

Wardak, Ghulam Dastagir. *The Voroshilov Lectures: Materials from the Soviet General Staff Academy; Volume I: Issues of Soviet Military Strategy*. Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1989.

The man responsible for this book, Ghulam Dastagir Wardak, was a lieutenant colonel in the Afghan Armed Forces in 1973 when he was sent to the Voroshilov Academy of the U.S.S.R. Armed Forces General Staff for two years. Contrary to the dictates of prudence, he took detailed notes because he believed that the Afghan forces should obtain the necessary military education while reducing the influence of its foreign propounders. Such information was never intended to leave the U.S.S.R. and security for the course materials was strict.¹ Soviet distrust of foreign students was justified. In 1979 Colonel Wardak deserted the Kabul regime and became a mujahaddin fighter. He was badly wounded in August 1980 and in 1981 he arrived in the United States with his lecture notes. This volume is the first in a series which will publish them.

This volume covers about half the materials of the military strategy course presented at the Academy. Such lectures continued throughout the two-year course providing the framework in which army and front operations could be described and taught. The book includes two introductory essays: one by Raymond Garthoff outlines American considerations of Soviet military thinking; the other by John Yurchenko and Wardak discusses the Voroshilov Academy itself. Appendices describe the organization of the Academy and the course, and the meaning of certain Soviet military terms.

The principal advantage of this book is that it allows us to look inside the Soviet Armed Forces and see them looking out at us. Wardak is quite certain that, with the exception of some details about the most modern Soviet weapons, the lectures presented to the foreign students were the same as those given to the Soviets. From the outset we notice the all pervasive atmosphere of Marxism-Leninism which, needless to say, was a compulsory course.² Indeed, military strategy itself is "a means and a weapon of politics" (p. 81).³ Straightaway we are taken into the world created by the ideology. There can be wars between capitalism and socialism, wars between capitalist states, wars of national liberation and civil wars between classes, but there is no mention, and therefore no possibility, of wars between socialist states. Although it is admitted that "in a nuclear war there will be no winner or loser," nonetheless the very next sentence assures us that "Soviet strategy holds that the victory will belong to socialist countries." This is so because socialism guarantees that their aim is just,⁴ their morale is higher, their economic system better and — what must read a little strangely today after the revelations about Brezhnev's "time of stagnation" — "at the head of socialist governments are hard-working people who are members of the Marxist-Leninist party." (p. 72) This part of the lecture must have fallen victim to the revelations of *glasnost*. We are told that the "general crisis of capitalism" is "deepening" and the socialist system is strengthening (p. 104) — another boast which has yielded to *perestroika*.

The book stresses that a cornerstone of Soviet policy is the principle that the U.S.S.R. "will not initiate war." (p. 70) But, three pages later, we are assured that, as the initial stages of the war will be vital, "the strategic initiative must be seized." This must have created a rather jumpy state of mind for Soviet military leaders — they could not initiate force, but they must take control of events immediately; their trigger fingers had to be itchy — "the Soviet Army and Navy will rapidly initiate dynamic offensive actions when the enemy invades our borders." (p. 263) The contradiction between awaiting an attack but knowing that the initiative must immediately be seized — a pre-emptive strike is the only way to resolve the contradiction — meant that the Soviets ever declared their pacific aims while ensuring that their armed forces had a tremendous offensive capability. This, understandably, made Western armed forces doubt the statements and see only the capabilities. This contradiction appears finally to be recognized: today we are told by the Chief of the General Staff that "it was necessary to go half way to meet the Western countries alarmed at our military might"⁵ and by the former Chief that "our ability to repel an aggression was previously more offensive than defensive."⁶

The teaching on nuclear war is also contradictory. On the one hand, it is termed a disaster (p. 72) but, on the other, the lectures continually speak of operations — like mobilization — taking place in the midst of nuclear strikes. At these times, nuclear weapons appear as ordinary weapons. This split seems to have run through Soviet strategic thinking from the mid 1960s until recently. The lectures that Wardak received appear to represent an intermediate state between casually treating nuclear weapons like conventional artillery and today's view that they cannot ever be used. In fact, the Chernobyl disaster has made many Soviets realize that even a conventional war fought amidst dozens of nuclear power stations would produce devastating amounts of radiation. This particular penny has fully dropped today and a central principle of the new Soviet security policy is that any major war would be a disaster for both sides. The newly-stated purpose of Soviet doctrine is now the prevention of war, not its preparation.

The assessment of NATO forces presented in the lectures is interesting. It appears that, in the private confines of the Voroshilov Academy, the Soviets really were concerned that NATO might attack them. Or, to put it more bluntly:

The ruling authorities of the USA are engaged in preparation for a new world war to destroy the socialist system and to establish American bourgeois domination over the world. (p. 141)

Their military assessment told them that NATO had the strength:

NATO can initiate combat actions . . . and can achieve great success on the first day of operations . . . the enemy can launch an invasion without announcing mobilization. (p. 183)

NATO bloc forces are in a high state of combat readiness, and they are equipped with highly sophisticated, modern weapons and combat equipment. They are also provided with the necessary quantities of materiel reserves for conducting war. (p. 239)

NATO officers, accustomed to their own problems and to looking over nervously at the "Red hordes," will find it hard to believe that the Soviets lived in constant fear of NATO forces surging out of their barracks without warning and driving east. But it seems true. Military men of necessity assume the worst-case option and it should come as no surprise that the same holds true for Soviet officers.⁷ According to their analysis, NATO has formidable war-making powers: "NATO can produce in one year: 30,000 tanks; 25,000-35,000 aircraft; 50,000-60,000 artillery pieces; and 1-1.5 million tons of ships." (p. 109) Its mobilization potential "could amount to more than 25 million men." (p. 110)

The section of the book on theatres of strategic military action (TSMA — the editors' translation of TVD⁸) illustrates this fear more clearly. Everywhere there were enemies set in motion by the USA and the UK.⁹ Africa was being converted into the main supply base of NATO's strategic materials and was a bridgehead against socialism (p. 115), the Nordic countries were another (p. 116), "very aggressive Israel" was an "arm" of the USA, many Arab countries were under the same influence, China had an "anti-Soviet policy," the CENTO bloc of Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and "England" was "led and controlled by the United States" (p. 121), imperialism exploited India and China supported Pakistan (p. 132), American aggression was widespread in the Far East (p. 139), the Atlantic Ocean was another imperialist bridgehead. (p. 143) Threats were omnipresent. This teaching supports the thesis, advanced by many Soviet thinkers today, that the U.S.S.R. was trying to attain parity with virtually every military power on earth not actually allied to Moscow. Attacks from all sides were anticipated. The "most likely form in which war will be initiated by the enemy" is one of limited nuclear strikes, and such a war will be from all sides:

Such a war would be initiated not only by the US or the NATO aggressive bloc against the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact countries, but also by China against the Soviet Union and other socialist countries of the Far East. (p. 247)

Thus, the resolute use of Marxist-Leninist axioms told the Soviet General Staff that their most likely threat was a coordinated attack on them by all enemies at once. As the axioms created this danger, they have had to be changed.¹⁰

This is a "must read" book for anyone interested in Soviet military thinking. For the specialist there is much valuable information: the major TSMA's (TVDs) are analyzed; the three states of readiness are described;

responsibility for initiating certain operations is established and much else. But for those not so concerned with the details, the lectures show how central Marxist-Leninist generated axioms were to Soviet military thinking. The ideology created the split between capitalism-imperialism and socialism, posited the immiscible nature of the two systems and all else followed. This book makes it clear that the past twenty years were probably more dangerous than we realized at the time.

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Endnotes

*Note: the opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and are not to be taken as those of the Department of National Defence or the Government of Canada.

1. Wardak states that, despite promises to do so, textbooks and the original lecture texts were not sent on to the students' countries, p. 405.
2. Wardak and his Muslim companions had little interest in the subject and refused to study it. He concluded that the prime purpose of military instruction of foreign students was to indoctrinate them with Marxism-Leninism "to support the expansion of the world communist system." p. 406.
3. "Current Soviet military strategy is in full compliance with the policy of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which is directed towards establishing communism and protecting the Soviet Union and socialist nations from enemy aggression." p. 58.
4. The sentiment is repeated: "In this case [of a war "imposed upon them"] the socialist countries would follow legitimate aims, which are the support and protection of the achievements of their people." p. 235.
5. General of the Army Mikhail Moiseyev, quoted in *Nedelya*, 1-7 May 1989 (*FBIS*, 12 May 1989), p. 71.
6. Marshal of the Soviet Union Sergei Akhromeyev, interview in Paris *Le Figaro*, 13 June 1989 (*FBIS*, 15 June 1989), p. 70.
7. In this connection, the reviewer has been told by one of the civilian actors in the new Soviet security policy that Soviet generals were especially obsessed with the possibility of a surprise NATO air attack. And why not? They have seen this actually happen, in 1941 to themselves and in 1967 to an ally. When in Moscow for staff talks in October 1989, the reviewer was struck by the number of times NATO naval capability for land attack was mentioned by the Soviet side.
8. *Teatr Voyennykh Deinstvii* - theatre of military actions or operations.
9. Britain, or more commonly "England," receives a great deal of mention as an enemy. This is the remnant of the Bolshevik tradition from the 1920s when the UK was rather more powerful than it was in the mid-1970s.
10. It is not possible to demonstrate this point here. The reader is referred to the reviewer's paper D Strat A Staff Note 89/07, "Reasonable Sufficiency: The New Soviet Military Doctrine," (Ottawa: Operational Research and Analysis Establishment, Department of National Defence, June 1989).

Kolodziej, Edward A., and Roger E. Kanet, eds. *The Limits of Soviet Power in the Developing World*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.

Rubinstein, Alvin S. *Moscow's Third World Strategy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988.

Clashing Soviet and American interests in the Third World have brought the world to severe crisis — if not global conflict — on more than one occasion. Cuba (1962), the Middle East (1967-1973) and growing Soviet boldness in Angola, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan have added a dangerous dimension to superpower rivalry, more perilous than the often routinized, predictable confrontation in Europe.

The east-west dimension of Third World studies presents serious methodological problems for the researcher and analyst. One must not only master the area in question but also U.S. and Soviet policy in the region in order to trace the extent to which the actions of one side are a reaction to moves, real or imagined, of the other. An excessively regional perspective tends to treat superpower involvement as irrelevant if not annoying, a distraction from the “real” problems of the area and exaggerated in importance. “Globalists” tend to ignore regional perspectives and focus on reputed “grand designs,” as Rubinstein argues Kennedy did in responding to Khrushchev in southeast Asia. After all, don’t regional actors use the superpowers, “the big influence of small allies?” How often are superpower intentions translated into effective influence in these areas?

Both volumes combine these perspectives in a judicious manner in describing Soviet Third World policy. Kolodziej and Kanet do a thorough job of integrating their many regional studies to stress the limits of superpower influence as well as making their own contributions. Kolodziej, for example, notes that the Soviet military role compensates for weaknesses at the economic and cultural levels. He also notes that both Washington and Moscow are often “prisoners at the initiative of local rivals” (p. 28) who, in some cases, are increasingly able to manufacture their own arms and are becoming more resistant to effective influence or control. Regional “facts of life” betray both superpowers. Duncan, for example, cites Cuba and Nicaragua’s anger with Chernenko when he declined to deploy a Soviet flotilla in the region as a show of solidarity after the U.S. mined Managua’s harbors. Simon argues that the Soviet air-naval facility at Cam Ranh establishes a strategic “presence” in southeast Asia but alienates ASEAN states that Moscow would like to court for commercial reasons. Weinbaum, in a particularly cogent study on Afghanistan, notes that whatever strategic advantage the Soviets gained in the Persian Gulf area they were responding to local events over which they had little effective control from the very beginning of their enhanced involvement in the late 1970s. In his concluding chapter Kolodziej contends that Moscow is learning from such mistakes and will practice a “Thermidor” or contraction of Third World involvements with