

The Other Side of the Hill

Soviet Cold War wargaming and why it matters today

Connections UK 2026



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All information presented is the authors own opinions and does not represent any organisation's position

The central question

What is a (Soviet) wargame for?

- A system for turning experience into rules, testing plans against those rules, and training staffs to apply them.
- Not primarily a competitive contest.



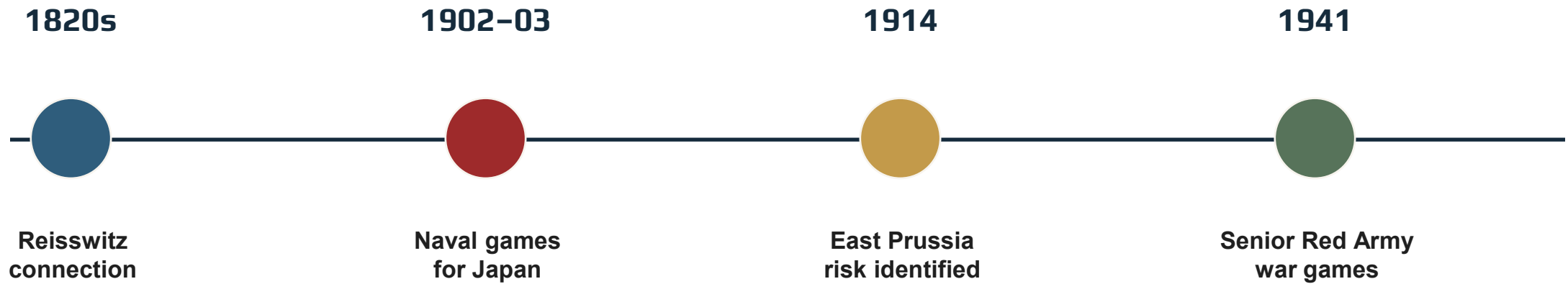
Reconstruction game at Conference of Wargamers 2026

A brief route through a much larger study

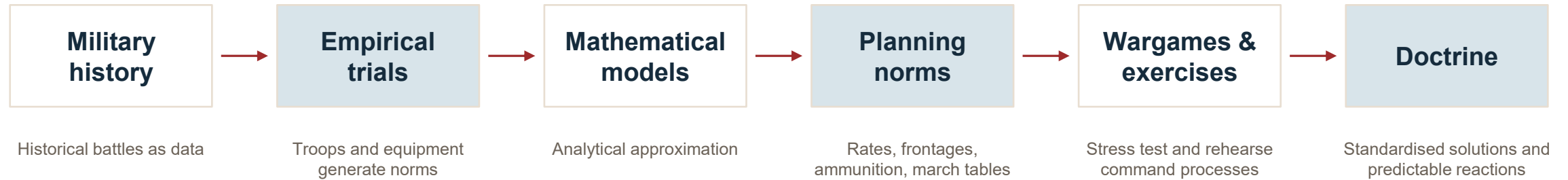


1.5 MINUTES

Before the Cold War: establishing inheritance



The Soviet Understanding: war as a problem of knowable norms



What a Cold War Soviet wargame looked like

1

Directive

purpose, level, constraints

2

Preparation

control group, maps, data, roles

3

Decisions

staffs present operational solutions

4

Adjudication

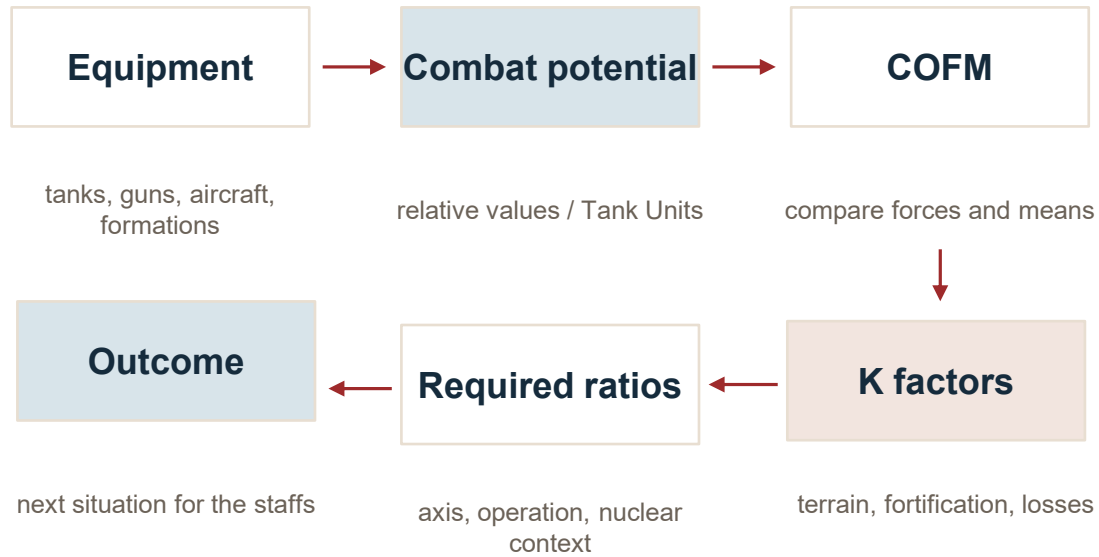
norms, formulae, umpires, next situation

5

Critique

lessons, report to higher HQ

The adjudication engine: no dice



Reconstruction game at Conference of Wargamers 2026

Tank Unit Values

T55		Centurion (105mm)	
T62		Chieftain Mk V	
T64A		Leopard 1A1	
T10M		M60A1	
PT76		M60A2	
T34/85		M47	
T34/76		M48/M48A1	

Tank Unit Values

T55	1.0	Centurion (105mm)	
T62	1.0	Chieftain Mk V	
T64A	1.5	Leopard 1A1	
T10M	1.51	M60A1	
PT76	0.48	M60A2	
T34/85	0.49	M47	
T34/76	0.43	M48/M48A1	

Tank Unit Values

T55	1.0	Centurion (105mm)	0.85
T62	1.0	Chieftain Mk V	1.5
T64A	1.5	Leopard 1A1	1.4
T10M	1.51	M60A1	1.1
PT76	0.48	M60A2	2.2
T34/85	0.49	M47	1.1
T34/76	0.43	M48/M48A1	1

Not just “the Soviets wanted 3:1”

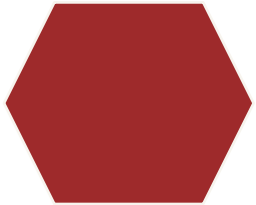
Required superiority varied by arm, axis and nuclear context.

Forces / means	Nuclear general	Nuclear main sector	Conventional general	Conventional main sector
Motor rifle battalions	1.0–1.5	2.0–3.0	1.0–1.5	3.0–4.0
Tanks & SP artillery	1.0–1.5	2.0–3.0	1.0–1.5	3.0–4.0
Artillery	1.0	1.5–2.0	1.0–1.5	3.0–5.0
Aircraft	1.0	1.0	1.5	2.0

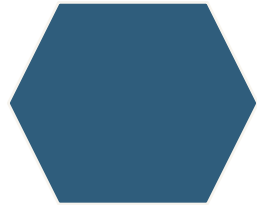
Not just combat

$$t = \frac{D}{V} + tn + tBt$$

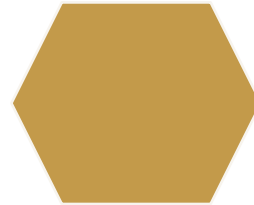
What these games were for



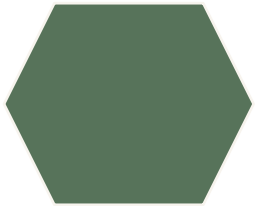
**War-plan
testing**



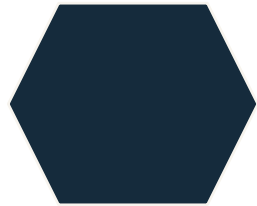
**Force
structure
and TOEs**



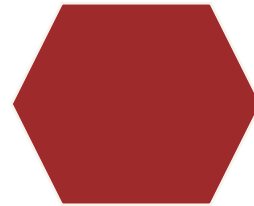
**Equipment
evaluation**



**Mobilisation
and logistics**



**Inter-service /
Warsaw Pact
coordination**

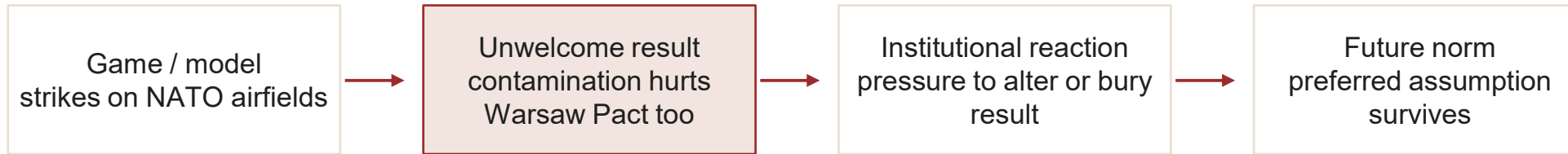


**Command-
staff
rehearsal**

Not one activity, but a military knowledge-production system.

The failure mode: when the model challenged the premise

1973 nuclear strike study



Post-1991: the USSR disappeared; did the analytical grammar?

Why Cold War study still matters

Modern Russian military calculations did not emerge from a vacuum.

Cold War methods provide the historical grammar for how plans, force ratios and “objective” superiority may still be understood.

1

Terminology

KShVI: command-staff military game

2

COFM survives

now chiefly operational / tactical

3

Baseline changes

T-55 → T-72A in later material

4

Values evolve

equipment scored by context and phase

What Can We Learn?

1

Judge games by purpose

Soviet games often make more sense as analytical tools and staff rehearsals than as competitive free-play.

2

Adjudication contains doctrine

Combat-potential tables reveal what an institution believes matters — and what it discounts.

3

Sophistication is not immunity

A model can be technically elaborate and still protect the wrong strategic assumption.

“Plans are worthless, but planning is everything.”

Dwight D Eisenhower

Questions/Sources

Contact:
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