Sokolovskii and his critics: a review

Robert D. Crane (ed.), *Soviet Nuclear Strategy*
Wlodzimierz Onacewicz and Robert D. Crane (eds.), *Soviet Materials on Military Strategy*
V. D. Sokolovskii (ed.), *Military Strategy*, with an introduction by Raymond L. Garthoff
V. D. Sokolovskii (ed.), *Soviet Military Strategy*, with an introduction by Herbert S. Dinerstein, Leon Gouré, and Thomas W. Wolfe
V. D. Sokolovskii (ed.), *Voennaia Strategiia*

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For all the great powers, strategic innovation in the postwar period has lagged behind the revolution in weapons-systems technology. Great Britain has had perhaps a better record than the United States in adapting to this revolution—in large part because, being strapped for funds, it has been more obliged to make hard choices. Both countries have adjusted their strategies to changed technology with greater facility and in a shorter time span than the Soviet Union. It was not until after Stalin's death that Soviet strategic thought began to evidence an appreciation of the strategic implications of the atomic era, especially with regard to the role of surprise. (The Chinese have a point, however, when they credit Stalin with the decision to develop atomic and hydrogen weapons.) Several characteristically Soviet features reinforced the generals' general penchant for preparing to wage the last war. Among these, we might note: the pervasive stagnation of Soviet thought in the last years of Stalin's life; a geopolitically conditioned continental-power perspective; an ideologically reinforced preoccupation with seizure and control as prerequisites to victory; the dominant position of the army in the Soviet military establishment; and Stalin's personal association with, and consequent stake in, a World War II-type strategy ("the permanently operating factors") (Dinerstein, 1959). Since Stalin's death, Soviet strategic thinking has progressively extricated itself from the confining strictures of latter-day Stalinism, "the Great Patriotic War," and the permanently operating factors. The publication in 1962 of the first edition of *Military Strategy* (*Voennaia Strategiia*), written by an "authors' collective" of fifteen high-ranking Soviet officers headed by Marshal of the Soviet Union V. D. Sokolovskii, constituted a major step in this process.

Military Strategy is the most systematic Soviet work on strategy thus far published. Its central theme is the need for new strategic concepts corresponding to the

"radically changed" nature of war. Its authors proclaim that, in view of "the appearance of weapons of mass destruction . . . and in particular the development and perfection of missiles with nuclear warheads," "a fundamental review of many tenets of military strategy" is required. Now, Sokolovskii and his colleagues assert, "*military strategy becomes the strategy of deep nuclear missile strikes in conjunction with operations of all branches of the armed forces with a view to achieving the simultaneous defeat and annihilation of the enemy's economic potential and armed forces throughout his entire territory; these goals are to be achieved within a short period of time*" (Sokolovskii, 1963, p. 19, italics in original).[1] They have no doubts that World War III, "if the imperialists unleash it," will be a war in which "massive missile blows will be decisively important" (Sokolovskii, 1963, p. 250), and that global, strategic operations will greatly dominate "over theater warfare between contending armies" (RAND edition, 1963, p. 52). In brief, the authors have come to share the expectations of their Western counterparts about the nature and conduct of war in the missile age.

At the same time, the authors continue to give vent to a number of traditionalist concepts. Most importantly, they maintain the need to seize and occupy the enemy's territory to ensure "final victory" (Sokolovskii, 1963, p. 303). The persistence of traditionalist notions is also reflected in the considerable attention paid to problems of general post-attack mobilization and the unusual emphasis, by Western standards, on the possibility of "broken-backed" war.

Sokolovskii, in short, maintains what Raymond Garthoff has termed an "enlightened conservative" position (Praeger edition, 1963, p. x) between the "radicals" like Khrushchev who are concerned almost exclusively with deterrence and the "conservatives" who still think in terms of waging theater warfare with ground forces. With Khrushchev, Sokolovskii asserts the paramount position of global and strategic considerations; with his conservative military colleagues, he finds it difficult to conceptualize the strategic implications of weapons systems in terms which do not include waging war, victory, and seizure of territory.

Military Strategy also constitutes a major advance over previous Soviet analysis in terms of the information and expertise it reveals. This is most readily apparent in the treatment of American military might and strategy. Sokolovskii and his colleagues, largely utilizing the figures of the London Institute for Strategic Studies, depict American strategic delivery capabilities in an unprecedentedly detailed fashion. An elaborate breakdown of the number, type, and range of the missiles and airplanes which the United States had at its disposal in 1962–63, as well as the planned operational missile capability of the United States in 1966, is given (Sokolovskii, 1963, pp. 101–109). Even American strategic policy and its changes in response to shifts in the global distribution of power are described in a way which bears some resemblance to reality and which reveals more than a casual acquaintance with contemporary Western strategic writings.[2] For example, the description of

[1] The second Soviet edition (1963) will be cited except when the material referred to is available only in the first edition or in one of the two American introductions, in which case the RAND or the Praeger edition will be cited.

[2] Many of these books (Knorr, Kissinger, Brodie, Taylor, to name a few) have been translated into Russian. A list of these, unfortunately incomplete but nevertheless suggestive, is appended to the RAND translation.

the United States' shift from massive retaliation to flexible response is reasonably accurate and relies heavily on Maxwell Taylor's *The Uncertain Trumpet* and Henry Kissinger's *The Necessity for Choice.* On the other hand, Bernard Brodie's effective dissection of the case for preventive war is mendaciously portrayed as a justification of preventive war (Sokolovskii, 1963, pp. 72–96). Still, a Soviet citizen, having read Sokolovskii, could sketch a picture of American strategy which a Western observer would at least recognize.

At the same time, much as the Sokolovskii volume represents an advance over previous Soviet standards, one must hasten to add that, in terms of sophistication, it by no means measures up to Western standards. It would scarcely pay a Western reader to wade through its turgid and elliptical prose—still characteristic of Soviet commentary—in order to achieve insight into major strategic questions when he could more readily profit from dozens of studies written in the West. This is not, of course, why Sokolovskii warrants attention.

The justification for reading *Military Strategy* lies in the contribution it may make in enhancing our comprehension of Soviet strategic thinking and Soviet foreign policy behavior. A widespread assumption that fairly specific inferences about Soviet strategic perspectives and behavior could be derived from it undoubtedly accounted for the attention the book has received in the West—which, compared with most recent Soviet publications, has bordered on the phenomenal. Few Soviet publishing events, with the possible exception of a literary achievement such as Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch,* have attracted the attention of so broad a Western audience. The general press has adverted to *Military Strategy* on several occasions and two separate translations of the first edition have been published (RAND, 1963; Praeger, 1963). It also, apparently, has been taken very seriously by persons in the highest reaches of American officialdom (Crane, 1963, p. 2). Similarly, few Soviet books have been subjected to more intensive scrutiny by the specialists, in and out of the American government, customarily concerned with Soviet military commentary. Testimony to this interest is provided by the introductions (one written by Garthoff, the other largely the product of Thomas Wolfe) to the two American translations and by *Soviet Nuclear Strategy,* edited by Robert Crane. (The latter is an outgrowth of a conference held under the auspices of Georgetown's Center for Strategic Studies in the spring of 1963, attended by several well-known specialists on Soviet military affairs.)

Certainly *Military Strategy* has all the earmarks of a significant source for insights into the "Soviet mind." Sokolovskii is, after all, a Marshal of the Soviet Union and a Central Committee member, as well as a former Chief of the General Staff. The remaining authors, while not of Sokolovskii's stature, are nevertheless either colonels or generals. The authors in their introduction asserted that theirs was the first work published since 1926 "in the open Soviet military literature" which gave a "general understanding of military strategy" as a whole (Sokolovskii, 1963, p. 9). Other Soviet sources repeated this theme, with variations, and made other obvious efforts to impress the potential reader with the unusual significance of *Military Strategy.* Reviewers in the Soviet military press hailed it as a "very welcome event. . . . [which] fills a known gap," "a major development of Soviet military science," and an "im-

portant event. . . . [which] presents the essence of Soviet military strategy both in its military . . . and in its wider sense" (Onacewicz and Crane, 1964, pp. 73, 45, 79).

On examining *Military Strategy* and the reception accorded it in the Soviet Union, however, one quickly perceives that its publication was not governed by the traditional canons of Soviet polemics. *Military Strategy* is not authoritative in the conventional Soviet sense. It appears not to have been the culmination of a stage in the dialogues *within* the military and *between* the military specialists and the political generalists as a result of which an official position was laid down, but rather part of an ongoing debate over matters of high policy (RAND, 1963, pp. 12–41). (Garthoff in his introduction, signed February 1963, to the Praeger translation [Praeger, 1963, pp. vii–xxi] argues the opposite view; by April his position had modified appreciably [Crane, 1963, p. 10].) The same Soviet reviewers who generally commended the Sokolovskii work expressed major misgivings about the handling of specific issues, including the boundaries of party and military competence and the role of various branches of the armed forces in war. Moreover, the criticism was not homogeneous in character—it was not "directed from a single center." It is rather instructive to observe Admiral V. A. Alafuzov condemning the "inadequacies of the book in naval matters"; General of the Army P. A. Kurochkin lamenting that "the authors have neither assigned sufficient weight to, nor analyzed deeply enough, the role and methods of . . . the ground forces"; an article written by two colonels, one known to be a "political" officer, criticizing the authors for impinging, "whether they desire it or not," on the sphere of "politics"; and finally, one A. Golubev, in the traditionalist *Journal of Military History*, complaining that the authors had not given attention to the "strategy of attrition" advocated by M. V. Frunze (an early Soviet military theorist, currently a more acceptable authority than Stalin) or related it "to the problem of the nature of a new world war" (Onacewicz and Crane, 1964, pp. 45, 76, 82, 69).

Rather than an expression, necessarily, of the currently established doctrine, Sokolovskii's book is as profitably conceived as an effort on the part of a major segment of the military establishment, in the context of continuing controversy, to enhance its chances of favorable treatment in the allocation of resources and to increase the scope of the decision-making competence of the military. Within the parameters set by Malinovskii's speech at the Twenty-second Congress of the CPSU, as Wolfe observes, "the volume represents, in a sense, a point scored for the military side of the argument by getting the military viewpoint on the record in the form of the first comprehensive exposition of the new doctrine" (RAND, 1963, pp. 33–34). Seen in this light, the publication of a detailed breakdown of American strategic delivery capabilities, which if anything overstates American might, may be seen as a device to exert pressure for greater weapons allocations in a way compatible with Khrushchev's desire to inform a broad audience about the implications of modern thermonuclear war. The effort at institutional aggrandizement is even more clear-cut. It is revealed in the passage specifically criticized for attempting to preempt the sphere of "politics": "In wartime, strategic considerations often determine policy. . . . [and] even acquire decisive significance"; in the amazing assertion that military *doctrine* (a more

comprehensive and political concept than strategy) "is not thought out or compiled by a single person or group of persons"; as well as the skillful effort to equate strategy with the Western notion of grand strategy (RAND, 1963, pp. 104, 130, 88).

That these inferences concerning the importance of the first edition in the domestic political process are viable seems to be borne out by the "corrected and enlarged" second edition, published a scant fifteen months after the first. The second edition in general is characterized by being noticeably more attuned to the political policies, foreign and domestic, of Khrushchev and the party, while at the same time sticking to its guns on matters which both the party and the military consider strictly military. The claims to military competence are markedly more restrained. The explicit equation of the Soviet concept of strategy and the Western idea of grand strategy is dropped, as is the assertion that military doctrine is not the product of a single person. At the same time, however, Sokolovskii and his colleagues do not yield completely; in fact, they openly reject the "proposals of several reviewers to exclude from the content of *Military Strategy* the questions of leadership in the preparation of a country for war. Such a proposal," they declare, "is motivated by the notion that military strategy supposedly must concern itself only with the leadership of the armed forces while the preparation of a country with respect to war—this, don't you know, is the affair of politics" (Sokolovskii, 1963, p. 5).

What all this suggests is a plea for caution in attempting the leap from *Military Strategy* to the perspectives of the foreign policy decision-makers. The establishment of a direct nexus between doctrinal formulations and behavior has always been difficult. Even in periods of Soviet history when the regime's control over society effectively precluded the appearance of non-accidental discrepancies in formulation (when discrepancies occurred they were usually traceable to differences in target audiences), inferring policy from doctrinal formulation was often accomplished only after the fact. Now there are plural transmitters emitting divergent signals on some, not all, issues of high policy and the task has been greatly complicated. (With the Chinese and the Americans both listening in, it also becomes more difficult to compartmentalize audiences.) Given the changed "signal-to-noise ratio," skillful discrimination is required to identify *who* speaks as the voice of Moscow on *which* subjects.

In Sokolovskii's case, the Soviet regime has felt an interest in making more clear to Western listeners the distinctions, on several questions, between matters of opinion and official positions. In the second edition and elsewhere the authors have emphasized that the common ground on which the enlightened conservatives (Malinovskii and Sokolovskii) and the radicals (Khrushchev) come together is official doctrine; namely, a world-power perspective with the attendant emphasis on the paramount role of strategy, strategic weapons (ICBMs), and the strategic arena ("the deep rear") (Onacewicz and Crane, 1964, p. 87). They have also delineated more precisely those areas in which contention is *explicitly* permissible. Thus, the second edition specifically notes that the methods by which war will be conducted in the modern era are still a matter for "polemics" (Sokolovskii, 1963, p. 367).

As for the remaining range of issues treated by Sokolovskii, only a comparison of the two editions (Joint Publications Re-

search Service, 1963), other Soviet texts, and Soviet behavior will establish its value as an index of official views. Considerations of space preclude discussing the relation of Sokolovskii's positions to operative Soviet policy on the many topics touched upon: limited war and escalation, preemption, targeting doctrine, the military uses of outer space, the functions of the instruments of violence in the modern era. These are treated in detail in the two American introductions and in the Crane monograph. Two examples may, however, illustrate the complex nature of the task.

Soviet observers, including Sokolovskii, have persistently emphasized the danger of escalation. For instance, until recently, the Soviet view has been that a direct confrontation of United States and Soviet forces would inevitably escalate. (The second edition is somewhat less fatalistic on this score.) Several American specialists (RAND, 1963, pp. 289–93; Crane, 1963, pp. 5, 29) have been dubious whether these attitudes constituted the "real" views of Sokolovskii and/or the regime or whether they were an effort to impinge upon United States maneuverability. In the 1962 Cuban crisis, however, Soviet behavior conformed to a pattern consonant with an expectation of inevitable escalation. With Soviet forces in Cuba and the certainty that the United States was going to engage its troops unless the IRBMs were removed, the IRBMs were removed—in part apparently because Moscow assumed a direct Soviet-American confrontation could not be contained. If this reasoning is correct, and the views concerning limited war and escalation in Sokolovskii represent an authoritative expression of Soviet thinking, it would lead to the presumption that the changes in doctrinal formulations relating to escalation from the first to the second editions are reflective of changing appraisals and policy positions.

Sokolovskii, in both editions, reaffirms the traditional Leninist position, adopted from Clausewitz, that war is the continuation of politics by other means and repudiates the "metaphysical" notion that modern weapons have invalidated this dictum (Sokolovskii, 1963, p. 24). In this instance one might reasonably expect that Sokolovskii is expressing the view of all good Marxist-Leninists. He may well be; he is not expressing the views of the influential Institute of World Economy and International Relations which, months before the second edition was published, expressly repudiated Clausewitz' formulation (*Mirovaia*, 1963, p. 9); nor of Nicolai Talenskii (a prominent retired general long identified with Khrushchev), who as early as 1960 had virtually rejected it; nor, presumably, of Khrushchev. Excessive reliance on Sokolovskii in this instance would obscure the existence of a major debate, having wide policy ramifications, now in process in the Soviet Union: if the CPSU officially repudiates Clausewitz' dictum as outdated, it will be difficult for even the staunchest defenders—East or West—of Khrushchev's fidelity to Marxism-Leninism to deny his revisionism.

If these examples are typical, our progress toward correctly appraising Sokolovskii will advance at a torpid pace if we persist in discounting hypotheses about the connection of analysis to Soviet behavior because that analysis appears to imply an asymmetrical effect on Western maneuverability, or if we exclude hypotheses about Soviet perspectives because of their incompatibility with traditionally Bolshevik perspectives.

These methodological observations may be extended more generally to our analysis of Soviet foreign policy behavior. Refin-

ing our questions to account for (a) changed domestic control patterns and (b) the socializing experience of participation in the contemporary international system seems to be in order.

In view of domestic changes, we may well reexamine our notions about the Soviet decision-making process. Who makes which decisions and who has access to the decision-makers? How do those individuals and groups with access structure the decision-makers' environment to achieve priority for their special pleadings? How do the generalists avoid becoming captive to the experts? While these issues are being broached—for instance by Wolfe (RAND, 1963, p. 11)—little of a systematic nature has been attempted. It is cause for concern, for instance, that no major effort to apply interest group or role analysis has been attempted. Until recently our attention has been chiefly focused on power struggles and control mechanisms; little interest has been shown in the stuff of everyday politics in which the leader's right to rule is not being challenged. The study of who gets what has taken a back seat to *kto-kogo*.

Similarly we need to examine more fully the impact on the international relations perspectives of those Soviet decision-makers who most directly and continually experience the perquisites, power, responsibility, and frustration of world-power status. Which facets of the Leninist world view still color the Soviet perception of the international system, and to what extent? How have these changes in perspectives affected Soviet behavior and goals?

A significant feature of the Sokolovskii volume and its appraisal in the Soviet Union is the extent to which it encourages an optimistic judgment that tentative answers to these two sets of questions may be possible. It also suggests the interdependence of the two lines of inquiry by driving home the differential effect of modern weaponry on various Soviet observers—a phenomenon largely influenced by their divergent roles within the Soviet system.

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