The road and Fortification Preparation of Border Areas in the 
Recommendations of the Russian military theorist A.A. 
Svechin (the late 1920s)

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the Russian military construction on the example of the St. 
Petersburg Military District in the period from 1864 to 1917. Without taking into account the 
military factor, it is impossible to reconstruct the socio-economic development of our country's 
regions. The scale and priority of military construction affect the long-term goals of the state. 
“Strategic” motives could both give an impetus to the economic growth of some regions, and 
the contrary significantly restrain the development of others. St. Petersburg contains the 
results of many years of headquarters work such as all plans for mobilization and the sequence 
of replenishment, loss and restoration of the armed forces, stocks of maps. The main 
gunpowder, cannon and shell factories were located near St. Petersburg, while pipe, cartridge 
and mine factories are located in St. Petersburg itself. In St. Petersburg are stored the vast 
reserves of the State Bank, the Mint, the treasures of the Hermitage, the incalculable capitals of 
private financial enterprises, the money reserves of the State Treasury. The conditions of 
quartering significantly determine the combat training of troops in peacetime and, accordingly, 
their combat qualities in military conditions.

1. Introduction

A promising area of the historical research is the study of geographical and economic factors in the 
socio-economic development of society, and this applies to both the primitive period [1, 2] and the 
events of Contemporary history [3, 4]. In previous publications, we examined in detail the nature of 
the New Economic Policy (hereinafter NEP) using the example of Siberia [5, 6]. The production 
indicators achieved by the middle of 1926 in the USSR created a certain 
supply of economic strength, 
which allowed the Bolsheviks to take a course towards the gradual curtailment of the NEP and forced 
violent collectivization.

Both as a contemporary of the NEP historical period and subsequent scientific and journalistic 
literature is permeated with military terminology (“front”, "struggle", "enemy"), saturated with special 
rhetoric: "on the class front of the struggle", "creating conditions for complete victory over the 
kulaks", " on the economic front "," under the conditions of the modern class struggle "," an economic
line hostile to Soviet power "," enemy maneuvers "," the heroic struggle of the Communists for the Socialist future of the countryside "," class enemy "," the attack on the Nepman and the kulak ", "Sabotage of class enemies", "on the national front", "the struggle for the re-education of the petty-bourgeois masses and the intelligentsia (intellectuals)", "on the literary front", "against reactionary theories on the military-scientific front", etc.

It is necessary to take into account and evaluate the influence of the expert views on government decisions of the modern NEP in the USSR (V.I. Lenin, I.V. Stalin, S.I. Gusev, M.V. Frunze, A.A. Svechin, P.P. Lebedev, B.M Shaposhnikov, M.N. Tukhachevsky, etc.) on the need to prepare the mobilization and concentration of human and material resources in case of war [7. 8].

2. Materials and methods

The used methods cover three levels: general scientific, general historical and concrete historical. During the research, the following general scientific methods of cognition were used: induction and deduction, going from abstract to concrete, analysis and synthesis, description, measuring, explanation, analogy, comparison. All of them were used as concrete means of cognition. At the general scientific level, the leading methods were the methods of historism and objectiveness. It was tried to avoid the equation of the past and the future; the object was put into the historical context; special attention was paid to determining the cause-and-effect links of the events and processes. In the research, the following concrete historical methods were used: historical-genetic (as the basic one), historical-comparative and historical-systematic.

3. Results

The USSR was preparing not only for defense, but also for the offensive, reorganizing the Red Army and focusing political preparation on strengthening its class character. The general approach is that the Civil War, as the war against the landlord-bourgeois counter-revolution, is over, and in the future, completely new tasks of the revolutionary war may face the Red Army. Political bodies were instructed to work out measures to counteract the "demobilization, liquidation" moods of the peasants - the land was conquered, the landowner was defeated, why do we need an army? why do we need new wars? [9]

Questions of class, in particular, proletarian solidarity occupied a key place in the military theory and current propaganda of the Bolsheviks, closely intertwined with the comprehension of other aspects of the world experience. It was believed that future wars would undoubtedly take place in an atmosphere of a very acute class struggle, which would create more or less strong defeatist groups in all the states taking part in the struggle. Hence the growing importance of domestic policy, the development of a power, protective policy, and social reorganization followed.

Military theory paid substantive attention to economic issues, the put forward generalizations explain a lot in the national economic course chosen by the Bolsheviks. In the USSR, the world military mobilization experience was thoroughly analyzed, measures in Germany, England, the USA, etc. were analyzed. The military's critical assessment of the domestic economic practices of 1918-1920 is noteworthy.

P.P. Lebedev wrote: “Widespread militarization in all branches of state and public activity is the law of modern preparation for war. For the high military command, there is the need for constant communication with the highest civilian authorities to guide them in military requirements. And each supreme civilian body must have a cell that looks after military interests and prepares the transfer of the activities of the People's Commissariat to new rails, with the announcement of mobilization, so that it can meet the requirements set by the war”[10].

The most systematic concept of preparing border areas for war was formulated by A.A. Svechin who gave comprehensive explanations [11]:

It is necessary to prepare for the creation of mobilization centers, especially for machine-gun, artillery, aviation and other technical units requiring special training. These mobilization centers most conveniently coincide with existing training ranges, shooting schools, airfields, etc. During the World
War, the officer shooting school played the role of a machine gun center and issued many hundreds of Colt machine gun teams. This major business should develop not spontaneously, but in a planned manner. Is our most important center for practical training of artillery - the Luga proving ground - well located to fulfill the mobilization tasks that fall on it? Is our barracks building program aligned with mobilization requirements? After all, the USSR inherited the barracks grouping of the standing army, and the army school needs barracks at least of the type of winter barracks - where one can learn to shoot, fly, and maneuver. It is necessary to build and equip these mobilization centers in advance; for that, it is only necessary to coordinate the army's peaceful training equipment with the mobilization requirements.

The entire army deployment in peacetime must meet not only the convenience of the troops, but also the well-balanced requirements of war. We are not talking here about such deviations from strategy requirements, such as the inter-lane deployment of two different corps parts, or the placement of territorial, long-mobilized units near the border itself. Already in peacetime, sufficient saturation of the more important and threatened areas of the border area with troops is needed in order to facilitate the cover of the deployment and accelerate the latter. But it is not allowed to bring the group of troops closer to the borders more than it is strictly necessary in operational terms. Mobilization can be flexible only insofar as the deployment of troops in peacetime brings them closer to the sources of spare replenishment when war is declared. The territorial principle is the basis of an armed nation, and too serious violation leads to major disadvantages. It should also be remembered that border areas are not a strategically reliable source of replenishment and manning.

The success of both the spare units recruitment and the formation of new units is closely dependent on the legacy - tradition, living space, sighting devices, shooting ranges, etc. - left by the army that went on a campaign. The central, internal regions, which will face a gigantic task of feeding armed forces with the monthly expulsion of 100-130 thousand fighters with the outbreak of war, must be prepared for this task by peaceful deployment coordinated with the development of the railway network [11].

In the border areas in peacetime there is a well-known military organization: there are headquarters, there are shops and warehouses that issue various supplies to the troops, there are repair shops, there are barracks, camps, shooting ranges. Peaceful needs are served by permanent communication lines. In the border strip, there are also border watch detachments, which also have their own equipment. Shortly after the outbreak of the war, the scheme of the district equipment should be replaced by the circuit of the front-line equipment. A lot will have to be expanded and redone. But this problem of creating a combat organization will be greatly simplified if it is possible to fully utilize peaceful equipment, if the district equipment scheme in a significant part will be included in the front organization. While everything will be in ferment, when thousands of chiefs and heads, poorly guided in the unfamiliar environment of the border space, will arrive with their units and institutions from afar, with the indispensable order to immediately clear the landing stations, every immobile particle of the general apparatus acquires colossal organizing significance, arranged in advance and has already begun to function, with a permanent address. It is not indifferent whether fronts and armies headquarters will be re-established in unequipped points, or whether they will settle on the former station of the district headquarters and corps. It is much easier to develop a modest, peaceful food store to the required size than to create a new one. An engineering property warehouse, which turned out to be exactly at the point where the development of road or fortification works is necessary immediately with the start of mobilization, will render great services. On the contrary, if everything is to be transferred, evacuated, if mobilization turns out to be tantamount to the great migration of peoples, then the period of time, when everything settles and straightens out, it will significantly stretch; a lot of extra work will be required, and a period of inevitable turmoil will not increase the credibility of management. This implies the need to consider each organizational measure in the border districts from the point of view of the front-line problem solution in mind.

At present, maneuvering along railways is of great importance; the speed of the troops transfer over the railways is often decisive. It would be a mistake to believe that this speed depends solely on
railway technology and on the ability of troops to quickly get into carriages and quickly clear disembarkation stations.

The organization of the rear is essential. Troops must have known supplies and a known baggage train in order to raise these supplies and transport cargo to replace the consumable. This supplying apparatus should be confined to certain hierarchical authorities. Although the functions of a supply distributor to a certain extent increase the authority of the command authority, however, there is no need for each chief to necessarily have his own commander, on the scale of the unit commanded by him.

Fundamentally, it is beneficial to concentrate stocks and supply functions in a few instances. The reserves concentration allows you to get by with a smaller amount, compared to the method of spraying them, and allows you to use them more expediently: to deliver cartridges to those who are fighting, and food to those who could not get it on the spot. However, it would be unreasonable to centralize all front supply in the instance (apparatus) of the front, since the latter, of course, cannot follow all the needs of various military units. A certain part of the mobile reserves and the convoy must be included in the composition of separate units so that they can satisfy the needs arising in the process of battle with their own means.

Special measures for equipping the struggle theater should be expressed in the development and repair of communications networks. The productivity of the army is directly proportional to the quality of the roads in its rear. Bad paths weaken the front and multiply the rear. It is natural to strive to build good roads in the area where the direction of our offensive is planned, and to launch the road network where we suppose to remain passive, we are afraid of the enemy strike direction. It is necessary, however, to think deeply about the operational environment before creating road traps.

Having in mind, that the USSR's highways in border theaters are 50-200 times less than in Western Europe, and our rear is very cumbersome, it would be reasonable to restore an extensive highway construction program. The latter, due to the need to adapt the track to the oncoming traffic of heavy vehicles, will have to be made wider and with a thicker crust of crushed stone, which will double the consumption per mile of highway. Highway consumption is an expense to increase the ratio of combatants to non-combatants, an expense aimed at being able to wage war more economically and successfully. The strategy, and stretching along the border, can turn against us, if the enemy succeeds in pushing us off it into the swampy forests lying behind it. The road preparation must cover sufficient depth. There is little need to be afraid that the enemy will use the roads we have drawn for invasion. The movement of military supplies severely destroys even the highway; what hooves and wheels will not destroy, maybe, with proper preparation, pyroxylin can finish. The design of deep funnels series in remote places will hinder any movement for a long time.

It is a big mistake to believe that positive results can be achieved by developing the number of convoys and not paying attention to the road network. We see a gap between the one-sided regular swelling of the Red Army rear and the state of our road network. What would they say about such a People's Commissariat for Railways, which would unilaterally increase the railway rolling stock, without caring at all about the condition of the tracks, or about their expansion? If we propose to strike from some areas, and peacetime experience says that in front of them, one crossing is necessary to drag cars on the sand on our hands, placing boards, then concern about the success of the strike will also be expressed in a decent road ahead. The development of the road network must match the requirements of the deployment and the intended maneuver.

What was more important for tsarist Russia - was the construction of the four-track Orel-Sedlec railway, on which the French insisted, or the construction of the Murmansk railway? If we carry out the strategy of destruction, then the superhighway, which will allow sending 150 extra trains a day into the concentration area, is incomparably more important; but under the conditions of the attrition strategy, which really took shape during the world war, the Murmansk railway, making it easier for Russia to breathe economically, would be much more useful. According to A.A. Svechin, the conditions of fortification preparation have changed since the beginning of the 20th century. If earlier, with subsistence farming, individual protection of each settlement was built. With the growth of the
capitalist economy, the general economic base was strengthened, and the attacking means increased. The defense capabilities of the isolated fortified point opposite were reduced.

The main requirement is to have sufficiently mobile and organized large-caliber artillery and to widely familiarize commanders and troops with methods of an accelerated attack on long-term fortifications. Such structures retain the meaning of existence only in close connection with this maneuver, strengthening the well-known important positions in the war theater. The need for fortification work on the modern front stems, first of all, from the need to extremely strongly vary the density of the front occupation.

If there are no fortifications prepared in advance, vigorous work will have to be done to establish fortified positions with the beginning of mobilization. The success of such work, despite the preparation of position projects, the preparation of the entrenching tool and wire, the formation of workers’ squads and transports, will still remain doubtful, since the work will have to be scattered over a wide area, enemy raids may interfere with their implementation, the first week after the declaration of war will take organizational preparation, and in the third week, in some cases, the fortified areas will already have to fulfill their purpose.

This feverish mobilization fever for the construction of fortifications is inevitable in all cases. However, in the presence of a certain fortification framework, created in advance, this work will proceed much more successfully. Naturally, the troops will concentrate for a strike in areas more abundant in communication routes, and the passive sectors of the front will be predominantly remote roadless sectors.

The track junctions will first of all need to be provided with covering troops; the availability of long-term fortifications is especially valuable for these troops. Here the main forces will also be consistently accumulated; a long-term position will cover their accumulation and play a huge organizing role; its presence will make it possible to gather in advance a portion of heavy artillery and technical equipment near the border, and to spread a permanent communications network. Remote places are better to leave remote; blocking them with a continuous front can be left for the further course of the war; in the event of the enemy masses’ breakthrough through them, we will find ourselves in a not bad position, since, having secured track nodes, we can direct flank attacks under the most favorable conditions.

In the conditions of the USSR western border, where rivers form the most important frontiers, there is a great temptation to concentrate all fortification preparation on bridgehead positions. A healthy strategic thought must fight this direction. It is incomparably cheaper to prepare a spare railway bridge in the rear, for quick repair of blown up farms, than to try to defend the bridge when the enemy advances by taking a bridge position. The latter, in modern conditions, should be put forward for a whole crossing from the river and the bridge, and the struggle for it will always be unfavorable for us.

The river lines, of course, must be used in defense, but so that our troops have a gain, not a loss from the river. Long-term fortification preparation should strive to strengthen the river line by forming a defensive or offensive flank; moreover, it will often be possible to use tributary valleys for this purpose.

It is unaccountable to spend a significant part of the military budget on the construction of fortifications; but 1-2% of the military budget, systematically spent from year to year to increase defensive capabilities of border theaters, will undoubtedly pay off, allowing our forward strategic deployment units to immediately stand on the solid ground [11].

4. Conclusion

The military development clearly reflected the socio-economic course persistently outlined by the Bolsheviks. The need to unite and coordinate leadership on the fronts of political, economic and armed struggle was widely recognized - the idea of an "integral commander". It was emphasized that the strategy needed a secret and unanimity, centralization and autocracy. This instructive management
experience deserves further reflection in the light of contemporary economic methodology in the interests of practical use [12].

A.A. Svechin pointed out the need for firm and systematic economic preparation for a future war: the transfer of industry to less vulnerable areas, a well-thought-out policy of prices and railway tariffs, energetic socialist accumulation, bringing it to at least 10% of the productivity of all national labor, the militarization of all state and social activities. The minimum recommendation was: "Extreme caution in influencing the natural course of economic development is still not tantamount to giving it the opportunity to grow spontaneously." The advantage is that the Soviet industry worked according to a general plan even in peacetime.

Accounting for all the necessary raw materials and their distribution, accounting and the most rational use of factory equipment, the regrouping of technical managers and workers, the full utilization of the labor of the unemployed, the attraction of new labor from the countryside, tasks, considered with the possibilities of the available means and the needs of war - are the essence of this mobilization ... The practice of leading the peaceful economic life of the USSR was the best school for the compilers and executors of mobilization plans.

Theorists analyzed the optimal combinations of actions for crushing and attrition. It was recommended that the plan of military operations be carefully coordinated with existing material capabilities. Any failures in accounting could lead to the construction of operational "castles in the air or mobilization houses of cards." It was recommended to create large grain reserves in order to overcome the element of the peasant market.

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