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# **SOVIET OPERATIONAL ART AND THE AIRLAND BATTLE**

## **THE INFLUENCE OF SOVIET OPERATIONAL WARFARE ON AMERICAN DOCTRINE**

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the development of Soviet and American operational thought. It investigates the development of the Soviet operational paradigm during the early 1920s and follows further Soviet development into the 1980s. It then studies the US Army's development of the operational level and suggests reasons for the relatively late development of American operational thought. It goes on to establish the influence of Red Army operational thought and practice on the development, and nature of US Army doctrine. It does this by comparative analysis of the Soviet 1936 *Provisional Field Regulations for the Red Army* and the American 1993 *Field Manual (FM) 100-5 Operations*.

The thesis concludes that the strategically defensive nature of American doctrine and the historically tactical emphasis of the US Army slowed American recognition of the operational level, and its application, operational art. American recent historical experience also played a large part in this. A more significant conclusion is that Soviet, and especially Red Army doctrine and practice had a large impact on the formulation and eventual nature of American operational doctrine. American operational thought crystallised due to the threat of a major conflict against the Soviet Union and its allies in Europe during the Cold War. This was helped by the thorough study of Soviet historical and contemporary operational thought, by organisations and individuals both within and without the US Army.

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# Introduction

The operational level of war is one of the most important concepts of military operations. It provides the critical linkage between strategy and tactics. It is applicable to the full range of military activities from high intensity combat to peace support operations. American recognition of the operational level of war developed in the early 1980s. The United States (US) Army first officially encapsulated this when it published its *FM 100-5 Operations* Field Manual (FM) in 1982. The concept of the operational level of war, and its application, operational art, have remained important in all American Army field manuals since the early 1980s and there are no signs that this is likely to change in the near future.

The Soviet development of operational art was unique. Soviet recognition of the operational level preceded American developments by some 40 years. It was based to a large extent on operational experience gained by the Tsarist Army in the First World War and the Red Army in the Russian Civil War. Thus when Soviet writers came to describe the operational phenomenon, they could call on first hand experience, along with a rich historical background. The Americans had only flirted with warfare at the operational level before the 1980s.

The obvious question to be answered was why had the Americans missed the boat in terms of this concept? In other words, why had it taken the American Army almost 40 years longer than the Soviets to come up with a clear doctrinal definition of the operational level?

The American operational approach was similar in many regards to the Soviet approach. This was especially evident in the shared emphasis on manoeuvre warfare theory and especially deep operations. Yet there is little explanation in secondary works about the possible linkage between the Soviet and the American operational schools.

The thesis aims to answer two key questions. The first is why is it that the US Army did not recognise the operational level of war and its application operational art? The second is how much did US Army operational doctrine borrow from Soviet operational thoughts and concepts.

The initial chapters of this thesis will examine the development of Soviet operational thinking by looking at some of the key events that shaped the Red Army. They will also look at the contribution of some of the most important Soviet military theorists. The fourth chapter will provide a detailed examination of the 1936 Soviet Field Regulations. These regulations were a distillation of Red Army practical experience and careful thinking about the form and requirements of future war. Chapter five will examine the experience of the mobile group concept during the Great Patriotic War. This is important as it shows one of the concepts that would form the cornerstone of Red Army post-war doctrine. Chapters six and seven will show the further development of Red Army doctrine in the context of the Cold War. The lion's share of Chapter seven will look at some important Soviet operational war fighting techniques. An understanding of post-war Red Army doctrine is critical to understanding the main potential enemy that faced the US Army as it emerged, battered, from South East Asia.

Indeed, the nature of the enemy would to a large degree shape the development of American operational thought and doctrine. Thus, chapters eight and nine will examine the development of US Army operational thought and doctrine. Chapter ten will look in detail at the 1993 *FM 100-5 Operations*. This manual represented the most complete American field manual that was concerned primarily with conventional combat operations. It retained much of the emphasis on deep operations and contained many elements of manoeuvre warfare theory.

A much more detailed analysis of Soviet and American operational thought is contained in the penultimate chapter. This chapter looks in detail at the differences and similarities between the Soviet 1936 *Provisional Field Regulations for the Red Army* and the American Army 1993 *FM 100-5 Operations* manual. The chapter will compare and contrast Soviet and American deep operation and command and control theory. It will also examine the use of artillery and long-range fires and the use of turning movements, along with differing attitudes to the issue of combined arms. This comparison will show how American operational concepts were influenced by Soviet doctrine and practice. This work ends with a conclusion that will discuss the main findings.

This thesis set out to answer two main questions. The American failure to codify the operational level of war prior to the 1980s was due to their recent experiences of war. It also appears that American recognition of the operational level was held back due to their strategically defensive posture during the Cold War.

It is also clear from the research carried out on this project that the Red Army did have a large influence on American operational theory. This influence was conveyed directly

and indirectly. The Americans were forced to develop an operational concept due to the inherent nature of their potential enemy in Europe after World War Two, and especially during the Cold War. This forced the US Army to develop concepts of depth, both offensively and defensively which were critical to operational level warfare. The influence was also notable in the education of US Army officers in Soviet warfare theory during the early 1980s.