

SOVIET MILITARY POWER AND PERFORMANCE

Also by John Erickson

The Soviet High Command 1918–1941

The Military-Technical Revolution (*editor*)

Soviet Military Power

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Disraeli, Democracy and the Tory Party

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Soviet Military Power and Performance

Edited by

JOHN ERICKSON

and

E. J. FEUCHTWANGER

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Introduction

Churchill called the Soviet Union 'an enigma wrapped inside a riddle'. The end of the cold war, detente, and the growth of East-West contacts have not significantly diminished the hazards facing the analyst of the Soviet scene. Nowhere is this more true than in the military sphere. There is a great debate in the West about the degree of danger to be feared from a Russia newly arrived at undisputed superpower status. The profound misapprehensions about Russian strengths and weaknesses that misled friend and foe alike in two world wars serve as a warning against facile judgements.

The papers here presented seek to make a contribution to our knowledge of Soviet doctrine, style, procedure, and problems in matters military. It is a subject with such wide ramifications that no claims to comprehensive treatment can be made. Nevertheless, the various contributors to this volume, from their different standpoints, arrive at a remarkably consistent view of Soviet behaviour as a military power. They all agree that the Russian past and memories reaching back deeply into the Tsarist era still leave their mark upon Soviet military ideas today, even when it comes to the concepts governing the use of nuclear weapons and the methods of electronic warfare. The weaponry which is now available to the Soviet Union as well as to the West may have changed the nature of warfare in a way that is literally unfathomable but the human mind that has to grapple with these well-nigh insoluble problems is still shaped by past experience. The military aspect of Soviet affairs, which permeates so much of life in the USSR today, mirrors the developments in the rest of Russian society since the Bolshevik Revolution. As the year 1917 recedes further into history it often looks as if the perennial tides of Russian life will increasingly wash away the marks, apparently so deep and ineradicable, that were made by the Revolution.

Such a general perception may be said to be shared by all the contributors to this volume, as it is by many other informed

observers of the Soviet Union. It still leaves wide open to debate and controversy the more detailed conclusions to be drawn about Soviet realities today and in the foreseeable future, not least in the military sphere. The common views that pervade this survey of Soviet military power and performance do not preclude, even within the same contribution, the dichotomy of view to be found in many assessments of the Soviet role in the international system. On the one hand there is a very real sense of the danger which the Soviet Union's great military potential presents. It is based on a wide spectrum of advanced technology and great economic resources; it commands a population systematically trained in the military virtues; it is governed by an ideology which combines traditional nationalism with the remnants of a universal messianic philosophy and which thereby legitimises it on a world-wide scale; it is guided by a military doctrine and style that can be expected to maximise the strengths of the Soviet system and minimise its weaknesses. On the other hand, the contributions in this volume equally strongly reflect an awareness of these weaknesses. Some sectors of advanced technology continue to be backward compared with the West and the concentration of economic resources on military production has so far failed to overcome this backwardness and may even perpetuate it. Constant indoctrination cannot overcome the lack of individual initiative which the Soviet system inculcates or the problems arising from ethnic frictions, nor can it cure the vast differences in educational standards that continue to exist. Patriotism and militarism thinly veiled by socialist rhetoric cannot disguise the ideological fatigue which has overtaken the Soviet Union. Everyone concerned with Soviet affairs must make their own judgement on the balances of strengths and weaknesses and arrive at their own estimate of danger.

The papers in this volume were written for publication and first read at a conference jointly organised by the University of Southampton and the Royal Naval College Greenwich and held at Greenwich in April 1977. The Editors would like to thank Dr Trevor Cliffe, of the Ministry of Defence, for the academic and financial support his department gave in arranging the conference. They also wish to express their thanks to Bryan Ranft, then Professor of History at Greenwich, for his advice and help. The papers express the personal opinions of their authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the organisations to which they belong. They contain no classified information and are based on

open sources. The discussions which followed the presentation of each paper at the conference have been briefly summarised by Dr John Simpson, Department of Politics, University of Southampton, and by the Editors. The paper on the 'Soviet Army as the Instrument of National Integration' was not presented at the conference. The conclusion to this volume summarises the major points emerging from the lengthy general discussions with which the conference ended. Last but not least, the Editors wish to thank their secretaries, Miss Kathie Brown of Edinburgh and Mrs Mary Crowden of Southampton.