

Douglass, Joseph D. Jr. and Amoretta M. Hoerber, *Conventional War and Escalation: The Soviet View*. National Strategy Information Center, Inc., New York: Crane, Russak and Co. Inc., 1981.

Dziak, J.J., *Soviet Perceptions of Military Power: The Interaction of Theory and Practice*. National Strategy Information Center Inc., New York: Crane, Russak and Co. Inc., 1981.

One of the commonest of mankind's many follies is that of taking oneself as the measure of all mankind. This fallacy has caused as many wars as anything else: wishful or ethnocentric thinking has helped along many a decision to go to war—"the British don't really care about the Falkland Islands," "only a few thousand Soviet troops are needed to sort out Afghanistan," and so on. The principal theme of these two monographs addresses specific examples of this fallacy—namely that the rulers of the USSR regard nuclear war as "unthinkable" and that they make the same distinctions about military and political matters that we do. Neither is the least bit true and holding to either of these rather pious beliefs will do us no good.

The thesis of Douglass and Hoerber's work is simply stated: the USSR is planning for a nuclear war (at least on the tactical level) and indeed sees the use of nuclear weapons as inevitable in any Warsaw Pact/NATO general war. Like the Duke of Wellington, they know that great nations cannot have small wars. The authors are writing against a belief, which they claim is pervasive in Western circles, that the Soviets have given up the notion that they may have to fight a nuclear war, are planning a purely conventional war and, furthermore, make the same distinction between the two that Western planners do. On the contrary, to the Soviets war is war and, as such, all weapons are available. They quote Marshal Grechko (Minister of Defence until his death in April 1976): "... in a future world war, if the imperialists start it [as, by definition, they will], nuclear missiles will be the deciding means of warfare." That's a pretty definite statement. The authors argue, that for the Soviets, the debate is not *whether* to use nuclear weapons but *where* and *when*.

In recent years the Soviets have been discussing conventional war more and, according to the authors, seem to be coming to an agreement that there are some compelling reasons for starting a war not with nuclear weapons but with conventional weapons. Generally speaking, starting a war conventionally would allow the Soviets to complete their mobilization and to wear down NATO's nuclear weapons and command and control apparatus—in short, that the introduction of nuclear weapons would be more effective after a conventional prelude. Furthermore, the authors contend, the Soviets' apparent current emphasis on conventional forces represents their conviction that nuclear weapons cannot do the whole job effectively by themselves. According to the authors, this recent emphasis on conventional

weapons has been interpreted as signalling a gradual movement on the part of the Soviets towards agreement with the West that a nuclear war is not feasible. They argue that this is a complete misinterpretation and that the Soviet planners have never abandoned the belief that Grechko enunciated.

Yet, surely there can be no victor in a Europe ravaged and poisoned with nuclear weapons? The authors argue that the Soviets do not see it this way at all. Rather, they wish to gain the territory, resources and industry of the West with enough workers to make it run. Nuclear weapons will be used to destroy the combat force of the NATO armies—basically, they are not intending to destroy Nurnberg but the NATO forces covering that city. They also point out that the Soviets have no particular objection to killing people and indeed they have killed enough of their own in pursuit of their millennium to prove that they have no compunctions. After all, as Stalin was wont to say, you can't cut down a forest without making the chips fly. If the forest is worth cutting down, so are the chips.

Douglass and Hoeber's work is written, as all of its kind should be, from Soviet sources. In particular, *Voyennaya mysl* ("Military Thought") is much relied upon. Restricted in circulation in the USSR, this is a journal by high ranking professionals written for each other and not for propaganda purposes. The authors appear to have a good familiarity with such primary sources and a deep background knowledge of the USSR and its history. They are, then, speaking from some considerable knowledge of the subject. Material which they quote makes it very clear that, for the Soviet rulers, a war with NATO would be a big war and would be fought in a big way. From assault rifles to chemical weapons, from nuclear weapons to psychological operations and sabotage, all are integral parts and there are no isolated compartments.

It is altogether rather depressing reading. What is most depressing is what is not mentioned by the authors (and their coverage is thorough enough to suggest that their sources do not deal with it either). That is, the Soviets appear to assume they alone will determine the time, place and scale of a nuclear exchange. But, once the "nuclear threshold" has been crossed, who can say what will happen? NATO also has these weapons and NATO also has its own ideas about what should happen. If these writings really do reflect Soviet military thinking, then they seem to be committing the error of ethnocentrism themselves, believing that they alone hold the initiative and dictate events.

The monograph by Douglass and Hoeber is a good summary of recent Soviet military thinking on the subject and is a powerful antidote for the belief that the Soviets think the same way the West does. No one can read it and not realize that the Soviet armed forces expect to fight and win a war involving nuclear weapons. Their only question seems to be exactly when to plan the nuclear strikes—on the first day, or on the third.

Dziak's work is also admonitory and concerned with strategic ethnocentrism. While the first book discussed warned us not to think that the Soviets believed that nuclear and conventional war were two different things, this one cautions against the belief that the Soviets see war and peace or politics and military action as separate. They are but different aspects of the same thing. As every Marxist-Leninist knows, wars are the inevitable concomitant of imperialism; therefore, as long as imperialist regimes exist, there will be wars. Peace is the abolition of the causes of wars (not merely the absence of wars); therefore peace is the final destruction of imperialism-capitalism and the triumph of socialism. Thus, by this logic, war is peace and peace is victory.

Dziak takes passing aim at that well-loved speculation (much current today with the new succession rites) that there will be a struggle for power between the "military" and "political" leadership of the Soviet Union. In reality they are the same people—no one can rise in the armed forces unless he is a trusted and vetted party member. The founders of the Bolshevik state were determined to prevent "Bonapartism" and took care to ensure that the armed forces were well controlled by the party. In this they were successful. With the possible exception of the Tukhachevsky affair in 1937, there has never been a military attempt at a coup, or any other attempt for that matter. Officers, like everybody else in the Soviet apparatus, are subject to observation by the KGB and, additionally, are watched by the Main Political Administration of the armed forces. In fact, the connection is even closer than this. It is not simply that the party watched the army but that, at the highest levels, the two are one. Brezhnev was head of the party apparatus, head of the government apparatus, and he was Supreme Commander-in-Chief. In short, like the Czar, he was the Vozhd, the Leader. The members of the Defence Council are the important members of the Politburo. This stands in great contrast to equivalent bodies in the West in which a committee of generals and civil servants advises the political leaders; in the USSR, all committees are peopled by the same members.

Dziak's explication of the decision-making committees at the top of the Soviet pyramid makes it perfectly clear that all decisions are made with an eye to the overall struggle between capitalism and socialism upon which Marx founded his theory of history. In stressing that war is a continuation of politics, Dziak could equally stress the converse, politics are a continuation of war. It is one struggle and all forces are coordinated and applied to the victory. The "correlation of forces" could be seen simply as the strength to "make us an offer we can't refuse." It is presumably in this light that Douglass and Hoebner's monograph should also be seen. Whether or not the Soviets really believe that they can fight and win a nuclear war, they very likely believe that it will never need to come to that. They probably agree with one of the shrewdest and most successful plotters of history, Tokugawa Ieyasu, that "The right use of military power is that it

should conquer while remaining concealed in the breast. To take the field with an army is to be found wanting in the real knowledge of it."<sup>1</sup> One of the clearest illustrations of the way in which armed might can be used without resorting to fire-power is the way in which the Soviets took over the Baltic states in 1939. There was no need to fight, the correlation of forces saw to that.<sup>2</sup>

In plain terms, Dziak is stating that there is indeed a plot; there is a Soviet "Plan for World Conquest." Unfortunately, since Senator McCarthy, this message is too easily dismissed. Now, in fact, there is no "plot;" there is no secret document written by Lenin in 1905 which lays out all the moves to checkmate. Only poor chess players play by trying to work out all their moves in advance. A really good chess player does not do this at all. He sets out to slowly and carefully build up a position of strength. His opponent, if he is not up to his quality, finds himself slowly strangled and his freedom of movement reduced until the chess master feels that the correlation of forces will permit the final moves. Just what these final moves are depends on how the game has developed. From a powerful position, there are many routes to checkmate. There never was a detailed plan but neither was there any doubt where the chess master was going.

Dziak shows in the clearest possible way that the chess masters in the Kremlin do have the long-range aim of winning the game and all their resources are bent to this end. Occasionally they lose a pawn, occasionally one of their snares is blocked, but always they are going the same way. Why do the Soviets have such a large navy? That's easily answered—all chess sets have rooks. They intend to block all the routes so that when they make their offer, we can't refuse it.

Both of these works are written by people who understand their subject thoroughly and have gone to the source for their supporting data. Both of them are arguing a related point—the Soviets do things differently than does the West, and we must accurately determine their methodology. Anything less and we will be deluding ourselves. These books should be read, but probably will not be, by all those who take the (appealing and cheerful) view that, if only we could sit down together, everything could be worked out to a mutually satisfactory conclusion. It is not true that 'our' side does all the thinking and that the 'other' side allows us to define their categories of strategic thought. The Soviets would like us to continue in this delusion. The chess player who sees the game only in terms of his own initiatives, and his opponent's reactions to them, will surely lose the game.

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### Footnotes

1. Tokugawa Ieyasu won a long and involved power struggle in 16th century Japan becoming Shogun in 1603 and founded a dynasty which endured until 1868. The quotation is taken from a collection of sayings which he left to guide his heirs. Despite his own advice, he took the field many times but his final battle at Sekigahara was won by guile as much as by fighting. He is the original of the character Toranga in the novel *Shogun*. Chinese strategist Sun Tzu expressed similar sentiments in his famous observation that "to subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill."
2. However, the Finns demonstrated that the correlation of forces was not quite as favourable as Stalin thought; had Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia elected to fight it is possible that they, like Finland, would be independent today.