The Eagle Against the Tricolor: Exploring the Parallels Between the Development of General Aleksandr Vasil'evich Suvorov's Tactics and Revolutionary France

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Debates about Russia's relationship with Western European powers have long shaped interpretations of Russian military history. Historically, such debates began as soon as the question of Russian military projection became relevant to the European order. The doctrine of Aleksandr Vasil'evich Suvorov (1730-1800) is of major interest. Suvorov never lost a tactical engagement throughout his many campaigns against diverse enemies. Thus, for many romanticists nineteenth-century Russian military theorists, claiming the figure of Suvorov as the harbinger of a uniquely successful Russian model of war is appealing.[1] Yet, far from an isolated Russian visionary, Suvorov was embedded in the wider shifts in military thinking that marked the end of the 18th century. While not the first comparison of Suvorov's armies with foreign militaries, this paper argues that Revolutionary France should serve as the most appropriate basis for comparison for such analyses. The methods by which France and Russia developed and finalized their revolutionary schools of warfare in the 1790s were distinct but remarkably similar in outcome. Thus, two societies with seemingly opposing socio-political values independently developed similar military doctrines. The planning for and execution of Suvorov's 1799 campaign against Revolutionary France in Italy and Switzerland will serve

[1] Walter Pintner, "Russian Military Thought: The Western Model and the Shadow of Suvorov," In *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton University Press, 1986), 366-367. Among such thinkers, Mikhail Ivanovich Dragomirov (1830-1905) stands out. In 1879 as head of the Russian Imperial General Staff Academy he published a textbook on tactics which shaped the officer corps for the next three decades. Inspired by Suvorov, these tactics sought to extend the preponderance of bayonet charges in Russian warfare through to and even past the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905.

as a final backdrop for the analysis. Among Suvorov's campaigns, the War of the Second Coalition will receive the most attention. This is because it directly pitted the new revolutionary-adherent French and Russian schools of combat against each other.

Much has been written about the origins of the doctrinal revolution that accompanied the political revolution of late 18th-century France. Pre-1762 French tactical thought was heavily inspired by the work of Jacques François de Chastenet, Marquis of Puységur (1656-1743).[2] After his death, Puységur's most famous work, *Art of War, by Principles and Rules*, was published and housed in the Parisian Royal Library.[3] Drawing upon his long experience, Puységur concluded that contemporary suggestions for advanced and flexible instructions that could only be communicated in the quiet and pristine conditions of a drill field were frivolous and useless.[4] Instead, an emphasis had to be placed on tirelessly, and in great detail, going over simple, tried and tested maneuvers. Basic maneuvers were relentlessly drilled so that men knew their purpose once the smoke and rough terrain of battle swept away the chain of command.[5] Even if justified by the need to maintain discipline, such a system was inflexible in battle. Given France's military preponderance in Europe during Puységur's time, we can expect this was the system that much of the continent incorporated into their thought. Consequently, western officers imported into Russia through the Petrine

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[2] Robert Quimby, *The Background of Napoleonic Warfare: The Theory of Military Tactics in Eighteenth-Century France* (Columbia University Press, 1968), 16. Puységur was a distinguished soldier who saw intermittent service with the army for 58 years from the Franco-Dutch to Polish succession wars. Puységur reached France's highest rank of marshal in 1734.

[3] Jacques François de Chastenet marquis de Puységur, *Art de la guerre, par principes et par règles* (Charles-Antoine Jombert, 1748), 1.

[4] Puységur, *Art de la guerre, par principes et par règles*, 236.

[5] Puységur, *Art de la guerre, par principes et par règles*, 235-236.

Reforms would have thought of the burgeoning modern Russian military along that model.

The years after Puységur's work were not kind to France, which suffered numerous defeats during the Seven Years' War. In response, French war minister Étienne François de Choiseul (1719-1785) began a long discussion on tactical reform by arranging a committee in 1762.[6] The birth of French offensive tactics and operations characteristic of the 1790s occurred towards the end of the *Ancien Régime*. Among theorists of the period, Jacques Antoine Hippolyte de Guibert (1743-1790) stands out as the foremost inspiration for France's military ordinance of 1791 and later, Napoleon Bonaparte himself.[7] In his *General Essay of Tactics*, Guibert expressed the need for offensive tactics in what he refers to as a new form of war that will surprise enemies.[8] As Guibert wrote, "I say that a general, who relieves himself in that respect, of established prejudices, will embarrass his enemy, will astonish him, will leave him no place to rest, will force him to fight or to retreat continuously before him."[9] Such attacks were to be carried out by infantry columns that would systematically lunge toward select points of the enemy line. These columns would then be able to charge, or form a firing line as needed, faster than the enemy's speed of redeployment.[10] In between the columns, Guibert placed skirmishers to harass and disrupt the enemy's defensive firepower.[11] Thus, for France, Guibert can be described as a link between the early 18th century and later revolutionary warfare.

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[6] Quimby, *The Background of Napoleonic Warfare*, 97.

[7] Quimby, *The Background of Napoleonic Warfare*, 106.

[8] Jacques Antoine Hippolyte de Guibert, *Essai général de tactique* (Plomteux Clément, 1775), 178.

[9] Guibert, *Essai général de tactique*, 179-180.

[10] Guibert, *Essai général de tactique*, 43-44.

[11] Quimby, *The Background of Napoleonic Warfare*, 126.

A similar history of staggered reform can be found in the Russian Imperial Army of the late 18th century. In St. Petersburg's case, those western tactics of the early 18th century were directly imported into an increasingly Westernizing state. Pyotr Aleksandrovich Rumyantsev-Zadunaisky (1725-1796) was the architect of many of Russia's campaigns during the reign of Catherine the Great (1762-1796). Mentioning Rumyantsev is crucial as his figure casts a shadow over much of late 18th-century Russian military thought. After receiving praise for being a "hero of all time," Suvorov retorted, "Tell them Suvorov is the pupil of Rumyantsev!"[12] This is because he knew that he could not have developed his insights alone. Rumyantsev traces much of his influence on tactical thought to his training during the "Germanizing" period of Empress Anna (1730-1740), and his experience facing Prussian infantry during the Seven Years War.[13] He also once served with the Prussian army and often spoke well of Frederick the Great, with whom he developed a cordial relationship.[14] Thus, in many ways, the age of Catherine the Great represented a Russian army still clinging to pre-revolutionary Western European influences.

Despite this, through Rumyantsev, we can trace the beginnings of alterations to the old order that Suvorov could have later profited from. In preparing for a campaign against the Ottomans in 1773, Rumyantsev wrote to Catherine II that unprecedented authority should be delegated to frontline officers to form their own initiative.[15] His statements regarding officer independence have at times been described as proto-Clausewitzian.[16] The

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[12] Christopher Duffy, *Russia's Military Way to the West* (Routledge, 2016), 173.

[13] Eugene Miakinkov, "A Russian Way of War? Westernization of Russian Military Thought, 1757-1800*"* (PhD diss, University of Waterloo, 2009), 64.

[14] Duffy, *Russia's Military Way to the West*, 168.

[15] Miakinkov, "Westernization of Russian Military Thought, 1757-1800,*"* 56-57.

[16] Miakinkov, "Westernization of Russian Military Thought, 1757-1800,*"* 57; Duffy, *Russia's Military Way to the West*, 169.

increasingly centralized Russian absolutist court rejected the Rumyantsev proposal due to court officials and bureaucrats fearing a loss of their authority over the army.[17] Rumyantsev expanded the use of the infantry square or *kare* as a viable alternative to a firing line. In this formation, infantry units covered each other's backs, protected by artillery at each vertex of the square.[18] Even while heavily outnumbered, these squares saw major success against the Ottomans, such as at Kagul in 1770.[19] It is worth noting, however, that such an adaptation was born out of his rejection of thin linear European "cordons" in their specific application against Turkish cavalry, showing how the *kare*, rather than being revolutionary, was only made to remedy tactical challenges in conflicts with the Sublime Porte.[20] Despite this, the *kare* and analysis of its applications remained an aspect of later Suvorov's military thinking. The question also arises if Napoleon's more notorious adoption of infantry squares against the cavalry-dominated Mamluk army in Egypt was a direct inspiration from Rumyantsev's Turkish campaigns.

Not content with just the *kare*, Rumyantsev also advocated another novel infantry formation. Rumyantsev borrowed from a growing European fascination with light troops to introduce to Russia arguments in favor of

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[17] Miakinkov, "Westernization of Russian Military Thought, 1757-1800," 57.

[18] Miakinkov, "Westernization of Russian Military Thought, 1757-1800," 58.

[19] John W Steinberg. *The Military History of the Russian Empire from Peter the Great until Nicholas II* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2024), 86. It is worth noting that even among Russians, Rumyantsev was not the first to develop the modern infantry square. For instance, the Russians adopted defensive squares at the 1758 Battle of Zorndorf (see pg. 69 in the same source). What made Rumyantsev unique was that his infantry was drilled to more quickly march in columns and form squares. This meant the Russian squares could operate more offensively than at Zorndorf where they were a passive anti-flanking reserve of the army.

[20] Miakinkov, "Westernization of Russian Military Thought, 1757-1800," 64.

dedicated light infantry battalions.[21] Rumyantsev's will to experiment with new infantry formations set the stage for his protégé to develop further alternative infantry models. Thus, through Rumyantsev, we see two forms of tactical thought. Rumyantsev continued the imported early 18th-century models with a new appreciation for Prussian drill. Yet, he also set the then-nascent seeds for an alternative model, especially regarding infantry formations, that an astute commander like Suvorov grew into a full-fledged doctrine. Thus, when tracing the parallel development of the doctrinal revolutions in Russia and France, Rumyantsev is a link to Suvorov, not unlike Guibert to Napoleon.

The relative peace central Europe experienced between 1763 and 1792, only briefly interrupted in 1778, came to a dramatic end with the French Revolution. Revolutionary France found itself at war with most of the continent, and the theories that Guibert and others had drawn up were put into practice. The successful synthesis of this new offensive form of warfare was in large part thanks to the experience the officer corps gained through the War of the First Coalition. Beginning in 1793, the French war ministry under Dubois Crancé (1757-1814) merged units to improve cohesion between political factions of the army.[22] While the reform took years to complete, it led to increased professionalism among the new and inexperienced ranks of the National Guard. Beginning in 1794, Crancé's aide Lazare Carnot (1753-1823) undertook comprehensive reforms that streamlined French staff work and improved logistics.[23] With both newfound professionalism and the backing of Carnot's revolutionary bureaucracy, officers had the practical tools needed to put the operationally and logistically taxing form of aggression Guibert called for into practice.

Aside from increased professionalism, the revolutionary system incentivized officers to embrace this new offensive doctrine, especially

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[21] Miakinkov, "Westernization of Russian Military Thought, 1757-1800," 51.
[22] Frederick C. Schneid, *European Armies of the French Revolution, 1789-1802* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), 21-22.

[23] Schneid, *European Armies of the French Revolution, 1789-1802*, 23-24.

during the Robespierre era. The *levee en masse* drastically increased French manpower at the cost of soldier experience.[24] These recruits were often incorporated into light units, allowing for a substantial increase in the skirmishers that Guibert's tactics called for.[25] Via political repression, the Robespierre regime also fostered a cult of the offensive. In 1793, French general Louis-Charles de Flaurs defeated a numerically superior Spanish army on the Pyrenees front at Perpignan. Despite this, the regime later sentenced him to death as his victory came from standing in line, and it was believed that he should have achieved victory by pursuing a more offensive strategy in pursuit of the enemy.[26] The fallout from this political legacy on the newly developing generation of revolutionary officers is evident in combat. A study on various engagements between French and British forces between 1792 and 1815 found that 78% of a total of 226 French advances on British line infantry culminated in a column assault.[27]

The road to military reform in Russia met with far more political backlash before Suvorov applied it. The reign of Emperor Paul I (1796-1801) saw a major political push for continued adherence to the imported Prussian school of war. Paul I patronized the completion of two manuals for infantry drill and warfare in 1796 and 1798 that borrowed heavily from Prussia, including even the uniforms.[28] Suvorov opposed such influence, but Paul's further Prussianization seemed assured when the Tsar exiled Suvorov to the countryside for not embracing the new drill.[29] With the backing of the

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[24] Quimby, *The Background of Napoleonic Warfare*, 321.

[25] Quimby, *The Background of Napoleonic Warfare*, 330.

[26] Paddy Griffith, *French Napoleonic Infantry Tactics 1792-1815* (Osprey Publishing, 2002), 17.

[27] Griffith, *French Napoleonic Infantry Tactics 1792-1815*, 24.

[28] Christopher Duffy, *Eagles over the Alps* (Helion and Company, 1999), 28.

[29] Duffy, *Eagles over the Alps*, 17-18.

absolute authority of the Tsar, more years of Prussianization appeared forthcoming. Thankfully for Suvorov, events in Western Europe would end this retirement and see the general put his revolutionary theories into practice.

In 1798, Austrian preparations for a renewed war with Paris prompted the creation of a second coalition to combat French expansionism. Weary of growing French power in the Mediterranean, Paul I opted to join the coalition.[30] Suvorov and his then-published military treatises, which included methods to fight France, may have made the general seem indispensable to Paul I despite political differences. The Tsar repeatedly attempted to prod Suvorov into taking command in the upcoming war and sent inquiries to the general on how to wage war against France.[31] In February of 1799, a combination of Austrian wishes for the esteemed general to help lead them and a personal desire to see Revolutionary France's political ideology contained, prompted Suvorov to action.[32] Suvorov was sent to aid the Habsburgs in ejecting the French and their satellites from Italy. Suvorov's Italian campaign of 1799 is of special analytical interest as it mirrors Napoleon's success two years earlier in terms of speed and decisiveness. After defeating and driving the French into Liguria, Suvorov undertook his final campaign in Switzerland to aid coalition forces on the Alpine front. While unable to reach allied forces, Suvorov's campaign was brilliant because it blindsided the French command. When faced with French forces and their revolutionary form of warfare, Suvorov responded in kind by outdoing the French at their own game.

The campaign followed Suvorov's reorganization of the Russian army along the lines of his military manual, *Art of Victory* (sometimes translated as *Science of Victory*). Suvorov held three fundamental military

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[30] John Kuehn, *Napoleonic Warfare: the operational art of the great campaigns* (Bloomsbury, 2015), 42.

[31] Duffy, *Eagles over the Alps*, 18.

[32] Duffy, *Eagles over the Alps*, 18.

principles: *glazomer*, *bystrota*, and *natisk*. These referred to having an eye for a situation, achieving speed, and maintaining momentum.[33] This flexibility easily resembles the tactical advantages Revolutionary France held in the 1790s, namely, tactical freedom delegated down to the battalion level and unfixed supply lines for rapid advances.[34] Facing such a flexible opponent, Suvorov allowed every corporal to detach four marksmen for flexible operations, perhaps to match their opponents' acumen for such tactics.[35] Finally, the rank and file were also not exempt from Suvorov's insistence on flexibility. Suvorov often posed convoluted questions to his soldiers, such as "How many fish are there in the Danube?" He chastised those who failed to attempt a response at least, labelling them *nemonuznaika* or "don't knower."[36] Suvorov's intense hatred for such individuals reveals his thoughts on inaction and methodology. He expected quick reflexes and action, and reserved anger for those who could only follow carefully planned methodology.

Beyond the scope of flexibility, Suvorov's cult of the offensive also resembles its contemporary revolutionary models by improving his army's morale. As outlined in the *Art of Victory,* a basic infantry advance was to be one of continuous forward march. Infantry attacks could take place in line, columns or squares, as needed. Lines and columns marched while firing sparingly by platoon until close enough to form ranks for a bayonet charge.[37] Squares were to forgo firing at range and simply brace for the bayonet charge.[38] Every soldier was to believe retreat was never on the table, with

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[33] Duffy, *Eagles over the Alps*, 17.

[34] Duffy, *Eagles over the Alps*, 10.

[35] Duffy, *Eagles over the Alps*, 29.

[36] Miakinkov, "Westernization of Russian Military Thought, 1757-1800*"*, 78-79.

[37] Aleksandr Suvorov, *Nauka Pobyezhdat'* (1809), 4-5.

[38] Suvorov, *Nauka Pobyezhdat'*, 5.

only top-level commanders permitted to contemplate it.[39] Even then, Suvorov wrote that commanders should avoid it because he believed it is easier to beat an enemy one can face and see.[40] Suvorov would rather die fighting in repeated offensives than give ground, something demonstrated in his Swiss campaign. While Suvorov by no means held positive views of Revolutionary France as a state, he seemed to emphasize adopting a similar level of *élan* in attacks, with officers tasked to yell "*ura*" with careful timing.[41] Some French noted the stubborn devotion of the Russian soldiers and described how they prayed even in death.[42] Beyond the obvious indication of morale, this highlights one of the main points previously noted. This is because post-Catherine Russia and Revolutionary France, two societies with opposing cultural values, developed the revolutionary model of war by independent means. For Suvorov, who knew well the strengths of the French, finding an independent and uniquely Russian form of achieving this model was useful when adopting techniques that Revolutionary France encouraged was not possible. As a Russian imperial soldier, Suvorov may have abhorred Parisian ideas of revolutionary violence to defend *la patrie*, but, through religious zealotry, he hoped to mimic its morale benefit that enabled bold offensive tactics.

As noted, since the Russian Imperial Army would be precluded from inspiring courage by appealing to revolutionary causes, Suvorov sought to instill such an *élan* by other means. Yet, the general seemed to believe that morale matters not only for the foot soldier but for officers as well. The piety of the Russian soldiers who prayed in death had to be brought to the officer corps as well. At the time, over one-third of the Russian officer corps was of

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[39] Suvorov, *Nauka Pobyezhdat'*, 7.

[40] Suvorov, *Nauka Pobyezhdat'*, 7.

[41] Suvorov, *Nauka Pobyezhdat'*, 2.

[42] Laurence Spring, *Russian Grenadiers and Infantry 1799–1815* (Osprey, 2002), 50.

German origin.[43] These German officers seemed to revel in their positions by shedding what they believed to be their "Teutonic" characteristics for the noble Christian spirit they saw in Russians.[44] If not for Christianity, there were other means of instilling such a defiant spirit. During the reign of Catherine the Great, officers who achieved special or daring actions were granted large agricultural estates and peasants to work with them.[45] From this, it can be theorized that within the late 18th-century Russian army, a culture developed where young and glory-hungry officers had additional incentives for risk-taking and boldness.

The final way Suvorov tended to appeal to officers was through their emotional instincts. When marching into Italy, Suvorov wore an Austrian uniform to instill loyalty among his allied regiments.[46] Later, at the Trebbia, he threatened to commit suicide over suggestions of a premature retreat.[47] Suvorov's most famous and, as viewed by the general staff, most inspiring emotional outburst came in late 1799 when he learned of the difficult situation he faced in the Swiss Alps. First by rumor from retreating priests, then by his spies overhearing the celebrations of the French, Suvorov learned that the Russian army to his North under General Korsakov was crushed by French general Masséna at Zurich.[48] This meant that Suvorov's army was isolated from reinforcements in unforgiving terrain while a well-positioned and vastly superior enemy force threatened its existence. Many contemporary armies may have surrendered in such a position, most famously shown by the Austrian surrender at Ulm in 1805. Yet, Suvorov

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[43] Duffy, *Russia's Military Way to the West*, 146.

[44] Duffy, *Russia's Military Way to the West*, 147.

[45] Duffy, *Russia's Military Way to the West*, 152.

[46] Kuehn, *Napoleonic Warfare*, 53.

[47] Kuehn, *Napoleonic Warfare*, 57.

[48] Duffy, *Eagles over the Alps*, 210.

turned the hopeless situation into one where he got his officers to defy expectations while appealing to zealotry and honor. When he learned that Korsakov was routed, he dramatically exclaimed:

What can we do now? To go back is disgraceful; I have never retreated. To advance to Schwyz is impossible - Masséna has over 60,000 men, and our troops scarcely amount to 20,000 men. We are devoid of provisions, ammunition and artillery . . . We can turn to nobody for help. We are on the verge of disaster! All that remains for us is to rely on Almighty God and the bravery and self-sacrifice of my troops! We are Russians! God is with us![49]

Perhaps Suvorov's most famous quip is "The bullet is a fool, the bayonet a fine fellow."[50] Other generals, such as the French Marshal De Saxe, preceded Suvorov when it came to a fascination with bayonets.[51] However, Suvorov sought to utilize the unflinching discipline of Russia's infantry to take bayonet practices to new heights. Suvorov lambasted firing methods that he believed were wasteful. These included firing at a retreating enemy, firing while withdrawing, and firing en masse before an infantryman could see and target an individual enemy.[52] As mentioned previously, Suvorov's love of the bayonet is perhaps one of his defining characteristics, which future romantics would use to cement the general as an architect of a uniquely Russian school of war. However, since Suvorov was a flexible commander, his deviations from strict revolutionary tactics were often inspired by necessity or opportunity. For instance, Russian gunpowder was

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[49] Alexander Mikaberidze, "The Lion of the Russian Army: Life and Military Career of Prince Peter Bagration 1765-1812" (PhD diss, Florida State University, 2003), 153-154.

[50] Suvorov, *Nauka Pobyezhdat'*, 8.

[51] Miakinkov, "A Russian Way of War? Westernization of Russian Military Thought, 1757-1800," 90.

[52] Suvorov, *Nauka Pobyezhdat'*, 6-7.

of poor quality and the muskets were inferior to French models.[53] We may also assume that the complications of a Russian army operating halfway across Europe and being reliant on allied supplies raised logistical insecurities and promoted the bayonet. For instance, by the time Suvorov's army neared the end of the Swiss campaign, encirclement and constant campaigning had virtually drained Russian ammunition stocks. To parry a potentially fatal French attempt to block his army, Suvorov sent his advanced guard under Prince Bagration through the village of Sool to strike the French flank at Schwanden.[54] Bagratian launched four costly bayonet charges to pin the French advance before slowly fighting his way back to the main army[55] The army's experience with bayonets served the Russians well as they briefly claimed the operational initiative against a superior advancing force that was forced to react defensively rather than pursue the shattered remnants of Suvorov's main force.

Despite Rumyantsev's appeals, skirmishing tactics within the army were still in their infancy.[56] The first Russian manual on skirmishing of the type Guibert had already furnished to France, only appeared after the Napoleonic Wars in 1818.[57] By contrast, French skirmishers were feared professionals with an elite level of initiative demonstrated by the fact that, despite being light infantry, they could still close into melee at a moment's notice, if required.[58] Thus, for Suvorov, getting into a melee would serve to dilute the disadvantages Russian troops may face in a firefight. It also robs the French of the ability to charge first, effectively hijacking the

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[53] Spring, *Russian Grenadiers and Infantry 1799–1815*, 51.

[54] Mikaberidze, "Life and Military Career of Prince Peter Bagration 1765-1812," 167-168.

[55] Mikaberidze, "Life and Military Career of Prince Peter Bagration 1765-1812," 168-170.

[56] Kuehn, *Napoleonic Warfare*, 44.

[57] Spring, *Russian Grenadiers and Infantry 1799–1815*, 47.

[58] Griffith, *French Napoleonic Infantry Tactics 1792-1815*, 20.

revolutionary model's dependence on always being the attacker to force the enemy to react.

Undoubtedly, one of the most unique aspects of the Russian Army during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars was its large corps of irregular Cossack cavalry. In Italy and Switzerland, Suvorov commanded a rather exceptional army whose cavalry consisted entirely of Cossacks.[59] Thus, if attempting to link Suvorov to the revolutionary school of war, one has to explain how he adapted a cavalry force so seemingly foreign to fit such a model. Firstly, it must be established that far from the image of an exotic savage looter, Cossacks could conduct many of the same actions as western cavalry. As shown later in the Napoleonic Wars at Eylau and Borodino, Cossacks were perfectly capable of executing charges on French heavy cavalry.[60] They could also conduct daring and direct rearguard actions, such as in Suvorov's Swiss campaign, where, during the final retreat into the Panix Pass, they protected Bagration's rear from French foragers.[61] Thus, the irregularity of the Cossacks should not be seen as a major impediment that Suvorov had to overcome to match revolutionary tactics. Instead, it may be more prudent to consider the opportunities they presented to a skillful general seeking such a model.

As discussed earlier, the principles of *blazomer*, *bystrota*, and *natisk* were Suvorov's version of the revolutionary model, and the Cossacks represented it. Cossack horsemen rode small and swift horses compared to their counterparts.[62] One obvious benefit of having faster horsemen is the additional potential in reconnaissance. Suvorov divided his Cossacks in Italy into an organized system of four to five scouting detachments under Adrian

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[59] Laurence Spring, *The Cossacks 1799–1815* (Osprey, 2003), 42.

[60] Spring, *The Cossacks 1799–1815*, 45.

[61] Duffy, *Eagles over the Alps*, 249.

[62] Spring, *The Cossacks 1799–1815*, 42.

Denisov.[63] Suvorov famously said that these Cossacks were the "eyes and ears of my army."[64] In regards to other non-combat roles, Cossacks were extremely reputable dispatch carriers who could transmit friendly dispatches and capture enemy messengers with speed and devotion.[65] Both of these traits were undoubtedly aided by the speed of their light horses. While reconnaissance and communication are vital for any army, it becomes more so if following the relentlessly aggressive and flexible tactics of revolutionary and Suvorovian warfare. This is because an army that always aims to be on the march will need to find ways to receive intelligence more rapidly, so it knows what to achieve. By contrast, an army that takes more operational pauses would not face such a challenge.

Finally, the combat roles the Cossacks excelled at can be viewed in the context of the initiative Suvorovian warfare sought. Cossack cavalrymen were trained to ride in a curving and then swerving motion, unlike their more linearly riding western counterparts.[66] Already, that implies a degree of unpredictability compared to their horse-mounted foes. If caught unprepared, enemies may have to pause and adjust to the Cossack movements, thus passing the initiative to the Russians. This unpredictability may have also aided in one of their most infamous skills, the ability to threaten enemy command structures. The speed and unpredictability of Cossack horsemen made high-ranking officers vulnerable to capture, a fate which Napoleon himself twice narrowly avoided.[67] In this, one only has to be reminded of the many times when a loss of senior leadership has doomed the cohesion and impetus of an army in history. While we cannot be certain of its potency, fear of capture could have incentivized the enemy command

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[63] Duffy, *Russia's Military Way to the West*, 217.

[64] Spring, *The Cossacks 1799–1815*, 41.

[65] Spring, *The Cossacks 1799–1815*, 41.

[66] Spring, *The Cossacks 1799–1815*, 29.

[67] Spring, *The Cossacks 1799–1815*, 50.

staff to withdraw to safer locations. In that case, the enemy's command structure would suffer, allowing the Russian command to operate more efficiently, and hijacking the revolutionary model's reliance on offensive flexibility. Finally, Cossacks, through their traditional lifestyle, also trained for dismounted warfare, as shown when they fended off the French assaults on Suvorov's rear at the Muetenttal in Switzerland.[68] The ability to operate both mounted and dismounted ensured that Suvorov's offensives remained effective in any terrain. Switzerland offers a perfect example, as the Cossacks could operate in Alpine terrain normally hostile to cavalry by engaging in dismounted warfare for which they were equally trained.

While Suvorov had his views on how to fight the French, the War of the Second Coalition was a geopolitical struggle where Suvorov was but one element. This meant Suvorov's vision had to compete with other visions, most notably the Habsburg bureaucracy. Suvorov's relations with those institutions reveal a rift in his perception of European armies during a period that favors his belonging to the revolutionary school. Prior to his campaign in Italy, Suvorov wrote to Emperor Paul that a campaign in the region should emphasize flexibility and avoid prolonged siege warfare if possible.[69] Aside from following his belief in sustaining operational momentum, it's possible this letter was inspired by Napoleon's previous campaign, which was briefly stalled by the fortress city of Mantua. However, Suvorov's allies seemed to take the opposite lesson from Napoleon's Italian campaign of 1796-1797.

The Austrian army of 1799, which Suvorov was tasked to fight with, did not delegate operations to any command headquarters but, instead, made

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[68] Duffy, *Eagles over the Alps*, 227. Andrey Rosenberg (1739-1813) who commanded the Russian rear dismounted his Cossacks and had them operate as light infantry. On the first day of the Battle of the Muetental, the Cossacks were deployed in a multi-layered screen ahead of his main force. As the French pursuers fought their way through this improvised defense in depth, Rosenberg's reserves charged their exhausted enemy. As this counterattack pinned the French, the Cossacks circled the rough slopes of the valley to harass the enemy flank. The subsequent enemy retreat ended all French pursuit efforts on that day.

[69] Duffy, *Russia's Military Way to the West*, 216.

such decisions through a central bureaucracy in Vienna known as the *Hofkriegsrat*. After defeating Marshal Macdonald at the Trebbia River, Vienna issued orders against Suvorov's planned vigorous pursuit of the French. The *Hofkriegsrat* instead wished to besiege local fortresses to reassert Austrian power in Northern Italy. In response, Suvorov wrote to Austria's Emperor Francis I and complained about being unable to maintain the initiative by striking the French at Genoa, for which the emperor reprimanded him. [70] Thus, allied operational planning in the Second Coalition War revealed a clash between Suvorov's impulsive revolutionary doctrine and a more traditional and meticulous *Hofkriegsrat*. It also demonstrates that not all military institutions in Europe had yet become adherents of this new model.

While unashamedly critical of those who opposed his theories, even to the point of upsetting Europe's predominant monarchs, Suvorov could not help but to notice the advances made by the French in the art of war. Among France's enemies in the 1790s, only Suvorov attempted to bring a level of soldierly morale that could match the revolutionary model.[71] Even before 1799, Suvorov noted that if faced against the French infantry columns, "we ought to beat them as columns."[72] Even as early as 1796, when Napoleon's career as a general was in its infancy, Suvorov noted the scale of his talent. Suvorov delighted in how Bonaparte "carried the council of war in his head" while "his enemies will continue in their old routine subject to the scribblers in the cabinet."[73] He even remarked that Napoleon "has stolen my secret, the speed of my marches!"[74] The last quote is particularly prescient because it does more than show that Suvorov favored the revolutionary model. In it,

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[70] Duffy, *Eagles over the Alps*, 113-114.

[71] Miakinkov, "Westernization of Russian Military Thought, 1757-1800," 97.

[72] Suvorov, *Art of Victory*, 10.

[73] Duffy, *Eagles over the Alps*, 269.

[74] Duffy, *Eagles over the Alps*, 269.

Suvorov claims the mantle of the creator concerning revolutionary forced marches, a mantle that, according to Suvorov, Napoleon was wearing now, only to match his skill. In other words, Suvorov is not a Westernizer here, in the sense of being impressed by the revolutionary model but rather, he was impressed with the level to which the French had adhered to his theorems, whether deliberately or not. To Suvorov, if anything, the French were Suvorovians, which was more reason to regard them as superior to their contemporaries.

Despite their achievements, Suvorovian tactics were not wholly born out of a vacuum of one man's unrivalled mind. Whether by inspiration or by reaching similar conclusions about warfare, Suvorov's tactics tended to resemble the emerging schools of thought present in Revolutionary France. Just as with the French, Suvorovian warfare was focused on speed and a constant state of offensive. By seizing both operational and tactical momentum, Suvorov sought to gain the initiative over his enemies and thus exploit circumstances to gain rapid victories. Such a comparison also explains Suvorov's general success as traditional 18th-century dynastic armies struggled against the French throughout the 1790s. Suvorov was able to identify the shortcomings of traditional military models in his sharp critiques of Paul I's Prussianization reforms and the Austrians' *Hofkriegsrat* establishment. This may demonstrate why Suvorov's campaign in Italy and Switzerland was one of the most successful anti-French campaigns in the years between 1792 and 1812, otherwise marked by frequent coalition defeats. Regarding the notion of later romantics that Suvorov represented a uniquely Russian school of war, it must be acknowledged that the general did indeed possess certain unique eccentricities, such as his love of the bayonet and his hatred of any who he thought a *nemonuznaika* or "don't knower." Despite this, the unique characteristics of both Suvorov and the Russian army cannot be viewed as wholly separate. Instead, these unique characteristics were molded to more effectively resemble the revolutionary school of warfare when direct adaptation was impossible. Revolutionary France and Imperial Russia were such different states, with distinct social and economic structures, as well as military traditions. Given this, it is reasonable that a skilled general would make these alterations. These

differences, rather than being remarkable for their variety, should be seen as remarkable for their similar result. Lastly, it must be assessed how, beyond France's borders, grand all-encompassing conditions for such doctrinal changes existed to create multiple innovators.