

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE HILL

by

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All nations see the world from their own belltowers, and the Russian tower is the tallest.

—From a traditional Russian saying

The following fictional monologue represents a hypothetical lecture presented by a senior Soviet military planner to the older students at the Academy of the General Staff in Moscow. Although it may be questionable that the government of the USSR would be quite so candid even with such a select group, this panorama from the Russian belltower may be useful in providing a view of what lies on the other side of the hill:

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Comrade officers: Soon most of you will be in key positions on our General Staff and will play important roles in making and carrying forward our military strategies. First and foremost, you must bear in mind—always—that our strategies must be designed to carry out the policies and directions of our state and party leaders. *Warning:* after the Great Patriotic War, even one so famous and popular as Hero and Marshal of the Soviet Union, Georgi Zhukov, was relieved of his duties and prematurely retired because he tried to place the narrow military requirements of the armed forces of the Soviet Union, as he saw them, above the political ideological training of his command. Only in his declining years was he granted once again his well-earned prestige. It is the prerogative of the Communist Party and its elected senior officials to decide and control our grand strategy; they must also approve and supervise the supporting military and operational strategies that we are charged with developing.

As you know, the international correlation

of forces is moving more and more in our favor despite setbacks here and there. Before too long, perhaps in your lifetime, the inherent contradictions and corruptions of the capitalist system will cause it to collapse in a heap of rubble, and that historic event will usher in the era of world socialism. Already we have shattered their infamous "Containment Policy" and now have air and naval base rights in many strategic areas of the world. But, as Lenin warned us long ago, the capitalists are extremely dangerous, especially in the midst of their death throes, and they might lash out at us in frustration.

It is no secret that the United States, the leader and most powerful member of that decadent society, will use all means at her command to prevent our inevitable and just victory. Her thousands of strategic nuclear weapons are not "paper tigers," as those foolish revisionists in Peking used to shout into the wind; they are still the most serious threat to our goals and even to our entire society, despite the fact that our growing strategic power and our resolute policies have forced them finally to acknowledge the correctness of Lenin's concept of "peaceful coexistence."

For this reason, our leaders have decided to pursue a long-range policy of peaceful coexistence—we reject the word "detente" as too vague. Under the umbrella of this rational policy, we will continue to oppose neoimperialism and colonialism anywhere and anytime they rear their Hydra heads. But even our vast resources are not unlimited, so we must be practical and judicious in committing them. Additionally, we do not want to excite

the badly wounded reactionary forces into striking at us prematurely. We must exercise patience and wisdom, taking two steps forward and one step backward if need be. For example, although the Cubans are very useful to us in Africa at the moment, we might have to restrain them periodically; they are a costly ally.

Peaceful coexistence also provides us the opportunity to obtain much needed technology, credits, and grain at a quite reasonable price. Would it not be ironic justice if the imperialists sold us the very means required to speed the end of their hegemony? Did not Vladimir Ilyich predict "the capitalists in their greed will sell us the rope to hang them with"?

Our leaders will not be turned into idealistic dreamers by the wishful thinking that others might conjure up from our sensible policy. Have no fear, comrades, that the strategic arms and troop withdrawal negotiations will place us at a disadvantage. Our leaders know well how to bargain hard and shrewdly.

Yet we must continue to be realistic, among ourselves, in our world view. The so-called "western world" still possesses industrial might, advanced technology, and agricultural techniques that surpass ours. Even their outdated political ideology can be dangerous if one is so shortsighted as to permit the chaos of unguided elections and political license, as did Indira Gandhi; she and her party had to pay the piper. Such foolishness will never be permitted here nor among our East European allies.

Our grand strategy is based on the fact that we are one of only two superpowers, and that eventually we will be the sole surviving one. If all goes well, this dramatic shift in power will take place without a mutually devastating global war. We, however, will continue to demand—and receive—the rightful recognition and respect that goes with this status. It is impermissible for other states to attempt to influence our internal policies. Our enormous and vastly improved military power gives our leaders and diplomats the necessary support to carry out

our worldwide strategy. It is designed to avoid a head-on and costly clash with the United States—if at all possible—and to attain our long-range goals by more indirect methods. The other "forces" being employed are political, diplomatic, economic, and technological. The KGB, of course, will support our initiatives in a number of ways. And our large-scale, but selective, arms aid programs provide us with political and economic leverage in many strategic regions of the world. Bit by bit we will continue to confuse, divide, and weaken our principal enemies.

That is why we prefer to negotiate with our antagonists, and even our allies, on a bilateral basis; this method increases our bargaining power and decreases theirs. Our basic military strategy is a defensive one, but this does not mean that we are required to sit back and helplessly absorb yet another surprise attack. Twice in this century we have been invaded by the Germans, and we have had to crush Japanese and Chinese attacks on our eastern frontier. Nor can we ever forget that the British, French, Japanese, and Americans were but four of the sixteen nations that sent arms and even troops during our Revolution to assist those traitors and their misguided followers who opposed the Red Army. We are still surrounded by potential enemies and military bases. Our military forces cannot relax vigilance for one moment.

The two most recent devastating attacks on our Motherland came from the West. For this reason, we must maintain the unity and the strength of the Warsaw Treaty Organization, at all costs, as both shield and sword. Several of the member states have grave political and economic problems that could create serious difficulties for us, and they bear close watching. After that wily Tito dies, we will carefully employ the necessary policies and pressures to remove any potential threat from, or through, Yugoslavia to our comrades in Eastern Europe. When that issue is resolved favorably, Romania will no longer be a major problem. As you know, this is not the line our leaders take in public, so do not repeat my comments outside this room.

Always remember the Germans! Never will

we permit them to reunite—except under a friendly socialist regime—or to acquire nuclear weapons. We will fight to prevent either of these nightmares from taking place.

In the long run, the “Yellow Peril” on our eastern frontier may present the biggest threat. Nuclear weapons, in the hands of those madmen who have replaced that renegade Mao, multiply our problem considerably. Yet, we do not want to be faced with the prospect of ever having to fight on two fronts simultaneously. Our current policy, therefore, is to protect that flank with strong forces while employing other means to influence in our favor the evolving situation. Of course, we will do what we can to assist friendly factions in China in their just desire to bring her back into the true socialist camp. It is possible that internal power struggles will weaken her revisionist cliques and perhaps even result in a breakup into regional segments. So much the better for us. Again, I caution you against irresponsible discussion of this matter.

Japan cannot be trusted to continue her weak military posture indefinitely, especially if the United States continues to draw down her forces and reduce her commitments in Asia. We will resist strongly a major Japanese rearmament—especially one involving nuclear weapons.

There are other capitalist regional powers along our lengthy borders that must be watched—Iran, for one. We can really trust none of them, so we must maintain strong military forces in position to protect ourselves from these greedy imperialists who squander their peoples’ money on American armaments.

In the near term, however, the gravest threat to us is posed by the aggressive combination of the United States and the other members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. We face not only their large and versatile nuclear forces, but also their significant, modern conventional forces. The so-called West Germans alone admit to a mobilized strength of almost one million seven hundred thousand! It may be higher; we

dare not trust them. Even our numerous agents there send back conflicting data.

What will France and Spain do in the event of war? Prudently, we must count them on the side of NATO. And although relatively few in number, we cannot scoff at the French and British nuclear missiles. They complicate our strategic problem. On the other hand these nations, both individually and collectively as NATO or the European Economic Community, have a number of serious political and economic problems. The steady growth of the Communist parties in Italy and France—even though they loudly protest their independence, at least for the present—might assist us in achieving our long-range goals. Our strategies must take political and psychological advantage of this and other weaknesses to dismantle and neutralize much of NATO, without war, through a combination of pressures and promises. It is to our advantage that a large segment of their people and some of their leaders believe it both unpopular and futile to spend more monies on armaments. Even though never unleashed, the long shadow and the massive weight of our armed forces will be both seen and felt in Western Europe every minute of each day. More importantly, even

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the United States is no longer immune to direct military pressures. Our strategic forces have severely restricted her freedom of action throughout the world.

Now I am certain that you are most interested in the appraisal of the General Staff on how our military forces compare with those of our primary antagonists. While the United States and NATO boast of their "triads," we have been building, at great costs, our own powerful "troika." Over the past ten years our costly and sustained efforts have borne fruit: we have substantial parity in the strategic and theater nuclear elements and have increased our superiority in most sectors of the third leg. However, beware of being deluded into believing that we don't still have significant gaps and shortcomings in our conventional forces.

Strategically we have matched, and in a number of areas surpassed, their once overwhelming might. Never again will we be placed in such a humiliating position as we were in Cuba in 1962. We also possess a strong rook which they have ignored—our extensive defensive plans and preparations, including civil defense. In any end game situation, this piece could provide us with what might be the deciding physical and psychological advantage. We have never accepted their foolish "Mutually Assured Destruction" gambit. The primary duty of any responsible state is to do everything within reason to protect her citizens. Some day they may regret, too late, this shortsighted and irresponsible neglect. As Marxists and military professionals, it is our highest duty to develop the best possible strategies for winning any conceivable war as quickly as possible.

Our modern aviation forces outnumber theirs in most areas, but in all candor our aviation forces are still inferior in many respects. Although we have poured countless rubles and a great portion of our still limited technological talent into this endeavor, we still must count heavily on surprise, tactics, and numbers to overcome their advantages. The variety of their offensive and defensive

aerial systems is a serious matter to our planners.

Thanks to the foresight and perseverance of Admiral Gorshkov and our political leaders, we now have the second largest and most powerful fleet in the world, supported by our long-range naval aviation. Our fleet was designed and built to support our grand strategy, as well as to exploit the inherent vulnerabilities of the United States and NATO and to counter their most versatile, but vulnerable, naval weapon—the large aircraft carrier. Our submarine fleet—the largest the world has ever seen—should be able to substantially and quickly sever the sea lines of communication between the United States, Western Europe, and Japan, and reduce to a mere dribble the flow of oil and other vital resources on which the latter two are totally dependent. Our air-, land-, sea-, and undersea-launched missiles have an excellent potential to neutralize or inhibit the use of their aircraft carriers; thus, the Mediterranean is no longer an American lake! Our own multipurpose warships, especially of the *Kiev* class, along with our improved naval infantry and their specialized craft, will increase our ability to demonstrate and project our power overseas in peacetime. This factor, enhanced by our improving long-range aviation transport capability, was an important element in the satisfactory solution to the Angolan situation. Our unprecedented naval exercise, OKEAN 75, proved to the world that our navy is fully capable of operating on a sustained basis anywhere on the open seas. Our large and modern shipbuilding industry combines with our careful coordination of naval, merchant, and ocean research matters to make us a first-rate maritime power.

Nevertheless, we must admit—but only among ourselves—to some continuing shortcomings. Our submarines are still too noisy, and the majority are still limited-range diesel boats. Our four fleets and two deployed squadrons are separated by geographic choke points. Our shipborne aviation is still much inferior to theirs. We still lack sufficient numbers of strategic amphibious ships. Our surface fleet is even

more vulnerable than is that of the Americans. Their naval defensive systems are improving both in quality and quantity, and their surface ships are being armed with better offensive weapons. Also, their aircraft carrier task forces and large elite Marine Corps—or naval infantry—still pose a threat to our long sea frontiers which we can't ignore. Their allies, both current and potential, also possess formidable naval forces; those of our allies are much less numerous, capable, and reliable. The morale and dedication of some of our own sailors is another matter of serious concern to us.

Aside from our Strategic Rocket Forces, our main military strength resides in the Soviet Army, and that is as it should be. Although our army appears to be very large for a so-called peacetime situation, there are many demanding and geographically separated tasks that it must be prepared to fulfill. It is armed with modern and sophisticated weapons in unprecedented quantities and has been rebuilt in both size and capabilities since the burial of Comrade Khrushchev's ill-advised policy of overdependence on limited strategic nuclear forces. We have added more than thirty divisions to our ground forces. Additionally, our divisions have been enlarged by both men and weapons and our battlefield resupply capabilities increased in order to fulfill the norms established by our General Staff. Our elite airborne and tank troops are, by and large, dependable and combat ready, but the operational norms of our more numerous motorized rifle formations have not been achieved in all cases. Some observers suggest that there is little spirit of cooperation between the tank and infantry troops; if true, this situation must be corrected. While our East European allies add considerable numbers of men and equipment to our order of battle, the readiness and reliability of many of them are questionable. Although the forward lines of communication are well-established and firmly in our hands, you as future planners must be aware of the fact that under certain circumstances some of them could present us with serious problems in a major war.

On balance, however, we believe that our combined armed forces are adequate to perform their respective roles in a war with NATO if the scenario unfolds closely along the lines which we have calculated. Our tremendous military industrial base gives us a major advantage in both peace and war. Although the enemy's *potential* still is far greater than ours, it will take more time for them to gear up than we intend to grant them. However, comrades, you must be aware that our armaments cost our society a great deal and that there are practical and political limits on what we can demand from our leaders.

Our operational strategy for a war in Europe is based on our concept of defending ourselves and our allies aggressively. As you well know, our military doctrine and exercises are based on the assumption that the perfidious NATO alliance will some day, either out of frustration or avarice, attack our forces and allies in East Europe. If we maintain strict discipline and achieve all established norms in armaments and combat readiness, we shall crush that attack and very quickly turn to a counteroffensive as we did at Stalingrad and Kursk. This time, however, it will be executed at a rapid and continuous tempo until the will and military capability of the aggressors have been demolished. Still, as prudent military men, we must prepare alternate plans. For example, if we are certain that NATO is preparing to attack quite soon, we may have to seize the initiative from them, or as one of our foreign associates put it, "Strike first as a last resort!" We on the General Staff are justly proud of the fact that we have developed a major contribution to the doctrine of modern war—that of the "non-stop offensive and continuous operations."

We have thoroughly analyzed the strong and weak points of our opponents, and we intend to exploit fully their vulnerabilities. The NATO decisionmaking process is slow and cumbersome when compared to ours, especially when involving such grave matters as mobilization and nuclear weapons. Their

major reinforcement must come from the United States. Their operational depth is shallow and the distance to key objectives, such as the Ruhr, is short. Their flanks are weak and exposed. A large part of their forces is poorly positioned to repel a strong surprise attack. Their air bases are fewer, more exposed, and less well-defended than are ours. They currently have insufficient forces and equipment in hand to defend their long frontier against a series of powerful breakthrough attacks reinforced by our well-thought-out deception plans. Their reserve stocks of ammunition, equipment, and spare parts are inadequate. They are not up to our standards, in many instances, in electronic warfare. Their defensive—and especially their offensive—capabilities in chemical warfare are well below ours. And, their complex command and control system appears to be a potential weakness.

From this incomplete list of exploitable vulnerabilities, it would seem that the task facing our strategists is relatively simple, but this is not so. Earlier, I discussed a number of critical unknowns and mentioned several of our own shortcomings. But the most exasperating variable is the probable reaction of the Americans to any given situation—they seem to be totally unpredictable. Where, when, and how will they respond? Although they have proclaimed that they will never start a war with us, it is unsafe to make one's plans on such a flimsy basis. The mixture of Germans and Americans makes for a dangerous brew, but we believe, on balance, that the latter, despite their unpredictability in a crisis, exercise some sort of long-term restraint on the former.

There are other major problems that our strategists must solve. For example, the increasing urbanization of Germany, if properly used by the defenders, can slow the pace of our breakthrough forces and cause us to mass men and firepower for costly and time-consuming assaults. Our infantry may be inadequate in both numbers and quality for that sort of operation. Although improved, our forward resupply system and stocks are based on our doctrine for a relatively short

war. Our opponents are increasing significantly their anti-tank systems. The United States is improving its capability to rapidly reinforce by air. The German Territorial Army is becoming more of a substantial obstacle to our necessary rapid and sustained movement. We really don't know how well our soldiers—and especially those of our allies—would perform in Western Europe, particularly if our momentum is halted. In that regard, the apparent lack of ideological fervor among the soldiers is of some concern. We cannot take for granted the security and efficiency of our lines of communication through East Europe. Even if we initiated an attack in the conventional mode, which we are increasingly capable of doing, the Americans might respond with massive theater and strategic nuclear strikes. And, to repeat, we have no assurance at all that the Chinese, or even the Japanese, would not take advantage of our preoccupation to try to regain the territories they persistently claim. In order to provide for these many uncertainties, we must maintain large central reserves.

In conclusion, comrades, any major war in Europe would be a very risky and potentially fatal choice for either side. For this reason, our grand strategy is devised to obtain our long-range goals by means short of general war. On the other hand, we would be foolish and derelict not to plan carefully for such an eventuality. When you are assigned to the General Staff, your mission will be to continue our efforts to determine our enemies' significant weak points, to devise better and surer ways of exploiting them, and to reduce or provide adequate protection for our own vulnerabilities.

Remember that many of the variables of war are only temporary, so one can never cease studying and thinking. Strategy is similar to chess, but it is much more complex, and the penalty for defeat is incomparably more severe. Our government and party demand that you not fail in your duty.

Goodbye and good luck, comrades. Long live the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the mighty Soviet Army!

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Since this one-act playlet does not pretend to represent the viewpoint of the other side either fully or in a predictive sense, some literary license has been taken. There is so much that we will never know, including the Soviets' finite intentions, which can change rather quickly with leaders or circumstances. However, a number of points have been surfaced that should intrigue any innovative American strategist. The luxury of one-sided strategic thinking is reserved for those fortunate enough to be paired off with an opponent infinitely weaker and unimaginative. Such is not the case on *either* side of the hill!

The USSR, with her East European allies, appreciates and employs both major elements of strategy—the physical and the psychological. We, on the other hand, have relied primarily on the former and have slighted the latter. This bias toward the direct strategic approach did not serve us well in Vietnam, particularly against an enemy who

located and attacked, skillfully and persistently, our “psychological jugular.” One suspects that most of our signals were not received by Hanoi because we were transmitting on the wrong frequency.

Have we learned from that experience? How well do our current national and military strategists really understand their Soviet counterparts? How clearly do we see what lies on the other side of the hill?

Therefore I say: Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril.¹

NOTES

1. Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (1963; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 84.

2. The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of several associates knowledgeable in the areas of the USSR and Eastern Europe whose comments and suggestions were candid and quite helpful.

3. This piece is an internal segment of a broader but still incomplete paper, tentatively titled, “Strategic Jujitsu: or the Indirect Mode versus the American Way of Making Strategy.”

