

CLAUSEWITZ OR KHAN?

THE MONGOL METHOD OF MILITARY SUCCESS

by

STEVEN D. STINEMETZ

Kremlinologists, being a contentious breed, seldom agree on anything. One point that garners their general consent, however, is the symbiosis of civil society and military power in the Soviet Union. Indeed, many of the most curious features of the Soviet armed forces mirror idiosyncracies of Soviet social structure or Russian national character. Take, for example, an observation from David Holloway's most recent book, *The Soviet Union and the Arms Race*:

Soviet military power is not something separate from the Soviet state, but forms part and parcel of it. Soviet military power must be understood not only in terms of the international environment, but also in the context of domestic politics, for its domestic roots—ideological, political, social and economic—are very strong.¹

In many ways, these internal forces come to their full fruition in the network of mutually interacting beliefs and customs normally gathered under the rubric "culture." Like many other armies past and present, the Soviet military cannot be analyzed aside from the web of social values that holds it together.

In this respect, the Soviet Army resembles its distant antecedent, the Mongol horde. Historically, Muscovite forces imitated Mongol methods of making war. Even now, the Soviet armed forces display striking similarities to their Mongolian predecessors.

They specialize in fast, mobile operations, employ deception on an immense scale, and enforce an unusually rigid tactical doctrine in order to guarantee strategic flexibility. They subordinate an entire society for their own ends, and they draw enormous strength from programs of social indoctrination. Cultural causation runs like a red thread throughout all these tendencies, commonly misinterpreted as evidence of archaic or inferior military art.

Examining the peculiarities of 13th-century armies for insights into those of the 20th century might seem incongruous to some. But the Mongols long ago mastered tactical and strategic techniques of pressing contemporary significance. This article investigates the cultural background of their solutions. By analyzing seemingly esoteric features of yesterday's Mongol armies, one might learn lessons of present-day utility—chief among which could be a new perspective on the cultural "quirks" of today's Soviet military forces.

Since the publication of Liddell Hart's *The Great Captains* in 1927, the Mongols have attracted the attention of military scholars worldwide. Initially, proponents of armored warfare like Liddell Hart cited the Mongols as evidence for the potential efficacy of the tank. Later, military practitioners such as Rommel and Patton studied them for insights into mobile operations. The interest of these figures in the Mongols would

have come as no surprise to Marco Polo, who observed the Mongols firsthand:

No people upon earth can surpass them in fortitude under difficulties, nor show greater patience under wants of every kind. They are most obedient to their chiefs, and are maintained at small expense. From these qualities, so essential to the formation of soldiers, it is [evident] that they are fitted to subdue the world, as in fact they have done in regard to a considerable portion of it.²

How did a numerically insignificant tribe of technologically backward herdsman come to merit such high praise? The answer, it seems, lies in the Mongol Khans' exploitation of the cultural conditioning of nomadic life. The resultant military methodology guaranteed the dominance of the Mongols and their heirs over most of Eurasia for centuries.

The Mongol method of making war stemmed from a complex of mutually reinforcing military practices and nomadic traditions developed among the Mongols from the reign of Chingis (or Genghis) Khan to that of Kublai Khan, 1206-1294. This synergic relationship permitted these "pirates of the land" to secure control of the important caravan routes emanating from China to Russia, Persia, and India. Almost incidentally, the Mongols sequestered the services of the peoples along the way. While the Mongol Empire lasted substantially past 1294, it cannot be said that the Mongols still ruled. By the mid-14th century most ethnic Mongols had been assimilated into local elites by linguistic adaptation, religious conversion, and regional intermarriage. Thereafter, their descendants governed as Tatars, Il-Khans, or Yuan dynasts, still employing many features of the Mongol approach to war.

Chingis Khan left a definitive imprint on Mongol military craft. His proclamation as Khan of Khans in 1206 united the nomadic tribes between Lake Baikal and the Altai Mountains. For the first time, a single individual administered the loose conglomeration of herders north of the Great Wall of China. While the tribes possessed related but dissimilar customs, Chingis rapidly fused the

varied traditions into a coherent whole, devoted largely to perpetuating his army. This adoption of tribal law for military usage resulted in what one scholar has termed a *Militärstaat*, or military state. Codified later in the Great Yasa, the discipline of the herd, the strategy of the hunt, and the organization of the raid served as the basis for the acquisition and operation of the Mongol Empire.³

THE MONGOL MILITARY STATE

The benefits of such a culturally reinforced military state cannot be overstated. It enabled the Khans to mobilize experienced armies at small expense. The Great Yasa converted the Mongol way of life into an unrelenting program of military training and political indoctrination. From childhood, all Mongols were taught skills suitable for campaigning and were conditioned psychologically for combat. Every Mongol was a soldier, every child a skirmisher, every woman a forager. Disobedience or cowardice were taboos strictly regulated by families themselves, who accompanied the troops and made Mongol armies the ultimate focus of loyalty. Significantly, the enforced truce among the Mongol tribes deprived them of a major source of revenue, internecine conflict. Tribal leaders were forced to look to external conquest for profit. They clamored for campaigns and supplied the wherewithal to win them. Mongol war bands required only minimal organization to become an army.

A critical need for manpower in their internal wars forced the nomadic tribes north

Steven D. Stinemetz is currently working toward the Ph.D. degree in modern Russian history at Harvard University, where he earned both his bachelor's and master's degrees, concentrating on modern European history, the Russian language, and Soviet affairs. He has taught history at Harvard and has contributed reviews to *Military Review* and *UCLA Historical Review*. He is also a contributor to *The International Military Encyclopedia*, forthcoming.



of the Altai Mountains to value every horseman. When Chingis unified the Naimans, Keraits, Merkits, Tatars, and Mongols to war against the numerically superior Chinese, each individual herdsman counted even more than before. Chingis subjected all males to conscription. Typically, major wars required the call-up of three in every ten men for service lasting about five years.⁴ Since several wars might be conducted at the same time, the necessity of mobilizing every possible soldier continued to plague the Mongols. At its highest, the number of Mongols in an army never exceeded 150,000. And as the empire expanded, most of the Mongols sent on campaign dispersed in various occupation duties. Indeed, only 7000 Mongols accompanied Batu's infamous invasion of Russia in 1243. In response to this perennial shortage of manpower, the Mongols levied drafts on local nomadic tribes to fill out their armies. Consequently, Mongol forces tended to swell in size as they picked up men in their military expeditions. Nevertheless, supplying the requisite personnel for their far-reaching operations remained a critical problem for the Khans. Only by tapping the traditions of Mongol culture could they stretch their limited resources enough to build an empire.

The basis of Mongol military organization lay in its steppe hunting heritage. The Mongols modeled their armies on the hunting band, with its centralized command and voluntary submission to stringent discipline. Their strategy and tactics derived from principles of the hunt, while their mobility relied on a familiarity with the horse, essential to steppe survival. John of Plano Carpini, another Western observer of the Mongols, alluded to the hunting background of the Mongol army when he said of Chingis, "He became a mighty hunter before the lord, and learned to steal and take men for prey."⁵

In fact, Chingis institutionalized the hunt in the Great Yasa, the Mongol code of laws:

Whoever has to fight shall be trained in arms. He should be familiar with the chase in order to know how the hunters must approach the game, how they must keep

order, and how they have to encircle the game, depending on the number of hunters. When they start on a chase let them first send scouts who shall obtain information. When [the Mongols] are unoccupied with war, they shall devote themselves to the chase and accustom their army to that. The objective is not so much the chase itself as the training of warriors who should acquire strength and become familiar with drawing the bow and other exercises.⁶

The command structure of the Mongol army mirrored this hunting tradition. The Mongols' notions of authority and hierarchy stemmed from the example of the hunt leader. The tribal gathering which in 1206 proclaimed the supremacy of Chingis Khan swore loyalty to him both in war and in the hunt. At first, the nomadic tribes attached themselves to the Khan as an emergency measure, as submission to the chief of the chase. Later, Chingis and his successors contrived to continue the occasional obligations of their Gobi alliance. Accordingly, each Khan required a formal election by the tribes before he could exercise any power. The resulting illusion of selection by merit *cum* heredity lay at the foundation of the Khan's suzerainty.

Centralized command by a charismatic Khan and the rigid discipline thus engendered preserved the unity vital to the widespread Mongol armies. The decree of the Khan was the word of the hunt leader, to be obeyed without hesitation lest the game escape. The aura of immense power and favored birth hung over the Khan. The divinity of Chingis Khan was embodied in all his heirs. Mongol discipline reflected the coordination of the chase, the total subordination of the individual to the collective goal. Their voluntary submission in extraordinary circumstances became a permanent feature of the empire. In any case, the austere nomadic life prepared them for the worst contingencies. Almost all firsthand accounts speak of the remarkable obedience of the Mongol rank and file: "In short, whatever the Emperor and the chiefs desire, and however much they desire, that they receive

from their subjects' property; and their persons they dispose of in all respects in like manner."⁷

The Mongols retained the customary decimal organization of the steppe as the structure of their forces. Like many pre-modern armies, they grouped their men by tens, hundreds, and thousands. A contemporary of the Mongols observed:

Chingis Khan ordained that the army should be organized in such a way that over ten men should be set one man and he is what we call a captain of ten; over ten of these should be placed a captain of a hundred; at the head of ten captains of a hundred is placed a soldier known as a captain of a thousand, and over ten captains of a thousand is one man, and the word they use for this number means "darkness." Two or three chiefs are in command of the whole army, yet in such a way that one holds supreme command.⁸

While the commanders of ten thousands and of thousands were appointed by the Khan, the rest of the officers were "elected" by their subordinates, i.e. they were clan elders. Chingis Khan organized the entire male population under these customary designations. This evolution from voluntary recruitment to proto-conscription not only provided an effective mode of mobilization (every male belonging to a predesignated group of ten) but also enabled the assembly of armies nearly instantaneously. At the same time, it developed relatively painlessly. The imposition of concepts already familiar to the steppe-dwellers aroused little opposition. By extending the traditional pattern of Mongol war bands to cover the entire population, the Khans struck upon a remarkably comprehensive mechanism for raising troops.

The demands of an established state later led to an increasing reliance on the Khan's bodyguard. Only a few thousand strong under Chingis Khan, it grew to 12,000 men under Kublai. The guard served as a reservoir of administrators, its members graduating to high posts throughout the empire. It also supplied a standing force of shock troops. Local units supplemented them when

necessary, Kublai raising 360,000 when civil war threatened in 1286. Allied contingents formed the mass of garrison troops, usually in cities distant from their homelands. For instance, Marco Polo saw detachments from Russia in southern China. Nomads in Mongolia and central Asia represented a speedily mobilized reserve for major campaigns. In this manner, the Mongols at length arrived at a more methodical, stable organization for their armed forces.⁹

In order to make the most of its human resources, the Mongols devised an ingenious approach to logistics. Orchestrating the movement of vast numbers of people came naturally to nomads. Their extensive "hunting" maneuvers expanded to almost continental scope. Nevertheless, transporting armies across Eurasia posed nearly insoluble dilemmas. Only the Khans' authority allowed coordinated supply despite the distance and numbers involved. The Mongol state cared for immense herds of warhorses with all the resources at its disposal. It also maintained a network of grain stores with the utmost diligence. Before an offensive, allied and nomadic cavalry, often accompanied by Chinese catapults, massed with thousands of extra horses at prescribed points. Local officials cleared roads, stockpiled food, and reserved pasture on the intended axis of advance. When in hostile territory, however, the Mongols depended on foraging for their sustenance. Periodic pillaging of the enemy's towns was not only customary, but absolutely necessary to replenish Mongol supplies. The mobility they gained through intensive use of horses, each warrior having several, enabled them to forage widely, consequently reducing the need for a baggage train and making possible greater accumulations of troops. Yet, their largest problem lay in these huge herds of horses. The availability of pasture determined Mongol movements. If a castle far inside enemy territory tied down major Mongol forces, as at the siege of Maimum-Diz in 1256, then Mongol supply, especially fodder, failed. This limitation on the Mongols' logistical capabilities at times proved a severe handicap in besieging cities. In fact, knowledgeable observers of the

Mongol style of warfare usually suggested a scorched-earth policy as the best deterrent to a Mongol advance. Nonetheless, Mongol logistics allowed mass mobilization at much less expense than in Western Europe, at the acceptable price of continual reliance on foraging inside their opponents' frontiers.¹⁰

In addition, the extensive system of communications fostered by the Mongols greatly facilitated the coordination of their operations. The herders of the steppe evinced an extraordinary ability to relay messages over enormous distances. The Khans systematized their messenger network with Chinese organizational guidance. Horse depots every 30 miles or foot stations every three miles lined most primary trade routes in the empire. These posts, maintained at local expense, formed a relay service capable of informing the Khan of events within a few days. A single messenger could make 250 miles a day. This scheme of communications, by far the most efficient in the world, placed the Mongols a jump ahead of any opposition. Once forewarned, they could capitalize on their mobility by rapidly redeploying their forces on internal lines.¹¹

The Khans operated within severe numerical constraints. Too few Mongols ruled too much empire. The Mongols of necessity evolved social mechanisms to compensate. Mongol cultural patterns infused all aspects of the army, greatly simplifying recruitment and training. The same need to conserve scarce human resources made itself felt in the Mongols' tactics. They resolved the problem similarly—by an appeal to the steppe hunting tradition.

TACTICS

The coursing mystique so dear to the individual Mongol warrior shaped the Mongols' tactical ideas. As steppe hunters, the Mongols exhibited an affinity for mobile warfare. Although most were only lightly armed, as befitted hunters, their expertise with the composite bow provided them with an accurate, often overwhelming firepower, the arrows "passing like hail through the sieve-like clouds." They displayed a

remarkable rapidity of fire, shooting two or three arrows for their enemy's one. Moreover, they possessed a variable "caliber" of arrow, some of which could pierce all types of armor except plate. "The arrow passed through coats of mail as the wind of early dawn through the petals of flowers."¹² Finally, Mongols were extremely agile and intrepid on horseback. Using signal pennants, their cavalry could maneuver instantly on command. The horse's mobility, coupled with short stirrups that permitted archery while riding (an adaptation for fast steppe game), also made possible the rapid deployment of Mongol firepower in mass.

The usual Mongol tactics resembled battue hunting.¹³ In the battue, mounted hunters surrounded and tired their quarry until they could kill it easily. Likewise, Mongol tactics involved a diversionary fire or charge in the center while two flanking columns enveloped the enemy, then opening a converging fire with arrows. If weaker than their foes, the Mongols attempted to draw them into a long chase, during which they could tire and ambush the enemy, as at the famous battle at the Kalka River in 1223. Only when these options failed would the Mongols attack directly. First, they would suppress their opponent's movement by fire. Having seized the initiative, the Mongols selected a *Schwerpunkt*, massed their fire at that point, and launched waves of expendable allied units. They then struck home with special Mongol shock troops armored in lacquered leather and armed with lances. "However, it should be known that, if they can avoid it, the Tartars do not like to fight hand to hand but they wound and kill men and horses with arrows; they only come to close quarters when men and horses have been weakened by arrows."¹⁴

Their predilection for the battue notwithstanding, the Mongols did not depend completely on their hunting heritage. The steppe also taught flexibility. Sieges were troublesome for them. Static warfare violated the basic tenets of nomadic campaigning. Moreover, sieges and assaults on fortifications involved close combat and heavy losses, which the numerically inferior

Mongol force could ill afford. Prolonged sieges also threatened their supply, since foragers rapidly denuded surrounding regions of pasture and food. Furthermore, an extended siege gave the enemy a chance to counterattack. Yet, defeating the Mongols' foes required the capture of hundreds of fortified cities.

As their steppe tradition held no solution for this quandary, the Mongols learned from experience to employ Chinese and Moslem siege techniques. At first the Mongols acquired Chinese cities by deception, only to abandon them. They had little use for cities except as a source of plunder, but they soon developed a taste for the fruits of urban civilization. In the long, disastrous siege of Chung-tu in 1215, the Mongols learned the costs of their disregard for technology. Thereafter, they began to capitalize on the skills of the ubiquitous Chinese artisans. In 1219, over 10,000 siege engineers followed Chingis Khan in the Transoxianan campaign. Even then, the Mongols still relied primarily on deception and terror to storm the opulent Khorazim cities. The Mongols remained inferior to the Chinese in siegecraft for decades. By 1279, however, the Mongols had mastered the new techniques sufficiently to overcome the Sung. Indeed, they introduced a light catapult as field artillery. The Mongols learned to innovate when necessary without deviating from their traditional pattern of military activity.

At the height of their empire, the Mongols consolidated their borrowed siege technologies into something akin to a doctrine of *coup de main*. Usually the practitioners of siegecraft formed a special engineer corps, often composed of the indefatigable Chinese. Local draftees stiffened by a few Mongols constituted an assault corps. The reduction of a city began with a general bombardment of siege machines accompanied by arrow volleys that swept the walls. Mass assaults commenced only after this preparation breached and cleared the parapets. The attack continued day and night. The Mongols employed feigned retreats, tunneling, and deception whenever possible. Yet, even with this meticulous

orchestration of storming attempts, cities presented a recurrent obstacle to Mongol dominion. The best way to ward off a Mongol surprise offensive required castle garrisons to delay the Mongols until a counterattacking force gathered. Otherwise, the nomads might occupy a country before its defenders could mobilize. Despite the Mongols' artifices, fortified cities remained a thorn in their side.¹⁵

In response to this problem, the Mongols used terror to flush out the enemy. All armies pillaged cities; it was a customary reward for soldiering. In the Mongols' case, it fulfilled other functions. Sacking cities replenished their supplies and provided useful recruits to bear the brunt of future fighting. Pillage also served as a crude exaction of indemnity. In addition, individual terror provided a sanction against malcontents. If a garrison refused to surrender, it was annihilated. If the populace of a city battled alongside their protectors, the Mongols executed those suspected of resistance, i.e. males capable of bearing arms. Selective atrocities discouraged opposition while encouraging collaboration, at least in the short run. Widespread devastation occasioned by the Mongols' foraging expeditions forestalled outbreaks of small warfare by displacing the local population temporarily. While the Mongols could exhibit incredible brutality, it rarely failed to serve a purpose—usually the preservation of scarce manpower during sieges.

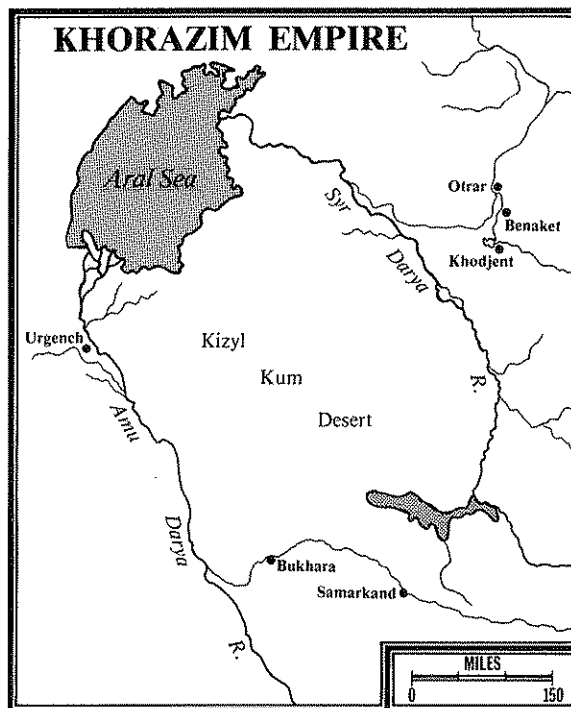
STRATEGY

Conservation of resources likewise characterized Mongol strategic concepts. Although the Mongols introduced nothing new, they did develop a typically nomadic strategy to a fine pitch. That strategy replicated the traditional pattern of mobile warfare: a surprise strike by massed troops, defeat of the enemy in detail, and quick exploitation of success. A concentrated Mongol army usually advanced in three mutually supporting columns. They tried to herd the enemy into a pocket, forcing a battle in the open. Spectacular feats of navigation

underlay the coordination of such operations. Numerous feints deceived the enemy as to the Mongol intentions and dispersed his forces. This strategic strike achieved a temporary numerical superiority "of such great numbers that Gog and Magog themselves would have been destroyed by the waves of [their] battalions." Despite advance notice of attack, the speed of their movement often caught opponents off guard and divided. "They set out . . . with the speed of the wind, like a flood in their onrush and like a flame in their ascent; and their horses' hooves kicked dust into the eyes of time."¹⁶ While the enemy remained divided, they sought to smash a nerve center, at the same time shattering isolated and exposed hostile groups. Thus, the center of resistance would fall before the enemy's troops could concentrate or new leaders of opposition could emerge.

The means of Mongol strategy were not exclusively military. The Mongols always sought to suborn local elites or disaffected minorities. Their espousal of religious tolerance particularly appealed to oppressed sects and discouraged attempts to mobilize popular fanaticism against them. At the same time, they supported the pretensions of regional aristocracies against central governments. The Mongols left those same aristocracies in power, playing them against one another in a Machiavellian game of divide and rule. Most significantly, the Mongols made trade safe throughout their sphere of influence. The economic benefits of *Pax Mongolica* were highly attractive. Merchants opened city gates to the Mongols in campaign after campaign, especially in central Asia. This Mongol fifth column provided them with strategic intelligence and armed support.

The invasion of Transoxiana in 1219-20 superbly exemplifies the pattern of Mongol strategy.¹⁷ Transoxiana lay between the Amu Darya (Oxus) and Syr Darya rivers. Its center, Samarkand, routed silk caravans from China to either the Persian Gulf or the Black Sea. An incredibly profitable undertaking, commerce in silk supplied massive amounts of hard currency in a world without deficit financing. The silk trade was the



greatest prize on the globe, and its key lay in Transoxiana.

Two empires competed for Transoxiana. In the east, Chingis Khan peered hungrily at the caravans traveling west from his new conquests in north China. Headed by Sultan Muhamed, the Khorazim Empire jealously guarded those caravans' destination, Samarkand. Muhamed deployed more than 200,000 soldiers to protect the two routes from Sinkiang to Transoxiana, a northern pass toward Otrar and a southern one to Khodjent. Mongol agents, however, inflamed ethnic antagonisms among the Sultan's Turkish mercenaries. More importantly, Chingis Khan planted rumors of impending mutinies, ensuring that Muhamed would hear of the discontent. As a result, Muhamed commanded his garrisons to stand fast in order to prevent potential desertions. He hoped to delay the Mongols with sieges until reinforcements could arrive from the Iraqi border.

Chingis Khan concentrated about 150,000 men at the headwaters of the Syr Darya, midway between the two roads to Transoxiana. Khorazim merchants apparently supplied him with detailed

information about likely avenues of advance and the Sultan's troop dispositions. In December 1219, Chingis Khan dispatched a diversionary raid toward Otrar. Upon contacting Khorazim troops, the Mongols instantly retreated. In January 1220, Chingis Khan sent a second diversionary thrust at the Khodjent gap. Meanwhile, he set the rest of his army in motion toward Otrar.

The Mongol main force bypassed Otrar, leaving its garrison of 20,000 isolated. A feint by 5000 Mongols toward Benaket threatened to take the Sultan's troops at Khodjent in the flank, while another Mongol mobile group pinned down all the Khorazim garrisons on the Syr Darya. Chingis Khan himself disappeared into the Kizyl Kum Desert with approximately 40,000 horsemen. He followed an old caravan trail to Bukhara, which he surprised and sacked in March. His stores replenished, Chingis Khan turned to storm Samarkand from the rear. The Mongols swept forward in several columns, bypassing local bastions. On the way, they amassed siege materials and food supplies, capturing thousands of peasants to swell their army. By the end of March, the 40,000 Khorazim soldiers at Samarkand were encircled. The Turkish mercenaries defected to the Mongols and most of the garrison died in an ill-timed sortie. Sensing the trend of events, the city's imams induced the populace to surrender. Although Chingis Khan's men pillaged Samarkand with their normal alacrity, the imams were permitted to evacuate their clients.

The Mongols then consolidated their position in Transoxiana. They launched a harassing pursuit of the retiring Khorazim units. At the same time, they organized a picket-line along the Amu Darya to thwart counterattacks. Khodjent soon fell. Finally, over 30,000 Mongols rode to storm Urgench, the port for the Caspian branch of the silk route. When repeated summonses to surrender went unheeded, the Mongols launched a round-the-clock assault. The city's citizens defended every street in fierce close combat. Enraged by their losses, the Mongols burned the buildings, smashed the canals, put many people to the sword and drove out the rest. It seems likely that

Urgench accounted for most of the Mongol casualties in this lightning operation.

The Transoxianan campaign exhibited all the characteristics of Mongol warfare at its best: acquisition of strategic intelligence necessary for long-range maneuver; exploitation of deception to disperse the enemy's reserves; intensification of internal dissent within the enemy's forces; use of Mongol speed and endurance to achieve surprise; conscription of local manpower to cushion losses; expropriation of regional resources to supply Mongol forces; occupation of cities before effective resistance appeared; and timely coordination of wide-ranging detachments. It all added up to conservation of scarce manpower—and to victory.

Yet, the key to the Mongols' success lay not so much in a single faculty as in a synergy of all their talents. The Chinese produced better engineers, the Turks swifter horsemen, and the Moslems more heroic warriors. The Mongols, however, fused all their resources, physical and psychological, into a militarist ethic suitable for a people totally inured to war. The Mongols transformed a voluntary association of tribes into a protean military state. They maintained their mighty armies by rigid discipline and predation upon the enemy. Their relay network allowed the Mongols to respond rapidly to any challenge on their far-flung frontiers. Finally, they developed a consummate strategy based on the hunting tradition of the steppe. Mongol mobility and battue tactics enabled their numerically inferior forces to prevail time and time again. Rather than waste their limited manpower, the Mongols employed selective terror and Chinese siegecraft to supplement their traditional skills. By the complete subordination of steppe culture to military needs, the Mongols evolved the finest army of their time. They derived their collective strength from a world view inculcated by the demands of the desert, the hunt, and the raid.

LESSONS

When Liddell Hart examined the military exploits of Chingis Khan in his book

The Great Captains, he asked, "Is there not a lesson here for the armies of today?"¹⁸ That question retains its relevance for the contemporary soldier. What can present-day practitioners of military science learn from the Mongols?

Four general themes suggest themselves:

- *The interrelationship between tactical capabilities and strategic possibilities.* Universal conformity to conventional modes of maneuver provided the Mongols with the prerequisite tools for very complex strategic operations. In a similar manner, the German General Staff prescribed set responses to standard tactical scenarios for its officers. This doctrinal rigidity established a common frame of reference for operational use. Knowing their subordinates' responses to almost any situation, commanders could rely on the fulfillment of complicated directives, in turn permitting extraordinarily flexible command in the field. Soviet officers likewise conform rigidly to prescribed doctrine. While such constant compliance may create tactical inflexibility, the advantages it offers at a higher level of planning ought not to be discounted.

- *Conservation of resources.* Despite a constant numerical inferiority, the Mongols evinced an ability to seize the initiative and carry the struggle to the enemy. Severe manpower constraints forced them to gain maximum advantage from traditional force multipliers: terrain, firepower, mobility, and surprise. While these ideas are hardly foreign to American military theoreticians, the Mongols' campaigns supply unusually striking examples of their employment. After all, one of the purposes of military history is to demonstrate the realm of applicability for such principles of war. An intriguing example is Chingis Khan's recognition of his own limitations at the end of the Transoxianan offensive. He halted at the Amu Darya River, despite the near rout of all Khorazim troops in the vicinity. By his restraint, he secured the Mongols' immediate economic goals, a defensible strategic frontier, and a base of operations for the invasion of either Persia or Russia. Yet, Chingis Khan did not eschew the opportunity presented by the Khorazim

defeat. His dispatch of a pursuit in force prevented any major counterattack for at least a year. He managed to reconcile the theoretical demands of Clausewitz (destruction of the enemy) with those of Jomini (occupation of territory), a rare feat indeed.

- *The danger of misinterpreting culturally inculcated military usages.* The Khans effected a symbiosis of traditional nomadic culture and a sophisticated commercial network. The resultant empire depended heavily on its most "primitive" members. Seeing only the Mongols' nomadic roots, Western European observers branded them barbarians and discounted their ability to maintain an organized threat. The phrase "Mongol horde" conveys a derogatory and quite invalid appreciation of the Mongols' armed prowess. Likewise, some defense analysts today cast opprobrium on the Soviets for a variety of failings, not the least of which is a perceived inability to deviate from massed onslaughts. A glance at a Soviet tactical manual should dispel this illusion. To confuse an inability to innovate with a socially reinforced preference for certain patterns of behavior can prove dangerously misleading, particularly for an American officer suddenly confronted by a Soviet *spetsnaz* assault. In fact, an appreciation of the motives behind an enemy's apparently aberrant behavior can prove to be an offensive asset. As mentioned earlier, 13th-century strategists suggested the devastation of fodder along invasion routes as a likely deterrent to Mongol attack. The destruction of potential pastures could be as effective a defensive obstacle as stone walls, since the Mongols bought their speed at the price of supplying several horses per man. Soviet armored forces make a similar exchange, logistical security for enhanced mobility. Compared to NATO formations, Soviet tank units are almost devoid of support services. For instance, tanks carry their own fuel and only rarely can rely on rear area supplies. Accordingly, they are not tied to columns of fuel trucks. At the same time, they are highly vulnerable to any unexpected depletion of their fuel, unlike their NATO counterparts. Taking advantage of this peculiarity in a

European battle would involve a deliberate effort to increase Soviet fuel consumption by maneuver, neutralization of West German civilian petrol storage, and air interdiction of emergency fuel reserves in the rear. Note, however, that the first step in exploiting differing enemy doctrine is to analyze the reasons for the deviation, rather than simply dismissing it as error.

• *Strategic deception.* Picture a multipenetration offensive. Attacks on a 300-kilometer front pin down the alarmingly overstretched enemy. Several Soviet armored spearheads appear. The enemy commander, unwilling to dribble away his reserves, must attempt to discern the *Schwerpunkt* of the Soviet advance. As it happens, he chooses correctly and halts the Russian tanks. Seizing the moment, the Soviet commander shifts his strategic echelon to another axis and the Red Army pours through a front now devoid of support. The Mongols cultivated a similar flexibility. Their masterful strategy deflected Khorazim attention toward false threats, awaiting the unguarded moment when they could strike unawares.

The Mongols learned "to fight outnumbered and win" long before that catchword was coined. If there is a lesson here for the NATO forces of today, it is how to avoid playing the Khorazim Empire to the Soviets' Mongols. But to do so requires the sort of synergical sophistication that characterized the Mongol method of making war.

NOTES

1. David Holloway, *The Soviet Union and the Arms Race* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1983), p. 177.
2. Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, trans. Manuel Komroff (New York: Random House, 1953), pp. 91-92. Since this is an interpretative essay, it cannot survey all

aspects of Mongol warfare. For an excellent bibliography, see James Chambers, *The Devil's Horsemen: The Mongol Invasion of Europe* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979).

3. A. von Pawlikowski-Cholewa, *Die Heere des Morgenlandes: Militärische Beiträge zur Geschichte des nahen und fernen Orients* (Berlin: Verlag Walter de Gruyter, 1940), pp. 197, 201-02.

4. John of Plano Carpini, "History of the Mongols," in Christopher Dawson, *The Mongol Mission* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955), p. 44.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

6. As quoted in George Vernadsky, *The Mongols and Russia* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1953), p. 113.

7. Plano Carpini, p. 28.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

9. Marco Polo, pp. 113, 133, 226.

10. For the archetypical siege at Maimum-Diz, see Atamalik Juvaini, *History of the World Conqueror*, trans. J. Boyle (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1958), pp. 621-36.

11. Marco Polo, pp. 160-64.

12. Juvaini, p. 630. Chambers, pp. 56-57, 62-63.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 621, 627.

14. Plano Carpini, p. 37.

15. The siege of Urgench in 1221 is a good example. See W. Barthold, *Turkistan Down to the Mongol Invasion*, trans. H. Gibb (London: Luzac, 1958), pp. 433-37. On the social dimensions of Mongol warfare, see Georg Altunian, *Die Mongolen und ihre Eroberungen in kaukasischen und kleinasiatischen Ländern im XIII Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Matthesen Verlag, 1911).

16. Juvaini, p. 625.

17. This account of the Transoxianan campaign derives from many sources: Juvaini, pp. 362-411; Barthold, pp. 393-462; Chambers, pp. 1-18; M. I. Ivanin, *O voennom iskustv i zavoevaniakh mongolo-tatar i sredne-aziatskikh narodov pri Chingis-khan i Tamertan* (St. Petersburg: Obshchestvennaia pol'za, 1875), pp. 47-81; Liddell Hart, *Great Captains Unveiled*, (London: Blackwood and Sons, 1927), pp. 11-17; Erich Haenisch, *Die Geheime Geschichte der Mongolen* (Leipzig: Otto Harraffowitz, 1948), pp. 124-32; S. L. Tikhvinskii, ed., *Tataro-mongoly v azii i evrope* (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), pp. 107-39; and Jeremiah Curtain, *The Mongols: A History* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1908), pp. 93-130. Figures for this campaign vary widely; only the conservative ones are used here. The most readable descriptions are Chambers and Hart. Unfortunately, some inconsistencies arise in these works. Since they are not footnoted, the reader cannot judge their authenticity. For example, Chambers has Chepe taking Khodjent by himself. Barthold (p. 147) cites irrefutable evidence against this interpretation. In general, Barthold and Ivanin provide the most reliable narratives.

18. Hart, p. 32.

