



## Continuing Dilemmas

### Russia and Twenty-First-Century Positional Warfare

*Joseph Rudolphi*

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**Abstract:** Late nineteenth- and twentieth-century warfare had one reoccurring theme: the shifting of power from mobile to positional warfare. Consequently, the question for proponents of offensive doctrine related to the restoration of mobility during times in which new developments favored defense and complicated offense. The ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War demonstrates that this is continuing into the twenty-first century. The characteristics of modern conventional war as they currently stand complicate offensive warfare. The question of how to restore mobility to achieve battlefield gains is one that Russia must answer again in the present century. Russia's historical approach may be inadequate in current conditions. The Russian military has already made several adaptations in its

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Joseph Rudolphi received his bachelor's degree in history from the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs in 2019 and has previously published an article with the National Defense University's *Joint Force Quarterly* journal. He currently serves as an emergency response technician with the Colorado Springs Police Department. <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4635-6213>. The views expressed in this article are solely those of the author. They do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Marine Corps University, the U.S. Marine Corps, the Department of the Navy, or the U.S. government.

attempts to deal with this problem and is trying to figure out how to restore mobility to the battlefield. This article assesses the following: historical Russian offensive doctrine; the characteristics of war that complicate further offensive action; and initial failures, attempted adaptations, and current Russian military academia on the subject. The United States can learn a lot by observing what comes out of Russian military academia, and it might possibly predict future Russian strategies based on its findings.

**Keywords:** Russia, Ukraine, deep operation, deep battle, Aleksandr Svechin, Mikhail Tukhachevsky, attrition

Russian military doctrine since the eighteenth century has favored offense over defense. For this reason, when innovation complicates offensive warfare, Russia must find a way around it. This problem is not unique to Russia, but both Russian and U.S. publications offer a strong understanding of how this has played out historically. When machine guns and trenches became the features of modern war in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5) and World War I (1914–18), the Russian armed forces lost what was historically their primary means of defeating an enemy: their powerful infantry and their skilled use of the bayonet, which the Imperial Russian Army general Aleksandr Suvorov said they handled more skillfully than all other armies.<sup>1</sup> Warfare became static during this period, and all sides looked to artillery to restore mobility with negative results.<sup>2</sup> Neither did the invention of tanks alone achieve this end, and so the problem of restoring mobility passed into Soviet military academia.

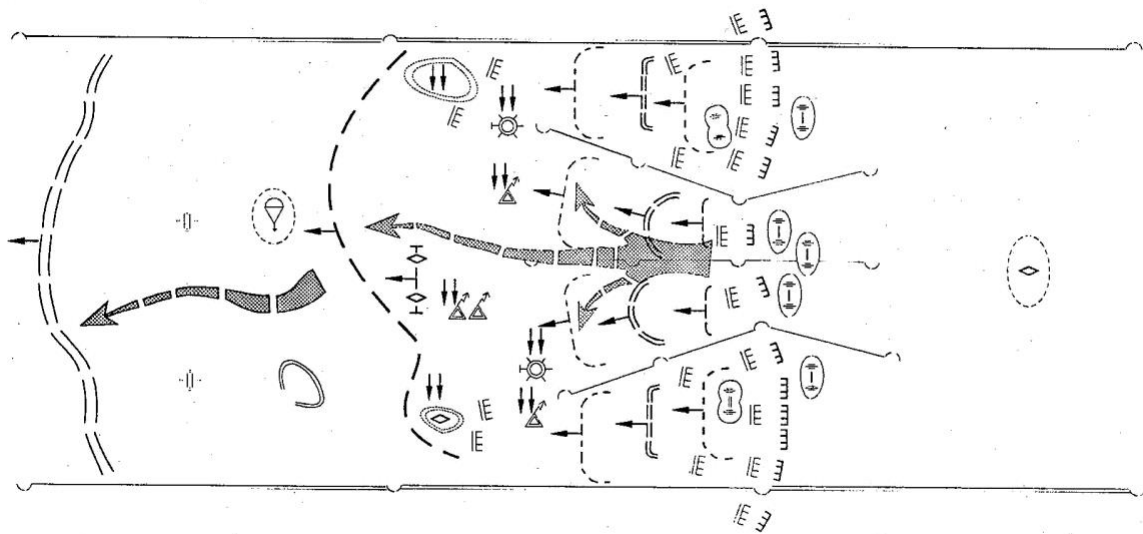
Soviet Red Army marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky and general Aleksandr Svechin, both former tsarist officers, theorized the *glubokaya operatsiya* (deep operation) offensive theory to restore mobility to war. The problem they needed to solve was how to get around the great positional campaigns of World War I, moving past deep and heavily defended areas to restore mobility and achieve results. Their means of achieving this, as stated in a 1935 Red Army doctrinal manual, saw echeloned attacks pushing through to the entire depth of an enemy defense.<sup>3</sup> Earlier field regulations discussed force allocation to achieve this, which included a one- or two-echeloned shock group containing two-thirds of the force and the remainder as a holding group. Mobile units of the shock group would rush to the rear of the enemy after penetration, while other forces would be allocated to widening the puncture and preventing it from being sealed by the flanks.<sup>4</sup>

Tukhachevsky and Svechin also addressed the possibility of a mobile war becoming a positional war. Tukhachevsky believed in taking the offensive again as soon as resources sufficed to conduct them. Svechin, departing from Tukhachevsky in this matter, believed in exercising more patience when mobility was blunted, embracing strategic defense prior to restoration of mobility. Svechin believed that the technological developments of the period would cause more need for operational pauses, which could turn a mobile war into a positional war and then into a war of attrition. Svechin accepted that war could lose its mobility and that a strategic defense would have to be resorted to after initial gains to maintain an offensive political goal.<sup>5</sup> Mobility could then be restored after successful defensive and attritional actions. Ultimately, Tukhachevsky won out in the intellectual debate between the two theorists. Neither, however, would see their ideas play out in World War II

(1939–45) due to Soviet leader Joseph Stalin’s political purges of 1936–38, during which both were executed.

Tukhachevsky’s deep operation (or deep battle) theory proved effective for the Soviet Union during World War II after much trial and error. This method of restoring mobility allowed the Red Army to make enormous gains along the entire eastern front in its summer offensive of 1944. Russian publications have displayed various ways to execute deep operations in different scenarios. Two examples from the Voroshilov Lectures given at the Voroshilov General Staff Academy in 1973–75 are displayed in figures 1 and 2, with map symbols supplied in figures 3 and 4.<sup>6</sup> The lectures offered several other variations for executing deep operations.

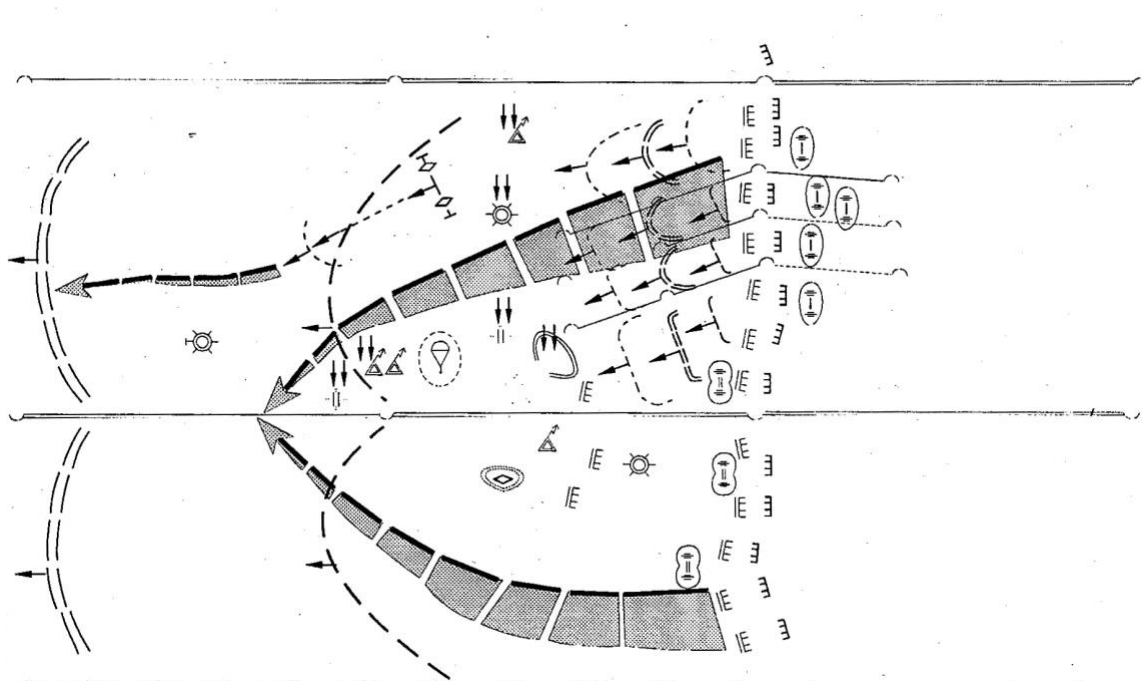
**Figure 1.** Conduct of penetration in conventional war



This figure displays a deep operation with penetration, a widening of the flanks using holding groups, and a farther advance into the enemy’s rear.

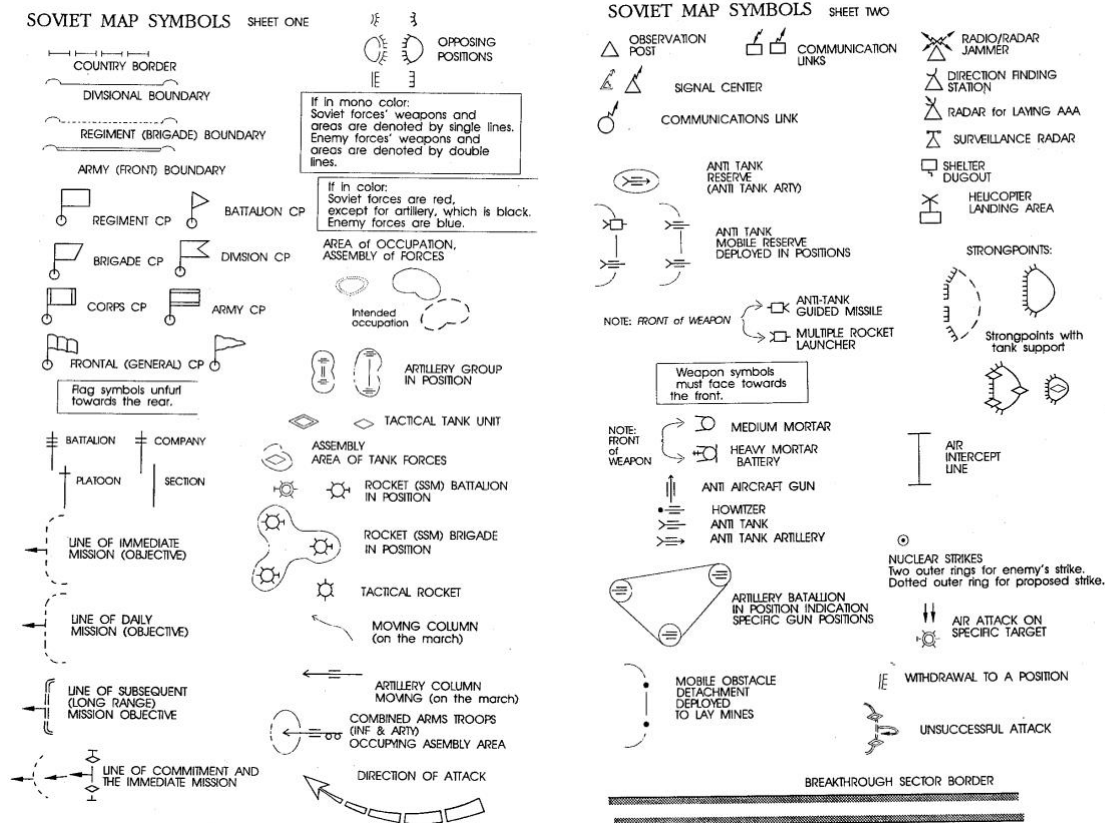
Source: *The Voroshilov Lectures: Materials from the Soviet General Staff Academy*, vol. 3, *Issues of Operational Art*, comp. Ghulam Dastagir Wardak, ed. Graham Hall Turbiville (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1992), 488.

**Figure 2.** Coordinated encirclement by two armies



This figure displays a deep operation similar to the one conducted against the German 6th Army in Stalingrad during World War II. It shows penetration to the north and south that encircles an enemy grouping by joining in the rear. Today, Russian forces attempt something similar against Ukrainian settlements, though rather than succeeding in encircling Ukrainian forces, it is the threat of this kind of envelopment that instead pressures withdrawal. Source: *Issues of Operational Art*, 490.

## Figures 3 and 4. Soviet map symbols



Source: *Issues of Operational Art*, 474–75.

## Post-World War II Developments

The introduction of antitank guided missiles in the post-World War II period shifted the balance of power for a time back toward defense and positional warfare. This did not change the Soviet Union's overall idea of using armored forces to execute deep battle after achieving an initial breakthrough, but it did influence how that breakthrough was to be achieved. In this case, the theoretical solution was to use BMP infantry fighting vehicles supported by tanks to conduct armored reconnaissance to locate weak spots in the enemy's line and to increase artillery usage to support a breakthrough once those areas were located.<sup>7</sup> The amount of artillery assigned to the penetration area

was 90–120 guns and mortars per kilometer of width, a large concentration to break up the enemy's antitank defenses.<sup>8</sup> The focus remained on restoring mobility through deep operations whenever new technology hindered it. Even when facing an enemy attack, the Soviet military did not believe in taking up positional warfare; as specified through their general staff lectures in the 1970s, situations such as those were to be dealt with by meeting engagements. The Soviet leadership considered defense to be forced and temporary, thereby proving the continued influence of Tukhachevsky.<sup>9</sup>

### **Characteristics of Modern Warfare in Ukraine: How Has It Complicated Offense?**

The Russo-Ukrainian War is the most technologically sophisticated war fought in history so far. Just as Svechin assessed in his own time, present-day technological developments have added new characteristics to warfare that have complicated mobile offensives. There are five major characteristics, which are described here:

- **Battlefield transparency.** In this sense, it is not meant that the battlefield is transparent in a way that a government is or is not transparent with its citizens, but rather that the battlefield is unprecedentedly easy to observe, a result of a combination of some of the other characteristics listed here. Both sides can see one another, making an offensive even more difficult. Operational security is hampered, and force concentration is difficult to achieve unobserved.
- **Social media use by soldiers involved in the campaign.** A contributing factor to battlefield transparency and a characteristic of modern war is the use of social media. Social media has made it

difficult for the Russian military to conceal buildups, losses, and intentions. Russian positions have been tracked by soldiers' use of social media as well. In one particular social media disaster for the Russians, a soldier tagged his unit's position, which the Ukrainians subsequently struck. The same soldier then posted pictures of the strike's aftermath, allowing the Ukrainians to conduct a damage assessment of the position without needing to do anything other than passively observe.<sup>10</sup> Even civilian use of social media has complicated the Russian offensive in Ukraine, as civilians in occupied areas can use Ukrainian apps to inform on Russian movements through their areas.<sup>11</sup> Outside of battlefield transparency, social media also impacts morale, as both sides take to it to boast of their victories and losses inflicted on the enemy.

- **Drones.** Drones likewise contribute to the ability of both Russia and Ukraine to observe one another, contributing to battlefield transparency. They have also affected change in other areas. The ability of drones to strike high-priority Russian or Ukrainian equipment led to the diluting of assets and therefore force concentration, giving favor to the defender. Russia is currently following this strategy with its artillery; for example, rather than employing their TOS-1 Buratino rocket artillery systems in batteries, the Russians seem to be dispersing them over wider areas due to concerns about them being easily discovered and subsequently destroyed by Ukrainian drones.<sup>12</sup> This also appears to be the case with Russian armor, especially as their losses continue to mount with insufficient replacement. Such drone innovations favor the defender, who can conduct a kind of unmanned air-land battle,



striking concentrations from afar with cheap disposable assets. While Russia has the ability to do this as well, Ukraine is the defender, and so its drones add to the risk of Russia concentrating armored assets for an attack and increase losses during the actual attack.

- **Missile warfare.** Not unlike the Iran-Iraq War (1980–88), a lack of battlefield gains in Ukraine has resulted in both sides exchanging missile attacks daily, with each side trying to hit at economic, infrastructural, and other targets in cities to weaken resolve. While it is possible to exchange these attacks in a mobile war, in this particular case, Russia and Ukraine are resorting to these attacks due to a lack of gains of the battlefield. During the Iran-Iraq War, in times of positional warfare, missiles and airstrikes became Iraq’s only means of attacking Iranian territory.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Russia sees a need to strike the enemy away from the front lines where positional engagements take place. This also offers a means to attack what the Russians would prefer to capture in mobile warfare. Like Iran in the Iran-Iraq War, Ukraine can retaliate, complicating the Russian air offensive.
- **Urban warfare.** The largest clashes between ground forces in the Russo-Ukrainian War occur in populated areas, where infrastructure can help sustain a defense. Two Russian officers, Colonels A. V. Zelenov and A. V. Vdovin, have identified urban warfare as the future of war in the Russian Ministry of Defense publication *Military Thought* and discussed what they believe to be necessary in urban war. They accurately note that a defender can turn large cities “into a kind of fortress that necessitates an assault with the accompanying risk of situation escalation.”<sup>14</sup>

These characteristics have made modern war as it stands in Ukraine—a positional war, continuing the historical shifting from mobile to positional warfare into the twenty-first century.

There are also other characteristics of the war that are natural, such as terrain of the country and weather. While terrain and weather are uncontrollable, warring factions can control how they react to or use them to their advantage. For example, Russia and Ukraine both experience a muddy season, known as *rasputista*. The *rasputista* season combines wet weather with winter thaw, making movement across terrain difficult. Both countries, being former Soviet republics, are well aware of this climate phenomenon and the advantage it has given to defenders in wartime in the past. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 occurred at the beginning of the *rasputista* season and presented a logistical challenge to the invaders. It was an uncontrollable characteristic but one that should have been accounted for. Both sides make strong use of terrain features when fighting on the defensive. After the Ukrainians pushed the Russians back to the eastern bank of the Dnipro River in 2022, both sides have struggled to conduct offensive operations there. When attempting their counteroffensive in 2023, the Ukrainians had to cross the Dnipro into prepared Russian defenses with strong positions, dense mine networks, and artillery. The strength of the Russian defenses was significant enough that initially the Russians did not have to worry about counterattacking because the Ukrainians could not advance.<sup>15</sup> On a smaller scale, even a canal at Chasiv Yar, a Ukrainian village that Russia has been fighting to capture since April 2024, has caused great difficulty. The Russians could not storm their way across the canal and instead

had to rely on infiltration through tunnels to gain and consolidate positions on the west side of it.<sup>16</sup>

Conversely, when on the offensive, or even just when hoping to take the offensive, both Russia and Ukraine have shown an unwillingness to give up bad terrain that they have gained to pull back and reconsolidate on better ground for an attack. This is a symptom of Tukhachevsky's continued influence, which Svechin warned of decades ago using examples from World War I. An attacker, rather than consolidate on good ground, would abandon the best positions just to move a few kilometers forward. When stopped on bad ground, they would hold to it, and from there plan an offensive that began from bad positions.<sup>17</sup> In the case of the Russo-Ukrainian War, while Russia redeployed in 2022, both sides have since been reluctant to give up territory in favor of stronger positions, irrationally believing that conditions will allow them to remain on the offensive indefinitely. When this turns out to be false, they risk being unprepared to fight on the defensive, as Russia was before Ukraine's 2022 counteroffensive. If journalist interviews with Ukrainian soldiers are accurate, Ukraine was likewise guilty of this before the fall of Avdiivka in February 2024. According to Ukrainian soldiers, rear positions were not prepared, and there was an assumption that Russia would not be able to launch the offensive that captured the city. Fortifying the forested hilltop terrain at Chasiv Yar in advance for Ukrainian soldiers was also overlooked while the Russians were winning at Bakhmut.<sup>18</sup>

One can contrast the positional warfare in Ukraine to the beliefs that the Russian chief of the general staff, General Valery Gerasimov, has expressed about future war. Gerasimov made several good predictions about new forms of war in his paper, "The Value of Science Is in the Foresight." He

included in these new forms of war the initiation of military operations during peacetime, the mass use of high-precision weaponry, warfare in all physical environments and in the information space, and the use of asymmetric and indirect operations. All of these have been present in Ukraine. One of Gerasimov's predictions, however, has been critically wrong in Ukraine: that highly maneuverable, noncontact combat operations of interbranch groupings of line units would replace frontal clashes between forces.<sup>19</sup> While the use of drones and other means of fighting of beyond visual combat may make him partially correct, to say that highly maneuverable noncontact war has replaced frontal clashes between ground troops is absurd.

In addition to the technological and natural characteristics that have complicated offensive war, there were several problems with the initial Russian strategy that contributed to its initial failure in Ukraine. Offensive mobile warfare failed initially in achieving Russia's war goals for several reasons, which are listed here:

- Russia possessed an overconfidence in its military capabilities that resulted from previous operations in Ukraine. The Russians believed that their special military operation would achieve quick and decisive results using their new-generation warfare. They had unrealistic expectations of the effectiveness of Gerasimov's theory of noncontact war.
- Russia had insufficient resources relating to what was actually required to win in Ukraine. Ukraine was not a weak adversary. It had received Western aid before the Russian invasion to prop up its forces due to previous confrontations with Russia, and it had years to prepare for and become accustomed to existing outside of the Russian sphere of

influence. For the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Russia massed 160,000 soldiers along the border.<sup>20</sup> This represented a large portion of the Russian armed forces but was not a total mobilization. These forces were spread across a large front that included not only the Russia-Ukraine border but also the Belarus-Ukraine border. The Russians departed from employing multiple echelons in their advance on Kiev by using just one echelon with reserves, which was insufficient for the task.<sup>21</sup> They further departed from their historical doctrine by advancing on six axes instead of concentrating resources for a breakthrough in one direction.<sup>22</sup>

- Russia falsely assumed that its invasion would be welcomed. During the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, a large regional pro-Russia movement supported the Russians, reducing the need for more forces there. There was no such movement to support them during their advance on Kiev in 2022. Russian soldiers taken as prisoners of war even reported surprise at coming under fire and not being welcomed by the Ukrainians.<sup>23</sup>
- Russian air operations failed to establish superiority and were therefore unable to assist ground forces in movements while uncontested.
- Strong Ukrainian resistance contributed to heavy losses among Russian troops attempting mobile maneuvers.
- Russia displayed an unwillingness to shift to a strategic defense outside Kiev. The Russians simply did not have the patience to build up their forces to resume attacks when faced with counterattacks just 27 kilometers from Kiev. Instead, they withdrew, redeployed, and

reengaged in positional offensives in the east to try to keep up pressure and with the hope of restoring mobility there. The positional nature of the war in Ukraine that developed from this failure thereby resurrected the historical question of how to restore mobility.

The Russians have attempted to restore mobility to the war in Ukraine through the use of various solutions. They have attempted to restore it by stratagem, by new offensive operations, by shifts in tactics, and by technological adaptations. While there have been some small tactical successes, they have ultimately failed overall to restore mobility to the war and to achieve the intended result of Russia's historical doctrine of deep operations.

It has been noted here that one of the characteristics of the war in Ukraine is its proximity to populated areas and urban environments, and that the Russians correctly assessed that cities would be turned into fortresses by defenders. The Russians have attempted to restore mobility by stratagem, threatening envelopment and forcing Ukrainian forces to withdraw. This was the case at Avdiivka, where the Russians made modest gains by pressuring Ukrainian forces to withdraw under threat of encirclement. The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) assesses that the Russian offensive at Pokrovsk also has the goal of threatening envelopment.<sup>24</sup> If the Ukrainians withdraw from the settlement, that gives Russia an opportunity to restore mobility on that front. It is notable that prior to its 2022 invasion, Russia achieved two victories by forcing Ukrainian forces to withdraw from settlements, the first at Ilovaik in 2014 and the second at Debaltseve in 2015. Both victories resulted in Russian gains along the front and contributed to the Minsk agreements in

2014–15. Zelenov and Vdovin also mention as a requirement for successful urban warfare a corridor that defenders can use to withdraw.<sup>25</sup> If sufficiently pressured to withdraw, such a corridor spares the Russians from positional assaults in the urban environment. The ISW assesses that the Russian armed forces are disseminating doctrinal material instructing to advance by threatening envelopment of front-line towns, which has the effect of pressuring Ukrainian forces to withdraw.<sup>26</sup>

The Russians launched a new offensive in May 2024 in the Ukrainian Kharkiv Oblast, where they had previously been pushed out. This offensive was assessed by the ISW to have the objective of drawing Ukrainian forces away from other fronts and then intensifying offensive operations against the most weakened front to achieve a breakthrough.<sup>27</sup> The timing of this offensive was before the arrival of more aid for Ukraine from the United States; Russia likely wanted to achieve its goals before the arrival of further aid. Nevertheless, the offensive failed to make significant gains on its own front, nor did it divert enough Ukrainian resources from other fronts to restore mobility. While Russia continued to make gains in Ukraine throughout 2024, the slow pace and associated losses could hardly be described as a mobile war.

The Russians have also attempted shifts in unit tactics. Here, they have achieved some successes but ultimately failed to restore mobility. Infantry units, for example, have advanced using small groups of “disposable” soldiers to expose enemy positions. The Russians can prepare more deliberate attacks along the routes where these small groups advance unexpectedly farther than what they would be capable of if opposed.<sup>28</sup>

In terms of armor, the mocked return of the older Soviet T-62 main battle tanks to the battlefield is not being done to employ them in the conventional role of tanks but rather as armored self-propelled artillery that is less vulnerable to counterbattery fire, replacing the BMP in an infantry support role with its more powerful and longer-range gun. The Royal United Services Institute for Defense and Security Studies notes that the Russians rarely employ armored thrusts to achieve a breakthrough.<sup>29</sup> This suggests a lack of confidence in their armor to restore mobility to the war. While they have found other uses for armor, these new uses are suited for roles in positional warfare.

### **Technological Adaptations and New Weapons**

Technological adaptations have had varying degrees of tactical success on the battlefield, but none have restored mobility to the war in Ukraine. The war has seen Russia employ new weapons such as the hypersonic Kh-47M2 Kinzhal ballistic missile, the subsonic KH-69 cruise missile, and the short-range 9K720 Iskander-M ballistic missile. While the Kh-47M2 was initially concerning, Ukraine has used MIM-104 Patriot surface-to-air missiles to shoot them down. The KH-69 has seen limited use, while the 9K720 is responsible for much of Ukraine's losses deep in the rear. While the employment of these missiles may be an effective use of noncontact warfare as perceived by the Russians, they have not helped them advance on the battlefield. Ukraine is also capable of retaliatory strikes.

The Russians have also attempted innovations on existing pieces of equipment in attempts to keep them viable in modern war. New-production or refitted tanks are given additional armor, and some T-80BVMs are seen



with a new ant drone electronic warfare device on their turrets.<sup>30</sup> While protection against unmanned aerial vehicles appears to be a main concern, other Russian electronic warfare systems employed along the front have been used for communications suppression and decryption to good effect. In one such documented example, Russian electronic warfare systems were able to intercept and decrypt a Ukrainian call for fire support in almost real time.<sup>31</sup> The turn by both Russia and Ukraine to fiber-optic drones that are immune to electronic warfare has not had a decisive effect for either side. All these adaptations, despite being innovative or being used to good effect, have not restored mobility to the war, and they perhaps contribute even more to the battlefield transparency that makes taking the offensive difficult.

### **Ukrainian Counteroffensives**

The problem of mobile warfare in Ukraine is not one-sided. The Ukrainians have struggled with their own problems restoring mobility, though they have had some notable successes. Ukraine's 2022 Kharkiv counteroffensive temporarily restored mobility along that front, pushing Russian forces back and retaking large amounts of territory and thousands of prisoners. The counteroffensive successfully employed the element of surprise despite the problem of battlefield transparency. The Ukrainians achieved this first successful counteroffensive by distracting the Russians with a counteroffensive in Kherson, which drew away military units, and combining that with the arrival of new weapons and the achievement of tactical surprise at Kharkiv. This tactical surprise was not so much a "surprise" to many of the Russian soldiers, who complained that their command was ignoring the obvious counteroffensive before it began.<sup>32</sup> The Russian military leadership

therefore failed to take advantage of battlefield transparency, instead falling for deception and focusing its efforts in containing Ukraine's Kherson counteroffensive.

Ukraine's 2023 counteroffensive and 2024 Kursk offensive cannot boast of such successes. In 2023, the Ukrainians were unable to achieve any significant breakthrough and took heavy losses. The commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, General Valerii Zaluzhnyi, authored his own paper toward the end of the counteroffensive that recognized the inability of Ukraine to achieve a significant breakthrough and noted the return to positional warfare due to technology possessed by the Russians complicating the offensive. His conclusion was that Ukraine needed a technological breakthrough that was capable of penetrating deep Russian defenses.<sup>33</sup>

Similarly, the 2024 Kursk offensive devolved into positional warfare despite some initial mobility and momentum. Ukraine committed its operational reserve to another front as Russia continued its slow advance in the east. While this may have boosted morale and served as an embarrassment for the Russians, it stretched Ukraine's already limited resources into a new front of positional war and failed to stop Russia's eastern advance.<sup>34</sup> The offensive was contained in a salient, with limited ability to supply along the only major road, the R200 road running from Ukraine's Sumy to Russia's Kursk Oblast. The Russians are fighting to force the Ukrainians out of their territory with the same slow advances they make in the Donbass region. The offensive has put Ukraine in a precarious situation: to remain draws away resources from other fronts, while to withdraw would allow Russia to regain the territory.

## **Future Russian Adaptations**

An article appearing in a 2022 issue of the Russian Ministry of Defense publication *Military Thought* entitled “Current Requirements for Tactical-Level Combined-Arms Formations” divides requirements into structural, systemic, and functional. Within functional requirements are the two most absent in Russian forces in Ukraine: mobility and the ability to destroy an enemy along a front to the depth of the objective.<sup>35</sup> Previous adaptations have so far failed. It may be possible to observe debate within the Russian military itself to anticipate future adaptations. Russian military publications have accepted the current reality of positional warfare, with former chief of the general staff General Yuri Baluevsky remarking that despite the high mechanization of the Russian armed forces, rates of advance in Ukraine are “turtlelike” even by World War I standards. He admits that the possibility of positional warfare was not foreseen.<sup>36</sup> The problem is therefore recognized, so how are the Russians considering proceeding? It is this debate on how best to proceed that will provide valuable insight on Russia’s views of modern warfare as it progresses, and it may even help the United States and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies to anticipate future actions. Historically, Svechin cautioned patiently overcoming positional warfare, while Tukhachevsky advised to take the offensive as soon as possible. Tukhachevsky’s method has been employed up to this point, though the Russian armed forces have executed it so poorly that he would abhor it. While the Russians have been making incremental advances, they have not restored mobility in Ukraine.

Some lines of thought in Russian military academia indicate that the Russian military leadership is accepting the attritional approach to achieving

victory. Two Russian officers, Lieutenant General A. V. Serzhantov and Colonel D. A. Pavlov, wrote in *Military Thought*: "At present, it is quite difficult to achieve victory in a military conflict by instantly crushing the opposing state using exclusively military methods, especially given the coalition nature of the confrontation."<sup>37</sup> They go on to suggest that the destruction of military economic targets should be of equal priority to the destruction of military targets themselves to destabilize the enemy. This is the logic behind Russian strikes on Ukraine's power and other critical infrastructure that are viewed as "military economic." Other Russian officers still believe in and argue for the employment of deep operations, but changing the theory to involve several smaller deep operations rather than one single thrust. Two other Russian officers, Colonels I. L. Makarchuk and K. A. Trotsenko, published a series of articles in *Military Thought* on the subject. In their concluding article, they write that several smaller offensive operations in depth would fool adversaries and create numerous small cauldrons. While a traditional deep operation would involve one or two strikes, they suggest one or two strike areas with several small strikes in each.<sup>38</sup> One can see this idea implemented to an extent already in Ukraine, with several ongoing Russian attempts to envelop frontline towns such as Pokrovsk.

Russia has so far departed from its historical method of restoring mobility through massive armored penetrations. At first, this seems accidental, a result of bad planning, or the overestimation of their capabilities and characteristics that complicate offensives. But as the Russians have recognized shortcomings, they continue to innovate. While these innovations have yet to restore mobility to the war in Ukraine, statements and publications from high-ranking Russian military officers indicate that they no

longer intend to employ the type of deep operation envisioned by Tukhachevsky and have instead embraced longer-term methods of degrading the Ukrainian armed forces so that mobility might be restored in the future. The tactics that Russia has adopted because of its initial failure in Ukraine and the turn to positional warfare are already conducive to the attritional way of restoring mobility.

The armed forces of the United States would do well to observe the debate within Russian military academia now and in the future. It should launch efforts not unlike the colossal endeavor in the 1970s and 1980s to understand Soviet military thought through a plethora of translated books and articles. The debates that happen within Russian military academia will reform the Russian understanding of modern war and help military leaders decide whether or not they should accept a more patient strategy of attrition in modern war or continue other shorter-term efforts to restore mobility. They will no doubt try to address how to fight on a transparent battlefield, how and to what degree their previous new-generation doctrine can be integrated into combat, and how to achieve victory when war loses mobility. Even if the Russo-Ukrainian War ends soon, they will spend a great deal of time reflecting on it for the future. Furthermore, the lessons that Russia has learned at great cost to itself on the battlefields of Ukraine could even prove valuable to the U.S. and NATO understanding of modern warfare.

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<sup>6</sup> *The Voroshilov Lectures: Materials from the Soviet General Staff Academy*, vol. 3, *Issues of Operational Art*, comp. Ghulam Dastagir Wardak, ed. Graham Hall Turbiville (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1992), hereafter *Issues of Operational Art*.

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