



The New Soviet Strategy

ISAAC DEUTSCHER

IN AN INTERVIEW with Marshal K. A. Vershinin, commander in chief of the Soviet Air Force, the September 8 issue of *Pravda* contains the most important elements of a revision in strategic thinking that the Soviet high command seems to have carried out, and the outline of what may be described as the new Soviet strategic doctrine.

The interview is the first outward sign of an official recognition by the Soviet military leadership of the supremacy of aviation over all other armed forces. This recognition, it should be remarked, goes against the grain of Russia's traditional military thought, which has been determined primarily by Russia's position as a land power. Until quite recently Russian military thought was dominated by the idea of the unshaken pre-eminence of land forces and of the decisive importance of infantry that, mechanized and modernized, was still supposed to remain "the queen of arms." This

line of thought, sustained by the experience of the last war, remained prevalent and was, so it seems, virtually unchallenged until two or three years ago. Only the latest developments in war technology appear to have brought about a definite readjustment in strategic conceptions.

Views, Aspirations, and Claims

It is unlikely that Marshal Vershinin should have voiced only the views and aspirations of the Soviet Air Force and its leaders. The Soviet government would hardly permit a controversy over the relative importance of various arms comparable to that which has been going on in the United States for years to be conducted or even alluded to in public. Nor would it allow the spokesmen of the various forces to stake out their sectional and competitive claims in this way. No doubt the Soviet high command has had its share of conflicts of views

and claims. But Marshal Vershinin's statement probably represents the main elements of an agreed and "integrated" doctrine on which the unified command of the Soviet armed forces now bases itself.

The paradox of the recognition by the U.S.S.R. of the supremacy of aviation is that the recognition comes at a time when, according to Marshal Vershinin, the traditional air force has entered into a period of eclipse. One can speak of its supremacy only conditionally; that is, only if one considers the new developments in ballistic technology as belonging to the domain of the air force. Marshal Vershinin has in fact drawn up an interim balance of these developments and of their effects on the relative positions of the great powers and the military blocs.

It is significant that the marshal is not inclined to overstate and overdramatize the importance of the intercontinental rocket, which,

according to an official announcement, has been successfully tested in the U.S.S.R. He may even appear to underplay it. He does not claim that the intercontinental rocket by itself has shattered the strategic structure of NATO but he does claim that this structure has been crumbling under the impact of a much wider revolution in military technology, a revolution of which the invention and manufacturing of the intercontinental rocket is only one instance. He sees the development of the "ordinary" atomic and hydrogen rockets as the decisive phase of that revolution, radically altering the whole aspect of modern war.

Marshal Vershinin holds that by means of those "ordinary" missiles Russia is in a position to put out of action or destroy all NATO bases in Europe and the Middle East at the very outset of war. These NATO outposts appear to him as relics of an epoch in which the United States could still rely on the decisive superiority of its striking power and could plan to unleash that power from a concentric chain of bases situated near Russia's vital centers and yet remain relatively immune from Russian retaliation. "One can only be surprised," the marshal says, "by the short-sightedness of those who make no allowance for the fact that if their bases are close to us, then they are also not far from us." Eight or even five years ago the NATO bases may indeed have been close to Russia and yet in a sense far away, but today they are not.

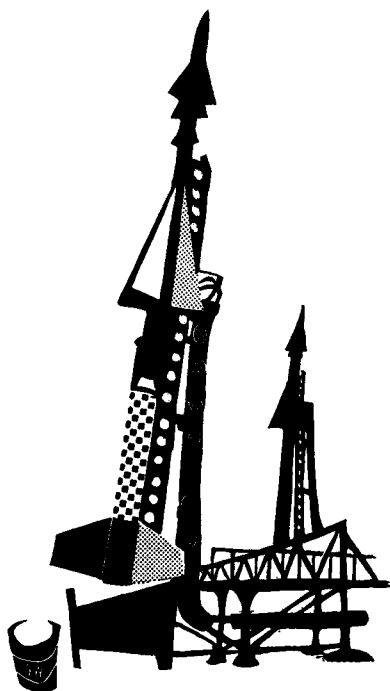
EVEN the "ordinary" guided missile, Marshal Vershinin argues, has changed the relative importance and the functions and uses of such older weapons as the submarine, the strategic bomber, and the aircraft carrier. Hitherto the submarine has been employed mainly in the disruption of maritime communication lines and occasionally in short-range coastal bombardment. It can now be used for long-range atomic and hydrogen bombardment of enemy territory. The submarine can thus assume the functions of the aircraft carrier and, being less vulnerable, can supersede it.

From the Russian viewpoint this

is all the more important because geographic and economic reasons have kept Russia far behind the United States in the production of aircraft carriers while at the same time Russia has greatly developed its submarine fleet. The transformation of the submarine into a carrier of atomic and hydrogen missiles has relieved Russia from the effects of its geographic and economic handicaps vis-à-vis the United States. Indeed, when Marshal Vershinin speaks of the United States's new vulnerability and describes the assortment of weapons that can be deployed against the vital centers of the American continent, he places at least as much emphasis on the submarine as on the intercontinental rocket.

Bombers and Rockets

It is in this context that he also speaks of the virtual eclipse of the strategic bomber. But he does it in a tone suggesting that the Soviet high command may still regard this



as an open question. He makes a case for the rocket as against the bomber on the basis that the striking power of the rocket is far more reliable and that in the present state of technology there is no effective defense against it. However, when he lists the weapons that may be deployed against, say, New

York and Chicago, he still finds use for the bomber alongside the submarine and the guided missile.

It is against this background that the chief of Soviet military aviation views the intercontinental rocket. He refrains, of course, from disclosing details, but he is definite and even emphatic about two points: that the rocket can reach "the most remote regions of any continent on the globe" and that it carries a hydrogen bomb. There is, in my view, no ground for supposing that in saying this Marshal Vershinin was engaging only in advance publicity for a technological feat that Russia has still to achieve.

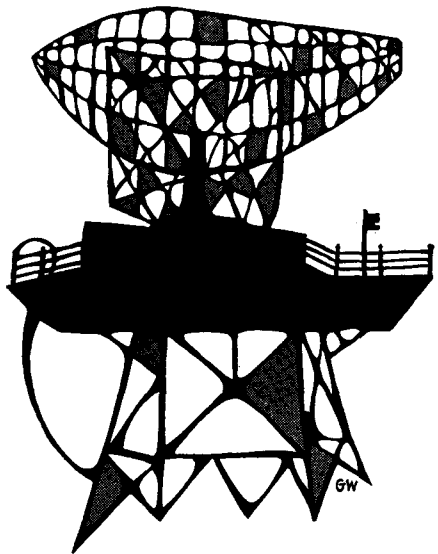
Has the Soviet high command come to accept the view that in a future war the strategic decision can be obtained by means of a series of simultaneously staged atomic-cum-hydrogen Pearl Harbor attacks? On this point Marshal Vershinin is rather obscure and self-contradictory. He begins his argument by deriding Hitler's blitzkrieg illusions and the views of those in the West who appear to be believers in "the first knockout blows." But then the whole trend of his reasoning points to the conclusion that the blitzkrieg idea may be, after all, no longer fantastic. Moreover, he intimates that if any power has a chance of waging a successful blitzkrieg then it is the U.S.S.R. rather than the United States, because the U.S.S.R. enjoys the advantages of a far greater dispersal of its vital centers over a much vaster territory. Thus even in the atomic Armageddon, space would still remain Russia's ally.

BUT the marshal does not dwell on this advantage too much. He emphasizes the destruction and desolation to which Russia, too, would be exposed, and when he says that a single hydrogen bomb would suffice "to make life temporarily impossible in the whole of the Ruhr area," no Russian can fail to deduce that the effect of such a bomb on the Donetz Basin would be the same. It is only fair to add that throughout the interview, Marshal Vershinin is extremely careful to avoid bluster and threat and that he speaks of the destructive force and the long range of the new weapons in Russia's

armory in a tone of foreboding. But however circumspect his tone, it cannot soften the grimness of the dangers he describes.

Marshal Vershinin's words are a commentary on the deadlock reached in the London disarmament negotiations, and they may have been prompted also by recent international tension over Syria. They appear to address to the NATO powers, or rather to the United States, the following propositions: first, that the new weapons in Russia's armory have made the whole military structure of the western alliance obsolete (but only on condition that Russia retains and continues to develop these weapons); second, that as long as the NATO structure remains in being Russia has no interest in reducing its armory and allowing any western inspection; and, finally, that the United States, in view of its present vulnerability, has a new and vital interest in revising its strategy, withdrawing from European and Middle Eastern perimeters and seeking direct agreement with Russia.

THE SOVIET military leaders can hardly believe that these propositions will be eagerly listened to beyond the Atlantic. Marshal Vershinin's statement sounds therefore like a signal for the continuation of the arms race in the new strategic situation. It is perhaps not a matter of chance that the signal has come from a military leader and not from Khrushchev.



The U.S. Missile Muddle

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IN ITS AUGUST issue *Fortune* magazine printed a reassuring article, "America's Widening Military Margin." Its thesis was that "Behind the disarmament talks lies the fact that technological competition with the U.S. is proving too much for the U.S.S.R." Yet on the next to last day of August, the Pentagon announced that late last spring there had been in the U.S.S.R. at least four and probably six firings of the intercontinental missile. At first glance it looked as though the *Fortune* thesis had had the misfortune to run afoul of some hidden facts. At second glance it looks as though those facts were available for even *Fortune* to see.

Neither inside nor outside the administration was any great worry apparent. President Eisenhower set the tone. "For a long time," he said, "the long-range missile is not going to provide the best means of delivering an explosive charge, and that is all it is for." With this, and little more, he moved on to other matters.

It was all rather like the day after the announcement that the Russians had detonated an A-bomb. When in September, 1949, President Truman announced, "We have evidence that within recent weeks an atomic explosion occurred in the U.S.S.R.," General Eisenhower greeted the news quite calmly. "I see no reason why a development that was anticipated years ago should cause any revolutionary change in our thinking or our actions," he said. Six months later, before a Senate Appropriations subcommittee, he supported a comparatively small defense budget of \$13.1 billion on the very eve of the war in Korea. Apparently he really didn't think the explosion had made any vital difference.

Last May, while the Convair Atlas, the first U.S. intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), was being moved to the testing site at Cape Canaveral, Florida, the Soviets were

actually testing theirs. When Atlas was tested in June it was a flop. And while the Soviets have reportedly been test-firing an intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) of 900-mile range for something like two years, we have been testing our two intermediate-range 1,500-mile missiles, the Air Force's Thor and the Army's Jupiter, for only a year or so. Note that the 900-mile and 1,500-mile missiles are comparable weapons. From our overseas bases we need the additional range to get to the heart of Russia, whereas the Soviet missiles can reach our bases abroad from launching stations in the satellite countries.

In a press conference on September 10, retiring Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson expressed his general satisfaction with progress in the development of missiles but said that he did not know "for sure" which side—the U.S. or the U.S.S.R.—was ahead. Nine days later, however, at another press conference he had no hesitation in stating that we had been outdistancing the Soviet Union in military power since 1953. That included the missiles field, he added. Had he wished, he could have claimed months ago that we had successfully tested a ballistic rocket with the capacity to hit any part of the world.

IT SEEMS to be clear that Secretary Wilson has contradicted himself. To know something about the present state of our missiles program, it is better to look at other non-classified sources of information.

Aviation Week has said that while launchings at Cape Canaveral are being photographed by visiting picnickers, official information policy "has its head buried deep in the Florida sand like an ostrich and takes the attitude that these firings are top secret and nobody knows anything about them." It said also that from some movie films shown in six hundred European movie