

RADIO FREE EUROPE *Research*

COMMUNIST AREA

● USSR: Military

15 November 1965

PROBLEMS OF INDOCTRINATION IN THE SOVIET ARMED FORCES

Summary: A deputy chief of the CPSU's political control apparatus within the Soviet military establishment has written a critical survey of problems confronting his organization. He criticizes a common tendency of officers to ignore political indoctrination in favor of technical military subjects when they allot training time and points to continuing friction between the separate nationalities in the Soviet army. Attention is devoted to the vexing problem of portraying Soviet history in such a way that the Party image is unimpaired. Apparently Soviet veterans find it difficult to remember the years of collectivization, the Purge, and the beginning of the war in anything but the most grim terms. The author concerns himself with the task of enhancing vigilance in the Soviet armed forces against security breaches, noting that new technical methods such as reconnaissance satellites have contributed significantly to the effectiveness of Western espionage. A particularly noteworthy statement alludes to the appearance in the Soviet military press of "exaggerated" figures on American missile strength, suggesting that knowledge of Western strength is an obstacle to political indoctrination in the Soviet armed forces.

The Main Political Administration of the Soviet Army and Navy (MPA), the Party organization within the military which is charged with the task of politically indoctrinating the officers and men of the Soviet armed forces, is faced with a never ending struggle for the attention of the serviceman against boredom and the mounting competition of technical military training. The Soviet military press, therefore, frequently carries vigorous criticism of ideological-political indoctrination methods and achievements, criticism which is often voiced by the Main Political Administration itself. A recent example of such criticism, by Colonel-General M. Kalashnik, a deputy chief of

the MPA, is exceptional in its overall outspokenness and the fact that it raises several very delicate and unusual issues.¹ These issues alone warrant their notation by Western observers.

Many of the complaints raised by Kalashnik are fairly common in the Soviet literature on political indoctrination of the military. He attacks, for example, the tendency of technical military training to intrude upon the time which should be reserved for political education, blaming "some commanders" for wanting to reduce the attention given to indoctrination and observing that political sessions often get diverted to technical themes. He warns,

Of course, questions of military training, of mastering technical matters have been and will be an object of our constant care and attention. Nevertheless, we must not forget that it is precisely the man with a communist world-view, idealistically forged, profoundly conscious of his duty to country, and in complete mastery of technical matters who guarantees the success of the cause. We do not train merely specialists in military affairs, narrow professionalists, but highly conscious, idealistically convinced defenders of the homeland.

The author also criticizes a common tendency of propagandists to deal with political and other problems superficially, glossing over the difficulties which face the Party and the armed forces. "This," he says, "leaves the listeners with a bad aftertaste. Knowing from their own experience of the existence of unsolved problems in the development of the economy, in the education of people, etc., they receive the words of the propagandist with a well-known scepticism." [Emphasis supplied]

He alludes to the fact that friction between the nationalities of the Soviet Union continues to provide the armed forces with problems. He admonishes:

Survivals of nationalism, of great-power chauvinism still may appear and do appear where one ceases to watch for them and to struggle against them. For example, in one construction unit, they long have failed to recognize the significance of an abnormal relationship between soldiers of different nationalities. As a result, damage has been inflicted on the internationalist education of the troops and the unity of the collective.

1) "Arm Every Soldier with a Communist World-View," Kommunist Vooruzhennikh Sil No. 20, October 1965, pp. 15ff.

Problems of History. Kalashnik devotes considerable attention to the manner in which propagandists employ the history of the 1930's and the last war to inculcate in the Soviet serviceman pride of past achievement and present strength. He berates the inclination of "some scientific workers and propagandists" to advance a one-sided view of the period of rapid industrialization, collectivization, and the Second World War by seeing everything "through the prism of the negative consequences of the cult of personality." Stressing the cult of personality, "some writers, film people, and propagandists-cum-critics of the cult" thereby distort the true essence of Soviet history and party achievements. The author is particularly critical of those who, in discussing the history of the war, concentrate on the shattering experience through which the Soviet armed forces went in its first months. He remarks ominously, "The authors of such works and narrow views voluntarily or involuntarily pour water on the propaganda mill of the bourgeois falsifiers of the history of the Second World War who with all their powers are trying to minimize the role of the Soviet Union in the destruction of facism."

The problem of keeping the early history of the war in what the Party considers to be a favorable perspective is an extremely difficult one. The high and middle echelons of the officer corps, including political functionaries, are made up of men who went through the fire and water of these grim days. For the veterans who now provide the sinew of the Soviet command structure, the experience was dominated by uncommon heroism in the field and criminal bungling at the top. They remember the USSR's woeful unpreparedness and the farcical confusion of orders emanating from Moscow. For them, the bland Party line on the history of the war's initial months, with its parenthetical allusions to Stalin's "mistakes", simply fails to capture the true horror of what they experienced and thereby belittles the psychological dimensions of their final victory. For these veterans, the party leadership fumbled the ball, but the people, in and out of uniform, rallied and saved the day.

The task of the historical propagandist has recently been made doubly difficult by the appearance of memoirs and reminiscences written by leading military figures. While many of these memoirs redress the distorted Khrushchevian picture of Stalin's incompetence in the later war years, they draw a uniformly frightful picture of the early days. Top-level commanders were kept in the dark about political developments; confusing and contradictory orders were issued; the political leadership could not be reached even as German forces poured across Soviet borders. In addition, the atmosphere of terror generated by the Great Purge carried over well into the war years, leaving the survivors with a memory of pervasive insecurity. Volumes on this theme are spoken in the terse

recollections of General A.V. Khrulev, chief of rear services, who reports a telephone conversation with Stalin in which the latter interrupted him impatiently saying, "You are worse than the enemy, you are working for Hitler." Khrulev relates laconically, "It is not difficult to understand my frame of mind after such a conversation."²

The trouble with the party line on history is that it wants to remember the war, but in the fact of an overpowering, frightful reality it can not ensure that memory will be selective.

Security and Vigilance. A second extremely vital matter which is raised, albeit briefly, by Kalashnik is the problem of military security. He writes,

Take such a question as the raising of vigilance. At the present time little is done to caution servicemen about conversations on military affairs with outsiders, about the maintenance of military secrecy in correspondence with relatives, etc. Thanks to new technical means of espionage, spy satellites, and radio interception stations, the eyes of the enemy have become considerably sharper, his ears longer. It has become important in training work to emphasize the necessity of carefully camouflaging military objects, of strictly observing the rules of radio transmission, of supporting the regime of secrecy, etc.

Calls for vigilance on the part of Soviet military men against the efforts of foreign intelligence services are by no means unusual and normally do not warrant notice, although Kalashnik's blanket allusion to a certain recent weakening in the observance of Soviet security procedures seems a bit out of the ordinary. More importantly, the passage quoted above is one of the extremely rare occasions in which the Soviets admit the effectiveness of the space-age espionage conducted by the West. Khrushchev once observed with some pride that the Soviet Union has put reconnaissance satellites into fruitful service and the Soviets have frequently accused the West of employing them. However, they have kept very much to themselves the admission that the West has increased the effectiveness of its intelligence

2) N. A. Antipenko in Novy Mir No. 8, 1965.

operations by means of the new technical devices.³

How Portray the Strength of the West? If ensuring that the level and nature of the Soviet military effort is kept secret causes some difficulties for the Main Political Administration (as well as the security organs, of course), it appears that the MPA is also troubled by the task of projecting a comforting image of Western military power, which the "imperialists" are so free in disclosing. Kalashnik admonishes,

Day in and day out, our press is called upon to unmask the aggressive essence of imperialism and its military machine, to tell the troops the truth about the weaponry of the capitalist armies. In this matter it is impossible to permit exaggerations. What is of concern here is the fact that occasionally in our press there appear unduly exaggerated figures on the nuclear rocket potential of the U.S. armed forces, which bourgeois ideologues are propagandizing for purposes of disinformation and the terrorization of peoples.

3) The same issue of Kommunist Vooruzhennikh Sil from which the above quotations have been taken presents further material on the security problem in another article (p. 76). Intended as an outline of lecture and seminar topics for the propagandists of Soviet missile forces, the article contains the following statement:

It is necessary to explain to the troops that rocket technology is a secret weapon. To maintain the war readiness of forces it is very important to keep secret the deployment locations of rocket units and outfits, their regions of deployment, and the nature of problems being dealt with. Only the strictest adherence to these rules, careful camouflage, active struggle against the smallest manifestation of carelessness and loss of vigilance will, along with other factors, assure the successful launching of rockets in combat.

It is forbidden to forget even for a minute that imperialist spies employ the most varied technical means, permitting them to overhear telephone conversations at great distances without tapping the lines, to intercept military radio transmissions. For these purposes the USA, for example, maintains hundreds of special units.

Decisive condemnation is earned by servicemen who fail to observe the established rules for radio and telephone conversations, who blurt out the location of units while on maneuver or in letters to relatives.

On the face of it, the import of this statement appears relatively uncomplicated; Kalashnik would like to tell the troops a convenient "truth" about American missile strength and wishes to prevent the exposure of "exaggerated" Western figures which might have a depressing influence on the Soviet soldiers' image of relative Soviet military power.

But the matter is not nearly so simple because, with infrequent exceptions, Western figures on the missile strength of the United States are not exaggerated. At least once a year, the Department of Defense releases fairly complete and detailed data on the number of strategic weapons currently deployed and programmed for the near future. Many technical features about these weapons are kept highly secret, of course, but their numbers are public and widely accepted as accurate. On the basis of these figures, the range for interpretive exaggeration is extremely narrow. What Kalashnik surely has in mind are the hard McNamara figures available to everyone.

Now it is virtually impossible that informed military and political opinion in the USSR regards these figures as exaggerated. The gross numbers of American strategic weapons, i.e., numbers of planes, deployed missiles, and missile-firing submarines in service, are so difficult to conceal that the United States has little to lose and propagandistically much to gain from disclosing them officially. There is thus a strong prima facie case for the accuracy of the Western figures. One must conclude that the Main Political Administration, with its responsibility for infusing Soviet forces with confidence in their own strength as opposed to that of the West, does not wish to see the true figures circulated in the press and exposed to the eye of the rank and file because the truth would work in the direction of demoralization.

The implications of Western nuclear power for the morale of Soviet troops, and incidentally of the political leadership as well, are particularly important in connection with current Soviet doctrine on the political nature of general nuclear war. Soviet strategic doctrine has come to envisage general nuclear war as a cataclysmic, essentially "one-act" event in which an all-out nuclear strike against all targets of conceivable military utility -- forces, communications, and political centers -- is rapidly followed by theater operations on the ground which "fulfill" the decision achieved by the strategic strike. As this doctrine has evolved, the Soviets have held consistently to the notion that nuclear war must be, as Clausewitz insisted in a less frightening age, the continuation of politics, i.e., that nuclear war must end in a politically meaningful victory.

1) Lieutenant-Colonel Ye. Rykin, "The Essence of Nuclear Rocket War" *Kommunist Voennoye Slovo* No. 11, September 1965, pp. 50-51.

2) See also "The Object of Marxist-Leninist Teaching on War and the Army" *Kommunist Voennoye Slovo* No. 18, September 1965; and "War and Politics in the Nuclear Age" *Ibid* No. 2, January 1964.

In the West many responsible strategic theorists have concluded that, in the face of the awesome weapons involved, nuclear war once begun will be politically meaningless, that nobody could win such a war in any rational sense. According to one Soviet military writer, "such notions are also found among some Soviet authors", including the well-known publicist General N. Talensky. It appears that even Khrushchev, although modifying his stance in public, believed personally that a politically meaningful conception of victory was out of the question in a general nuclear war and therefore pushed for inexpensive forms of minimum deterrence which staked all on preventing rather than fighting such a war. But the writer just cited disagrees: "To assert...that victory in nuclear war is in general not possible would not only be theoretically untrue but also dangerous from the political point of view."⁴ [Emphasis supplied]

The dangers of a "no-win" approach to nuclear war are twofold: such a doctrine would tend to undermine the morale of any military establishment by questioning its traditional raison d'etre and it would produce paralysis of political will in a crisis situation where deterrence threatens to fail, thereby perhaps increasing the likelihood of war. Thus the logic of nuclear strategy impells the Soviets to the position that deterrence, not to mention their political bargaining power, is strengthened by demonstrating a willingness and ability to seek victory if deterrence fails.⁵ The fly in the ointment is, of course, that the credibility of the Soviets' victory-oriented strategy is called into question by their evident inferiority in strategic delivery systems. How can the USSR "win" a one-act nuclear exchange -- which, according to Soviet scenarios, would be initiated by the United States -- when it possesses less than one-half the level of American inter-continental striking power (strategic bombers included)?

Now there are several political and strategic reasons why the Soviets should adhere to doctrine aimed at victory in general war in spite of clear inferiority. Some Soviet Party politicians would favor it because it enhances their international leverage to some extent. The military prefer it because it reflects their traditional function and reinforces their claim upon the nation's resources, this latter factor being a disadvantage from the politician's point of view. But, to return to the main theme of this paper, this

- 4) Lieutenant-Colonel Ye. Rybkin, "The Essence of Nuclear Rocket War" Kommunist Vooruzhennikh Sil No. 17, September 1965, pp. 50ff.
- 5) See also "The Object of Marxist-Leninist Teaching on War and the Army" Kommunist Vooruzhennikh Sil No. 18, September 1965; and "War and Politics in the Nuclear Age" Ibid No. 2, January 1964.

doctrine presents the political commissars and the military propagandists with definite problems. Upon reading in their own press of the enormous military power in the hands of the United States, Soviet officers and enlisted men who are not versed in the scholastic intricacies of the logic of deterrence must surely wonder how a Soviet victory in nuclear war is conceivable. Judging from Kalashnik's remarks, one must assume that MPA's answer to this problem of indoctrination is merely to withhold accurate information on Western strength.

It may be that the motives behind the previously-quoted statement go further than the desire to prevent the unpleasant truth from harming morale in the ranks. Kalashnik may be denigrating Western military data in an attempt to weaken the pressure of the military establishment in the Soviet budget. It should be noted that the Main Political Administration is fundamentally an organ of the Central Committee of the Party, not the Ministry of Defense, and therefore reflects the policy lines of the highest political authority. Yet it is most unlikely that the political commissars in the Soviet army could successfully obfuscate the picture of American military strength in the eyes of the military leadership, a picture which they as well as the political leadership know only too well. On balance, one should probably judge that the MPA is trying to tighten up on the circulation of figures accurately depicting Western strength in order to ease its own basic task, that of indoctrination. It appears, however, that on so basic a matter as the power of the enemy, which the Party has always insisted must be "objectively" assessed, the MPA can not build an impenetrable wall between those who know and those who don't.

It is not very clear what "press" Kalashnik is referring to when he criticizes the occasional release of so-called exaggerations of American missile strength. Of the Soviet open military publications reaching the West, the only one to contain a numerical rundown of U.S. strategic weaponry was Marshal Sokolovsky's Military Strategy, which scrupulously duplicated official Washington figures in both the 1962 and 1963 editions. Unless Kalashnik has Sokolovsky solely in mind, one must assume that he is referring to the semi-classified, limited circulation military press which is employed in the Soviet Union to inform middle and lower echelon officers on general strategic problems. It is precisely this sort of literature that is most influential in molding the opinions of the Soviet officer corps as a whole; and it is known in the West that in recent years this literature has become quite objective, at least on technical matters.

Fritz Ermarth