ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF V. M. KULISH

It is often difficult in the West to know when important changes take place in Soviet statements about politics or ideology. Frequently, important changes are discernible only well after they have occurred, when long-term trends can be seen more easily. When new ideas are expressed in Soviet literature, it is not clear whether these new ideas are held by the Soviet leadership as a whole or only by the individual author. This is especially true when the author does not hold a particularly authoritative position in the Party or government hierarchy. As a result, Western observers of the Soviet Union run the risk of not noticing important changes in Soviet statements affecting ideology or policy at the time these statements are made; often, such statements are noticed only after they have been made repeatedly over a period of time in Soviet literature.

However, a second danger that Western observers of the Soviet Union can encounter is the description of a statement as a major change in Soviet thinking when such a statement actually is not. This can occur either through selective quotation out of context from an author's work or through seeing the expression of a new point of view as being the opinion of the Party leadership when it is really only the opinion of the individual author. In this way, Western observers can attach a significance to certain Soviet statements which these statements do not possess in the Soviet Union.

It is an example of this second danger that will be examined here. A book edited by V. M. Kulish entitled Voennaja sila i meždunarodnye otnošenija [Military Power and International Relations] has been described by some Western observers as being a highly significant work which advocated that the USSR pursue offensive foreign and military policies without reference to Marxism-Leninism, but justified solely by Soviet interests as a great power. Further, this book was seen as being representative of Party and military thinking at the highest levels. However, through examining Kulish's statements, it will be shown here that he did not call for the blatant use of military force to achieve Soviet foreign policy goals or for the replacement of Marxism-Leninism by great power considerations as a basis for Soviet military policy.
In addition, it will be seen that the unique statements Kulish did make were not repeated in subsequent Soviet literature, and thus his influence as a thinker was rather more limited than some in the West have thought.

Kulish's book has been described as laying the theoretical foundation for the offensive use of Soviet armed forces in conflicts far from the USSR. Carl Jacobsen stated that before the publication of this book, military intervention in the Third World was an ideologically motivated policy pursued only by the imperialists (the West), and that this was a policy "...from which socialist states were excluded." In contrast to this earlier Soviet view, Jacobsen saw Kulish as developing a rationale for the USSR also

... to intervene in situations of local conflict. Further, such intervention need not be limited just to rendering aid to forces of national liberation, but it might take the form of a physical initiative by Soviet forces.

Other Western scholars also saw Kulish's work as a major theoretical innovation on the use of Soviet military force. From the remarks of these scholars, it would appear that Kulish's book is an extremely bellicose and threatening one. However, from reading what Kulish and the other contributors to this volume actually wrote, a more complicated, and even contradictory, picture emerges as to what they indeed meant.

To begin with, the main subject of this book is not Soviet foreign and military policy, but American foreign and military policy instead. The subtitle of the book is: "Voennyje aspekty mësnpoliticheskix koncepcij SSSR [Military Aspects of the Foreign Policy Concepts of the USA]." Most of the statements about the utility or futility of the use of force were made with regard to American foreign policy.

Nevertheless, some attention was also devoted to Soviet foreign and military policy, especially in a section of the book authored by A.M. Dudin and Ju.N. Listvinov. One of the frequently quoted statements that they made appeared to advocate the aggressive use of Soviet military force abroad:

In connection with the task of preventing local wars and also in those cases wherein military support must be furnished to those nations fighting for their freedom and independence against the forces of internal reaction and imperialist intervention, the Soviet Union may require mobile and well-trained and well-equipped armed forces. The actual situation may require the Soviet Union to carry out measures aimed at restraining the aggressive acts of imperialism. Practical steps toward resolving the problem of regional military opposition to imperialist expansion by expanding the scale of Soviet military presence and military assistance furnished by other socialist states, are being viewed today as a very important factor in international relations.

The term 'military assistance' both here and elsewhere in Soviet literature refers to arms transfers. The transfer of arms is a policy that has been advocated since the Khrushchev era, its advocacy here is nothing new. What is new, though, is the advocacy of increased Soviet 'military presence'. It is not clear from the above statement what precisely this term refers to. As has been seen, some in the West interpreted this as meaning the direct use of Soviet armed forces in combat situations. However, other statements made by Dudin and Listvinov indicate that 'military presence' referred to something much less drastic:

In some situations the very knowledge of a Soviet military presence in an area in which a conflict situation is developing may serve to restrain the imperialists and local reaction, prevent them from dealing out violence to the local populace and eliminate a threat to overall peace and international security. It is precisely this type of role that ships of the Soviet Navy are playing in the Mediterranean Sea.

Here 'presence' only appears to mean the ability of the Soviet Navy to patrol in areas of potential crisis, and not necessarily to fight in them. Military presence seems to play less of a combat role than it does a deterrent role according to the authors. Indeed, whenever these authors mention Soviet military presence, they discuss it only in connection with peacetime movements of the Soviet Navy. While it is obvious that these peacetime movements of the Soviet Navy may have far from peaceful purposes, what is being advocated here is something less than direct Soviet military participation in combat in the Third World as a policy.

Further, even if the term 'presence' is expanded to mean not only naval maneuvers, but also the stationing of other Soviet armed forces abroad during peacetime, Dudin and Listvinov placed limits on the extent to which the USSR should pursue presence, by saying that the USSR

... has its own historical, economic and geographic peculiarities which, distinct from those of the USA, will not allow it to or require it to maintain a military presence in remote regions of the world.

In this last statement can be seen the ambiguous nature of the Kulish book. As has been shown, the authors of this section do advocate Soviet military presence in the world. At the same time, the USSR is not regarded by them as
possession of either the capability or the need to maintain as large a military presence as the United States maintains. In this sense, the authors appear to recommend that the USSR use military presence in its foreign policy only to a limited extent—certainly to a lesser extent than they see the US using it. This, combined with the deterrent nature they assign to the term ‘military presence’, indicates that the authors of the Kulish book were advocating a much less provocative use of force by the USSR than some Western scholars have said they were.

II

In addition to seeing Kulish as the initiator of a new offensive Soviet military doctrine, Carl Jacobsen believes that this book departed from previous Soviet literature in one other important respect. According to Jacobsen, Kulish

... suggested that one might now conceive of purely military, secular rationales for interventionary designs. This had in fact been suggested earlier, but the ideological re-evaluation hinted at by the suggestion had not then been followed up, as it was now to be. 16

The implications of this conclusion are even more significant than the assertion that Kulish advocated an offensive military policy. If this conclusion is correct, it means that Kulish advocated the separation of ideological considerations from questions of Soviet use of force in international relations. The Soviet Union should no longer consider politico-military issues in relation to Marxism-Leninism. Instead, they should be considered on the basis of their non-ideological military merits. This would mean that Kulish abandoned all pretense of the USSR being a revolutionary power desiring to spread socialism, but considered the Soviet Union to be a traditional great power that acted solely to further its foreign policy interests through military means.

If this is what Kulish actually meant, then his statements were indeed a major departure from previous Soviet literature, all of which emphasized the ideological basis of Soviet foreign and military policy. What operational difference this new formula would have on Soviet military policy, however, appears marginal; whether the USSR acted to advance socialism or acted to advance Soviet interests, a similar military policy would probably result. Where this new formula calling for the separation of military policy from ideology would be important is in the realm of Soviet domestic politics. The previous Soviet emphasis on the ideological basis of military policy provided a rationale for the Party to be the final arbiter of such questions. In Kulish’s formula, though, the separation of military questions from ideological ones means that the Soviet military, and not the Party, should be the judge of what military policies the USSR should pursue. This would amount to the virtual overthrow of the Party by the military with regard to Soviet foreign and military policy.

Is this, however, what Kulish actually meant? The statement Kulish made from which this view could be inferred was:

Owing to the specific nature of all these [military] problems, they can be studied as part of an independent branch of the theory of international relations and foreign policy—the military-political problems of international relations. 11

What Kulish said, then, was that military-political problems can be considered or studied independently, but independently from what? Kulish only mentioned the “theory of international relations and foreign policy”. He did not explicitly state that military-political problems could be considered separately from Marxist-Leninist ideology. It is possible that this was Kulish’s implied meaning, but it is also possible that it was not; the statement is an ambiguous one.

In the conclusion of the book, Kulish did explicitly refer to the relationship between military policy and ideology. In this statement, however, Kulish said that military-political problems could not be considered separately from ideology:

The post-war experience in international relations generally and the experience of the prolonged arms race and military preparations on the part of imperialism in particular, confirmed the correctness of the Marxist position which holds that military force, both in the foreign policies of individual states and in the international relations between countries and peoples, appears not as an independent factor but rather as a component of a complicated system of interaction among various factors—economic, political, diplomatic, ideological, cultural, moral-psychological, etc. All of them are mutually related and operate as parts of an overall complex. 12

If Kulish’s first statement on this subject was meant to imply that questions of military policy should be considered separately from ideology, then he contradicted himself in the conclusion. Since the conclusion made an explicit statement regarding the importance of ideology while the first one did not explicitly say the opposite (though it is possible to interpret it as doing so), it appears that Kulish was either ambiguous on this point or he did not mean that military-political questions should be considered separately from Marxism-Leninism at all.
III

Given the interpretation of Kulish's book that certain Western scholars have made, it is not surprising that they have seen him as being highly influential on subsequent Soviet literature about foreign and military policy. Carl Jacobsen described Kulish as "... one of the premier Soviet strategic authors of the day";1 and Roger Hamburg described his book as "... a seminal monograph".14 The Scotts also saw Kulish as "... one of the most scholarly of the theoreticians at IMEMO," and this book as being "... one of the significant Soviet books of 1972".15

Even if, as has been argued here, the interpretation of Kulish made by these Western scholars is inaccurate, it is still possible that the book was an influential one in the USSR. As has been noted earlier, the Kulish book purports to be a discussion of the military aspects of American foreign policy. However, its significance has been seen in the West for its statements about the military aspects of Soviet foreign policy. If these statements were seen as the main significance of the Kulish book in the USSR as well, one would expect Soviet writers to acknowledge and recognize this significance and to repeat and expand upon these statements.

In order to assess what other Soviet writers think of a particular book, one can examine book reviews in Soviet periodicals. These book reviews stress what is most important in the book under discussion, and frequently offer criticism of it. A review of the Kulish book written by M. G. Vladimirov appeared in the journal SSHA (USA).16 Although the reviewer was somewhat critical of the quality of a chapter by B. M. Xaloša on U.S. military alliances (NATO, SEATO, and CENTO), Vladimirov judged the Kulish book to be "... a meaningful, scholarly volume which would be of undoubted interest to anyone studying contemporary international relations".17 However, what Vladimirov found to be noteworthy about this book was its examination of the military aspects of American foreign policy. He made no mention at all of the statements about the military aspects of Soviet foreign policy. It would appear that this reviewer simply did not consider them particularly significant.

Considering the separation of military considerations from other aspects of foreign policy (including ideologi cal ones), the only comment the reviewer made was to approve Kulish's criticism of this separation as something the United States did.16 Vladimirov did not interpret Kulish as recommending that the Soviet Union also adopt this practice. Thus, it seems that while this reviewer saw the Kulish book as being a "meaningful, scholarly" work on American military policy, he did not see it as setting forth a new Soviet military policy as some Western scholars did.

What is more, this review in SSHA of Voennaja sila i meždunarodnye otnošenija appears to be the only review of it that was ever published in the USSR. Letopis' recentiel [Chronicle of Reviews], which indexes book reviews appearing in Soviet periodicals, listed no other review of this book. Unfortunately, Letopis' recentiel does not index book reviews from all Soviet periodicals, including some military ones. However, no reviews of the Kulish book were published in Kommunist vooružennyy sil [Communist of the Armed Forces], Voennno-istoričeskij žurnal [Military-Historical Journal], or in the available CIA translations of the classified Soviet journal Voennaja mysl' [Military Thought].20

If the Kulish book had indeed been a major work on Soviet foreign and military policy, it would be quite unusual that it was not widely acknowledged as such in the USSR. Major new foreign policy statements by high Party leaders are usually praised as such in Soviet publications, sometimes long after they have been made. Similarly, authoritative works on Soviet military policy such as the books written by Marshals Sokolovskij or Grečko, or books such as Marksizm-leninizm o vojne i armii [Marxism-Leninism on War and the Army] have always been highly praised in Soviet military publications. Further, such works have been explicitly described as studies of Soviet military policy. The fact that the Kulish book was not treated in a similar manner by Soviet writers (indeed not noticed by them at all except for the one review by Vladimirov) indicates that this book was not considered to be as significant a work on the subject of Soviet military policy as some in the West have thought.

IV

Yet if the Kulish book was not the highly important treatise on Soviet military policy that some in the West claimed it was, then precisely what was its significance for Soviet thinking about foreign and military affairs? Before considering this, some biographical information on Kulish would be appropriate. Kulish served as an officer in the Soviet Army where he rose to the rank of colonel. After retiring from the Army, he worked at the Institute for World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO) of the USSR Academy of Sciences. It was under the auspices of this civilian institute
that the book *Voennaja sila i meždunarodnye otnošeniya* was published in 1972. Shortly after the publication of this book, Kulish left IMEMO to work at another research institute.\(^2\)

Kulish, then, was associated both with the military and with the Party/civilian institutes. Because of this, Kulish's statements on Soviet foreign and military policy must be looked at in relation to both military and Party/civilian writing. Since the most widely noted statements in the book concerned Soviet military presence, and since this presence referred to areas beyond the immediate vicinity of the USSR (in other words, the Third World), it is necessary to examine them in relation to other military and civilian statements about Soviet foreign and military policy toward the Third World. Since the Third World was discussed somewhat differently in military and in Party/civilian literature, Kulish's significance in each must be looked at separately.

Soviet military literature began to discuss conflict in the Third World in the late 1950s and has given increasing attention to it from the late 1960s through to the present. The Soviet military has, however, said relatively little about the role of the USSR in Third World conflicts. In those statements that have been made about the role of the USSR in Third World conflicts, though, a definite trend over time can be seen. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Soviet military writers said nothing specific about the role of the USSR in these conflicts. In the middle and late 1960s, they discussed arms transfers\(^2\) and then in the early 1970s they discussed the use of Soviet advisers to train revolutionary armed forces.\(^2\) In the late 1970s, the role of Cuban armed forces and treaties of friendship and co-operation were discussed.\(^2\) Even some hints of the use of Soviet armed forces were made,\(^2\) though no explicit statements advocating this as a general policy have yet appeared.\(^2\)

Where do the statements in the Kulish book about Soviet military policy fit into this pattern? If, as has been argued by others, the meaning of the term 'military presence' refers to the use of Soviet armed forces in combat in the Third World, then these statements were much stronger than anything the Soviet military said at the time the book was published (1972), or even since then. Further, the advocacy of the use of force that the Kulish book was alleged to have made was virtually ignored in subsequent Soviet military literature. However, if, as has been argued here, the term 'military presence' was used in the Kulish book to mean the peacetime deployment of Soviet forces in the Third World, then these statements were similar to what Soviet military literature was saying in the early 1970s. The role of both Soviet military writers and Soviet naval movements was to assist Soviet allies in the Third World; Soviet forces were not intended to undertake the main burden of any local conflict with the enemies of socialism that might occur. Thus, in relation to Soviet military literature, the statements made in the Kulish book about the role of the USSR in Third World conflicts were exceptional. The only thing unusual about this work was that a book which discussed military policy in such detail (albeit it discussed primarily American military policy) was published under civilian, not military, auspices.

The Third World was also discussed in Party/civilian literature. During the 1950s and 1960s, Party/civilian writers focused mainly on the economic, political, and ideological problems of achieving socialism in the Third World; little was said about military factors.\(^2\) Beginning in the 1970s, Party/civilian writers began to look at the military aspects of the struggle for socialism too, though they did not do so in as much detail as Soviet military writers.\(^2\) Only rarely did Party/civilian writers say anything about Soviet military policy in the Third World, and even then these statements were general and vague. Insofar as the Kulish book was published in 1972, it was one of the first Party/civilian works to discuss the military aspects of conflict in the Third World, though many others did so as well. What was unusual about the Kulish book as far as Party/civilian literature is concerned was the level of detail in which military matters were treated in it.

Party/civilian writers have seldom advocated specific military policies that the USSR should pursue. The discussion of Soviet military presence in the Kulish book was unusual in this regard. If military presence was meant as the use of Soviet forces in combat in the Third World, the advocacy of this as policy has not been repeated. After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, an important Party statement was made to justify the use of force there, but the Soviets have never insisted that this is a limited military operation; Party/civilian writers have not (yet) advocated that the USSR undertake similar operations in other parts of the Third World.\(^2\) Yet even if military presence meant only the peace time deployment of Soviet forces in the Third World, it was still an unusual statement to appear in Party/civilian literature.

With regard to the separation of military considerations from ideological ones, neither Party/civilian nor military writers have ever advocated this. It is impossible to say that such a suggestion has never appeared in Soviet literature without having read literally everything that has been published in the USSR. However, Party/civilian and military writers routinely emphasize the
exaggerate how offensive the USSR is; if indeed it is attempting to achieve world empire, it is certainly going about it more slowly than other nations which have attempted to do so in the past.

More important, through selective quotation of and overemphasis on certain Soviet statements, the full meaning, complexity, and significance of Soviet thinking can easily be missed. What, for example, do the Soviets consider to be their own strengths and weaknesses in pursuing their foreign policy goals? What do they consider to be American strengths and weaknesses in opposing them? How do the Soviets assess opportunities to extend their foreign policy interests? How do they conceive of national security? Do they regard their foreign policy as offensive or defensive? As the example of V. M. Kulish shows, the answers to these questions cannot be found if one selectively quotes only those statements indicating the 'offensive' (or, for that matter, the 'defensive') nature of Soviet foreign and military policy. In order to understand fully Soviet foreign and military policy, it is necessary to make a comprehensive study (not just a selective one) of Soviet thinking on this subject.

The Brookings Institution

NOTES


3. Ibid., p. 352.


ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF V. M. KULISH

26 Soviet military discussion of the use of Soviet armed forces in Afghanistan has taken place, but so far the Soviet military has not advocated the use of Soviet armed forces in combat as a policy that the USSR should follow generally in the Third World.

This progression is also noteworthy, though, because each of the successive steps of Soviet involvement discussed by Soviet military thinkers was only mentioned after they had already occurred in practice. The USSR had been shipping arms to Vietnam, Egypt, and other Third World countries long before this was acknowledged in the 1960s by Soviet military writers. Similarly, Soviet military advisers had been in Egypt, Syria, and Soviet military writers. This review of training revolutionary armed forces was acknowledged in elsewhere before this policy of training revolutionary armed forces was acknowledged in the early 1970s. Cuban involvement in Angola was only mentioned after it had occurred.

Soviet armed forces there has not yet been successful.


See World Communist Solidarity with the Afghan Revolution, New Times, No. 3 (January 1980), 8–10.