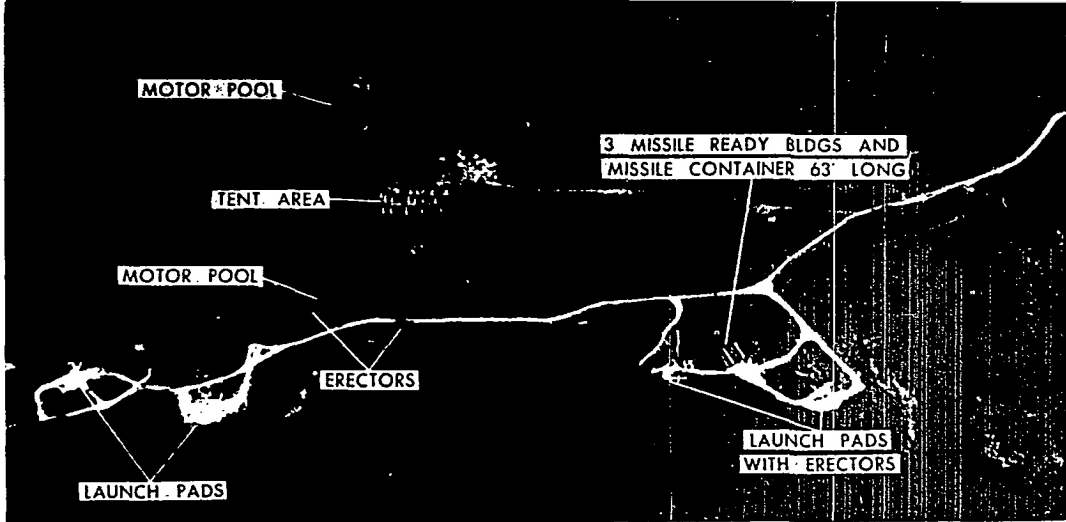
Finally, war could be precipitated theoretically by a call from an ally of the Soviet Union. The key provision of the 1950 mutual assistance treaty with Communist China mentions an attack by Japan or an ally of Japan (meaning, of course, the United States) as the *casus belli*. If hostilities were to break out in the Formosa Straits and involve the US 7th Fleet, for example, Peiping might demand a Soviet nuclear strike against American bases in the Pacific or even against California. At this point Moscow would have to decide between a preemptive attack or abrogation of the treaty. Although the former appears unlikely today, it can not be precluded. In a recent article, Chief of Staff Marshal Zakharov claimed that the Soviet nuclear umbrella protects all countries within the Communist bloc.

In view of recent developments, however, Peiping may have concluded that the USSR's pledge will never be fulfilled. The government newspaper in Moscow reported last year that Communist China's foreign minister, Marshal Chen Yi, had cast doubt on the 1950 treaty by stating that "for us [i.e., Peiping], the Soviet defense has no value," and by describing the Chinese People's Republic as a non-aligned country. "In effect," declared *Izvestiya*, "Chen Yi no longer considers China as a part of the socialist [i.e., Communist] camp." And Peiping later refused to participate in the consultative meeting of Communist Party representatives held in March 1965 at Moscow. Premier Chou En-lai has also been quoted as saying that there "will be no world conflict but a regional limited war in which China will ask nobody, not even the socialist countries, for help."

Theoretically, the situation is identical with regard to the bilateral treaties between the USSR and the East European countries as well as the multilateral Warsaw Pact system. All of these agreements are directed against West Germany or its allies. A recent official manifestation of "solidarity" in this geographic area took place during the seventh meeting of the Warsaw Treaty Organization's political consultative committee. The communique on 22 Jan 1965 following the two-day session warned that members would take "appropriate measures" if NATO continued to develop the proposed multilateral nuclear force. This statement was backed by joint Soviet-East German maneuvers during April 1965 which closed temporarily the expressway and made hazardous certain air corridors from West Germany into free Berlin.

The Soviet Image of War

If war does come, what will its scenario look like? According to Soviet military writers, an exchange of nuclear strikes may not annihilate either of the two superpowers. They see military operations continuing on land, sea, and in the air.



Soviet missile sites in Cuba. The gambit forced Khrushchev's retirement.

This may cover an extended period of time, until the adversary has been destroyed and his territory occupied. The other possibility is a conflict of the *blitzkrieg* type, although of much shorter duration than in World War II. If we may believe a recent authoritative statement, ICBM's are no longer considered decisive:

"Realistically evaluating the high military capabilities of [USSR] Strategic Missile Forces, Soviet military doctrine considers that final victory over the aggressor can be attained only as a result of combined operations by all types of armed forces, all kinds of weapons used in connection with their military possibilities in close cooperation [with one another]."

But this statement probably reflects the influence regained by the senior ground-force officers as a result of Khrushchev's fall. Similar statements are unlikely once his successor reestablishes firm Party control.

Current Soviet military doctrine on nuclear war also envisages destruction of industrial and civilian population targets as well as military objectives; i.e., everything that feeds an enemy's war machine. Here is how a former Chief of Staff phrased it in the authoritative article cited previously: "Much discussion [in the United States] has been heard about a so-called 'controlled' nuclear war, about firing nuclear weapons only at military targets and at the armed forces. This concept of a 'controlled' nuclear war represents demagogic hypocrisy on the part of the militaristic circles of imperialism."

With the establishment of the Strategic Missile Forces, the armed services of the USSR have been reorganized to conform with this concept of an unrestricted nuclear war. And another separate command within the Soviet armed forces has not received as much publicity: *Voiska PVO Strany*, i.e. Anti-Air and Anti-Missile Troops for Defense of the Country. These units include AA artillery, ground-to-air rockets, interceptor aircraft and even certain elements from the civil defense estab-

lishment. The importance of PVO can be seen from its co-equal status with other commands in the Soviet armed forces and the fact that it was placed from the beginning under a marshal, currently Aviation Marshal V. A. Sudets.

PVO troops are capable of operating independently of other commands in time of war. Their mission is to lessen the effects of a nuclear strike against the USSR proper, regardless of the success or failure of Soviet military operations elsewhere. They claim to have anti-ICBM complexes and to utilize for defense "bundles of tele-guided rockets." (But only recently has a nation-wide civil defense system been organized to cope specifically with a nuclear attack against open cities, according to the former CO of ground forces.) The mission of PVO is supported by the current USSR seven-year plan which extends through the end of 1965. It allocates some forty percent of all investments to the Urals, Siberia, the Soviet Far East, Kazakhstan, and Central Asia. These represent areas which should emerge relatively less damaged from a war than the European part of Russia.

It is anticipated that the United States will fire a mass of nuclear weapons in the first three days of any exchange. Current military doctrine in the Soviet Union may therefore consider the launching of most if not all of Russia's own ICBMs in a retaliatory or even a preemptive strike. Phase Two in a thermonuclear war will have many unknown factors in addition to those difficult to assess. For example, the comparative destruction to the USSR and the United States as well as to American overseas bases is impossible to predict. A Soviet claim that under conditions of a "protracted war" both sides will be able to continue to fight after Phase One may or may not be fulfilled. Important also would be whether both sides or only one remained capable of continued production of nuclear weapons after the initial exchanges will have exhausted available ICBMs and warheads. On the other hand, if neither side is capable of mounting any further nuclear attacks after

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Phase One, what would be the relationship between the two countries in conventional forces and trained manpower? That Soviet planners are thinking about this problem can be seen from discussions on the need for increased labor productivity and manpower in general during a protracted war.

The above reconstruction of possible USSR military strategy is based on published materials and shows that the Soviet high command is studying the kind of war that may have to be fought in the future. But these same writings apparently leave little hope that a general conflict may provide a "short-cut" to world communism. For even if the USSR were to emerge less damaged than its opponents, the homeland of communism would require many years to recover, and the Soviet Union might not even remain the paramount power in Eastern Europe.

Because of this danger to Russian territory, Soviet leaders have been attempting to reduce the number of bases from which nuclear strikes could be launched against the Communist heartland. According to the current Warsaw Pact CO, Marshal A. A. Grechko, by 1967 the number of American strategic bases overseas will have increased tenfold in comparison with 1961. Whether this is factually true or not remains irrelevant to this discussion. The point is that each overseas base operated by the United States or an ally represents both a potential launching site and a key factor in the mobility of conventional American power. Elimination of these bases will continue to be a fundamental goal of Soviet political and military strategy.

A good illustration is the series of proposals for nuclear-free zones. They started with the [Adam] Rapacki Plan of Communist Poland's foreign minister in 1957 and continued with East German proposals for a "Sea of Peace" in the Baltic; similar Soviet suggestions about the Balkans and the Adriatic; a proposal by Ghana for an African atom-free zone; the UN Political Committee's resolution not to manufacture, receive, store, or test nuclear weapons or nuclear launching devices in Latin America; British prime minister Harold Wilson's proposal for a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East; and, more recently, Communist Bulgaria's plan to extend the zone over the Mediterranean.

Similarly, in discussions with their Western counterparts at the so-called Pugwash conferences, Soviet diplomats, writers, soldiers, professors, and scientists are "unanimous" in their support for universal disarmament. This was the case at the fourteenth such meeting, held in April of 1965 at Venice. Through the elimination of all armed forces and their replacement with national militias; i.e. police, such an agreement would paralyze

the mobility of United States power. Communist militias in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union could rush to the aid of any West European Communist party engaged in an armed uprising or even subversion, but no American troops would be available on the continent of Europe to counter such a revolt or infiltration, and no ICBMs would remain to strike back at the USSR from North America.

Many of the foregoing proposals have been resurrected as a "joint" offer by members of the Warsaw Treaty Organization. Its political consultative committee issued a communique, mentioned above, calling for a conference of European countries [presumably excluding the United States] on collective security. Repeated was the suggestion for a nonaggression treaty with NATO, a peaceful solution of the German problem a renunciation by East and West Germany of nuclear weapons. Finally, the Warsaw Pact members went on record in support of Peiping's call for a world summit conference to agree on the destruction of all nuclear weapons.

Strategy and Politics

The military hierarchy in the Soviet Union has traditionally accepted the famous Clausewitz dictum that strategy is subordinate to politics. Several years ago, however, MajGen Talenskii described military strategy as "an active aide to politics, at times exerting decisive influence on its development, which [phenomenon] manifests itself in our times." More recently, the current chief of staff, Marshal Zakharov, wrote that "in a scholarly milieu, [research] workers can not be tolerated who try to lend weight to their superficial and primitive judgments by making reference . . . at times even to somebody [Khrushchev?] who had no direct connection with military strategy." But this remark apparently reflects the ascendancy of the military following Khrushchev's ouster—an ascendancy that may last only while the Party leaders are jockeying for power. In the second (1963) edition of the book *Military Strategy*, Party dominance was taken for granted. Of the 500 pages in this volume, fewer than five discuss this problem: "The essence of war as an extension of politics," declare the editors, "does not depend upon changes in technology or armaments."

Nevertheless, prolonged or repeated political crises in the Soviet Union could lead to an enhanced role for the military. This was the case in June 1957 when Khrushchev sought Zhukov's support against the majority of the Party Presidium, and it seems true to a lesser extent today. And it is arguable whether or not further development in this direction would increase the chances of war. In both Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia it was the Party leaders rather than professional soldiers who conceived and implemented the really disastrous policies. US & MC