

ILLUSTRATING THE LEVELS OF WAR – OPERATION ZITADELLE (KURSK), 5-14 JULY 1943, A CASE STUDY

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Introduction

In wartime military organisations function in a dangerous and complex environment. Doctrines are designed to ensure standardisation of thinking about military conflict and the use of military power. Therefore, it is defined as an explicit set of concepts according to which actions in a given field are discussed and executed.¹ However, without proper communication (conveying of information²) vital time and opportunities will be lost in a conflict situation. Efforts to standardise military technology (command language) will ensure proper communication within the framework of doctrine. However, this is difficult and many debates have developed on the meaning of terms and how they manifested in the past.

In this process military historians have a very important responsibility. Until the coining of the concept of operational art and the identification of the operational level of war in the English-speaking world they tended to identify any clash of arms as campaigns or battles and also not in a standardised manner. This led to confusion as contemporary students on senior military courses throughout the world are sometimes more bewildered by Military History, rather than being led to a clearer understanding of military terminology. For example, the so-called Battle of the Atlantic, 1939 – 1945 was clearly a campaign and not a battle, as the discussion of the term campaign will later indicate.

During the 1995 Senior Command and Staff Course at the South African Army College a guest speaker aimed to illustrate that the level of war is not determined by the size of the forces involved within a specific part of a conflict. This is quite correct, as corps and even armies can be involved in direct fighting with an opponent, thus, on the tactical level. However, the example used was the so-

called Battle of Kursk of July 1943. Amongst the students on course, including this author, the feeling was that the events at Kursk entailed more than a battle.

The aim of this paper is to determine where Operation Zitadelle may be placed in terms of the levels of war, according to contemporary doctrine. Current doctrine of the USA and British armed forces will be used as the norm to judge this. The approach will be to describe the different levels as well as the meaning of terminology such as campaigns, major operations and battles. The course of events leading up to and at the time of Zitadelle will then be analysed to determine on what level of war these events should be comprehended.

The national strategic level of war

The highest level of war is the national strategic level. The approach to a specific conflict will manifest in a strategy. Luttwak³ describes strategy as the art of developing and using military and other resources in order to achieve objectives defined by national policy. During the 20th century this definition was expanded to describe military strategy as a sub-component of a broader term, namely national or grand strategy. The latter is described as “[t]he art and science of developing and using the political, economic and psychological powers of a nation, together with its armed forces, during peace and war, to secure national objectives.”⁴

Thus, at the highest level of decision making, for example in a nation state, or in a formal alliance such as NATO, a national or alliance security strategy will be designed to achieve national or alliance objectives, based on the values of the nation or alliance. On the line of escalation in the spectrum of conflict national or alliance assets other than military power will be used to achieve national or alliance security objectives, until the only option becomes the use of military power.⁵

National or grand strategy is therefore the application of national or alliance resources to achieve objectives at the said level. Thus, it is the province of governments. Three broad responsibilities flow from this:

- ? Determining and prescribing policy objectives to be achieved by all government agencies.
- ? Stipulation of the limitations of activities conducted to achieve these aims.
- ? Making available the requisite resources and, if necessary, to direct the national industrial base of a state or of states in an alliance.⁶

The use of military power must be understood within this framework. Baucom sums it up as follows:

“Since the military is a national resource and an instrument of policy, it can be used in peace, right along with other instruments of policy, in the pursuit of national aims. With this broader definition, modern strategic thinkers have at last institutionalized in their conceptional framework the full implications of Clausewitz’s argument that war is nothing more than policy extended.”⁷

The military strategic level of war

The military strategic level entails two dimensions. At national level a strategic authority will provide strategic direction for the armed forces and this will be conducted by institutions such as the American Joint Chiefs of Staff⁸ and in the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) the Command Council under the leadership of the Chief of the SANDF. This strategic authority will develop a national military strategy that focuses on the application of military resources to achieve national/grand strategic objectives. The following actions will be taken:

- ? The identification of the military conditions that would constitute success will be identified. The relation of the specific situation to the spectrum of conflict will play a major role in this. The recognition of any political, financial or legal limitations on the use of force, with particular regard to alliance or coalition partners is also an important guideline that has to be provided to military planners.
- ? The military strategic objectives to be attained will be identified so that the allocation of the forces and resources required to achieve those objectives could be determined and the designation of the theatre of war and theatres of operations and areas of operations can be identified. Also, the important step of the appointment of the theatre and theatres of operations commanders for a specific part of a conflict, will be taken.
- ? The military strategic objectives will be confirmed with the theatre commander and, where necessary, the allocation of resources will be adjusted.

- ? The outline command arrangements – especially in multinational operations will be established.⁹

The next dimension of the military strategic level is theatre command. This dimension derives from the American model in which a commander is appointed to an identified theatre of war and was identified until recently by the abbreviation of CINC (Commander in Chief). The military strategic authority at national level will appreciate where campaigns and major operations will have to be conducted to achieve the national military strategic end-state. This will determine where the theatre of war will be situated, namely the areas of air, land, and water that are, or may become, directly involved in the conduct of war. In a global conflict, several theatres of war can be identified that are differentiated by geography, priority or existing command and control infrastructure.¹⁰ Larger nations such as the USA will appoint theatre of war commanders, but in smaller nations the military high command will conduct campaigns in the theatre of war themselves. In the RSA the Joint Operations Division of the SANDF would fulfil this role.

Luttwak¹¹ further describes a theatre as a geographic area that is sufficiently separated from other theatres by important geographic barriers or sheer distance to be defensible or vulnerable on its own. It must form a self-contained military whole rather than just one part of a larger whole. In the contemporary world operations within a theatre of war will usually be joint and sometimes multinational. The theatre of war will also be operationally self-sufficient, with a sustaining base adequate to support operations. Furthermore, the theatre would encompass only the areas or countries involved in the war. Thus, there can be nations in geographic proximity to the theatre that are not involved in the war.¹² A good example of this is Switzerland that stayed neutral during the two world wars.

Within a theatre of war different theatres of operation can be identified as well as smaller areas known as areas of operations. In both theatres of operation and areas of operations the commanders will be at the operational level of war.¹³ The theatres of operations refer to that portion of a theatre of war necessary for military operations and for the administration of such operations for extended periods. The commanders at this level have similar responsibilities to the theatre CINC, but smaller in scope.

According to some writers, during the Second World War, the war in the Western Hemisphere (theatre of war) was divided into the Atlantic, Western

European, Mediterranean and Russian theatres of operation. These were then divided into areas of operation, like Norway, North Western France, South East France and Italy.¹⁴ In 1943 Dwight D. Eisenhower became SCAEF (Supreme Commander Allied Expeditionary Force). He commanded the campaigns and major operations in these areas, i.e., Operation Overlord (the landing in and breakout from Normandy) and Operation Anvil (the landing in Southern France) that can be described as major operations within a campaign.¹⁵

However, operations in Italy were deemed more independent by most historians and are also described as a campaign. On the other hand the scope and magnitude of the war between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union was such that they most probably viewed the eastern front as a theatre of war on its own. This view is supported by a recent publication by Vego, professor in Military History at the US Naval War College in a monumental work on operational warfare. He postulates that Hitler personally in his capacity of Chief of the German Wehrmacht and the Army commanded this principle theatre of war.¹⁶

Therefore, the theatre commander translates national, alliance or coalition guidance into a theatre strategy that will include theatre strategic objectives, concepts and resources in a broad range of activities in the theatre. This will also include the possibility of the use of military power on the whole spectrum of conflict from peace support operations to full-scale conventional or nuclear war. He identifies which campaigns and military operations will achieve the desired military end-state in his theatre, which must contribute directly to the national strategic end-state. Thus he uses campaigns in different theatres of operations to achieve his aim.¹⁷

The next question that must be asked is: What is a campaign? The SADF Joint Military Dictionary defines a campaign as a series of related military operations to accomplish a common objective, normally within a given time and space.¹⁸ British Army doctrine, likewise, describes a campaign as "...a sequence of planned, resourced and executed joint military operations designed to achieve a strategic objective within a given time and space..."¹⁹ Apart from these generic and broad descriptions it must also be noted that wartime campaigns are broad in scope and usually involve the employment of large forces. Also, more than one campaign may be conducted within a single theatre of war or conflict.²⁰

The ability to command at theatre level depends on strategic vision. This constitutes the ability to discern the means and ways for the accomplishment of the

national strategic objective through the employment of military force. It is the single factor that enables the theatre of war commander to act in consonance with national policy to direct the efforts of military force to reach national goals?²¹ Clausewitz states in this regard: “The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgement that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature.”²²

The ability to achieve success entails the ability of the theatre commander to impart to all his subordinates his personal visions of victory and the conditions and methods for obtaining it. Tactical and operational abilities are not decisive at this level. The commander must have an adequate understanding of operations and tactics to know generally what lies within the realm of the possible, but he can rely on subordinates to translate his strategic vision into operational and tactical concepts. During the Second World War Eisenhower was provided with subordinates such as Bradley and Patton, freeing his hand to concentrate on what to achieve with the major campaigns in the Mediterranean and Western Europe and making the alliance between the US and Britain work.²³

In view of the above, theatre strategy as it manifests in strategic vision has a mission one level removed from an aim that can be stated in politico-economic terms, (national strategic) while operational strategy would have a mission one level removed from an aim which can be stated in military strategic terms. This is in contrast to Simpkin’s²⁴ view that the first part refers to the operational level of war. This wrong impression proliferated into the doctrine of several armed forces. For example, according to British doctrine certain questions will indicate that tactical operations will have implications at the operational level and, although executed by tactical assets, might be considered operational level actions. One such question is whether there is a political imperative for an action.

The example cited is the action at Goose Green in the Falklands War in 1982 that was an operational decision inspired by political imperative – to get on and do something. This is confusing. In the first place the decision to allow an offensive approach to the campaign would have been decided by the British government and the General Staff in London. All tactical operations will have an influence at the operational level. Thus, even though the decision was at the operational level (taken by the campaign commander) it validates neither Simpkin’s definition or that of British doctrine.²⁵ Even worse is the oversimplified so-called operational test, questions that are supposed to help to establish whether an action is operational or

tactical. The first question is if there is a political dimension.²⁶ This means nothing if politics are involved the level concerned is the strategic level.

It is the military strategic authority at national level and the theatre commander that is concerned with the interaction between the political and military dimensions of strategy. The confusion springs most probably from theatre commanders acting as operational and even sometimes as tactical commanders. Gray²⁷ rightfully points out that the most important contribution of Clausewitz to the understanding of war is that the use of force and its political consequences is what strategy is all about. Operational art and tactics are mere lower manifestations of strategy, so-called because of differences in scope and actions. But the level at which politics is taken into consideration during planning is the strategic level.

The operational level of war

The next level is the operational level. To understand the operational level of war it is necessary to understand the meaning of the word operational. According to Simpkin²⁸ it signifies different possibilities. The first meaning has directly to do with warlike operations in contrast to administrative and logistic functions, training or military exercises. To this end, military operations refer to the actual conduct of war and do not only relate to the operational level.

The second meaning refers to the organisational level at which these activities take place. For some time the assumption was that below theatre down to division level constituted activities at the operational level of war. However, it was eventually realised that the level of organisation or command does not equal the operational level of war: a special force section killing a national leader, for example, achieves a strategic effect. The case of the Shi'ite fanatic that blew up the US Marines' base in Beirut also resorts under that category. The manner in which the action is executed fall within the realm of tactics, but the decision as well as the effect will be on the strategic level. Consequently, the outcome rather than the level of command or organisation will determine the level of war.

Naveh²⁹ states that the operational level forms a natural or integral layer within the experience of modern war and cannot be understood in isolation. However, it differs from the tactical level in terms of quantity and quality and the strategic level in terms of substance. However, this still does not explain the difference between the operational and other levels of war clearly and sufficiently.

Newell³⁰ distinguishes between the levels by describing military strategy as something that involves attaining national policy goals by the use or threat of force. According to him it originates at the highest leadership levels of the nation and must be planned and executed in co-ordination with other elements of national power, such as diplomacy, economics, and technology. He defines operations as activities that form the implementing components of military strategy. Military operations therefore contribute to the overall strategic design and are executed over the course of a campaign in a given geographical area. The manner in which the campaign is executed with a combination of air, land and sea forces involves a series of battles to attain certain objectives. Planning and conducting these battles constitute tactics.³¹

Against this background one can conclude that the operational level of war constitutes those military activities that result in the end state desired at the military strategic level, i.e. campaigns and major operations.

Operational art

The next aspect that must be understood is the difference between the operational level of war and operational art. The level serves as a link between the strategic and tactical levels of war. It shapes tactical actions into operational results that in turn support strategic objectives. Operational art is the activity usually carried out at the operational level of war. It accomplishes the organisation and integration of major operations and campaigns to achieve the military strategic objectives of a war.³²

However, operational art is not the exclusive domain of operational level commanders as military commanders in charge of a theatre of war (military strategic level) will also use campaigns to attain the national strategic end-state in the theatre. Also, by providing guidelines to tactical commanders and monitoring their executing can be applied to the higher tactical level of war.³³

Major operations

A more difficult facet is the definition of major operations. According to one definition major operations consist of co-ordinated actions in a single phase of a campaign and usually decide the course of a campaign.³⁴ Vego postulates that a major operation consists of a series of tactical actions (battles, engagements and

strikes) sequenced and synchronised in time and place that is aimed at accomplishing an operational or sometimes a strategic objective in a given theatre.³⁵

Another aspect that must be taken into consideration in determining the difference between battles and major operations is the most dominant characteristic of operational art, namely a distributed free manoeuvre in a theatre of operations or area of operations. Distributed free manoeuvre is characterised by a series of distributed battles leading to the dispersion of combat force in space and time. The campaign commander no longer commands the battles himself, but acts more as a manager of the theatre.³⁶

As operational art manifests mainly at the military strategic level (when such commanders conduct campaigns) and the operational level of war, it distinguishes itself from tactical actions as a distinct style of warfare.³⁷ Military commanders exert less direct control over the activities of their subordinates and it is conducted in theatres (theatres of war, theatres of operations and areas of operations) rather than being closely controlled in a combat zone or on a battlefield. Therefore, operational level commanders set the conditions for tactical plans and support the campaign or major operations with operational intent, concepts and objectives. Commanders at the tactical level ensure that their intent, concepts and objectives are vested in those of the operational level commander.³⁸

The tactical level of war

The tactical level has been defined as a level of activity that is concerned with short-term and contingency planning in which the tasks that are executed are more concrete and less comprehensive than operational art and strategy.³⁹ Luttwak⁴⁰ describes tactics as an art in the use of armed forces deployed in a particular setting or theatre determined by a strategic decision. Barclay⁴¹ sees the manifestation of the tactical level from the moment when forces reach a battle area and come under fire, or are liable to do so.

According to recent US doctrine the activities at the tactical level constitute battles and engagements that are planned and executed to accomplish military objectives assigned to tactical units or task forces. The focus is on the ordered arrangement and manoeuvre of combat elements in relation to one another and to the enemy to achieve combat objectives as identified by the operational level commander. Thus, tactics are the art and science of using available means to win battles and engagements. It entails the solving of problems on the battlefield.

Engagements are usually between covering and guard forces, while main forces will conduct battles. Battles can be short or even last up to several weeks. It can cover a small geographic area like the Golan Heights in 1973, or can be distributed over a wide area like the Battle of the Bulge in 1944.⁴² However, the events in these two examples approximate the actions in a major operation. The test is the amount of direct control and if a distributed free manoeuvre occurs.

The distinction between a battle and a major operation is, however, not always clear. The larger the forces and the area in which they operate, the more will be their influence on the campaign, thus moving towards the description of a major operation. It is also clear that at the tactical level commanders focus very much on defeating the enemy through a process of attrition by physically destroying its forces, although tactical manoeuvres are imperative to achieve success. That is why Montgomery⁴³ argues that tactics means the dispositions for and control of military forces and techniques in actual fighting, while Luttwak⁴⁴ argues that it entails the forces directly opposed that fight one another.

In most American and British sources the war between Germany and the Soviet Union in the period 1941-1945 constitutes a theatre of operations in the Western Hemisphere theatre of war. This framework will be used in the forthcoming analysis, even though from the protagonists' points of view it could be a theatre of war on its own.

Military developments leading to the creation of the Kursk salient

Hitler's aim to conquer the Soviet Union and make Germany a European superpower can be seen as a national strategic objective. The management of Germany's war economy and the use of the resources of occupied Europe entailed the economic dimension of this strategy, while the non-aggression pact with the Soviets from 1939-1941 until other enemies such as Poland, France and Britain could be destroyed or neutralised, constitutes the use of diplomacy. With the advent of Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Soviet Union, on 22 June 1941, however, the military dimension of Hitler's national strategy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union became prominent.

The first German campaign in the Soviet Union ended in failure at the end of 1941 when they were forced to retire on reaching the outskirts of Moscow. The second campaign ended in the defeat at Stalingrad in February 1943 and retreat westwards. The Soviet advance was conducted along an 800 km front in two

thrusts, one towards the city of Kharkov in the Ukraine in the north and the other through the Caucasus towards the Black Sea in the south. Kursk was captured on 8 February, Rostov by 14 February, and during the next day Kharkov came under Soviet control again. It looked as if it would only be a matter of time before the Germans would be driven out of the Ukraine altogether. However, a counteroffensive under the direction of Field Marshall Eric von Manstein enabled the German forces to recapture Kharkov on 15 March. The intention was to straighten the front line by recapturing Kursk, but the spring thaw, melting the winter snow, again turned the roads in the Soviet Union into mud-lanes, prohibiting such action. Also, the measures by General Zhukov, appointed by Stalin to save the situation in the Ukraine, strengthened the Soviet forces in the area, postponing a possible German advance towards Kursk for the time being.⁴⁵

German and Soviet plans to enforce a decision in the Kursk salient in 1943

As both sides prepared for new operations during the summer of 1943 diplomacy was given a brief chance. Von Ribbentrop and Molotov, respectively the foreign ministers of Germany and the Soviet Union, met to discuss peace. Hitler insisted on the Dnepr River as the boundary, while Stalin wanted pre-war boundaries to be re-established. Consequently, the last chance of a compromise peace floundered.⁴⁶

Both sides concluded that the southern sector was to be the major theatre of decision.⁴⁷ The layout of the front after the successful German retrograde operations of early 1943 would determine the nature of operations in this region.

The situation in 1943 was, however, that after two summer campaigns the German Wehrmacht had not succeeded in destroying the Soviet Army. Apart from Hitler, most German leaders realised that the aim of conquest of the Soviet Union had to be replaced by a different military strategy. This should have been to prevent a German defeat and under the circumstances should have led to a strategic draw that would have forced the Soviet Union into a political accommodation with Nazi Germany. The Kursk salient formed an attractive strategic target that protruded into German held territory like a clenched fist. Its total frontage was 400 km, but at its base it was less than 112 km across. Most of the Soviet forces in the salient consisted of men who had seen continuous action for the past months and their equipment had to be worn down. By destroying these forces, Hitler hoped to deal the Soviets a decisive blow and regain the strategic initiative on the Eastern front. A commander from Army Group Centre, General Walter Model, and one from Army

Group South, General Hermann Hoth, respectively commanded the northern and southern pincers that would try and execute a double envelopment of the Soviet forces in the salient and destroy them.⁴⁸

On the other end Soviet military strategy would no longer focus on national survival only. They were unable to achieve a decisive victory over the Germans in the Ukraine in 1942, thus in 1943 the focus would be to destroy the capacity of the Wehrmacht to withstand the offensive power of the Soviet Army.⁴⁹

Military operations in the Soviet Union were divided into three main geographical regions. German Army Group North constituted the region around Leningrad and the Arctic region. Army Group Centre operated in the region due west of Moscow, while Army Group South's responsibility was the Ukraine.⁵⁰ If the war in the Soviet Union constituted a theatre of operation then these regions represented different areas of operation. This corresponds with different fronts in which Stavka (the Soviet High Command) divided the front for the deployment of Soviet Forces. Military operations in the region of the Kursk salient would entail German forces from two Army groups, Central and South, thus from two areas of operation.⁵¹ In view of the above, one could argue that for the duration of the operation this area temporarily constituted an area of operation, in itself indicating an activity at the operational level of war. Hitler's decision not to appoint a specific commander responsible for the Eastern Front complicates the issue as this person's position, would have been between a military strategic commander (CINC) and an operational commander at the campaign level.⁵² Therefore, Hitler and the German High Command acted at the national and military strategic levels of war and operational level commanders were appointed in an ad hoc manner.

As the division of a geographic region of war into a theatre of war, theatres of operations and areas of operations are still too vague in itself to determine the level of war, the intended outcome of operations will have to determine the appropriate level.

At the national strategic level Hitler needed a major military victory to reassure his allies that they had chosen the correct side in the war and possibly influence Turkey to join the Axis. Consequently, any defensive posture as proposed by German generals such as Erich von Manstein and Heinz Guderian was unacceptable and Hitler hoped to destroy major Soviet forces in the Kursk salient to reassure his allies that Germany could still win the war. In the theatre of operations the destruction of large numbers of Soviet formations, especially armour, would

disrupt the coming Soviet summer offensive. Furthermore, the front line would be straightened and more formations would be available for defensive purposes as it was also estimated that the British and American forces would try to land in Europe in 1943.

Stavka, under the leadership of General Georgi Zhukov, initially planned offensives on a wide front for the coming year. However, when they learned of the German intentions through intelligence the decision was made to conduct defensive operations in the Kursk salient so as to inflict as many losses as possible on the Wehrmacht. Thereafter a counter-offensive would be conducted to drive the Germans back to the Dnepr River.⁵³ In view of the above, it can be concluded that as far as the outcome of the operations in the Kursk salient is concerned both sides hoped to achieve results at the military strategic level. The question can consequently be asked whether these operations entailed a campaign, a major operation or a battle.

Taking into account the given definitions of a campaign, namely a series of military operations that are planned and executed to achieve a strategic objective within a given time and space, one can conclude that the events in the Kursk salient constitute a campaign. However, comparing this with other campaigns such as Barbarossa in 1941 and Case Blue in 1942 (the German offensive towards the Caucasus and Stalingrad), the definition of a major operation seems more appropriate. The operations in the Kursk salient clearly equalled co-ordinated actions in a single phase of a campaign that decided the course of a campaign. As the strategic initiative passed to the Soviets, their actions even more clearly demonstrated the difference between a campaign and a major operation. The first phase of the Soviet summer campaign in 1943 entailed the major defensive operation in the Kursk salient. The next phase was the conduct of offensive operations that drove the Germans back to the Dnepr River.

To understand the levels better it is also imperative to comprehend the actions at the tactical level as most history books describe these events as a battle. The German offensive operations under command of General Model in the northern part of the salient (himself under command of Field Marshal Guenther von Kluge of Army Group Centre) from 5 – 11 July and General Hoth's advance towards Oboyan and Prokhorovka in the south (under the command of Field Marshal Manstein of Army Group South) from 5 – 14 July can be described as operations at the tactical level of war. Within the scope of these operations certain actions can be described as battles, for example the tank battle of Prokhorovka on 12 July in which a total of

700 tanks on both sides were destroyed in a single day.⁵⁴ Taking into account the most important characteristic of operational art, a distributive free manoeuvre, the tactical actions of the two German forces (Model and Hoth respectively) together constitute a major operation rather than a single decisive battle as they operated under the command of two different army groups in two distinct areas of operation.

The aftermath of operations in the Kursk salient

The German offensive against the salient failed for various reasons and while the tank battle of Prokhorovka still raged in the south on 12 July the Soviet counter-offensive started in the vicinity of Orel. The city was captured on 5 August and in the south the Soviet forces needed only two days to capture Belgorod. Kharkov was recaptured on 23 August and the Soviet offensive progressed till the end of the year, reaching the Dnepr River. From July to December 1943 the Soviets had advanced over 329 km, their first summer campaign in the war.⁵⁵

Jukes⁵⁶ sees the result of the events from 5 – 14 July near the city of Kursk as follows:

“The strategic initiative passed totally and irrevocably into Soviet hands, and no responsible German general ever considered it possible to retrieve it. In that sense Kursk was a turning point in the war more important than either Stalingrad or Moscow had been and its consequences that much more far-reaching.”

The first phase of this effect would be the Soviet advance to the Dnepr River and the liberation of the Ukraine from German rule during the rest of 1943.

Conclusion

Considering the levels of war it is clear that Hitler and the German High Command (OKW) constituted the military strategic authority while Kluge (Army Group Centre) and Manstein (Army Group South) were joint campaign commanders at the operational level of war. As tactical commanders Model and Hoth were functioning within the grey area where battles and major operations overlap and it is not always easy to distinguish between operational and tactical art. Taking into account the characteristic of a distributive free manoeuvre the two forces operated in a too independent a manner to describe the events in the Kursk salient as a single battle. Also considering the definition of a major operation and the intended

outcome, it constituted a series of battles from 5 to 14 July 1943 in a major operation that was the first phase of the intended summer campaign on the Eastern Front for both sides.

The above analysis is based on the assumption that the war between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union represented a strategic action within a theatre of operation. However, considering the geographic scope and the nature of the alliance between the USA, Britain and the Soviet Union it is probably closer to a theatre of war on its own as supported by Vego's argument mentioned earlier. If so, it lends more credibility to the argument that the events in the Kursk salient represented an area of operations in its own right.

This is, however, no clear-cut case. Most historians refer to the event as a battle. It is also clear that it will never be easy to reach consensus amongst historians as to what constitutes a theatre of war, theatre of operations or areas of operations. There will always be a debate on the differences between a war, campaigns, major operations and battles. Nevertheless, taking into account all the arguments, it may be concluded that the description of military operations in the Kursk salient in July 1943 as a battle is an oversimplification of the complexities of modern warfare. It confuses the students of operational art as it makes the identification of campaigns and major operations in historical case studies difficult. According to definition, within the geographic divisions of the theatres of operations and areas of operations, the outcome of events, as well as the nature of operational art, the events constitute a major military operation as the first phase in a campaign. Its impact was also not only at the operational level (in a specific theatre of operation) but even in the theatre of war itself, irrespective of whether one sees the war between Germany and the Soviet Union as a theatre of war or a theatre of operation.

This case study demonstrates that it is imperative that military historians be well-versed in contemporary military terminology/command language if they want to contribute to the improved comprehension of war amongst soldiers.

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