

Moscow reassesses military doctrine

by Konstantin George

The Gulf war has accelerated an ongoing reassessment by the U.S.S.R. General Staff and Defense Council of Soviet military doctrine in the direction of a preemptive strike strategy to deal with a future security threat from any direction—from the West, the Far East, or, given the extension of NATO into the Persian Gulf region, from the south.

The shift was revealed days before the allied ground offensive began by Lt. Gen. V. Gorbachov, a senior lecturer at the General Staff's Voroshilov Academy, in a lecture on the lessons of the Gulf war. He stressed that Saddam Hussein had made the dual fatal error of having his huge forward-based forces sitting idly in Kuwait in the first phase of the coalition forces' buildup in Saudi Arabia, while they were still weak on the ground. This gave them the time they required to deploy superior ground forces: "A first strike against the allies could have reversed Saddam Hussein's military fortunes. Hussein lost his chance. He had only one option from the military point of view, to deliver a preemptive strike." Hussein's second cardinal blunder was to keep nearly all his forces forward-based, again sitting idly, to await the coalition offensive, thus leaving them wide open—as happened—for defeat by a huge encircling maneuver.

The message about Soviet doctrine in case of any hostile buildup threatening the U.S.S.R. was clear: The Soviet military will never allow any adversary the time to complete buildup and launch an attack with superior forces, but will go over to the offensive with a preemptive strike.

On Feb. 21 Gen. Mikhail Moiseyev, Chief of the General Staff, announced that "Phase I" of a reorganization, embracing the INF Treaty, modest numerical troop reductions, the withdrawals from Afghanistan, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Mongolia was essentially completed. For "Phase II," he announced the creation of "new defense groups of forces within the borders of the Soviet Union" to come under the command of the various Theatre Commands, West, Southwest, South, Far East, and provide the means for either a counteroffensive in the event of attack, or a preemptive strike across the Soviet border.

The first public hint of such a reorganization was given by President Mikhail Gorbachov last August in a speech to generals and officers in the Odessa Military District, one

week after the first U.S. troops arrived in Saudi Arabia.

The high publicity given to the February lecture by Lt. Gen. Gorbachov (its content was made public for Western correspondents, most unusually, as lectures at Voroshilov Academy are normally classified) and its followup with the Moiseyev announcement, have made it clear that the "détente" era military doctrine of so-called "defense sufficiency," if it ever really existed, has been scrapped in favor of a return to an updated version of the war-winning doctrine, traced back to the 1960s writings of V.I. Sokolovsky.

U.S. fatally miscalculating Soviet posture

A false and unfounded euphoria has blinded Washington by the apparent Soviet posture of "doing nothing" against the ground war in Kuwait and Iraq. The U.S.S.R. does not operate on the basis of a stupid "tit for tat" policy. Moscow has instead adopted a comprehensive strategy for the series of protracted wars and conflicts that have been unleashed by the Gulf war, wars that will span the decade of the 1990s, and cover most of the entire southern rim of Eurasia bordering on the U.S.S.R., as well as the extreme likelihood of armed conflict in the Balkans.

The Gulf war is only the overture to an expanding phenomenon of war over *years*, roughly comparable to historical phenomena such as the Thirty Years' War, 1618-48, the Peloponnesian Wars between Athens and Sparta, also of 30 years' duration, or the Punic Wars between Rome and Carthage. The Soviet response appears lame only if evaluated on a meaningless day-by-day basis. When seen correctly as a response being executed globally, in Europe and Asia in depth and over time, the Soviet response is indeed dramatic and profound.

Moscow has correctly recognized that the Gulf war is a military corollary to the doctrine of CIA chief William Webster, which had declared Germany and Japan as the two main economic adversaries of the United States, as well as being the first phase of declaring war against industrializing developing sector nations. The Soviet Union is intervening on this basis globally to secure new allies and partners among these nations targeted as adversaries by London and Washington, focusing on the industrial sector of Germany in Europe, Japan and Korea in the Far East. In West Asia, the new Soviet-Iran special relationship marks the first victory in a strategy of building an anti-Anglo-American coalition in Eurasia. At this stage of the protracted war period, and indeed for some time, the Soviet Union will not itself enter into combat. Moscow will, in the 1990s, as it did in the 1930s period of wars and conflicts raging near its borders, focus on building up its own military-strategic assets, at home and abroad, to create the maximum correlation of forces in its favor possible, and allowing the underlying processes of economic-industrial collapse and the attrition of protracted wars and military adventures to substantially weaken the United States, before actually itself entering the maelstrom of war.