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		PAR 9/20/2012 F2000-091/1			

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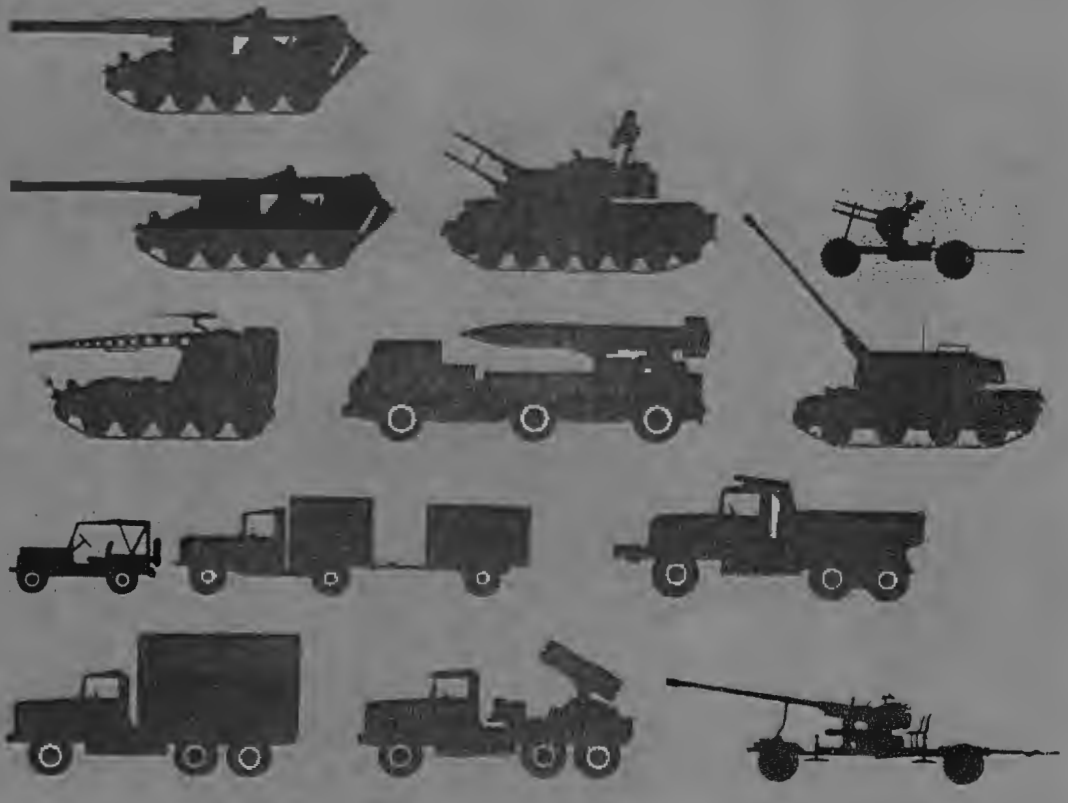
SOVIET ARMY ECHELONMENT:

Employment Concepts and Tactical Options



July 1979

Doctrine and Concepts Division
Deputy Directorate for Long Range Planning

CONCEPT ISSUE PAPER

NUMBER ONE

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SOVIET ARMY ECHELONMENT:

EMPLOYMENT CONCEPTS AND TACTICAL OPTIONS

July 1979

DOCTRINE AND CONCEPTS DIVISION

DEPUTY DIRECTORATE FOR LONG RANGE PLANNING

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REPLY TO
ATTN OF: XOXLD

SUBJECT: Concept Issue Papers

TO: Addressee

1. Concept Issue Papers (CIP) are prepared and issued by the Doctrine and Concepts Division, Deputy Directorate for Long Range Planning, Directorate of Plans, DCS/Operations, Plans and Readiness. The papers are issued on an occasional basis at security classification levels no higher than SECRET, to make them available to as wide a readership as possible. The purpose of the CIPs is to focus on current issues of Air Force interest with the intent of stimulating new ideas and approaches.

2. In an Air Force context, concepts are by definition general ideas of air power employment, they are dynamic in nature, open ended and ever evolving. They are the crucial links between doctrine, hardware, and force structure of the past and present and the as yet unseen intangibles of the future. The appeal is to the visionary but on a practical and useful level. The concepts addressed here are not grandiose new schemes but new perspectives on issues and processes. Sometimes they contain something new, at others they tend to review, recall, and focus old and proven ideas of air power employment.

3. Informed comments are welcome and should be addressed to HQ USAF, XOXLD, Washington, DC 20330. Telephone calls should be directed to Lt Col Samuel, (202) 697-0465 or Autovon 227-0465.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SOVIET ARMY ECHELONMENT: EMPLOYMENT CONCEPTS AND TACTICAL OPTIONS

- The Soviets normally employ forces in echelons both in the offense and defense.
  - "Classical" second-echelon concept suggests:
    - Forces echeloned in depth.
    - Forces attacking in a series of waves.
- Understandable interest, therefore, in devising techniques to detect, isolate, and destroy WP second echelon forces.
  - But this concern should not lead to a rigidity in perspective.
  - To overemphasize the importance of the second echelon could result in NATO forces being unprepared for a different type of WP attack formation.
- In fact, a case can be made for the "single echelon option" when considering the nature of a WP attack in Central Europe.
  - Soviet practices during WWII revealed a variety of echelonment formations.
    - The choice of formation was determined by the particular battlefield situation.
  - WWII experience reveals that Russian commanders were inclined to attack in a single echelon under certain conditions:
    - At the start of a war or a particular campaign.
    - When the enemy had not prepared a defensive position in depth.
    - When the maximum blow possible was required.
    - When surprise was considered particularly advantageous.

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- Caveat: The employment of a first echelon formation was highly dependent on terrain conditions.
  - Fairly open and level terrain seemed to be a pre-requisite.
- The WWII experience suggests that there is no fixed Soviet doctrine for echelonment.
  - No rigid model which can be applied to determine the number of echelons that will be used in a specific situation.
  - Decision is based on the actual conditions of the particular operation.

- What would be the "actual conditions" of a Soviet offensive in Central Europe?
  - Soviet forces would have to attain their objectives very quickly for complete success.
  - A premium would be placed on achieving surprise.
  - There would be a concentration of effort in support of the main blow.
  - Simultaneous attacks upon the enemy throughout the entire depth of his deployment are to be expected.

- In short, the conditions of a Soviet offensive suggest that a single echelon formation is the most likely form of attack.
  - At least where the terrain provides them with this option.

- The assumption that the extended first echelon is most critical has obvious implications for tactical airpower.
  - It cannot be assumed that the primary responsibility of tactical air will be battlefield air interdiction against second echelon units.
  - It is more likely that the majority of our air resources will have to be allocated for close air support of troops defending against massed WP single echeloned forces.

INTRODUCTION

> The organizational structure (of Soviet military forces) permits Soviet leaders to utilize the standard, classical second-echelon concept, when practical, but this concept is inherently adaptable so as to conform with the situation at hand.*

According to the "classical second-echlon concept," Soviet offensive forces are echeloned in depth and attack in a series of waves. In appreciation of this concept, various studies have been initiated to determine how echeloned forces--particularly second echelon units--can be detected, isolated, and destroyed. These efforts are timely, of course. But perhaps we have overemphasized the importance of Soviet second echelon forces and failed to stress that the "concept is inherently adaptable so as to conform with the situation at hand." It is conceivable that the evolving definition of second echelon employment is becoming overly rigid. If so, we may find ourselves unprepared for the actual deployment of Soviet forces in an attack on Central Europe.

*Statement made by Lt Col Lynn Hansen, USAF, during a recent DOD seminar on Soviet manpower, manning, and mobilization. See page 21 of The Soviet Military District in Peace and War, General Electric Corporation, July 1979.

This study attempts to do three things. First, it outlines Soviet concepts for the tactical echelonment of forces. Second, it describes Soviet philosophy for the employment of second echelon forces in offensive operations. Finally, it examines the "inherent adaptability" of Soviet formations and explores what has been described as the "first echelon option." Hopefully, this approach will serve to both highlight the importance of the second echelon concept and provide a balanced perspective on Soviet echelonment philosophy.

CONCEPTS OF ECHELONMENT

To ensure the momentum of offensive combat missions and to provide for contingencies, Soviet attack formations are "echeloned," usually in the form of a first echelon, a second echelon, and a reserve. Soviet military writing declares that the purpose of deploying forces in more than one echelon is to maintain the momentum of the advance. If the enemy defenses are sufficiently strong to cause heavy casualties to those troops that first assault them, a new and completely fresh wave of attackers must be available to take over the first wave and thereby keep up the pressure on the enemy defenses.

ECHELONS AND RESERVES.

First Echelon. The first echelon (at any level) comprises the leading assault elements required for the first phase of the operation. The proportion of troops allocated to the first echelon will vary according to the strength and depth of the defenses and the frontage of attack, but it will be common for units and formations to attack with the greater part of their strength--about one-half to two-thirds of the force--deployed for the initial assault. The first echelon includes tank support and most of the artillery available.

Second Echelon. The second echelon has no US equivalent. It is a body of troops appointed for a specific task: to

take over from, and then complete the work of, the first echelon. Its primary use is to maintain the momentum of the attack, especially on the main axis of attack. In his initial attack order, the commander plans for second echelon commitment, assigns a tentative employment line, and designates artillery and other support. The second echelon is initially tasked to reach the same objectives as the first echelons, should this assistance be required. Modifications of planned employment can be made as the battle develops.

Third Echelon. There are in Soviet writings occasional references to a third echelon. Such a formation is used primarily for extremely large formations attacking a heavily defended enemy.

To a significant degree, however, the reference to a third echelon appears to be in the historical context of front and army level operations and in connection with the organization of rear services.

Reserves. In addition to the formation of first, second (and sometimes third) echelons, at the tactical level reserves may be formed. Unlike the echelon forces which are assigned specific missions, a reserve is a body of troops to be used ad hoc (i.e., according to the wishes of the commander). They are formed to be ready for unanticipated requirements.

At the tactical level, two types of reserves may be formed:

Combined Arms Reserve: In comparison to US practice, this group will be small--about one-ninth the size of the total force.

Special Reserves. Special prupose reserves may be formed for contingency use (e.g., anti-tank reserves, engineer reserves).

In some cases where two or three echelons are formed, a reserve, as such, may not be designated. The size of the reserve varies considerably, but it is normally relatively small, corresponding to a platoon at company level, a company at regiment, a battalion at division, or a regiment at army.

The reserve is considered the commander's contingency force, which he uses to replace destroyed units, to repel counter-attacks, to provide local security against airborne/heliborne and partisan operations, and to act as an exploitation force to influence the outcome of the operation.

LEVELS OF ECHELONNING

It should be emphasized that echelonning can be and is practiced at all levels in the military chain of command. In other words, if an army group attacks, it can arrange its

constituent armies in one, two, three or even more echelons. By the same token, the armies themselves can deploy their respective divisions in one or more echelons; the divisions, their regiments similarly; and this process continues down to and including the battalions. (NOTE: Some Soviet writings indicate that echelonment pertains down only through regimental level, with battalions fighting as a whole, in one echelon.)

As a rule of thumb, a second echelon will be one-third the size of the first echelon. Thus:

Element's First Echelon	Second Echelon
Battalion	Company
Regiment	Battalion
Division	Regiment
Army	1-2 Divisions
Front	1-2 Armies

In any given operation, the number of echelons does not have to be the same at each of the various levels in the chain of command. It often happened in World War II that a Soviet army group (<u>front</u>) attacked with its armies in one echelon, that the armies deployed some in one echelon, some in two echelons, while the divisions might have been in two echelons and their constituent regiments in one. In short, adjacent attack units may be echeloned to different degrees, based on their roles in main or secondary attacks.

ROLE OF SECOND ECHELON.

The primary purpose of the second echelon is to intensify efforts on the main axis (breakthrough) and exploit success (exploitation) at high rates to a great depth. The availability of a second echelon permits the rapid buildup of attack strength, the exploitation of maneuver opportunity, and the rapid transfer of effort to a new direction. Various employment options and possible related missions can be associated with second echelon forces:

- Intensify effort on the main axis.
  - Attack to seize the subsequent objective.
  - Attack a weakness developed in the enemy defenses.
  - Reinforce the first echelon.
  - Link up with an aerial assault force.
  - Exploit a nuclear strike.
- Change the direction of the effort.
  - Attack the flank of the enemy force.
  - Attack an enemy weakness.
  - Reinforce the force making a secondary attack.
  - Exploit a nuclear strike.
- Replace the first echelon force.
  - Assume the mission of the first echelon force.
  - Provide assets for part of the first echelon force.

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_ Destroy flanking or bypassed enemy forces.

Attack enemy strong point(s).

- Destroy enemy aerial assault force.

Attack the air head.

Participate in a meeting engagement with attacking enemy force.

Thus, although a second echelon is assigned a general mission in the initial attack order, it is basically a multipurpose formation, ready for rapid commitment.

TACTICAL EMPLOYMENT OF ECHELONS AND RESERVES.

The Soviet commander normally employs his forces in echelons both in the offense and defense. Each tactical echelon down to battalion determines from the situation the number of echelons required for a particular operation. Each echelon is then given a mission which will assist in accomplishing the overall unit mission.

NORMAL ECHELONMENT

In the offense, two echelons are normal. As a unit attacks in echelons, each with a preplanned maneuver and objective, the offense appears to the defender to be a series of attacking waves. One echelon, all subordinate units on line, may be used when the enemy is very weak, the area of operations wide, and nuclear weapons allocations are plentiful.

Two echelons are also normal in the defense. The Soviet commander defends in one echelon only when the front is extremely wide, insufficient forces are available, enemy attack is considered weak, or as the terrain dictates. Similarly, he defends in three echelons when the following conditions exist:

- Very narrow defense front
- Sufficient available forces
- Against a strong attacking force.

These echelons in defense appear to the attacker as a series of defensive belts in depth.

ECHELONMENT FOR BREAKTHROUGH ATTACK.

The breakthrough attack is designed to rupture enemy defenses and permit passage of exploitation forces. Two echelons of attack are normally employed during breakthrough operations. While missions assigned to the echelons may vary, the first echelon is usually the assault unit. It attempts to rupture and pass through enemy defenses. The second echelon is the follow-up element. It is used to reduce bypassed enemy units and to continue the momentum of the attack. This echelon exploits any breaches or penetrations achieved by the first echelon. In addition to

echelonment, each command level may retain a small reserve for contingencies. Once the breakthrough is accomplished, subsequent action involves the encirclement and destruction of enemy forces.

Second echelon maneuver units are 15-20kms from the FEBA when the assault is initiated. As the assault progresses, the second echelon slows down or speeds up, as required, to arrive in time either to exploit the success, or to reinforce the efforts of the first echelon.

Second echelon combat teams of the regiments (initially some 3kms behind the first echelon) enter combat at about the rear of the first defensive position. They probably reinforce first echelon efforts into the rear of the brigade sector, widening the initial break. Second echelon regiments with supporting units speed through the break in tactical columns. Their immediate task is to strike deep into the defensive sector to seek out and destroy the division's counterattack force in a meeting engagement. By the time the enemy's division's rear boundary has been reached, the break in the enemy's defense may be 10 to 20 kms wide. Second echelon Soviet divisions advance rapidly in tactical columns and spearhead into the rear area of the enemy's corps. These divisions expand the break and advance at high speed to engage and destroy the enemy corps reserve

in meeting engagements. As these divisions assume first echelon roles, the army commander reallocates artillery and support elements to ensure that adequate resources are available to the leading units.

As each subsequent echelon becomes the leading element in the operation,the preceding echelon reorganizes. They then conduct supporting operations such as assaults on flanking positions or mopping up enemy subunits. These units may also establish a reserve or new second echelon to support operations on the main axis.

DISTANCES BETWEEN ECHELONS.

Distances between first and second attacking echelons are approximately:

- Between divisional echelons (i.e., leading and following regiments). - 15-30 km
- Between regimental echelons (i.e., leading and following battalions). - 5-15 km
- Between battalion echelons (i.e., leading and following companies). - 1-3 km

ASSIGNMENT OF OBJECTIVES.

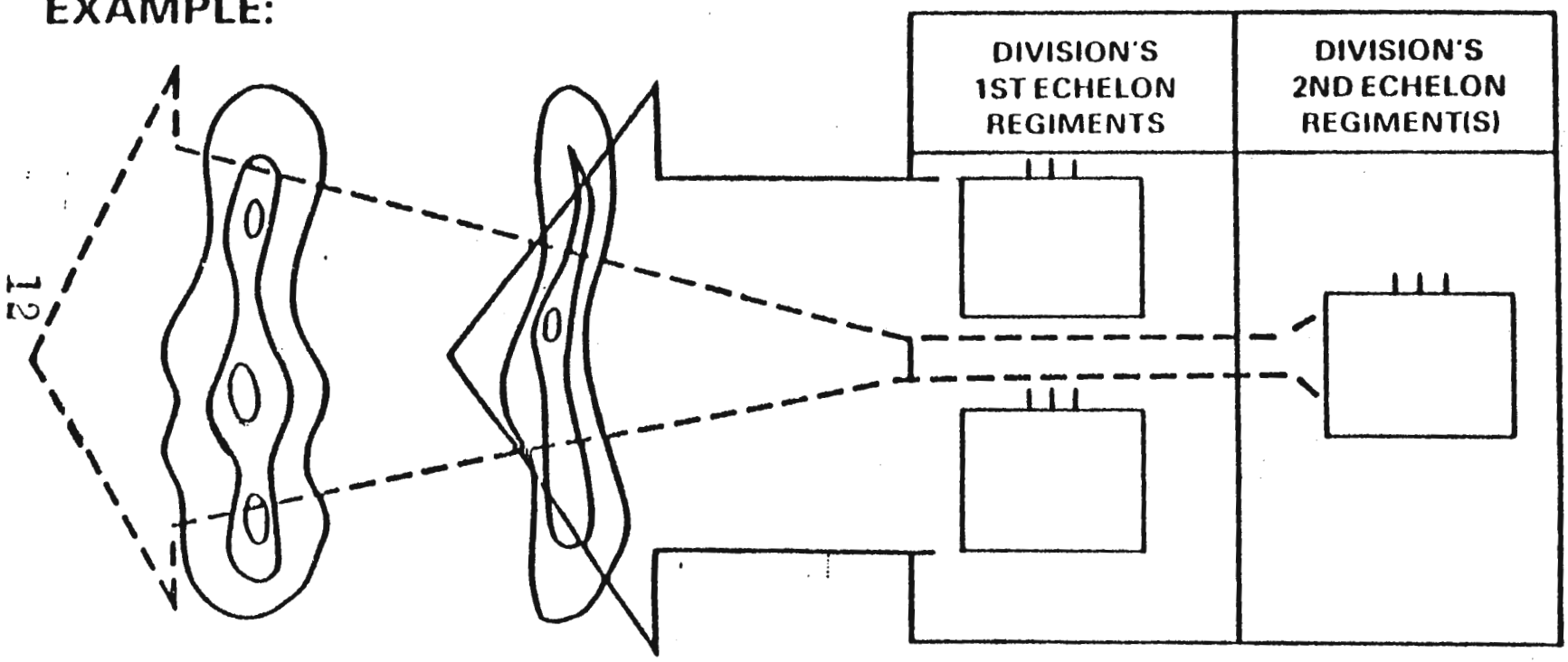
An element's first echelon is expected to attain that element's immediate objective; its second echelon is expected to attain the element's subsequent objective (see Figure 1). This rule implies that the second echelon would be committed to continue the attack after the immediate objective has been consolidated.

ASSIGNMENT OF OBJECTIVES TO ECHELONS

GENERAL RULE

AN ELEMENT'S FIRST ECHELON ATTAINS THAT ELEMENT'S IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVE
THE ELEMENT'S 2ND ECHELON ATTAINS ITS SUBSEQUENT OBJECTIVE

EXAMPLE:



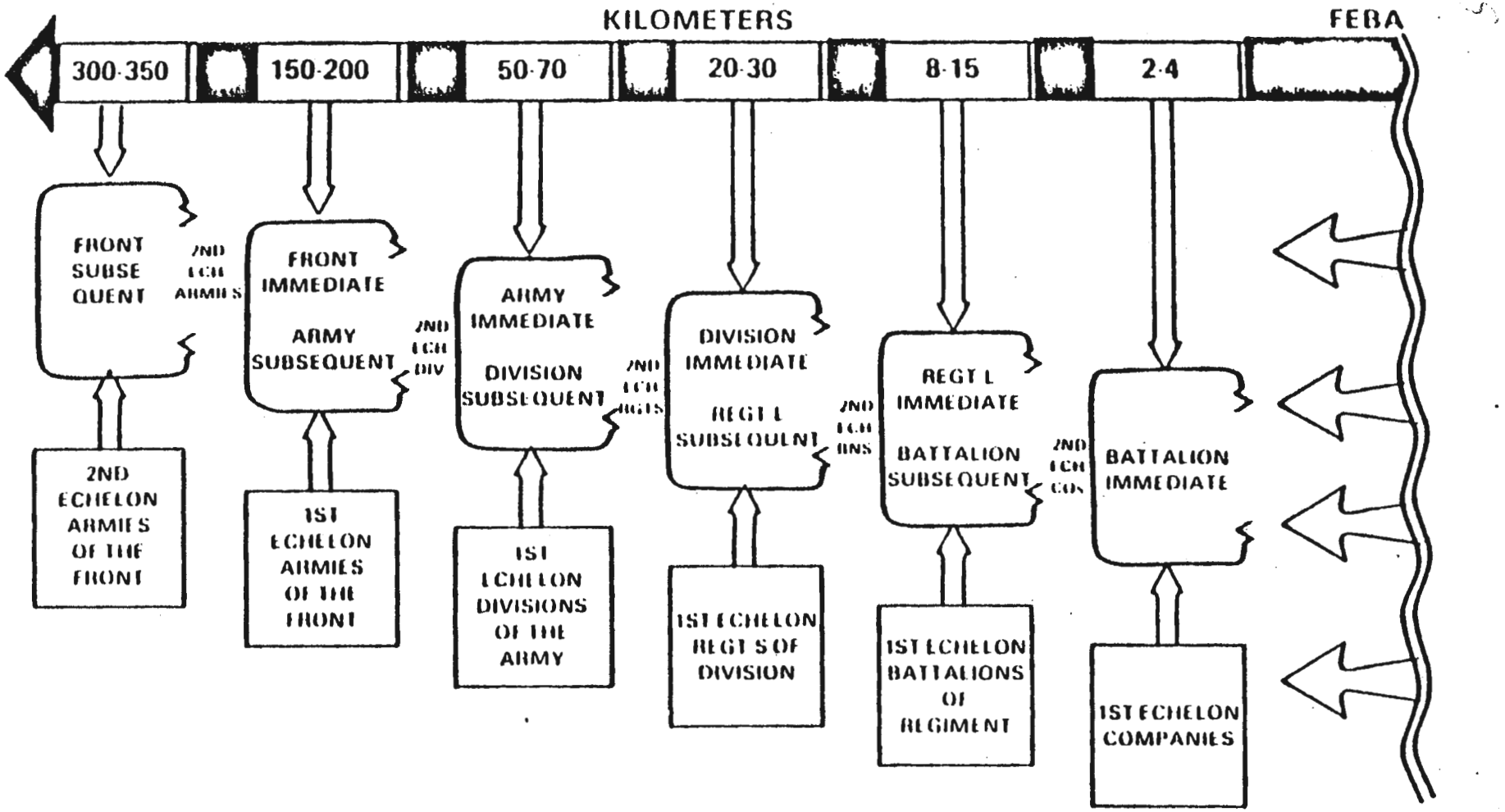
A second echelon might be committed by insertion into the line between units and formations, by a flank movement, or by replacing a first echelon unit through a passage of lines. The last is the least-preferred method.

Figure 2 develops the "general rule" to show the expected attainment of objectives from battalion immediate objectives through a Front subsequent objective; the depth into enemy territory beyond the initial FEBA is shown for each objective. This depiction has the merit of a sharply defined outline; it also risks being dismissed as too neat and orderly for the real world. It is not prescribed that each echelon will fight and execute in this exact fashion, and there may be many exceptions to the general rule. Nevertheless, the diagram presents the essential Soviet concept of how offensive actions at the tactical and operational levels should be carried into the enemy depths. Figure 3 through 6 show the spatial dispositions of first and second echelons and the descriptors and depths of objectives at the levels of Front, Army, division, and regiment. These diagrams pertain to the attack of a defending enemy, either in quick or deliberate attacks, or a mix of both types as the offensive progresses.

TIME FACTORS

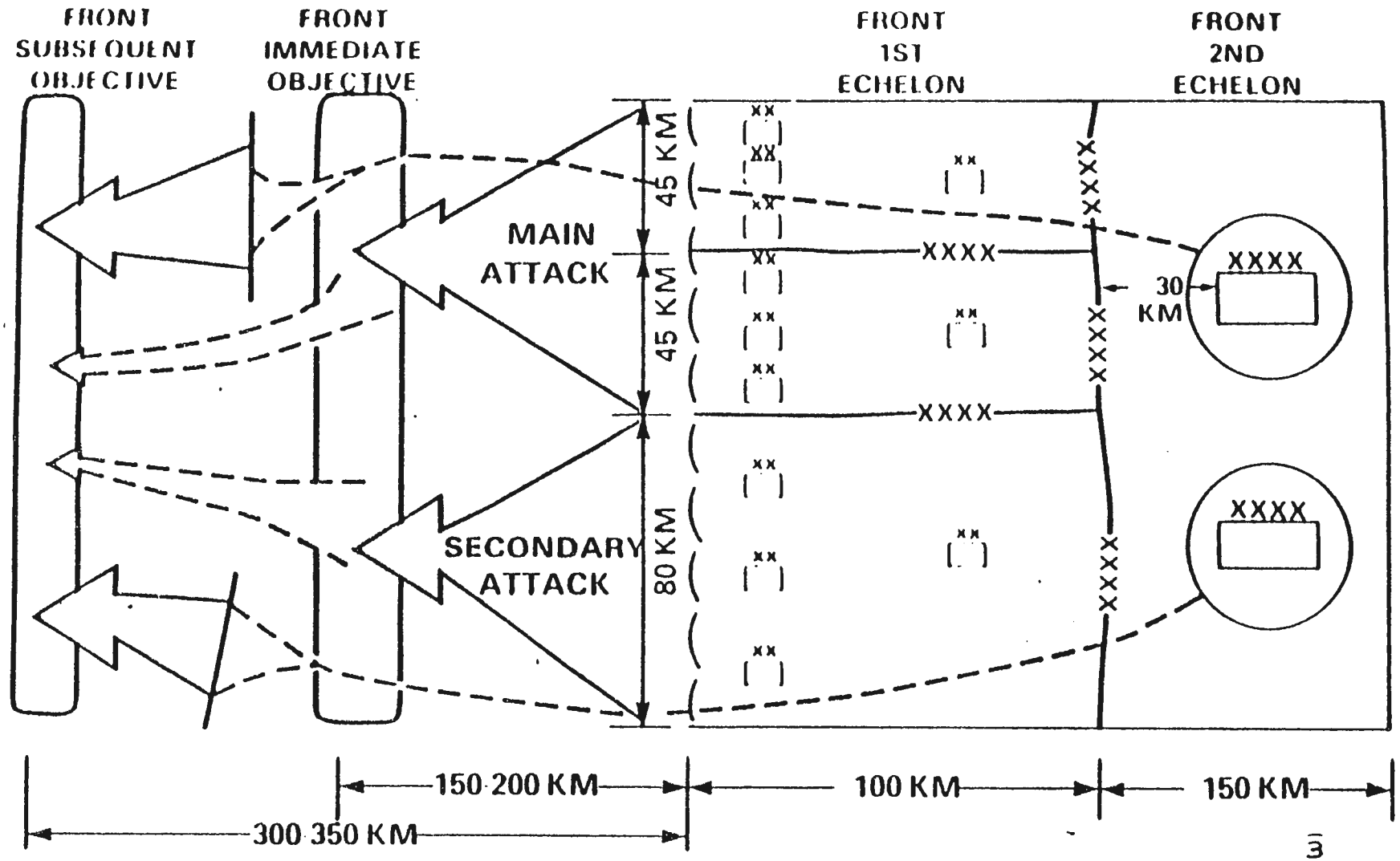
Figure 7 recapitulates the previous diagrams and additionally indicates the estimated time factors. Taken

ASSIGNMENT OF OBJECTIVES

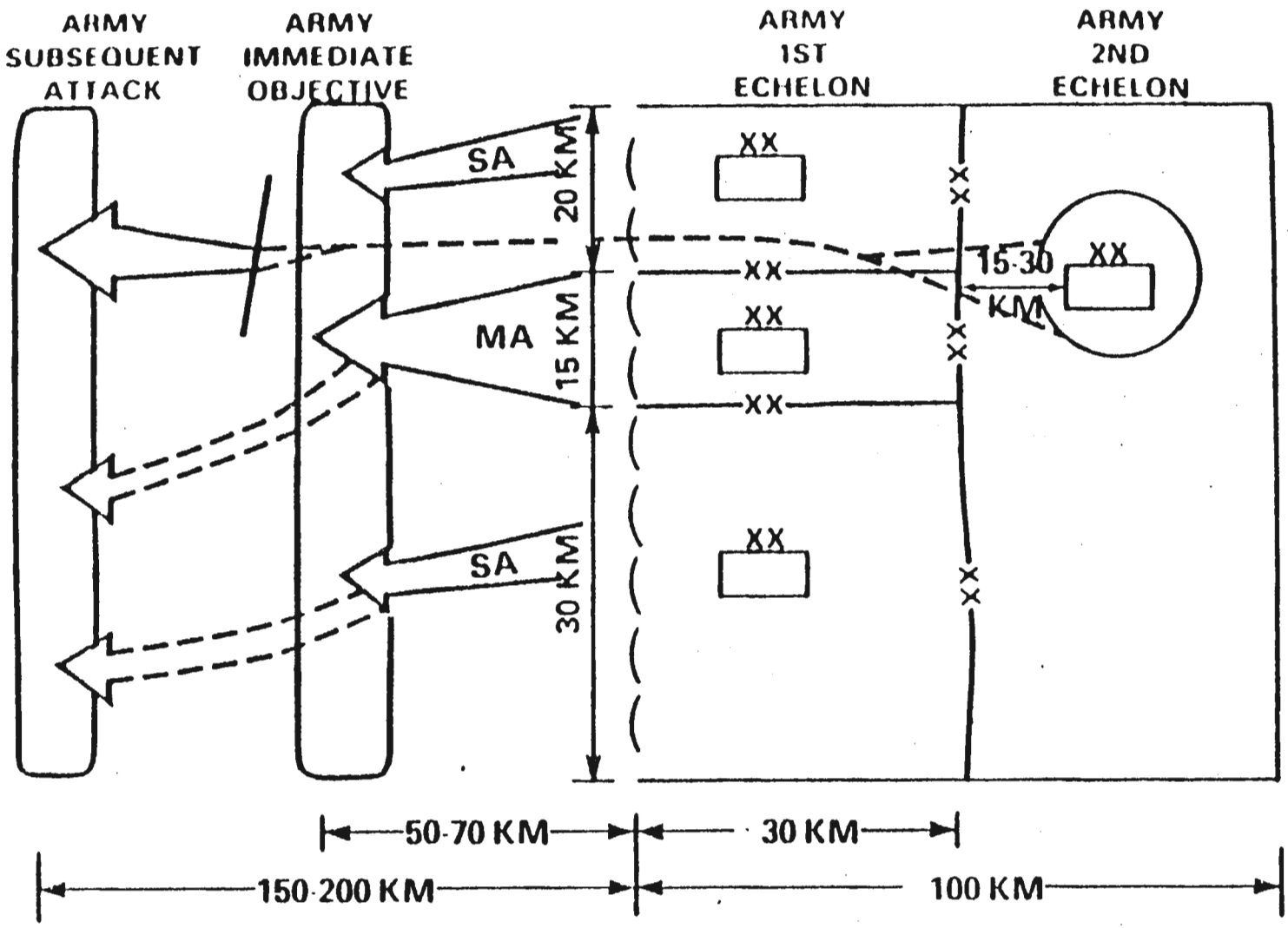


WITH LIGHT RESISTANCE, A UNIT COULD MAKE FURTHER PROGRESS IN DEPTH THAN INDICATED ABOVE
CONVERSELY, AND MORE REALISTICALLY, IT MAY BE NECESSARY FOR A UNIT TO COMMIT ITS
2ND ECHELON TO ATTAIN ITS IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVE

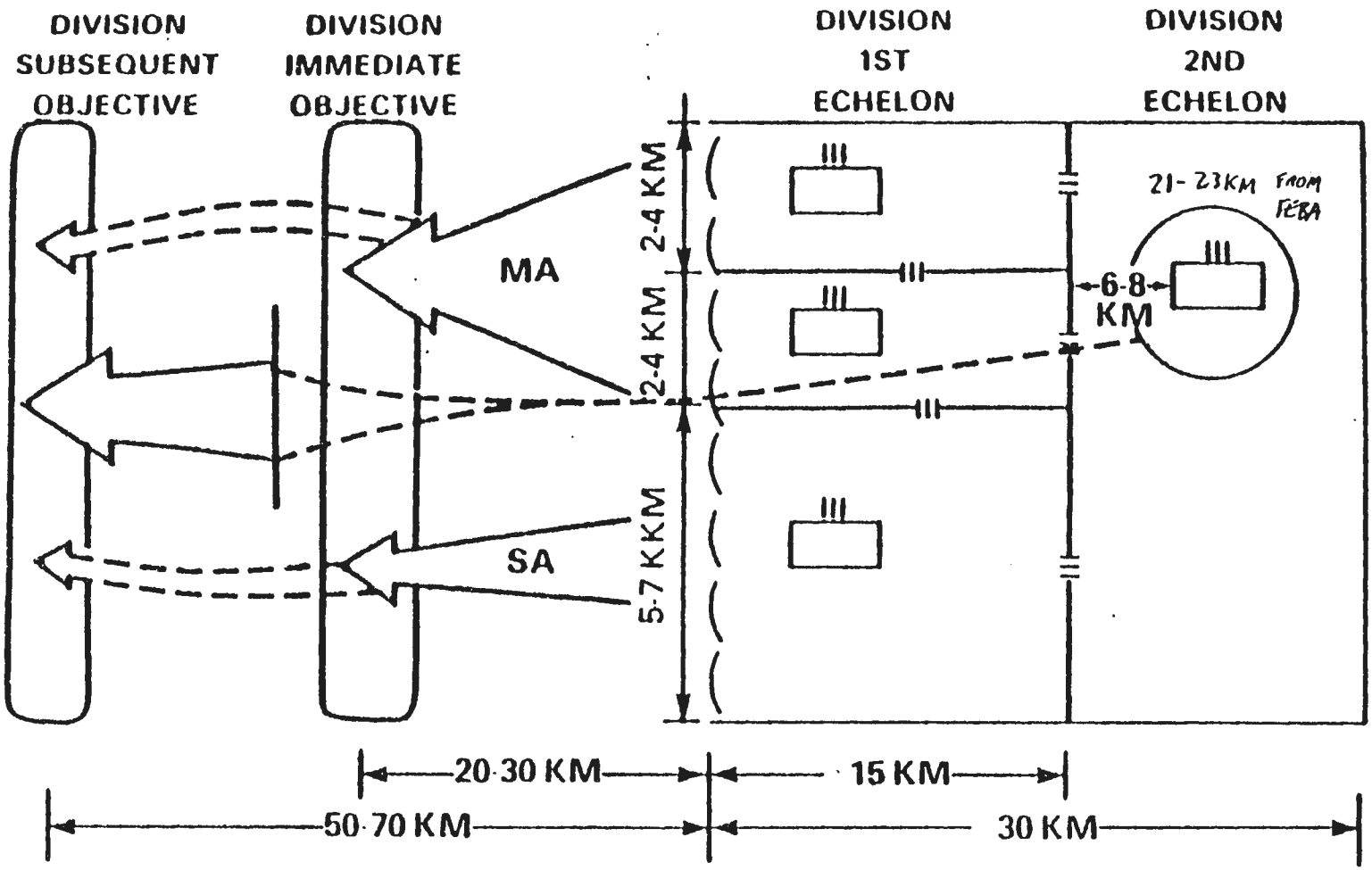
TYPE FRONT DEPLOYMENT FOR OFFENSIVE OPERATION



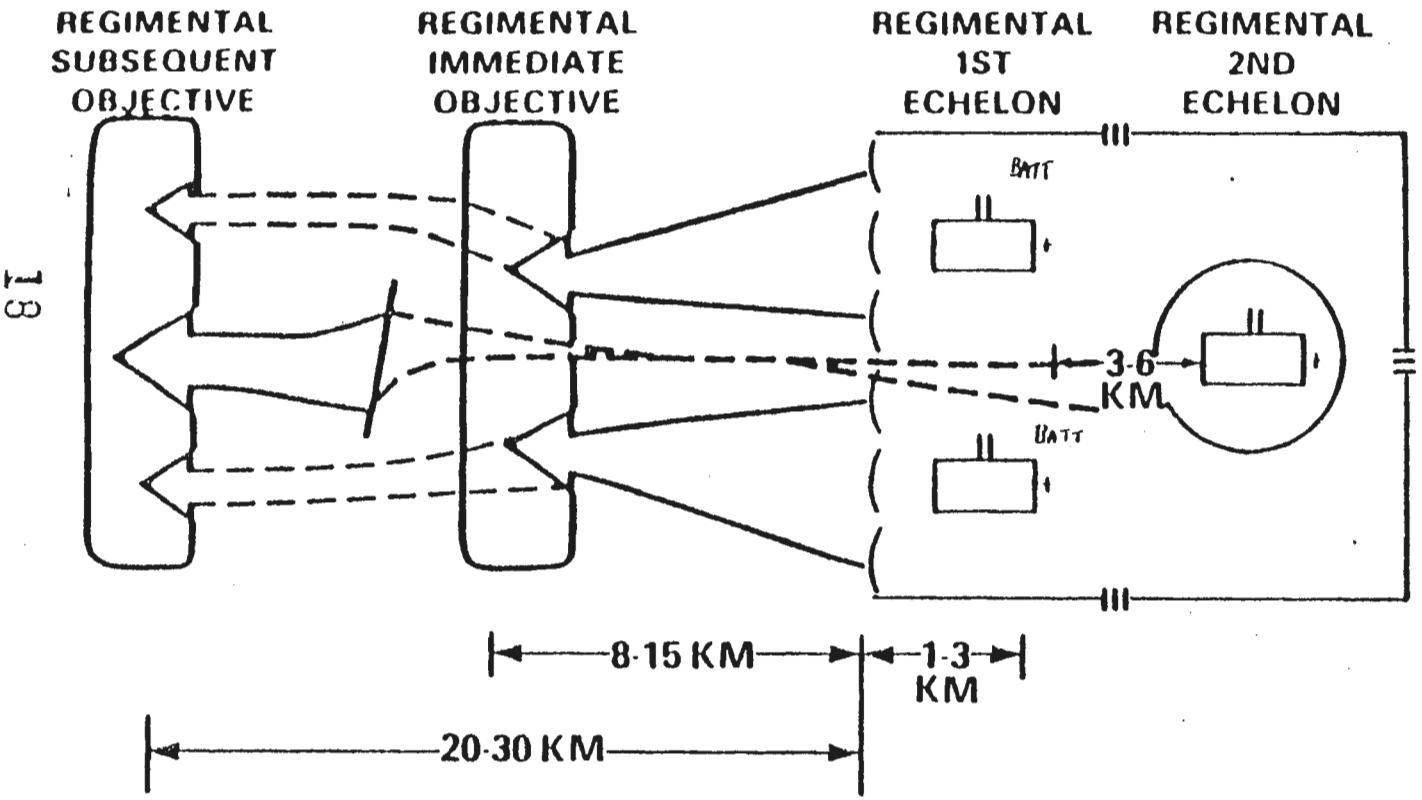
TYPE ARMY DEPLOYMENT FOR OFFENSIVE OPERATION



TYPE DIVISION DEPLOYMENT FOR ATTACK OF A DEFENDING ENEMY



TYPE REGIMENTAL DEPLOYMENT FOR ATTACK OF A DEFENDING ENEMY



ECHELONS & OBJECTIVES: TIMES OF COMMITMENT AND ATTAINMENT *

	BN 1st ECHELON (1st ECH CO's OF 1st ECH BNS)	REGTL 1st ECHELON (2nd ECH CO's OF 1st ECH BNS)	DIV 1st ECHELON (2nd ECH BNS OF 1st ECH REGTS)	ARMY 1st ECHELON (2nd ECH REGTS OF DIVS)	FRONT 1st ECHELON (2nd ECH DIV OF ARMIES)	FRONT 2nd ECHELON (2nd ECH ARMIES OF FRONT)
OBJECTIVE	BN IMMEDIATE	REGTL IMMEDIATE (BN SUBSEQ)	DIVISION IMMEDIATE (REGTL SUBSEQ)	ARMY IMMEDIATE (DIV SUBSEQ)	FRONT IMMEDIATE (ARMY SUBSEQ)	FRONT SUBSEQUENT
DEPTH OF OBJECTIVE FROM FEBA (KM)	2 4	8 15	20 30	50 70	150 200	300 350
EXPECTED LOCATION INTO ENEMY DEPTH WHEN COMMITTED (KM)	FEBA	2 4	8 15	20 30	50 70	150 200
EXPECTED TIME OF COMMITMENT	H HOUR	H + 4	H + 10	H + 18	DAY 2 3	DAY 3 4
EXPECTED TIME ATTAINMENT OF OBJECTIVE	H + 2	H + 7	H + 15	DAY 2 3	DAY 3 4	DAY 7 +

* ALL SITUATION DEPENDENT

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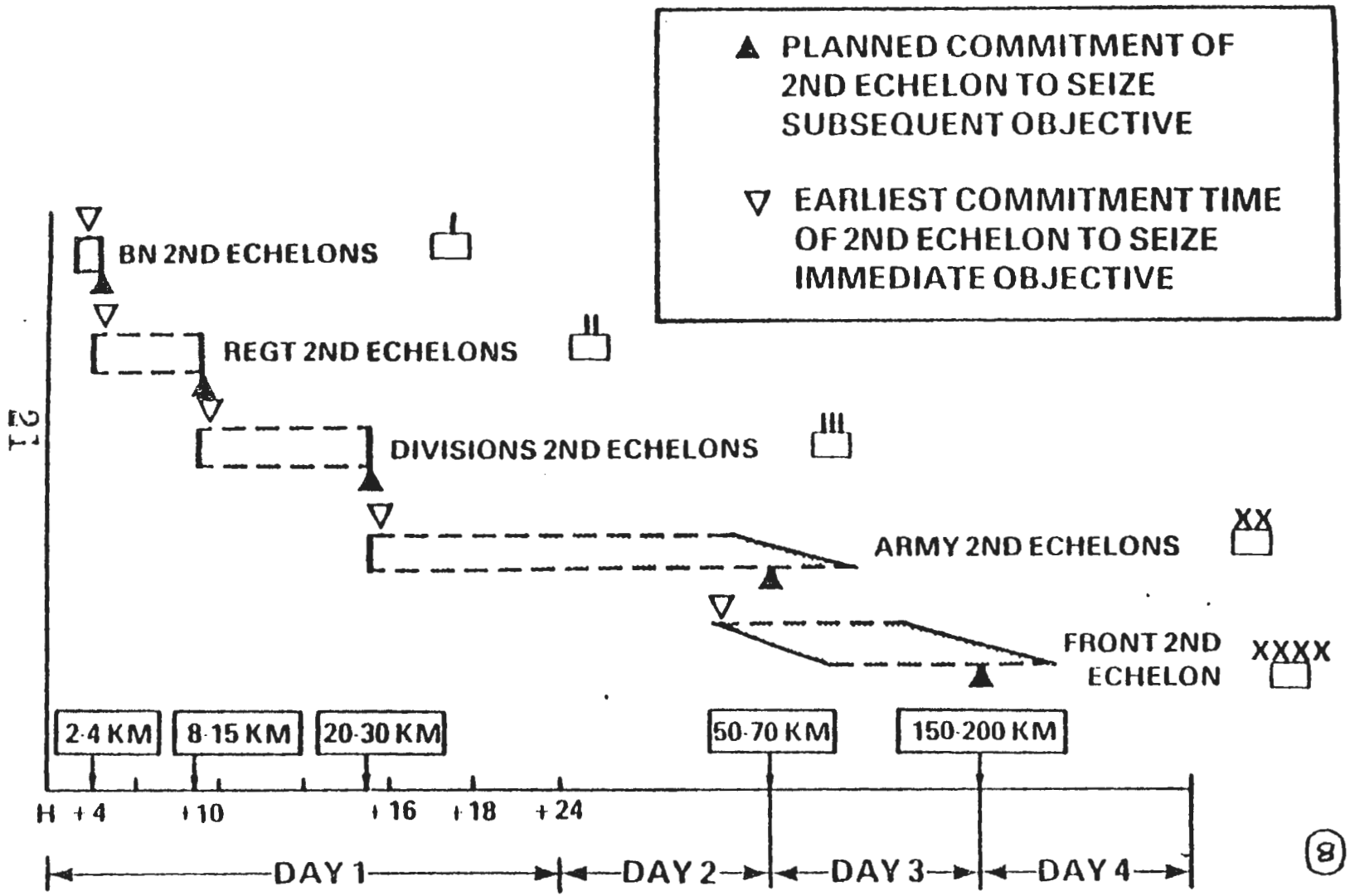
with the previous arrays, this tabular information provides, from the point of view of the defender, an idea of "when, where, and how many" Soviets may be attacking at a given time. This representation is again based on the neat and orderly concept of the general rule of echelonment and objectives.

Figure 8 emphasizes possible time-factor variants in commitment of echelons. The "earliest time of commitment" is developed on the premise that a second echelon may have to assist the first echelon in attaining an immediate objective; therefore, it can be committed against the defender at a time earlier than in the ideal norms. (This, from the attacker's viewpoint, would be the worst case; conversely, in the "best case," a first echelon facing weak resistance might be able to continue to that element's subsequent objective without commitment of the second echelon.) Such variants obviously could be applied to the full range of echelons and objectives shown first at Figure 1.

ECHELON EMPLOYMENT: THE SINGLE-ECHELON OPTION

As indicated by the previous discussion, the deployment of a second echelon is considered normal in Soviet offensive (and defensive) operations. For this reason, the interest shown in detecting, isolating, and destroying Soviet second

CONTINGENCY COMMITMENT 2ND ECHELON FORCES MAY BE COMMITTED EARLIER THAN PLANNED IF NECESSARY TO ASSIST IN ATTAINING THE ELEMENT'S IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVE.



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echelon units is understandable. But this interest should not lead to a rigidity in perspective; the importance of the second echelon should not be over-emphasized. To do so may result in NATO forces being unprepared for a different type of formation in a Warsaw Pact attack in Central Europe.

P. H. Vigor, Head of the Soviet Research Centre at Sandhurst, suggests in an article, "Soviet Army Wave Attack Philosophy: The Single Echelon Option," that this may indeed be the case. Much of the remaining discussion is based on this very thought-provoking article.

SOVIET ECHELONMENT DURING WW II.

Vigor's case for the single echelon option is based, in part, on Soviet practices during the Second World War. He emphasizes that during WW II the Soviet Army employed a variety of echelonment formations, with each formation determined by the particular situation (e.g., nature of the combat mission, availability of men and materiel, nature of the enemy defense, and terrain conditions). As a general rule, he says:

> Single-echelon deployment was employed primarily in attacking a defense which was poorly developed in depth, or on a secondary axis.
>
> A two-echelon deployment of the combat formation was most widespread. It permitted each troop echelon a command opportunity to rapidly shift efforts in the course of combat from one axis to another, successfully replace counterattacks, etc.

> A three-echelon deployment of the combat formation was employed usually in those instances where units were attacking across a very narrow front, as well as when it was necessary to exploit a success toward one or both flanks or reliably support the exposed flank of a strike grouping in the course of an attack.

Deploying troops in more than one echelon was found to be particularly necessary when the enemy had prepared a defensive position in depth. On the Eastern Front, German defensive positions in depth were typically divided into three lines of permanent fortification. The Russians found that a double-echelon formation was the best way to deal with this sort of defensive position. The first echelon was expected to pierce the first of the enemy's defensive lines and to penetrate into the depths of the enemy position. At this juncture, the Soviet formation's mobile group would be committed to the battle, would pour into the break, exploit the success of the first echelon and, at the same time, help that echelon to continue its advance. Assuming that all went well, the first echelon was expected to continue the advance until it reached the second line of the enemy's prepared position, by which time it was likely to be exhausted.

At that moment, therefore, the Soviet second echelon took over; and it was this second echelon, as yet uncommitted to battle, which was expected to pierce the

second line and to fight its way forward to the third line. If the battle was expected to be particularly tough, and casualties heavy, the Soviet commander might deploy his attacking formations in as many as three echelons in order to have a completely fresh echelon with which to assault the third defensive position.

Although the double-echelon deployment was standard practice where the enemy defenses were heavily fortified and deeply echeloned, the Soviet commanders were often willing to attack in only a single echelon when circumstances were different. This was because a deployment in just one echelon allowed the maximum weight of men and firepower to be brought to bear on the enemy defenses at a given moment of time. There were a number of occasions during the war when the need for this outweighed the need for having fresh forces to maintain the pressure on the enemy.

According to Vigor, Soviet practice suggests strongly that Russian commanders are inclined to attack in a single echelon at the start of a war or a particular campaign. Actually, when the Soviet forces began their first counter offensives during WW II, battalions were most frequently deployed in single echelon. Up to that time, the divisions, regiments, and battalions had always attacked in two echelons. But the two-echelon deployment was considered

inappropriate when German defenses were no longer deeply echelonned lines of well-prepared fortifications, but rather scattered fortified strong points. Furthermore, the Soviet forces at the time were not numerically superior to the Germans in men and equipment; on the contrary, they were usually inferior. Consequently, an unfavorable state of affairs would have been made much worse by the deployment into two echelons. In second echelon deployment, a significant portion of the formation was unable to play any part in the first stage of the attack.

To remedy this, the Red Army adopted the single-echelon formation as the standard mode of deployment for the attack, and that order remained until circumstances changed later in the war. By then, the Germans had gone over to defense base on deeply echelonned, well prepared lines of permanent fortifications. Secondly, the numbers of Soviet men and weapons had by then increased so much that the Red Army could afford to have echelons and still have numerical superiority over the Germans at the critical point of the first line of defenses. The history of the war on the Eastern Front also makes it clear that, where the maximum blow possible was required and subsequent supplementary effort was a secondary consideration, a one-echelon formation was decided upon in those cases where topography

3)

permitted. This was particularly true when surprise was considered possible. When, however, surprise was not considered possible, or when there was clearly a requirement for a second echelon as a means of breaking through an enemy's second line of defense, then a two-echelon formation was selected.

The campaign in Manchuria in 1945 is an excellent example of Soviet willingness to attack in a single echelon at the start of a particular battle. In fact, this campaign is the only example available of an attack launched by the Soviet armed forces at the start of a war which had begun on their initiative; when the forces themselves were in good shape and had ample equipment; and when, moreover, the Russians expected to achieve surprise. Under such circumstances, a one-echelon formation was chosen for two of the three fronts (the two-echelon formation adopted by the Third Front, furthermore, according to Vigor, was the result of special circumstances).

Units subordinate to the fronts in Manchuria were not uniform in the deployment of the corps and divisions. Thus, even where the front deployed all its armies in one echelon, many of armies deployed their corps (and most of the corps deployed their divisions) in two echelons. This was because the commanders at those levels were confronted with tasks

which consisted of penetrating the Japanese first line of defense and then going on and attacking the second. In other words, they were faced with the classic requirement for a two-echelon formation.

SOVIET ECHELONMENT FOR ATTACK IN CENTRAL EUROPE.

As Vigor's discussion makes clear, there is no fixed Soviet doctrine which can be applied to determine the number of echelons that a Soviet commander would use in all situations. A military commander's decision regarding the echelonment of his forces must be based on the actual conditions of the particular operations he is engaged in. Soviet writers emphasize the need to study the actual circumstances before making such a decision and condemn those who suggest a fixed theory of echelonning which applies irrespective of the situation.

Vigor points out, therefore, that it is necessary to consider the nature of a Soviet offensive in Central Europe before some conclusions regarding the echelonment of forces is made. Several factors stand out. The Soviets' only hope of attaining their objectives in a war in Central Europe is to move extremely fast; and it is well known that the Soviet Armed Forces are trained and equipped to do this as a first requirement. It also follows that the USSR has a great need to achieve surprise in these circumstances because its speed

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of advance would be very much greater than if NATO were to be properly alerted. The concentration of effort in support of the main blow is another important factor as is the need for simultaneous attacks upon the enemy throughout the entire depth of his deployment and upon objectives deep in his rear. The correct choice of direction for the main blow is another important factor, although the Soviets assert that, in the nuclear age, the main blow may have to be delivered along two or three axes rather than along one as was formerly the case. The existence of nuclear weapons has made it far too dangerous to mass men and equipment along one axis of main advance. The Soviet concept of the offensive now envisages the advance of troops along two or three sub-axes, these being not necessarily spread across the whole width of the attack sector.

Viewed in light of Soviet deployment strategy during WW II, the situation in Central Europe suggests that the Soviets might select a single echelon formation for the attack. This is particularly true if the objective is to achieve surprise over the NATO defenders. By gaining surprise, the Soviets can deploy into one echelon for delivering the maximum initial weight of blow. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that, at least at the army level, a one-echelon formation is what the Russians would decide upon.

On the other hand, the nature of the terrain in certain sectors of the NATO front makes it unlikely that all the Soviet armies would deploy all of their divisions in a one-echelon formation. Furthermore, the likely tasks confronting Soviet forces suggests that, at regimental and battalion level, it is most unlikely that anything other than a two-echelon formation would be adopted.

Finally, as suggested in a RAND study on The Soviet Style in War, the distinction between first and second echelons would be considerably blurred in any Soviet attack in Central Europe. According to RAND, the sequence of operations may be such that "massing" and "building up" is applied "without clearly indicating the conditions which make the one or the other optional." This is due in part to the emphasis on speed and the need to introduce the second echelon into battle "in the shortest possible time." Under these conditions, a precise distinction between first and second echelons may be purely academic.

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IMPLICATIONS FOR TACTICAL AIRPOWER

In summary, it can be argued that, as important as it is for NATO forces to be able to target and destroy Soviet second echelon forces in the Central European conflict scenario, it is the "extended" first echelon that is critical. (Extended first echelon suggests a Soviet formation in which second echelon forces are closely aligned with main unit forces in objective, time of commitment, and depth of attack). This has obvious implications for our targeting philosophy--we can not assume that the primary responsibility of tactical airpower will be to delay and disrupt second echelon forces that are separated in time and space from the main attack units. Indeed, with the Soviet emphasis on massed single echeloned forces striking quickly to penetrate NATO defenses and achieve breakthrough, it appears that the majority of our air resources will of necessity be devoted to close air support operations rather than Battlefield Air Interdiction.

The fear is that, in stressing the unique problems involved in attacking second echelon forces, we may have become somewhat preoccupied with our need to counter this threat. What is needed is a more balanced perspective that recognizes that Soviet echelonment doctrine is extremely flexible and is adjusted to the particular circumstances

encountered on the battlefield. Because in the Central European conflict scenario we can expect a rapid advance of massed troops across a broad front, our contingency planning should provide for an emphasis on CAS in the critical stages of the conflict, with BAI, of necessity, relegated to a secondary position.

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