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THE OPERATIONAL MANOEUVRE GROUP
IN SOVIET MILITARY DOCTRINE

Daniel J. Hayward

Master's Thesis

April 1987

~~Department~~ of Political Science

Carleton University

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IN SOVIET MILITARY DOCTRINE"

submitted by Daniel Hayward, Hons. B.A.
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

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THE OPERATIONAL MANOEUVRE GROUP IN SOVIET MILITARY DOCTRINE

- Analysis of the history and operations of the Operational Manoeuvre Group within the framework of Soviet military doctrine
- analysis of the vulnerable points of the Operational Manoeuvre Group concept and the ability of the Soviet Army to implement it
- assessment of the effectiveness of NATO strategy in dealing with a Warsaw Pact offensive including Operational Manoeuvre Groups

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Introduction

The Soviet military threat to Western Europe is usually conceived in terms of waves of Warsaw Pact tanks pouring across the Inter-German Border and steamrolling their way to the Rhine and beyond to the English Channel.

The reality of the Warsaw Pact conventional offensive would involve sharp, rapid thrusts deep into the NATO rear by operational manoeuvre groups (operativnaya manevrennaya gruppa), division- or corps-, or even army-sized, combined arms formations, including substantial elements of airborne and airmobile (helicopter-borne) infantry, supporting the advance of armies and Fronts. A Front is the Soviet equivalent of a NATO army group.

The operational manoeuvre group (OMG) is a modification of the tank and mechanized mobile groups (podvizhnaya gruppa) used by the Red Army during the Great Patriotic War. It has been developed as part and parcel of the changes in Soviet military doctrine to adapt the Soviet Army to the political requirement to fight and win a war at the conventional level without nuclear escalation.

The ideological underpinning to Soviet military thought, Marxist-Leninism, prescribes the inevitability of the triumph of socialism over capitalism, leading to the Era of Global Democratic Peace. This ideology sanctions the use of the available means of force only if it is expedient in advancing the socialist cause and does not jeopardize the security of those

achievements which have already been gained, such as the security of the USSR. Military power is necessary to defend the socialist cause and may be used to advance it, but need not be the decisive element in the historical process. The principal role of Soviet military power is thus to dissuade the "imperialist" camp from resorting to the use of force against the socialist bloc in an effort to thwart the "progressive cause of history driven by social-revolutionary dynamics." (1)

Should the Communist leadership decide that the use of force is in the interests of the Soviet Union, Soviet military doctrine is intended to obtain a socialist victory. Defeat is believed to be complete and irrevocable in a war between capitalism and socialism. The victor would not be interested in negotiating a peace, but in imposing his social system on the vanquished power. (2)

Doctrine (doktrina) is defined as the accumulated policies, concepts, practices, and procedures which combine to shape and provide the framework for military behaviour. (3) Doctrine covers the nature of future wars, how they are to be fought, and the organization and preparation of the armed forces for war.

The Soviets distinguish within doctrine between military art, the theory and practice of preparing and conducting military operations, and military science, the system of knowledge about the character and laws of war. (4) Strategy, operations, and tactics are all part of military art.

Strategy, as part of military art, is subordinated to

doctrine. Strategy prescribes methods of conducting the war, determines the composition of forces and sets out means to accomplish the goals set by doctrine. The Soviets consider the scope of strategy to include the laws governing armed conflict, the utilization of armed forces to attain military goals, the basis of material and technical support for military action, the leadership requirements of the armed services, operational planning for future wars, and the homeland's requirements for civil defence. (5)

Doctrine and military art are not constant. They shift with the tasks assigned by the political leadership and the discovery of new methods of warfare. There are, however, constants in Soviet military thought, impressed on the Soviet military mind by historical Russian and Soviet experiences. The trauma of the years of the Great Patriotic War has affected all aspects of Soviet life, not least military thinking.

It has been the Soviet wartime experience that superior resources will always produce victory in war unless this superior economic potential is emasculated. (6) Soviet doctrine, therefore, based on this lesson from the Civil War, the Great Patriotic War, and the confrontation with the West, is aimed at waging war from an inferior resource base.

The main principles of military art were summarized by Col. V. Savkin of the Frunze Military Academy in his work "Basic Principles of Operational Art and Tactics." (7)

The first, mobility and a high tempo of combat operations,

characterizes all Soviet military thought. The offensive is the basis of military thought; former Chief of the General Staff Ogarkov called it the "basic kind of strategic action." (8) Speed facilitates surprise, has a psychological effect on the defenders, prevents the enemy from employing countermeasures, and maximizes the chances for survival and victory. Speed means an economy in force and loss can be achieved, by avoiding a long campaign; the high-speed offensive increases the losses of the defender and reduces attrition in men, equipment, and supplies for the attacker. (9)

The emphasis on speed results in an emphasis on timing. The smallest delay might mean non-fulfillment of the mission and large losses. The commander must win the battle for time and the initiative by choosing the right direction for the attack and building up his efforts faster than the enemy; once the enemy reacts, inevitably late, he will be well on the way to defeat. (10) Suvorov's eighteenth century maxim that one minute decides the outcome of a battle, one hour the success of a campaign, and one day the fate of a war (11) is held to be just as true in modern warfare.

The second major principle of military art is the concentration of main efforts and creation of necessary superiority. The ability to concentrate force and create a superiority in men and weapons over the enemy at the right place and time is necessary to achieve surprise and superiority in an attack over a broad front. Savkin compares the force ratios in the Battle of Leuctra in 371 BC, in Frederick the Great's

campaigns, in the Great Patriotic War, and in nuclear warfare. In the Great Patriotic War, the Red Army deployed one division for every 0.7 to 1.6 km of front line, achieving ratios in the sector of the Soviet breakthrough of 5 to 10:1 in battalions, 6 to 12:1 in guns and mortars, and 4 to 10:1 in tanks. (12)

This massing, however, is no longer as attractive to Soviet commanders, as concentrations of men and vehicles are vulnerable to enemy nuclear attack, or can be detected by enemy surveillance, nullifying surprise. Such large concentrations were no longer necessary after doctrine prescribed nuclear strikes to achieve the breakthrough.

The principle of surprise (vnezapnost') has been seen as an important part of military art since ancient times, with the point being driven home for the Soviets by the unexpected Axis attack in 1941. Vnezapnost' means more than surprise, referring to actions which are sudden, forceful, unanticipated, and decisive. (13) Surprise has a "determining role in seizing the initiative," (14) according to General Gerasimov. Another Soviet officer, Colonel Loginov, writes that surprise is used "to stun the enemy by courage and daring, to catch him unawares when he is not prepared to repulse blows, to paralyze his will to resist, (and) to deprive him of the possibility to take effective countermeasures." (15)

The principle of combat activeness holds that success in battle will be achieved by the side "which, with all else equal, acts more actively and resolutely, takes the initiative, and

holds it firmly." (16) The key to combat activeness is the boldness and initiative of officers, which is constantly stressed in Soviet military literature but is counteracted by the docility taught by a Communist upbringing.

The offensive, the focus of Soviet strategic planning, is intended to deny the initiative to the enemy. There is a belief that NATO is no less vulnerable to the Soviet offensive than were the Germans in 1944-45, a view furthered by the perceived similarity between NATO and German defensive patterns.

There are three main actions in the Soviet offensive. In the first, the meeting engagement, the two opposing sides encounter each other. The object for the Soviet force is then to seize and maintain the initiative by swift and violent actions to disrupt the enemy and confuse him so that he is unable to sustain his own attack.

In the pursuit, Soviet units must outdistance the enemy and block his escape, terminating the chase when the enemy is eliminated or logistical problems arise. The third action, the breakthrough, is defined by Marshal Pavel Rotmistrov as "simultaneous and successive attacks through the depth of the enemy position" (17) to create and enlarge breaches in the enemy defence. Any such weak spots or gaps must be seized upon by the attacker and used to break through into the enemy's depth.

The fourth principle of military art is that of the preservation of the combat effectiveness of friendly troops. The forces being committed to battle must avoid being weakened by

combat before they embark on their missions. Defensive strongpoints are to be bypassed in order to avoid a protracted battle during the move into the enemy's depth. Unblooded "second echelon" forces are committed once the first echelon is exhausted; the first echelon formations are then withdrawn and regrouped.

It is worth noting here that under certain circumstances in the offensive Soviet commanders will "echelon" their forces to achieve the breakthrough. Forces are structured and divided in depth on a narrow front to achieve a rapid and irresistible buildup of pressure on a small sector of the enemy defence. Thus, a battalion might have a first and second echelon, as would a regiment, division or corps, and army. A company might be the second echelon of a battalion in the first echelon of a regiment in the first echelon of a division in an army's first echelon.

(19)

Savkin next mentions the conformity of the goal of the operation to the conditions of the actual situation. The goal must conform to battle conditions and the forces and means in correlation with the enemy forces. Savkin cites the German failures at Moscow, Stalingrad and Kursk as violations of this principle that plans must match troop capabilities, as the Germans over-estimated their own strength and under-estimated Soviet resources. (20)

The conformity of the goal to the situation requires skillful use of the forces at the Soviet command's disposal.

The commander must have a thorough estimate of the situation and make the correct decisions to maintain proper troop control. This makes the acquisition of timely and accurate information necessary.

Interworking or coordination is another point of emphasis, due to the Soviet preoccupation with the "correlation of forces." Efficient management and control are necessary to achieve joint efforts. Service branches or formations working as a team maximize strengths and minimize weaknesses. Soviet officers recognize that unsupported units are vulnerable to isolation and destruction by the enemy.

A major principle of military art is that of simultaneous action against the enemy to the depth of his deployment. The Soviets learned early from the Revolution and the Civil War that the rear is vulnerable. A premium is placed on extending destruction, disruption and psychological paralysis as far into the enemy's rear as possible to prevent him from regrouping, bringing up reserves, and establishing a new line of defence.

The deep battle (glubokiy boy) is therefore stressed in the Soviet military literature. Deep refers not to the distance penetrated by the general offensive, but to the distance to which sub-elements have thrust or to the distance sub-elements have advanced from the forward edge of the battle area (FEBA). (21) The Russian Army had some experience with penetrations into the enemy's depth, and the Red Army practiced and refined deep battle during the Great Patriotic War, using the mobile groups

Political Purpose and Military Means, Scholarly Resources, Inc.,
Wilmington, Del., 1982, p. 236.

18 Scott and Scott, p. 141.

19 Christopher Donnelly, "The Development of the Soviet
Concept of Echeloning," NATO Review, 32, No. 6, 1984, p. 9.

20 Jacobs, p. 72.

21 Ibid., p. 76.

22 Lt-Col. Andrew B. Finlayson, "US Arms for China - A New
Look," Naval War College Review, 39, No. 1, January/February
1986, pp. 68-69.

Mongolia towards Beijing, (22) There would therefore be a potential for the use of several OMGs at the army and Front levels. As speed would be essential to trap Chinese units in forward areas, the use of airborne and airmobile forces by OMGs would be advantageous as part of encirclement operations. There would be many missions for OMGs as the offensive penetrated deeper into China, with a number of important targets, such as rail junctions, river crossings, and ports, which would be suitable for OMG attacks and seizure.

There has been a considerable debate in the West since the OMG first appeared in the Western defence press in 1982, over aspects of OMG operations and the importance and meaning of the entire concept. The situation has been exacerbated by the lack of open-shelf Warsaw Pact literature dealing with the modern OMG since the concept was revealed to Western analysts; most of the unclassified literature deals with mobile group operations during the Great Patriotic War, with oblique references to the use of mobile groups today.

It is possible to shed light on these contentious points through an examination of the OMG using Western and Warsaw Pact analyses, and the historical Russian and Soviet use of mobile deep operations which inspired the OMG. The historical angle is vital to any treatment of Soviet doctrine as Soviet military art draws so heavily on formative experiences in Russian military history and the Great Patriotic War.

The OMG has appeared in some Western work as part of the

1.
"ten foot tall supermen" school of analysis of the Soviet military. Opinions differ on just how formidable the OMG doctrine is, but it has limitations which should be recognized, especially the ability of the Soviet officer corps to put the concept into operation in battle. The ingrained docility of the average Soviet officer may seriously hamper the effectiveness of the OMG and the entire Warsaw Pact offensive.

The Western debaters have for the most part looked at the OMG only within the framework of the Soviet Army and its doctrine. Only a few analysts have contrasted the restructuring of Soviet forces with the corresponding shift in NATO doctrine towards targetting Warsaw Pact rear areas and follow-on forces, and assessed how well NATO's military art can deal with a Warsaw Pact offensive spearheaded by OMGs. NATO doctrine does not exist in a vacuum, and the collective defence effort must be examined in light of the doctrine of the power most likely to be on the offensive in wartime.

Also neglected in the Western literature is the effect of the OMG, as part of a reoriented Soviet strategy, and its interaction with NATO doctrine on deterrence of war. Is the interaction of these two doctrines stabilizing or destabilizing in terms of preserving the state of armed peace in the European theatre? The effect of the OMG and Soviet doctrine on the Sino-Soviet conventional standoff also deserves assessment.

The Soviet "threat" in Europe has frequently been inflated and distorted by "worst case" analyses or lobbyists with their

own agendas. The Soviet leadership is not likely to launch an offensive against NATO unless it is necessary to pre-empt a perceived NATO attack (making the stabilizing or destabilizing effects of NATO and Soviet doctrines important) or the Soviet Army possesses a doctrine and forces capable of securing a victory without great loss to the Soviet Union. The part the OMC plays in their thinking is thus worthy of examination.

Footnotes

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1986, pp. 68-69.

Chapter 1

The Roots of the OMG

Advanced Detachments in the Imperial Russian Army

The roots of the modern Operational Manoeuvre Group can be traced back to the advanced guards which provided march security and reconnaissance for army columns. The Soviet Military Encyclopedia mentions the presence of these detachments in the army of Alexander the Great and traces the development of these vanguards through such events as the Battle of Nieuport in 1600 (1).

It is of course military common sense to safeguard a column on the march with a small "point" unit at the head to detect obstacles and the presence of the enemy. David Jones, in a valuable work on Russian and Soviet advanced guards, quotes Soviet military historian E.A. Razin that advanced guards appeared in Russia as the Kievan Rus standardized their march order in the 10th century (2); this forward unit became a feature of the march order in the medieval and Imperial Russian armies.

One of the first OMG-like operations in the Russian army was Lt-Gen. Y.V. Romeyko-Gurko's use of a forward detachment (peredovoy otryad) in 1877, during the Russo-Turkish War. This has been examined and related to OMG practice by Chris Bellamy (3).

Romeyko-Gurko commanded a detachment 11,000-strong, roughly equivalent to a modern Soviet division, and received orders from the Front commander to carry out a reconnaissance, collect information, and prepare to move into the mountains of southern Bulgaria. Once orders to enter the mountains were received, the second phase of the operation was to begin, entailing seizing the mountain passes, sending cavalry south to instigate a popular uprising and scatter small Turkish detachments, and protecting the passes while the roads were prepared for the passage of the main Russian force.

These missions are similar to those of a modern OMG, with the exception that Romeyko-Gurko could expect support from the local Bulgar populace, unlike an OMG in Western Europe or China. Like an OMG, the Romeyko-Gurko force performed missions which were an integral part of the general offensive, included units which had not trained together before, was assigned additional combat support units such as engineers, and was intended to largely live off the land. It went beyond the standard tasks of a vanguard by engaging in active operations against the enemy and seizing key objectives to facilitate the advance of the main body.

Romeyko-Gurko did not succeed in taking the Shipka pass from the south until the Turks withdrew after realizing that they were caught between the forward detachment and the main Russian force. Romeyko-Gurko then advanced into the pass and linked up with the

main body. Bellamy notes that an OMG in a similar state of exhaustion would be withdrawn and regrouped after rejoining the main force, but Romeyko-Gurko's force was the only one available for the deep penetration mission and it was pushed forward for the second phase of the operation.

The detachment's cavalry raids were successful in creating a perceived considerable threat to Adrianople and panicking the Turkish High Command. The entire operation had met most of its objectives in both phases, and was crucial to the general offensive.

Bellamy uses Gneral P.I. Mishchenko's raid during the Russo-Japanese War as a second ancestor of the OMG. Mishchenko commanded the forward detachment of the Manchurian Army, with 7,500 horsemen, mounted infantry, horse artillery, and volunteers to raid southward on the Japanese left flank during the winter of 1904-05 and cut Japanese communications. He was ordered to cut railways, capture Inkou and Tashichao temporarily to destroy supplies, and destroy transport, supply dumps, and minor Japanese detachments along the way. Inkou was added to the target list after the detachment's reconnaissance discovered the Inkou road to be open, much as reconnaissance would help to target an OMG.

For both Mishchenko and Romeyko-Gurko, the objectives and nature of the operation were known only to the commander until the attack was launched. This practice continues in the Soviet

Army. As a result of the secrecy, the Japanese thought Mishchenko's raid was just another Russian foray against Chinese bandits until the force had almost reached Inkou.

The raiding force, about the size of a weak division, was supplied exactly like Romeyko-Gurko's forward detachment, with five days' food for men and three days for horses, so the force would live off the land during the later part of the operation.

While Romeyko-Gurko's force had operated as part of a general offensive, as would an OMG, Mishchenko's raid was not part of an offensive and was instigated during a lull in the fighting. The raid would be conducted down the enemy flank, rather than striking into the Japanese lines. Such an operation had been considered as part of an offensive, but the Russian army was not prepared to launch one at the time and some action to counter the fall of Port Arthur to the Japanese was necessary. The Mishchenko raid was not therefore an OMG-style precursor to the advance of the main force, but it did teach lessons about inserting and handling a division-sized formation in the enemy rear.

Mishchenko's force advanced in a series of parallel columns (much like the vehicles of an OMG) down the enemy flank. The attack on Inkou was unsuccessful as the Japanese rushed reinforcements to defend the town, but the Russians did kill 500 to 600 enemy, capture prisoners and papers, and destroy firewood

and supplies.

Bellamy comments that the raid would have been very successful as part of an offensive, with the reasons for its failure at Inkou being inappropriate timing and a lack of clear objectives. While the Mishchenko raid was different from an OMG in theory, it did provide useful parallels in practice. Bellamy further points out that both Romeyko-Gurko and Mishchenko were exceptionally able, energetic commanders who were able to use their personalities and wills to keep their forces together (4), possibly unlike some modern OMG commanders.

The "cutting edge" of Russian military art before the First World War was represented by General A.A. Neznamov and his "futurist" look at mobile operations. His work reflected trends in the rest of Europe in advocating that modern doctrine be based on mass firepower, and movement, and stress the offensive. Warfare in the 20th century was seen as being essentially different from that in the past (5). There was no longer any need for a vanguard to engage and hold the enemy while the main force deployed.

Neznamov saw three types of operations, the first two being an offensive aimed at a deliberate action, and a wait-and-see stance to complete deployment or ascertain the enemy's intentions. The middle case was more similar to OMG operations, being an offensive operation to seize positions while the army

moved through territory. Targets might include mountain passes and swamp exits, necessary to continue the advance.

Forward detachments of cavalry were not seen by Neznamov as being sufficient to carry out such missions. Instead, he proposed using strong, combined-arms units, unencumbered by the baggage carried by units in the main body, sent up ahead. Such an advanced unit should not advance too far ahead lest it be destroyed before the arrival of the main force; one-and-a-half to two days march ahead was regarded as a safe distance. Neznamov wished to restrict the independent activity of these units and urged caution in their command and control (6).

Mobile Operations and the Red Army

The October Revolution brought home the importance of the rear in military operations, as it was the collapse of the rear that made revolution possible. The Civil War following the Bolshevik uprising further illustrated the vulnerability of the rear and also increased the emphasis on manoeuvre. It was the Red Army's experience in the Civil War that the results of combat depend not only on the relative size of forces and the means of fighting, but also on manoeuvre and the selection of the direction of attack (7), a lesson well learnt and integral to Soviet doctrine.

The Russian army had bad experiences on the defensive in

World War I, although its experiences on the offensive, as at the Masurian Lakes, were not much better. The Red Army was much more successful in the more fluid fighting of the Civil War, giving its officers even more of a bias for mobile operations.

In his writings during the 1920's, Svechkin contrasted two styles of warfare, the strategy of manoeuvre and the strategy of attrition, and wrote in favour of manoeuvre as a more flexible style of operations more in fitting with lessons learnt by the Russian and Soviet armies.

The preeminent Soviet military thinker of the interwar period was Marshal Tukhachevskii, who drew on the lessons of the Civil War and Russian traditions in manoeuvre, probably including points drawn from Genghis Khan, and Sun Tzu (who taught that the shape of an army resembles water).

Tukhachevskii's writings focussed on two major principles, cooperation between arms and simultaneity, bringing the largest possible number of troops into contact with the enemy at the same time. In the 1920's he argued for a mass army operating over a broad front, with infantry, artillery, and tanks pinning down the enemy to allow the cavalry to pierce the enemy line.

Shortly afterwards, Tukhachevskii's contemporary Triandafillov, in his 1930 work *The Character of the Operations of the Modern Army*, focussed on the versatile, all-arms

(including aviation) shock army. The first stage of developing this modern army resembled Tukhachevskii's broad-front concept. In the second stage, the shock army would contain a mobile force of "manoeuvre tanks" and "mechanized cavalry" (now known as motor rifle troops) operating in the enemy depth as "strategic cavalry" (8), a concept reminiscent of OMG operations.

Tukhachevskii, influenced by Triandafillov, formulated the concept of "deep battle," using manoeuvre to carry the battle into the enemy's depth, during the 1930's. The new approach resulted in the inclusion of deep operations in the 1936 Field Service Regulations (PU-36), and the formation of mechanized corps in the Red Army to carry them out. But Stalin's purges eliminated Tukhachevskii and five of his colleagues, allegedly over the poor performance of Red Army units in Spain, and for espionage. The mechanized corps were disbanded, tank formations limited to the brigade level, the infantry regained dominance over mobile forces, and attrition theory replaced deep operations (9).

The results of this backward step were shown in the war with Finland. The cautious approach of Soviet strategy and tactics of the period is illustrated by the 1940 General Tactics. The advanced guard would precede the main force at a distance of only four to six km, with strong communications links being maintained between the two at all times (10).

The Great Patriotic War: The Reintroduction of Deep Operations

Jones comments that by 1941 the Red Army had gained some battle experience in Spain, Finland, and against the Japanese in the Far East, and military writing was emphasizing the roles of firepower and air support and again recognizing the importance of manoeuvrability, flexibility, and coordination (11), although from a perspective of attrition warfare. But there was a gap between these currents in military thought and the ability of Red Army commanders, many of whom had been promoted quickly after the 1937 purges, to put them into practice.

The shock of the Axis attack in 1941 has led to a Soviet emphasis ever since on surprise and denying the enemy the initiative in opening the offensive. The Soviet forces reeled in disarray before the coordinated Axis combined-arms offensive. Richard Simpkin notes that "to the retreating Russians, often completely surrounded and more often still threatened with envelopment, the early German successes must have looked like deep operation theory in action." (12)

The German blitzkrieg did not rely on massing of forces for the breakthrough of enemy defences, but instead "leaked" its way through, then relied on a cutting edge of armoured and reconnaissance formations to avoid Soviet defensive strength. The Germans did not need to mass combat units and logistic strength at the point of penetration, thus avoiding the "crossing

the "T" phenomenon (not having enough room for the attacker to place all of his strength at the point of attack).

The German blitzkrieg doctrine enjoyed further advantages in using self-contained columns that permitted rapid shifts between and among axes of advance; using follow-on forces of progressively lesser quality to consolidate gains made by the spearhead; and eliminating the need for detailed planning, for which the Germans did not have the time or the staff (13).

The lessons learnt in 1941 about the deficiency of Soviet attrition doctrine and the advantages of German manoeuvre theory would be well remembered in the future. The first result of the successful German use of speed and surprise in deep operations and the evident need for drastic revisions in Soviet doctrine was agitation by officers who had been disciples of Tukhachevskii's for a return to deep operation theory. General Reznichenko notes that raiding detachments had been formed on an ad hoc basis during the Battle of Moscow for attacks on the enemy rear, to destroy enemy personnel and equipment, deny rest to the enemy, and sow panic (14).

A Stavka (Soviet High Command) directive of 10 January 1942, along with two later implementing orders, effectively reinstated deep operation theory and began the reorganization of the Red Army to accommodate it. Under the Stavka order, tank armies began to be formed, with four established by the time of the Battle of

Stalingrad. Each had a strength of 400 to 500 tanks on paper (15).

The early use of deep operations, and the genesis of the mobile groups which are the inspiration for the OMG, is illustrated by the battle of Tatsinskaya in December 1942.

A Soviet counteroffensive in October had encircled the German Sixth Army in the Stalingrad pocket, destroyed the Fourth Rumanian Army, and opened up a 120-mile wide gap between German Army Groups A and B. The Soviet Southwest Front began a new series of attacks with four armies to seize Rostov and isolate Army Group A in the Caucasus.

The 24th Tank Corps was plunged into the vacuum left by the collapse of the Eighth Italian Army after the first attacks. A tank corps in late 1942 consisted of three tank battalions, a motor rifle battalion and a motor rifle brigade, and two self-propelled artillery regiments. Its speedy advance put the 24th well ahead of its supporting units as it headed for the Tatsinskaya airfield, which held the entire German air resupply capacity for the Stalingrad pocket.

The Germans did not have the additional forces to defend the airfield, but could not move the airlift operation and maintain the resupply of Stalingrad. In order to protect the airfield from seizure and the destruction of many aircraft, the Germans

were forced to divert armoured forces from the effort to relieve the Stalingrad pocket. The 24th was isolated and destroyed.

The Germans scored a tactical victory at Tatsinskaya in defending the airfield, eliminating a Soviet tank corps, and temporarily stopping the Soviet drive on Rostov. But the action was a Soviet strategic success in that they only lost a portion of their advancing army; the threat to Rostov forced Hitler to evacuate the Caucasus, sealing the fate of the Sixth Army in Stalingrad (16).

The Mobile Group in Deep Operations 1943-45

Deep manoeuvre was refined in the doctrine for employment of mobile armoured forces during early 1943. A tank army was used for the break-in of German lines in the first phase of the post-Stalingrad offensive, with independent tank units advancing as part of the follow-up force. This two-echelon pattern evolved into a three-echelon (break-in, break-through, break-out) one, with independent tank units and infantry making the break-in and tank and mechanized corps completing the penetration and seizing tactical objectives such as bridges and rail junctions. Tank armies were held back as "shock groups" to exploit the breach in the defences.

This shock, or mobile, group concept ran into the problem that expanding the mobile group's power and scope by adding more

tanks required it to have a larger motor rifle component to protect the armored force, weakening the second, break-through echelon. It was also found that the three-echelon pattern often failed to ensure a "clean launch" for the mobile group which would not expose it to substantial enemy resistance. The mobile group had to complete the penetration and fight its way out, so that it was weakened, slowed down, and disorganized, and became vulnerable to a German counteroffensive. Another echelon was therefore added after the second, breakthrough echelon to complete the penetration and secure a deployment area for the mobile group (17).

The underestimation of the breakthrough problem was compounded by the lack of procedures for deployment from the march, passing successive echelons through each other, and for relieving units. The Red Army officer corps was also plagued with a problem which continues to pose difficulties for the OMG concept today: "the run-of-the-mill Russian officer's tendency to do nothing until not just told to but actively prodded; and his understandable fear of reporting an adverse situation lest he be held to blame for it." (18) Formation commanders had to exercise control directly, difficult given the rudimentary communications in the Red Army in 1942-43.

Soviet artillery was unable to give significant support to mobile groups and there were no liaison arrangements for close air support. Since the Soviets did not have personnel carriers

like the German panzer grenadiers, the motor rifle troops rode tanks into battle, so the German artillery was able to quickly separate the infantry from the tanks. The lack of direct fire support for the mobile groups affected their momentum, as there was no counter-battery capability to postpone or prevent the separation of tanks and infantry (19).

In an attempt to rectify the problem, a regiment of assault guns was added to the artillery element of tank and mechanized corps in late 1943. This was used in a direct fire role and the counter-battery problem went unsolved. Soviet counter-battery capabilities were deficient throughout the war despite the increasing attention paid to fire damage to the enemy.

Although each Front contained an air army, the Soviets never managed to imitate German techniques for close air support. Air support was mounted and coordinated at the Front level, and requests for air cover from lower levels of command were seen as cowardice or infringement of the higher commander's authority (20). It was not until the summer of 1944 that air guidance officers with forward detachments could even retarget supporting aircraft to new objectives (21).

In assessing the employment of armoured and mechanized forces at the battle of Kursk in 1943, Maj-Gen. Krupchenko states that the problems of Front-level offensive operations had not yet been solved, leading to solutions from scratch and mistakes and

individual shortcomings. The lack of artillery and air support still often forced mobile groups to participate in the fight for the enemy tactical defensive zone, weakening them such that operations in depth could not be conducted.

But, Krupchenko continues, Kursk and previous mobile operations showed that mobile groups gave a more fluid nature to the Front-level offensive and contributed to a sharp increase in the scope of operations. Their high mobility and manoeuvrability enabled them to rapidly change the direction of advance and make surprise strikes better than other formations (22).

Kursk saw the first use of mobile groups based on tank armies, operating in support of a Front. In contrast to earlier experiences against mobile groups, the Germans found that they could temporarily halt Soviet mobile forces but could not drive them back or destroy them as at Tatsinskaya.

From the end of 1943 onward, there were few changes in the concept and operation of the mobile group. The formations did grow in size, so that by 1945 a tank army had well over 500 tanks. A tank army became the normal Front-level mobile group and tank and mechanized corps performed mobile group roles in support of armies. By 1945 mobile groups could consist of multiple tank armies at the Front level and combinations of tank and mechanized corps at army level (23).

The scope of operations, especially their depth, progressively increased as the quality and strength of the opposing German forces declined. The usual duration of operations for a tank army became 30 days for mounting and execution. Such a Front-level mobile group was usually launched on the fourth or fifth day of an offensive, at an operational depth of 35 to 60 km beyond the initial line of contact with the enemy, and advanced at an average rate of 50 km a day. (24)

The role of the mobile group developed beyond simple exploitation of the breakthrough to allow the advance of the main body to seizing key rear-area objectives (as at the Tatsinskaya airfield), and isolating large enemy groupings for destruction by follow-on forces. The latter became an especially important task for mobile groups.

Mobile groups of armies and Fronts introduced after the initial breakthrough of enemy defences would sweep into the enemy's defensive depth and close the ring of encirclement. After turning the inner perimeter over to follow-on forces, the mobile groups would develop swift attacks on the outer perimeter to make relief of the pocket impossible, repel enemy counterattacks, and destroy surviving enemy reserves. Mobile groups would enter into battle with enemy forces during the initial encirclement only when it was essential to success (25).

One of the most studied battles of the Great Patriotic War

for Soviet officers is Jassy-Kishinev in August 1944 (26), which opened the way for the advance into the Balkans by destroying an entire German army group. The timely commitment of mobile groups made possible the creation of inner and outer rings of encirclement. Soviet deep operations succeeded in placing the Germans at a disadvantage from which they could not recover.

This use of mobile groups, and the deterioration of the Wehrmacht, enabled the Soviets to reduce the amount of time for destruction of encircled forces from 71 days at Stalingrad to seven at Minsk to two at Prague (27).

Although the Soviets never did overcome the difficulties of coordinating air support, after Stalingrad they did realize that an army's anti-aircraft artillery was unable to cover both the first echelon and the mobile group, so mobile groups were assigned their own, organic anti-aircraft elements. At Kursk, tank armies and corps were reinforced with an anti-aircraft artillery group (ZAG), either before the start of the offensive or during commitment to the battle. In the latter case, the ZAG often lagged behind rather than being incorporated directly into the mobile group's tank columns. The first proved to be the more effective and became official practice (28).

By the time of the operations in Belorussia in 1944, more self-propelled anti-air artillery was assigned, and air defence for mobile groups was planned for the entire operation, from

assembly areas to jump-off position right through to commitment and operations in depth. One fighter division was assigned to cover each mobile group once it was in the enemy's depth (29).

Belorussia also saw, for the first time the successive commitment to battle in the same sector of army-level and Front-level mobile groups. The mobile groups were held back until the breakthrough was complete and were used largely in an encirclement role in depth. Unlike Stalingrad, the Soviets did not establish a stable combat front first, but rapidly developed the offensive in depth, depriving the enemy of maintaining cooperation between surrounded troops and troops fighting on the external perimeter, and making possible the rapid elimination of pockets of enemy (30).

The crowning glory for mobile groups was the Manchurian operation in August 1945, using mobile forces to envelop Japanese positions at a rapid pace. Jones notes that Manchuria showed how well Soviet commanders had developed imagination and tactical flexibility during the war, as set procedures were set aside in favour of adapting practices to the demands of the particular battlefield (31). Manchuria also set a precedent for integrating mobile group and airborne operations.

Mobile groups thus turned out to be a successful response to the Red Army's early defeats as attrition theory met an enemy using a superior manoeuvre doctrine. In assessing their.

performance during the war, Marshal A.A. Grechko states that

the creation of mobile forces within armies and Fronts out of tank and mechanized units was a qualitatively new element which ensured a gradual stepping-up of efforts in operational depth, more rapid advance so that the attack was more resolute and flexible, and had greater efficiency. (32)

Challenges and Changes for Soviet Doctrine After 1945

Mechanized armies and divisions continued to fill mobile group roles in the postwar Red Army, until the Zhukov reforms of 1954-57 which reorganized and fully mechanized the ground forces. Mobile groups were abolished as being irrelevant in an Army in which all units had been made mobile. The exploitation of the breakthrough would be carried out by the second echelon only.

Khrushchev's ouster of Zhukov was followed by the revolution in military affairs, the realization that ground forces had supposedly become secondary to the Strategic Rocket Forces, whose nuclear weapons would dominate warfare. Non-nuclear operations were ignored as doctrine assumed that any war would begin with a nuclear strike.

Operational and tactical doctrine was modified to take into account the requirements of nuclear warfare. There was a greater emphasis in the offensive on the first echelon armoured units, due to the speed of tanks and their comparative invulnerability to nuclear effects. (33) The main concern for military thinkers

was the rapid advance through contaminated territory, and considerable attention was paid to speed and manoeuvre, armour, and decontamination. It was realized that massing forces for the attack made them vulnerable to nuclear attack, so armour was dispersed on the battlefield.

The rigidity of the nuclear-oriented doctrine softened in the mid 1960's, as NATO moved from a strategy of "massive retaliation," which had helped to inspire the revolution in military affairs, to one of flexible response. The new line was that modern war would undoubtedly be nuclear, but could begin with a short non-nuclear phase as each side tried to defeat its opponent's ground forces and destroy his nuclear weapons before their use. This made time, traditionally crucial in Russian and Soviet doctrine, even more important for the offence due to the threat of a nuclear attack. The offensive would now have the primary objective of neutralization of NATO's nuclear capability through destruction of the means of nuclear delivery. The 1967 "Dnieper" exercise was the first to involve such a non-nuclear phase before the nuclear exchange began.

Although the official party line remained that any war would be nuclear and, in Marshal Grechko's words, "in certain circumstances, the possibility is admitted of conducting combat operations with conventional weapons," (34) the Soviet leadership realized that it was clearly in their interest to win a war before a NATO decision to use nuclear weapons. The revolution

in military affairs had taken place while NATO still relied on massive retaliation; the Warsaw Pact could now take advantage of flexible response by using a rapid advance to bring its forces into close proximity with NATO troops and population centres, making effective use of nuclear weapons difficult. The inevitable confusion and disagreements between NATO governments on nuclear use would give the Pact time to advance, intersperse its forces with NATO's, and destroy as much of NATO's nuclear capability as possible.

The Soviet High Command was therefore forced to meet the political requirement that the army fight, and if possible win, a war with conventional weapons. But the revolution in military affairs had left conventional doctrine and equipment inadequate for the task. In the early 1970's the ensuing debate on changes in doctrine shifted the emphasis in the military press from the nuclear battlefield to conventional operations, using the Great Patriotic War for models and taking into account more recent lessons from the 1967 and 1973 Middle East wars.

The initial Soviet response to the resurgence of conventional combat had been an increase in the quantity and quality of conventional forces, including significant increases in artillery, armour and air assets. But the experiences of Moscow's Arab clients had shown that conventional warfare was in a state of dynamic change and that fundamental alterations in force structure and operational concepts were necessary. The

High Command therefore encouraged the military press debate and experimented through large-scale exercises in order to achieve an integrated, comprehensive doctrine instead of ad hoc, incremental solutions.

Frontal aviation became one area of special attention, as the 1967 war had demonstrated the capabilities of aircraft equipped with conventional weapons and the vulnerability of airbases to pre-emptive attack. The Warsaw Pact undertook a programme of aircraft shelter construction and set up the densest missile and gun air defences in Europe. This air defence network freed the air force from its previous defensive bias and the emphasis in the strike role shifted from missiles to new fighters with the range and payload to endanger the NATO rear. (35)

On the ground the Soviets were confronted by increasingly sophisticated anti-tank defences, including the precision-guided munitions (PGMs) which had demonstrated their lethal effect on armour in the 1973 war. Western advances in anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) technology produced an "almost paranoid" Soviet fear of being caught off guard, according to Philip Karber, and a deep concern that the Soviet offensive doctrine "might be pulled to pieces" as ATGMs ground the high speed offensive to a halt. (36)

Having recognized the difficulties ATGMs posed for a rapid breakthrough and defeat of NATO, the Soviets undertook doctrinal

changes. Exercises during 1974 against strong anti-tank defences showed that the stability of the defence against an armoured breakthrough had in fact increased. The density of ATGM deployment, rather than the specific ATGM technology, was of the most concern to Soviet officers; the Soviets had long held that the density of the defence was the key variable influencing the rate of advance. (37) The anti-tank defensive threat had in fact been introduced into Soviet military thought in the 1930's.

While retaining the nuclear and chemical options to attain the breakthrough, the Soviets appear to have adopted pre-emptive manoeuvre as the preferred method of overcoming the defence, attacking, before the enemy can mobilize and deploy its ATGMs. The traditional penchant for surprise (vnezapnost') had been adapted to solve a modern problem. Pre-emptive manoeuvre meant that deep penetration could be successful against a quantitatively equal opponent and costly massed frontal breakthroughs could be largely avoided. Philip Karber believes that the Soviet High Command now plans to launch an offensive without mobilization and reinforcement, to catch NATO's forward defences in the process of mobilization and deployment and avoid the ATGM "wall of fire." (38) Charles Dick states that the Soviets prefer a crude swipe at an unready enemy than a skillful thrust against a foe that is ready to respond. (39)

The pre-emptive concept relies on extensive use of deception to hide preparations through exercises, deployments ostensibly to

quell internal unrest, and slow incremental upgrades of low-readiness divisions. An attack might be launched after a false "peak" to a crisis or before NATO believes the crisis justifies military action.

The effort to counter ATGMs led to an increased emphasis on all-weather and night operations, since many ATGMs are ineffective in adverse weather and darkness. Problems of poor coordination and visibility, however, prevent gaining more than limited objectives under such conditions.

The range of ATGMs had permitted the defence to deploy in greater depth and made Soviet suppressive artillery fire less effective should prepared defences be encountered. The Soviet view was reflected in the writing of a Colonel Lorbachev that a high speed offensive was unthinkable unless 40 to 60 percent of the enemy anti-tank weapons were effectively suppressed. Soviet artillery assets and doctrine were inadequate for the ATGM suppression role, due to the speed of the battle and the accuracy of NATO counter-battery fire. (40)

While artillery assets at the division level were almost doubled in ten years, fire support doctrine was changed so that artillery could once again become the prime means of suppression of the defence. Under the concept of "integrated fire destruction of the enemy" preparatory heavy artillery fire would, in theory, destroy at least 40 percent of enemy resources,

especially nuclear weapons and ATGMs. This would be followed by supporting and accompanying fire phases during the breakthrough, (41) with accompanying fire to suppress enemy anti-tank positions carried out by self-propelled artillery attached to first echelon battalions. The complex NATO artillery command and control structure would be targetted at the same time by counterbattery fire and electronic warfare. (42)

Conventional operations doctrine in the mid 1970's was still in a state of flux. Pre-emptive attack and improved artillery support had dealt with the threat from enemy ATGMs. But doctrine had not yet been fully adapted to non-nuclear warfare and built on Soviet strengths while exploiting NATO weaknesses. The concept of echeloning, with precisely tasked follow-on forces to furnish momentum to the advance, was vulnerable to disruption yet the "crossing the T" phenomenon seemed to rule out alternative methods of penetration. It was out of this continued state of dynamic change in military thought that the mobile group made its resurgence and became the Operational Manoeuvre Group.

Chapter 1

Footnotes

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Chapter 2

Modern OMG Operations and Controversies

The Resurrection of the Mobile Group

As Soviet planners modified doctrine to fit new political requirements and technology in the 1970's, they took stock of perceived Soviet strengths and NATO weaknesses. They had a number of factors in their favour on which they could build. The Soviet Army had made constant improvements in the mobility, firepower and protection of tank and motor rifle forces, and had achieved a good balance of armour and mechanized infantry in their formations. New helicopters, fixed-wing aircraft, artillery (gun, rocket, and missile), and mobile air defence guns and missiles were being introduced. An important new air assault (heliborne infantry) element was becoming available in battalions and brigades at the army and Front levels, along with the corresponding helicopter airlift capability.

Soviet officers contrasted their own strengths with what they saw as the weaknesses of their principal opponent, NATO. The West was most vulnerable in time, a factor traditionally emphasized by the Soviets. Many NATO formations, especially in northern Germany, are garrisoned a significant distance from their wartime positions, requiring considerable warning and movement time. Time is also required to fully mobilize NATO reserves and bring combat units up to full strength, and to bring

reinforcements from Britain and North America. These factors had already been taken into account in the Soviet shift towards a pre-emptive offensive; doctrinal changes were now needed to exploit the Soviet time advantage.

NATO had other major weaknesses in Soviet eyes. The shallow, 400 km depth of the West Germany/Benelux area limits the ability of NATO commanders to trade space to gain time and fall back to successive defence lines, in order to preserve their scarce reserves from destruction or attrition. The forward defence doctrine placed NATO's most capable combat units close to the Warsaw Pact's borders, with the rear area defended by relatively weak home guard forces intended to counter sabotage or incursions by lightly armed airborne and air assault forces (1).

Rapid operations in depth building on Soviet force improvements suggested themselves as the future direction for doctrine. A decisive engagement would be forced on the enemy in the rear where his defences were weakest. The Soviets, as in other doctrinal debates, re-examined their own and their Imperial predecessor's experiences, especially during the Great Patriotic War, for guidance.

The entire Russian and Soviet history of deep operations, especially those in 1941-45, came under scrutiny. Mobile groups were singled out in the Soviet military literature from 1976 on as the most successful experience in transferring the decisive

battle to the enemy's less well-defended rear. The mobile group model seemed particularly appropriate to writers who depicted similarities between NATO's forward defences and the German defensive style of the war years. The renewed interest in mobile groups and their coverage in the military press reached a crescendo in 1979.

In scrutinizing history for inspiration for new operational concepts, the Soviets did not only draw on their own wartime experiences with mobile groups. The shock of the defeat of Soviet attrition doctrine at the hands of German manoeuvre theory in 1941 had been far from forgotten by Soviet officers. Interest in the German blitzkrieg was renewed, and its advantages were noted: "leaking" through the defence to avoid massing; rapid shifts between and among axes; and no need for overly detailed planning.

The Soviets also looked at their own forward detachments, which had been developed during the Great Patriotic War, and revived during the 1950's. These are highly mobile combined arms units based on tank or motor rifle battalions or even regiments with attached support units, assembled on an ad hoc basis and used to conduct raiding and enveloping missions in support of operations at the division level. They seize and hold important objectives such as important terrain features, road junctions, bridgeheads, and mountain passes pending the arrival of the main body, and are tasked to destroy such targets as nuclear weapons

systems, air defence sites, and command, control, and communications (C3) facilities. Forward detachments are not equipped for sustained combat with large enemy forces, and avoid enemy concentrations until the final objective is reached.

It should be noted that for the Soviets a raid is not a rare occurrence but is an integral, routine part of tactical and operational planning. Raiding detachments are considered one of the four components of the attacking force, along with the first and second echelons and the reserve. (2)

As well as their experience with forward detachments, the Soviets took into account new lessons being learnt in coordinating forward detachments with desant (airborne and air assault) elements. Exercise Berezina in February 1978 practiced airborne assaults in coordination with actions by forward detachments. (3)

Soviet planners decided to resurrect the mobile group, changing it to incorporate some features of the forward detachment on a larger scale and to accommodate desant operations. The new structure was introduced at exercise Zapad-81, held in September 1981 in Belorussia. The largest Soviet exercise since Dvina-70, it used 100,000 Soviet ground, air and naval personnel commanded personally by Defence Minister Ustinov, assisted by Chief of the General Staff Ogarkov.

Zapad-81 introduced two new doctrinal concepts, the new mobile group and the TVD (teatr voennykh deistvii, or theatre of military operations). The TVD is a level of command above a Front, and as an organizational concept enables coordination of strategy and forces within a region. The Soviet command structure now includes ten continental TVDs, for example, the Western TVD (corresponding to NATO's Central Region) and four oceanic TVDs.

The exercise involved a tank division as a mobile group engaging a large "enemy" reserve force deep in the rear, while airborne units were dropped to seize and destroy nuclear sites and command posts and cooperate with the mobile group in eliminating enemy reserves.

The timing and location of Zapad-81 was related to the crisis in Poland, but like Dnieper-67 which introduced the non-nuclear phase of operations, "it was a solely Soviet exercise commanded by the Soviet defence minister to showcase new operational concepts. (4) It was followed by Druzhiba-82, held in Poland in March 1982 with the Northern Group of Soviet Forces and Polish and East German troops. The refined mobile group was apparently introduced for the first time into Warsaw Pact planning, as the exercise stressed the extensive use of highly manoeuvrable groups to seize deep objectives.

Articles appeared in the Polish military press in 1982 on

air defence for these "operational manoeuvre groups" (operacyjna grupa manewrowa). It was clear from the articles that this was a Soviet and not a Polish concept, as the authors constantly referred to the Red Army's deep operations in 1941-45. The resurrection of the mobile group, "now the OMG (although the Soviet literature continues to use the historical term "mobile group") was recognized by Western analysts as a significant change in Soviet doctrine. Zapad-81 was examined by officers at SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers Europe) working on improvements to NATO strategy. A 1982 International Defence Review article by Sandhurst analyst Chris Donnelly introduced the OMG to the general Western defence community.

The OMG Debate

These first revelations began a debate in the West over the nature of the OMG and features of OMG operations that has continued for five years. One of the major points of contention is the types of targets for the OMG; some analysts, such as Peer Lange, do not see headquarters, river crossings and road junctions as primary OMG objectives and sees it more as a device to destroy enemy reserves. Also contentious are the method of penetration, with various analysts favouring nuclear, chemical, or conventional weapons to achieve the breakthrough, and the time of committal. Some debate the size of the OMG, doubting the existence of Front-subordinated, army-sized OMGs or classifying them as part of the second echelon due to the timing of their

committal. There are also questions as to how the OMG fits into the whole echeloning concept; some place it in the second echelon, others see it as part of the advanced penetration echelon.

The importance of the entire OMG concept is controversial. American analysts tend to treat it as an operational revolution, while others, especially West Germans, downgrade the importance of the OMG concept, seeing it more as a refined second echelon and simply an evolutionary addition to a generally restructured concept of deep operations.

Regarding the possible size and level of operation of the OMG, the Great Patriotic War precedent would indicate that OMGs can exist at both the army and Front levels. Front-level mobile groups existed from the battle of Kursk onwards. The majority of Western analysts acknowledge the existence of both army and Front-level OMGs. "Operational" includes army and Front levels of command in Soviet usage.

Lange, however, disagrees, stating that the inclusion of Front-level OMGs is based on an analysis of wartime operations and not on recent Soviet exercises. (5) Only army-subordinated, division-sized OMGs have been used in Soviet and allied manoeuvres.

Charles Dick, in disputing the existence of Front-level

OMGs, makes points which compliment Lnage's and lead to the conclusion that, while Front-subordinated OMGs may be part of the modern mobile group concept, the Soviets may see the army-subordinated OMG as more useful.

Dick asks if sufficient troops would be available to form a Front-subordinated OMG, and if several army-subordinated OMGs would be more disturbing to the enemy defence than one Front-level one. While the second point is well taken, on the first the importance attached to deep operations by the Soviets would indicate that the Front commander would be prepared to allocate forces from his own reserves and from the strength of formations under his command to reinforce a corps or army as an OMG. It is Soviet practice to divert resources from units not in contact to those which are spearheading the offensive.

Dick notes that the problem of committing a division-based OMG is large enough for Soviet staff. As logistics and mobility problems occur in proportion to size, a Front-level OMG may well represent diminishing returns. While he admits that a Front-level OMG could be committed if a substantial collapse of the enemy defence occurred, perhaps due to the actions of army-subordinated OMGs, but committal would be delayed for several days and the Front-subordinated OMG would then act more like the second echelon in the exploitation role. (6)

These problems of command and control indicate that an army-

subordinated OMG is more appropriate to modern operations; however, the option of using a Front-level group appears still to be open and would be used if circumstances were favourable, for example, if a pre-emptive offensive had eliminated the need to penetrate substantial defences and a mission of sufficient importance was assigned to require the use of a corps- or army-sized formation.

An OMG would be task-organized, as forward detachments are, with support assigned to fit the group's missions. While mobile groups were formed from tank and mechanized formations in a predominantly infantry Red Army, all Soviet units are now mobile and an OMG can be based on any tank or motor rifle division to support army operations and on a tank or combined-arms corps or army at the Front level.

The tank or motor rifle core would be reinforced according to the OMG's tasks with airborne and/or air assault, artillery, aviation, engineer, logistics, signals, and air defence units. These supporting elements may be subordinated to the OMG or operate in a support role while remaining under the control of the higher echelon of command, the army or Front.

Aviation support would be drawn from the tactical air army under the Front commander, and air assault troops from the Front's air assault brigade. The Front commander is provided with considerable combat resources independent of the Front's

component armies, and can allocate them as he sees fit, e.g. to OMGs at the army and Front levels. Artillery reinforcements, if necessary for an OMG's mission, would likely be drawn from the Front's artillery reserves rather than weaken an army's artillery regiment to reinforce a division-based OMG. Front artillery is assigned to key divisions during operations to form divisional artillery groups. (7)

Logistics support for army-subordinated OMGs, as with other divisions, would be drawn from the army. While in NATO logistics capability is organic to divisions, in Soviet practice it is concentrated at the army and Front levels. Soviet divisions are supplied according to need, as determined by the Front, with first echelon units attacking on the main axis of advance, and presumably OMGs, receiving priority. (8) This system is intended to reduce the number of support units clogging the roads and hindering the mobility of combat formations.

Opinion is divided on the OMG's position in the Soviet concept of echeloning, with one school depicting the OMG as an extension of the first echelon and others viewing it as part of the second, exploitation echelon.

John Hines and Philip Petersen view the OMG as essentially a forward detachment enlarged in size and carrying out missions at the operational level. They perceive the principles of organization and employment for the OMG and the forward

detachment as being identical despite the differences in size and the scale of operation.

The Soviet attacking force, in the Hines and Petersen model, is structured in four elements: advanced penetration and raiding, first echelon (penetration and fragmentation), second echelon (exploitation), and reserve. The OMG is part of the raiding element; the Soviet concept of the raiding body, they note, differs from the West's in that the force does not return to the main body but the main body catches up to it. (9)

Steven Canby also treats the OMG as an extension of the first echelon, and specifically differentiates it from the second echelon.

Contrasted to these views, is a considerable school of thought treating the OMG as part of the follow-up second echelon. The official NATO view falls into this category; General Rogers, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, in his references to OMGs has treated them as a component of the second echelon.

Michael Ruehle, a West German, states that OMG missions are similar to those carried out by the second echelon, although he also acknowledges a raiding task for the OMG like that of the forward detachment. (10)

Americans Colonel William Hanne and Steve Doerfel concur

with each other in treating the OMG as a second echelon exploitation of the first echelon attack. But both also separate the OMG from other second echelon formations and speak of a mutually supportive relationship between the OMG and echelonment. Echeloned formations would normally be committed against heavily defended NATO sectors to engage units deployed forward and reserves while the OMG penetrates into the rear. (11)

William Odom also subscribes to the second echelon view, seeing the OMG as a method of committal of second echelon forces across the line of battle earlier and deeper. (12)

The reality is that the OMG/echelonment relationship is not carved in stone in the Soviet military mind. Echelonning is not an automatic reaction of Soviet commanders.

Chris Donnelly followed up his original OMG revelations with an examination of the role of echelonment in the Soviet offensive. (13) He concluded, from studying both historical and modern Soviet practice, that at the Front level armies would be deployed in two echelons only if NATO defences were properly prepared. A Front commander might use one echelon of armies with a strong operational reserve to pierce weak defences. Whether armies deploy their usual four divisions in one or two echelons is also dependent on the state of enemy defences.

Soviet commanders choose their echelonning options depending

on the achievement of surprise, which will determine the state of enemy defences, and the terrain, as the more hilly the terrain, the heavier will be the first echelon to make possible more axes of advance. Commanders know that a formation with the bulk of its forces well forward will present more axes of advance, making enemy counterattack more difficult and perhaps forcing the defender to split his reserves.

Donnelly therefore shows that the presence of a second echelon is not gospel. In several Great Patriotic War cases quoted by General Radzievsky in his study of army operations, the army had no second echelon at all, for example, in the Vistula-Oder operation, which attracts much praise in Soviet military literature as an example of successful deep operations. (14)

This sheds doubt on the conclusions of the "OMG as part of the second echelon" school. Their viewpoint assumes that the Soviet offensive would encounter strong defences which would have to be breached to allow entrance of an OMG, when the Soviets favour a pre-emptive offensive (although Hines and Petersen make the same assumption and come to a different conclusion).

The evidence indicates that in a pre-emptive offensive, which would not require the first echelon to fight through defences, the OMG would act as the advanced penetration and raiding element, and the most successful portion of the first echelon might in fact be constituted as an OMG. Should the state

of enemy defences force echeloning, the OMG would be formed from the second echelon while the first echelon penetrated the defence, so as not to wear down the OMG during committal.

The time of committal is similarly dependent on circumstances, especially the state of enemy preparations. An army-subordinated OMG would be committed on the first day of the offensive if possible and normally not later than the second day, the latter case only applying if prepared defences take more than a day to breach.

A Front-subordinated OMG, if used, would probably not be committed until the Front's first echelon armies achieved their immediate objectives, completely penetrating the enemy's tactical defensive zone (30 to 50 km). This is expected by the second or third day of an offensive encountering significant opposition. Recent Soviet writings, presumably emphasizing pre-emptive manoeuvre, have cited wartime examples of Front-level mobile groups being committed on the first day when defences were weak or poorly prepared. (15) Of 26 examples he gives in his study "Tank Blow" (Tankoviy Udar) of tank armies used as Front-level mobile groups, Radzievskiy notes that 16 were committed in the first day, with fixed defences being completely avoided in seven of these. (16)

The OMG in Action

An OMG operation begins when the group is constituted for

its mission. An OMG must form up before committal under conditions designed to deny as much knowledge as possible to the enemy, as part of the Soviet emphasis on surprise. Mobile groups did not have to operate on a battlefield so dominated by reconnaissance and intelligence-gathering, and were thus not as vulnerable to enemy air, artillery, and missile attack before mounting their penetration. The pre-emptive offensive doctrine, of course, requires secrecy to a much greater extent than that necessary for mobile group operations in the Great Patriotic War.

Operational surprise for the OMG is achieved through the denial to the enemy of reconnaissance, and directing the main strike where it is least expected. Tactical surprise comes from concealment of start-up positions, exploitation of weather, time of day, and terrain, and unexpected application of fire. (17) The Soviets have placed an increasing emphasis on all-weather and night operations in exercises and training.

Vnezapnost', or surprise, is coupled with maskirovka (deception), the disguising of real moves and showing a false picture to the enemy.

As part of the security regime, the formation of the OMG would be known only to senior commanders, and officers at lower levels would not be told that their units would be operating as part of the OMG until just before the attack. Soviet defector "Viktor Suvorov" says that command maps are issued in several variants to

attack. The penetration might be complemented by diversionary attacks elsewhere.

Soviet literature quotes wartime examples of the use of surprise and deception in penetrations, achieved by tanks crossing rivers over thin ice, tanks fording rivers, using log paths for armour to cross swamps, and using searchlights to blind enemy troops. (20)

The method of penetration of the OMG is a subject of controversy, as to whether the gap for commitment of a division- or army-sized force would be made by conventional firepower, chemical attack, or nuclear weapons.

The degree of Soviet dependence on tactical and theatre nuclear weapons in the offensive is a major debate in itself. Briefly, the evidence falls on the side that Soviet doctrine has been changed since at least the early 1970's to open the offensive conventionally and escalate to the nuclear level if necessary, that is if NATO nuclear use appeared imminent, NATO initiated nuclear strikes, or the conventional offensive appeared in danger of defeat. Soviet writings of the 1970's attribute the same advantages to pre-emptive conventional manoeuvre as to an opening nuclear strike: low force density, fluid manoeuvre, and a high initial rate of advance. (21)

However, the Soviets undoubtedly do still retain the option

of using nuclear weapons to breach strong NATO defences and allow penetration by the first echelon and committal of the OMC. A large inventory of missile-, air-, and artillery-launched nuclear weapons serves this purpose if necessary, and has been augmented with highly-accurate, low-yield nuclear artillery shells suitable for breakthrough operations. Soviet forces still operate in a nuclear-potential environment and use tactics designed to minimize damage from enemy tactical nuclear explosions. Chris Donnelly states that it is not a contradiction that the Soviet Union would initiate hostilities on the conventional level and consider using nuclear weapons a few days later if things had gone badly to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat; Soviet policy has always mixed extreme caution and great daring. (22)

Also the focus of considerable debate is the importance of chemical weapons to the Soviet offensive. A number of analysts view changes in Soviet force structure as indicating a shift away from nuclear weapons believe that chemical attacks would still be used to open an offensive. Again, such weapons would be most useful against strong defences; chemical agents are no doubt more palatable as an option in that case than nuclear weapons, but are less useful in the situation favoured by Soviet doctrine, a breakthrough operation against weak or poorly prepared defences.

If chemical weapons are used, as with nuclear weapons, the Soviets have a significant arsenal to draw upon. Agents like

hydrogen cyanide (Agent AC) are designed to achieve a fast breakthrough of the defence. It is fast acting, difficult to detect by mechanical means, generates many casualties within a short time, and dissipates in seven to ten minutes so that the attackers need not be encumbered by protective gear while the defenders must wear bulky suits. (23)

The conventional penetration seems to be the one favoured by Soviet doctrine in situations in which defences are not excessively thick and strong. The Soviets stress massive air and artillery firepower to prevent casualties to the OMG during the breakthrough. Maj-Gen. Krupchenko notes that at Kursk insufficient artillery and air support often led to mobile groups having to fight their way through the enemy tactical defensive zone, inflicting such losses on the groups that operations in depth could not be conducted. (24)

Therefore, Soviet artillery doctrine applies the concept of "integrated fire destruction of the enemy" to fire support for the OMG penetration. Fire begins when the OMG leaves its forward assembly area and continues even after the penetration is completed. The barrage includes self-propelled artillery and helicopter gunships with the OMG for accompanying fire support. The need to achieve surprise has added a new preliminary phase to the three traditional phases of fire support ("fire preparation of the attack," "fire support of the attack," and "fire accompaniment"). The "fire support of the advance from the

depths" involves conventional strikes against NATO aircraft and nuclear systems (25) which could affect the progress of the offensive and OMG penetrations, utilizing the army and Front batteries of accurate, short-range missiles.

Air defence is considered to be vital during the committal period, provided by air defence vehicles in the OMG columns and possibly a fighter screen provided by the Front's air army. Fixed-wing aircraft would accompany the OMG during the operation in depth to isolate the battlefield from the enemy's aviation and ground counterattacks.

Once through the enemy's tactical defensive zone, the OMG would advance from 70 to 400 km ahead of the main body, depending on the composition of the OMG and the nature of enemy opposition. The range of the OMG is deduced from mentions in the Polish literature that the OMG would advance beyond the combat range of helicopters (65 km) and would be expected to go so deep that aircraft might have to be based forward of the FLOT in the OMG's area of operation to provide continuous air cover. There are also wartime examples of mobile groups penetrating over 300 km deep; the Fourth Tank Army in the January 1945 Vistula-Oder operation fought an encounter battle 340 km behind the forward edge of the enemy defence. (26)

Ahead of the OMG would range the OMG's own forward detachment (several for a corps- or army-based OMG) and

helicopter reconnaissance. The forward detachment, battalion-sized for an army-subordinated OMG and regimental for a Front-level OMG, would operate 20 to 40 km in front to conduct reconnaissance, identify weak points to be attacked, deny enemy units the opportunity to consolidate on favourable lines of defence, conduct raids, and seize targets that would significantly aid the advance of the main body. (27)

The forward detachment of the ground would be supplemented by helicopters conducting reconnaissance of the march route and detecting enemy moves to block or engage the OMG. When the OMG is in a meeting engagement with an enemy on the move, helicopters would acquire and attack targets in the open. They would be especially useful for protecting the exposed flanks and rear of the OMG. Helicopters would also sow minefields along potential enemy approach routes and counter enemy anti-tank helicopters. (28)

The missions which the OMG would perform during its operations in depth are the subject of questions in Western writing. Writers place different emphases on the tasks of raiding targets, seizing objectives, and destroying enemy reserves.

Mobile group operations placed the most emphasis on encirclement of enemy formations and the seizure of terrain features facilitating the advance of the main body. Encirclement

appears to be a mission for the modern mobile groups as well, and has been practiced in the introduction of the OMG to operations in the field, Zapad-81. In his analysis of encirclement techniques based on Great Patriotic War experience, General Laschenko stresses the role of mobile groups in encirclement and concludes that modern weapons and mobility make encirclement even more rapid and effective than during the war years. Strikes in depth by mobile forces have become more important to accomplish destruction of the encircled enemy due to the increase in the defenders' ability to hold out. (29)

But the fact that the OMG can play a role in encircling and destroying enemy formations does not rule out other missions. The Soviet concept of operations in depth utilizes all available means to shock the enemy and deny him the option of battling the attacker only in front. Raiding is more important for the OMG than the mobile group due to the inclusion of experience from forward detachments in the OMG concept and the fact that the modern Soviet army can exercise better control over more, mobile raiding units detached from the group.

As with other points of contention, the reality in OMG operations seems to depend on circumstances, each OMG being organized for specific tasks rather than all OMGs sharing common missions. The size of the OMG is especially important in determining objectives; the Front-subordinated, army- or corps-sized OMG, due to its size and possible later commitment, cannot

be expected to spend considerable time and power on raiding multiple targets. The Front-level force is more likely to be allocated major missions of seizing or isolating significant political, economic, or strategic objectives, such as major river crossings, industrial complexes, and ports, and encircling large enemy formations.

Hines and Petersen state that the destruction of enemy forces is more a mission for the second echelon than the Front-level OMG, and that a Front-subordinated OMG would still concentrate on the seizure of specific objectives. (30) Lange, however, contradicts them and questions the raiding orientation, believing that the most frequently mentioned OMG targets, such as headquarters, are too small to be targets for an army- or division-sized force. As for OMG targetting of nuclear weapons systems, Lange argues that NATO's nuclear weapons are too dispersed to be targets for such a large formation and NATO can resort to nuclear weapons elsewhere even should Soviet attacks eliminate most of the nuclear weapons in West Germany. (31)

However, such targets were attacked on occasion by mobile groups, for example, the Tatsinskaya airfield. As well, small, dispersed targets would not warrant an attack by the entire OMG, but by detached raiding elements. Regarding the anti-nuclear orientation of raiding, the Soviets know that attacks by OMGs, airborne and air assault troops, aircraft, missiles, and special forces cannot eliminate all of NATO's

nuclear arsenal; the objective is to influence the NATO decision on nuclear use, and limit damage to the offensive should the war escalate to the nuclear level.

The army-subordinated, division-sized OMG is most likely not to act as a consolidated force to seize major rear-area objectives, but can detach raiding forces to hit smaller targets and return to the main OMG. The range of targets can include bridges, river crossings, mountain passes, transport centres, airfields, C3 centres, and logistic assets such as fuel and ammunition depots.

A special emphasis is placed in Soviet writing on destroying the enemy's nuclear potential, by neutralizing enemy nuclear weapons systems directly, assisting targetting by higher formations, and forcing the enemy to rapidly relocate systems in the OMG's path. A priority in OMG raiding is therefore the locating and neutralizing nuclear weapons systems and their supporting C3, targetting, and storage facilities. Raiding elements would be detached to destroy nuclear sites not on the line of march or to pass targetting information on to allow attack by the army or Front's missile and aviation assets. The OMG would therefore attack enemy airfields, artillery and missile batteries, and known nuclear weapons storage sites. The fact that so many NATO nuclear weapons are launched by conventional aircraft and artillery makes it necessary for the OMG to attack all such systems with which it comes into contact.

The mechanics of OMG C3 are still unclear. OMG control is subject to a centralized plan; commanders would not act independently, but obey set tasks, although they would have considerable latitude as to how to implement the plans. Mobile group precedents are of little use as guidelines to OMG command and control, as the introduction of secure, long-range, largely electronic countermeasures-proof troposcatter communications into the Soviet army makes possible control of the OMG by higher formations and for OMGs to cooperate with each other. It is even possible that OMG commanders might be in personal contact by helicopter or light aircraft. (32)

It is worth noting in connection with command and control matters that the Soviets have never hesitated to trade lives for operational success (as with Zhukov's famous remark to Eisenhower about clearing minefields by marching troops across them), and the OMG is considered to be expendable in the army or Front scheme of things. The OMG would not constitute more than 20 percent of the main force at any level, so it would be too large for the enemy to ignore but would not be so large that its complete destruction would mean failure for the Soviet offensive in a given sector; in fact, its destruction might require a major diversion of enemy resources from the main battle. (33) Obviously, the loss of an army- or corps-sized OMG would be a greater blow than the destruction of a division-sized group assigned to less vital targets.

The Air Dimension

The original Polish writings on the OMG spoke of the OMG, unlike its mobile group ancestor, having the capability to operate in three dimensions. This air element is considered to be integral to the entire OMG concept.

Due to the depth and range of the OMG penetration, the Soviets have incorporated airborne and air assault operations, which have been receiving increased attention in recent years, into the OMG concept and have tested this integration in exercises. Exercise Berezina in February 1978 laid some of the groundwork by practicing coordination between the forward detachment and tactical airborne landings. Exercise Neman, 1979, tested air assault operations, while Zapad-81 used airborne troops to attack targets in support of the OMG, as did Druzhba-82.

Air assault brigades were deployed at the Front level during the period in which the OMG was under development. It was felt necessary to have a Front-level force to cover the "dead zone" 15 to 50 km from the FLOT, in which heliborne forces had apparently been too weak in mobility and firepower to operate, and to provide the Front commander with an organic air assault unit to maintain the speed of the advance. (34)

The air assault brigade assigned to a Front is made up of an

assault[^] battalion with air-droppable BMD vehicles, a parachute battalion, reconnaissance company, air defence battery, artillery battery (with air-droppable guns), and engineer, signals, chemical defence, anti-tank, and support troops. Any or all of this flexible force can be assigned by the Front commander to a Front- or army-level OMG.

Air assault troops are used to fulfill the OMG's missions of seizing and occupying key terrain features, especially river crossings, and conducting raids with company- or battalion-sized heliborne elements. They are useful in encirclements to quickly block enemy paths of withdrawal. A heliborne assault can divert enemy attention away from the OMG's real objective; in Zapad-81 a diversionary helicopter assault was made in the enemy's rear to draw away reserves while a second air assault seized a river crossing for the OMG. (35)

It is a prominent point in the Soviet literature that reconnaissance for the mobile groups was insufficient. Therefore, air assault elements might be inserted at points along the projected main direction of advance of the OMG, to provide timely information on on route conditions and enemy movements. (36)

The armed helicopters accompanying the OMG, in addition to countering enemy threats to the main OMG body, would be used to escort troop-carrying helicopters, clear landing zones, and help

defend an objective captured by air assault until the arrival of the main body of the OMG.

Airborne operations in support of the OMG would be carried out by the air assault brigade's parachute battalion or by elements of the TVD's airborne division. Parachute troops can be inserted by paradrop or by helicopter like other air assault troops. An air landing by transport aircraft or helicopters might be preferred by the Soviets over a paradrop. VDV (Vozdushno-desantnyye voyska, or airborne) chief of staff Lt-Gen. Palenko has stressed the need to reduce the time for deployment and landing, which is longer for parachute operations. All 20 of the airborne operations in Manchuria in 1945 were conducted by air landings. (37)

Airborne elements could be dropped to secure bridgeheads and river crossing sites, and block choke points to enable the OMG to encircle an enemy formation.

The Warsaw Pact literature places a major emphasis on air defence of the OMG, as OMG operations are seen as being very difficult if not impossible in a hostile air environment. Attention is paid to the insufficiencies of mobile group air defence and the need for all-weather air defence, reconnaissance for the air enemy, and air defence being organic to the OMG rather than the OMG being covered by a higher formation.

The original Polish articles deal with the OMG's air defence needs as being greater than those for the first echelon, as the OMG will be operating deep into enemy territory and does not benefit from the overlapping air defence of formations at the FLOT. Major Michalak gives three alternatives for air support for the OMG: the creation of an organic OMG air echelon to penetrate with the OMG into the enemy's depth; helicopters, as the primary means of air support, supporting the OMG from bases with the main force; and helicopters initially supporting from bases with the main body but at decisive moments in the operation landing for service and replenishment with the OMG after carrying out their missions and then operating directly with it. (38)

The second option is ruled out by the intention that the OMG would rapidly penetrate so deep as to put itself out of helicopter range from the FLOT, preventing support by the Front's air assets. The first option, a larger organic OMG air echelon (the division already has some organic armed and transport helicopter capability), was likely rejected due to the continuing lack of aircraft to serve all of the needs of the Soviet Army. A Front's organic helicopter assets can only move 500 men in a single lift, and would need additional lift capacity to simultaneously transport large elements of the air assault brigade. This helicopter element could be augmented directly by heavier lift aircraft from the VTA (Voyenno-transportnaya aviatsiya, or military transport aviation) or reinforcement of the Front's air army with helicopters and transport aircraft.

The second method is preferable since it reduces coordination problems and gives the Front commander additional organic assets (39).

The third option for air support, relocating helicopters with the OMG after operating them from the main force, is the one chosen. This requires the OMG, in addition to its other missions, to locate, secure, and defend landing areas for helicopters and possibly airstrips for fixed-wing aircraft as well, as the Polish articles raised the possibility of forward-basing combat aircraft with the OMG. Air assault elements would likely be tasked with the reconnaissance, capture and defence of suitable sites.

The Polish articles placed a twin priority on disruption of the enemy's air defence and the OMG taking its own air defence envelope with it over enemy territory. The former would be accomplished to some extent by the helicopters and combat aircraft supporting the OMG, and by attacks by army and Front missile assets and OMG raiding elements on air defence radars, missiles and airfields at known locations or targetted by the OMG.

Regarding the OMG's own air defence, it would carry with it a mix of systems from tank-mounted heavy machine-guns and hand-held surface-to-air missiles to vehicle-mounted missiles and air defence guns. The tracked ZSU-23-4 anti-aircraft gun vehicle is

one of the major Soviet means of defence of armour and mechanized columns against helicopters and ground attack aircraft.

The air dimension is also important to the OMG logistics structure. Heavy transport aircraft could airdrop and airland supplies and possibly provide a medical evacuation service. This places a further premium on the seizure and defence of proper airfields by the OMG, although if aircraft are only delivering supplies they can drop their load on pallets at low altitude.

Air, however, cannot be the OMG's main supply route, as Soviet VTA assets are insufficient to meet all demands. One Il-76 Candid transport can carry the entire unit of fire for a 152mm howitzer battalion, but the number of such flights is limited.
(40)

The OMG is intended to live off the land if it cannot maintain overland supply links with the main body. The Soviet experience in the Great Patriotic War showed that troops carrying out rapid exploitation missions tended to consume less than those fighting through organized defences; in 1944-45, armies advancing 16 to 45 km a day expended one-sixth of the ammunition and consumed one-third of the fuel of armies advancing four to 13 km daily. (40) The OMG can exploit civilian fuel resources, as Soviet engineers carry special pumps for this purpose, and captured enemy supplies.

Soviet logistics units have a cross-country vehicular capability unthinkable to their NATO opposite numbers, in an effort to reduce dependence on the roads and make the logistics element as mobile as the rest of the formation.

The OMG would presumably have a priority for supply, as Soviet army and Front commanders switch supply to units attacking on the main axis and encountering heavy opposition. The concentration of logistics assets at higher levels than in the NATO structure reduces the logistics "tail" that burdens NATO formations.

The OMG is most successful in the context of a Soviet preemptive offensive, and it is on this concept that the OMG is largely predicated. The Soviets do not expect total surprise, and know that they can expect some resistance from NATO forces, necessitating a first echelon breakthrough to open a gap for the OMG. But NATO deployment is expected to be incomplete, leaving spots with weak defences through which other OMGs can be launched. If NATO is able to fully mobilize before the Warsaw Pact attack, a breakthrough against strong defences may not be possible without resorting to nuclear or chemical attack. If the OMG is able to penetrate without severe loss, it must contend with mobilized enemy reserves in the rear, preventing it from accomplishing its missions.

But an OMG which is successfully committed as part of a

pre-emptive offensive is still not without problems. The OMG concept contains a number of weaknesses, not the least of which is the possible inability of the Soviet officer corps, which has never valued individual initiative in combat, to implement OMG doctrine under wartime conditions.

Chapter 2

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Chapter 3

Problems of the OMG Concept

The Soviet Officer in Combat

One major weak spot for the OMG, and for modern Soviet operational concepts, is command and control. While OMG control would be subject to a centralized plan on paper, in combat the OMG would be operating in a fluid and rapidly changing environment. The commander of an army-subordinated OMG must coordinate and direct the move of a division-sized main body but also his forward detachments 20 to 40 km up, supporting air defence units, raiding elements, and attached or supporting air cover.

The ability of any C3 system to deal with the amount of information produced by modern combat operations and electronic systems is doubtful. Marshal Grechko stresses that a commander and staff must keep constantly abreast of the situation at the front and rear, closely follow enemy behaviour, and comprehend the enemy's plans and situation. He recognizes that commanders and staff without extensive combat experience may be overwhelmed by the flow of information, necessitating the acquisition of the ability to analyze the situation quickly and identify the most important items of information. (1) Combat in Afghanistan will be only a taste of conditions on the rapid, violent European or Chinese battlefield. To cope with the flood of data, the Soviets

are trying to automate data processing for headquarters down to the divisional level.

The OMG and the entire offensive doctrine require a highly flexible command structure and officers who will take the initiative in reacting to dynamic combat situations. The preemptive, high-speed offensive and OMG operations in depth take place in a faster-paced and more violent environment than that of the Great Patriotic War. Officers must be able to think for themselves and make decisions quickly in order to maintain the mobility and timing of the operation.

The OMG and other developments in their doctrine for land warfare are therefore pushing the Soviets towards allowing independent subordinate command at a level never previously considered. If the flexibility of new operational and tactical concepts and weapons systems is to be fully exploited, junior commanders must be encouraged to show a far higher degree of initiative. Christopher Donnelly illustrates the present situation at the divisional level and below as the commander never making plans, only decisions on the basis of the pre-set drills taught to him. (2) Flexibility at the operational level has been created by denying versatility to the tactical commander.

The Soviet military hierarchy has recognized that the old disciplinary system based on mistrust and fear among levels of

This viewpoint is contradicted by former Polish Colonel Michael Sadykiewicz, who contends from his own experience that NSWP armies do exercise above the divisional level, and that multi-national units are unlikely below the army level. He states that Fronts under Eastern European command might even be established, (21) with the most likely candidate being the "Polish" Coastal Front directed against Denmark and northern Germany.

Regardless of this, OMGs are still likely to be largely, if not all, Soviet in composition, given the degree of trust that exists between the Soviets and their allies. It is not likely that a Soviet Front commander would give an East German or Polish army or division an OMG role, although it is possible that NSWP support units might be attached to an OMG if no Soviet ones could be spared. Of four Fronts identified by Sadykiewicz in the offensive against Central Europe, three, at least, would be under Soviet command, and it is doubtful that the Soviets would let a Pole command the fourth.

Regarding C3 problems arising from NSWP participation, Eastern European commanders share a common doctrine with the Soviets and most have attended Soviet military academies. There were some language problems during the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, but most senior Eastern European officers have been trained in Russian. Problems may arise logistically in that

The Soviet army has traditionally prized unthinking obedience and has ruthlessly enforced it, shooting approximately 100 soldiers during the first week of the invasion of Czechoslovakia. (5) The attributes desired to facilitate properly flexible operations are simply not part of Soviet history and upbringing. Independent thinking is discouraged in officers before they join the military, as obedience is taught in school, the Young Pioneers, and the Komsomol.

Officer training focusses on constantly practiced drills and operating under highly centralized control and all-embracing operating orders covering all contingencies. While battle drills do give officers a considerable range of "off the cuff" solutions to common tactical problems, they do not aid the development of the skills necessary for modern combat.

It is therefore difficult to introduce initiative and get commanders to do things for which they have not been trained and previously would have resulted in their punishment. Writing in the military newspaper Krasnaya Zvezda shows that many middle-level commanders are unable to grasp the concept of initiative, let alone its desirability. (6)

The campaign in the military press to foster initiative has been underway since the 1970's, parallel with the doctrinal changes which necessitate officer development. Typical of such writing is an article by General Mayorov in Voyennyy Vestnik

(Military Herald) which criticizes inexperienced young officers who fail to grasp the entire range of tasks and rely too much on instructions by senior commanders (7); this point would have been unthinkable in earlier writings.

The solutions proposed to the initiative problem in the military press concentrate on training and ideological indoctrination. A Krasnaya Zvezda editorial states that the "ability to act suddenly, boldly and decisively" is acquired through intensive training under realistic conditions, with commanders, political sections and staffs having a duty and obligation to develop situations which prompt initiative, innovation and cunning. The formal approach of some units in allowing combat training to go through the same tactical scenarios "must be well and truly eradicated." Party political work is touted as contributing to initiative and combat activeness. (8)

This line is echoed in other articles. Another Krasnaya Zvezda editorial states that "great vigilance, boldness and preparedness to operate in any modern combat situation...are developed with daily and purposeful Party-political work." (9) In an article on the modern rear services, Major-General Lopatin highlights the need for rapid decision-making in logistics movement due to the vulnerability of the rear to NATO deep attacks, and suggests how to foster "competence, boldness in

making decisions, (and) the ability to take a justified, well-founded risk" in officers: changing tactical situations in exercises as often as possible; and encouraging officers to analyze developments and occurrences, learn the theory of modern combat, and remember the experience of the Great Patriotic War. (10)

Lieutenant-General Reznichenko believes that success in rapidly-changing combat situations is directly dependent on the level of training of commanders and staffs, and proposes allowing a greater degree of control at lower levels of command. (11) This has been carried out to some extent through measures such as the automation of data processing down to the division, although sub-divisional commanders have yet to receive the autonomy required by the OMG concept.

It may seem contradictory to at the same time seek a greater degree of control by junior commanders while raising the level of overall control to the TVD. The TVD is also intended to accomodate changes in doctrine, streamlining the force posture for the pre-emptive offensive and minimizing the C3 problems created by Front commanders possessing weapons, such as missiles and aircraft, which have ranges beyond the Front's area of interest. (12) Donnelly points out that the Soviet demands for initiative do not represent a great decentralization, but "are what we in the West would rate as sensible devolution of control of detail, and the application of plain commonsense in the event

of loss of communications." (13) It is difficult for the Western observer to appreciate just how alien this is given past Soviet command practice; officers have been shot for taking the "justified, well-founded risk" advocated by Major-General Lopatin.

What can help to foster initiative is the trend towards an elitist and hereditary officer corps, which is being given Party support. The degree of Party influence on the military has no equivalent in the West, as civilian control in the Soviet model of civil-military relations is enforced through penetration of the military at all levels by the Party apparatus and the existence of a parallel structure of political officers.

As the military becomes a profession in which sons follow their fathers, and officer status means membership in a privileged elite, the officer corps becomes less fearful and mistrusting, and more homogenous, interrelated, and mutually reliant. Lower-level commanders are more likely to trust their superiors. Unlike during the Great Patriotic War, the individual officer is coming to realize that in the future he may be allowed to take risks and, as Donnelly puts it, he "may even be permitted to achieve less than total success and get away with his life." (14)

The reformist atmosphere under Gorbachev, with the increasing sophistication of Soviet society and the "glasnost"

(openness) campaign can only further this trend. The Gorbachev anti-alcohol offensive will also aid the efficiency of the officer corps.

Unlike conscripts, who get drunk on concoctions such as hydraulic fluid on the occasions when they have enough time off from political and military training to do so, officers have proper drink and sufficient leisure time to consume it. The result is widespread alcoholism in the officer corps. One Soviet conscript said that "we despised our officers because they tormented us when they were drunk, which was most of the time."
(15)

The Gorbachev-sponsored restrictions on alcohol and increased pride in an elite, hereditary officer corps can make inroads into the combat performance of Soviet officers. The Soviet experience in Afghanistan has shown how attractive initiative can be to junior commanders on the rare occasions when they can exercise it. (16) A sufficiently widespread awareness of and capacity for initiative in order to exploit modern weapons and communications technology will likely develop when the present generation of junior commanders get to formation command rank 10 to 15 years from now.

It should be noted that the encouragement of initiative is not limited to the Soviet Ground Forces. Vice-Admiral Koborov

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writes that his fleet "has nurtured a considerable number of selfless and courageous commanders who work with initiative and creativity." (17) Soviet tactics for fighter aircraft previously were based on tight control of the aircraft by ground controllers. Pilots are now allowed more freedom to react to situations developing in air combat, which is a considerable aid to OMG air support.

But the flexibility of the Soviet army at lower levels is still impaired by the lack of a truly professional non-commissioned officer (NCO) corps. Discipline is difficult to enforce and troops difficult to lead without effective NCOs.

While initiative is now encouraged in officers, for the junior ranks obedience and discipline based on fear and punishment are still the rule. The crude solution to the lack of effective NCOs to enforce discipline is to allow senior, second year conscripts to control the first year men with little supervision by the officers, resulting in sadistic punishments and hazing which are reflected in the high suicide and desertion rates.

NCOs are largely drawn from the "best and brightest" of the conscripts. Large numbers of NCOs are used to compensate for their inexperience and poor motivation, and officers are assigned to jobs which would be filled by NCOs in Western armies; for example, all tanks and personnel carriers are commanded by

officers. The backbone of the Soviet army is the officer, not the NCO as it is in most Western armies. The Soviets have, since the early 1970's tried to foster the growth of a professional NCO corps by encouraging a cadre of "old soldiers" with the praporshchik (warrant officer) rank.

The Soviets have thus not reached a satisfactory solution to the CG problem for the OMG, and cannot use their creation to its full potential until initiative is learned. William Odom concludes that the OMG, and the whole TVD concept, place demands on the Soviet officer corps that probably exceed its education and training achievements since the Great Patriotic War. (18)

This is not at all to say that the OMG would be ineffective in combat. The Soviet officer corps used mobile groups successfully, albeit on a less complex and slower-paced battlefield. However, the OMG's effectiveness will be limited by officers reacting improperly or not at all to changes in the combat situation, and commanders and staff being unable to cope with the rapidity of change. This could have consequences ranging from the defeat of a raiding element to the wearing down and isolation of an entire OMG.

Allied Participation in OMGs

The point comes to mind that the inclusion of Eastern

European units in a Soviet OMG, Soviet participation in an Eastern European OMG, or completely Eastern European OMGs would raise C3 difficulties, especially given the perceived unreliability of non-Soviet Warsaw Pact (NSWP) forces in a war against NATO.

Eastern European military literature does cover OMG operations, using Soviet models, as the Polish OMG air defence articles demonstrated, and OMG operations have been practiced in Warsaw Pact exercises such as Druzhiba-82.

Air Commodore E.S. Williams of the Royal United Services Institute and Lt-Gen. Rene Gutknecht, former Canadian military representative to the NATO Military Committee, both state that OMGs are probably all-Soviet in composition and are intended to assure a Soviet victory regardless of how NSWP forces perform.

(19)

In a study for the Canadian Department of National Defence, Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone and Christopher Jones offer evidence that there are no NSWP formations above the division level. (20) NSWP formations are incorporated into Soviet armies and Fronts, just as non-Slavic soldiers do not have their own units in the Soviet Army. A Front-subordinated OMG might then include a NSWP division or an OMG might be supported by Eastern European engineers or logistics troops.

This viewpoint is contradicted by former Polish Colonel Michael Sadykiewicz, who contends from his own experience that NSWP armies do exercise above the divisional level, and that multi-national units are unlikely below the army level. He states that Fronts under Eastern European command might even be established, (21) with the most likely candidate being the "Polish" Coastal Front directed against Denmark and northern Germany.

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Eastern European units are typically equipped with older equipment than front-line Soviet formations, but those NSWP troops most likely to be included in OMGs are support forces which are not heavily armed.

On unreliability of NSWP armies, the Rakowska-Harmstone and Jones study contends, reversing popular wisdom in the West, that Eastern European units would be more reliable in an attack on NATO than in defence of their homelands. NSWP troops are "sandwiched" between Soviet units and are policed by KGB troops to ensure their active commitment to the battle.

Logistics and Air Support

Logistics is a prominent Achilles heel for the OMG in the enemy's depth. It is doubtful that an OMG could successfully live off the land for very long if it could not keep open a supply line to the main body, a line which would run through hostile territory with little air defence available for logistics vehicles.

The Soviets may skimp on food and other comforts for their men, but their operations still require huge quantities of food and ammunition. OMG logistics units cannot scrounge all of the fuel and ammunition for a division, corps or army in an unfriendly area suffering damage from military action. NATO

forces, especially the West German territorial reserves, could destroy much of the civilian and military resources which the OMG planned to use.

The OMG cannot fulfill its missions if it cannot transport sufficient fuel, ammunition, and other supplies with it. The Soviets prestock 60 to 90 days worth of ammunition and 90 days worth of fuel in forward areas so that NATO cannot detect an impending offensive by monitoring the movements of supplies, but an OMG cannot transport such quantities. It is not known to what extent the Soviets have worked out the logistical difficulties of supplying a rapidly-moving OMG far from the main force, beyond examining the logistics for mobile groups.

The Warsaw Pact literature emphasizes the importance of air defence to carrying out the OMG's missions. To maintain its air defence envelope, the OMG must carry with it sufficient surface-to-air missile and anti-aircraft gun reloads, or be able to replenish its supply. If these stocks run down and are not replaced, the OMG will be unable to defend itself against constant air attacks.

Major Roger Bort comments that it is questionable if the Soviets would be able to consistently project helicopter air support for the OMG, given that the buildup of helicopter assets is still not sufficient to meet needs and that helicopters would

be flying in an environment heavy with hostile missiles, aircraft, and helicopters. Major Michalak recognizes that a "sizable loss rate among helicopters...seems to be a fundamental factor when deciding the capacity of the ground forces to operate in the depth of the enemy formations." (22)

Close air support would suffer not only from enemy anti-air threats but also from the distances the OMG would be operating from air bases and the tactical radar net. It is also worth noting that the air defence envelope would reduce the OMG's mobility somewhat, as the tanks could not outrun the slower wheeled and tracked missile and gun air defence vehicles.

Mobility

To be effective, the OMG must be successful in avoiding significant contact with the defenders. Unexpected opposition could mean delays, combat losses, and unexpected expenditure of fuel and ammunition, exacerbating an already bad logistical situation.

This weak spot has been recognized by US officers such as Captain Stephen Shervais, who writes in relation to Soviet deep operations that anything that slows them down, forces them to manoeuvre and deploy off-road, or attrits their numbers helps to prevent them achieving their mission successfully. Engagements that require high rates of expenditure of a limited ammunition

supply could weaken them enough to render them ineffective. (23)

The OMG negates many of its advantages when it splits into small raiding detachments. These units do not have the benefits of the air defence and artillery umbrella, and do not carry significant firepower, making it possible to wear down the OMG by singling out the easier to destroy raiding parties.

The OMG defends itself largely by its mobility, manoeuvring so that it does not present a concentrated, stationary target. But rapid mobility, Major Henry Shields believes, assumes that bridges are intact and that roads are not obstructed by battle damage and refugees. (24)

Roads are a problem for deep operations, especially as an OMG limited to roads which would stretch for kilometres in long, easy to target columns. The Soviets do have a greater cross-country ability than NATO, although cross-country operations by tracked vehicles also means maintenance for those vehicles, slowing the tempo of the offensive. As for refugees, the Soviets know that sowing panic among the civilian population would be enough to block the NATO transportation network in crucial sectors. The Soviets appear to have devoted less thought as to how they would cope with the refugee flow, short of simply driving through.

Blown bridges would pose a significant problem. A premium is placed on location and capture of river crossing sites in OMG

operations, and the Soviets do reckon on a small river every 5 to 10 km and a wider obstacle every 100 to 150 km. Therefore, Soviet tank and armoured personnel carrier crews are trained for fording rivers. Soviet divisional engineers are equipped with six heavy ferries, 12 amphibians, 36 vehicle-launched bridges, and 120 m of ribbon bridge; the army level holds 1000 more metres of ribbon bridge, 30 vehicle-launched bridges, 36 heavy ferries, and 40 amphibians. (25) Rivers, therefore, will slow down the OMG, but not as much as an equivalent NATO formation. The main dangers in river crossings for the OMG are that vehicles which cannot ford, such as self-propelled artillery, will be separated from the armour, and that in bridge crossings the waiting vehicles in the bridgehead will be caught by enemy aircraft. This makes air defence of special importance in such situations.

What can slow the OMG down are urban areas. OMG exercises have been held in areas of Poland and Belorussia that are sparsely populated by the standards of northern Germany. While Soviet movements in southern Germany are constrained by mountains and forests, in the north the OMG must avoid the numerous towns and cities. The OMG's columns must pass through some towns and villages, where West German territorials can use "sponge tactics" using small ATGM teams to knock out tanks and slow down the advance. Fighting in built-up areas has been a new focus in Soviet tactics and training, but it is difficult to lessen the challenge posed by the urban sprawl of Central Europe.

Another hazard to be encountered in Western Europe are nuclear power plants. Gorbachev has referred to the fact that damage to nuclear facilities could produce effects similar to the explosion of nuclear weapons. DMGs are capable of continued operations in irradiated areas; but would no doubt seek to avoid civilian nuclear facilities. nonetheless, imposing another constraint on their freedom of movement.

Timing and Massing

A major problem for the DMG is the preparation time for war on both sides. A long preparation time for the Warsaw Pact and little or no time for NATO are the circumstances most favourable for DMG operations; and for the Soviet pre-emptive offensive of which the DMG is a component. Considerable time is necessary to properly assemble the components of the DMG and prepare for the mission. Forming the DMG in several hours during a battle, coordinating it with other elements in the TVD, and planning the penetration and operation in depth would place a great strain on Soviet resources, and possibly stretch the Soviet C3 capability to the breaking point.

Odom offers an opinion on another possible DMG weakness, that the DMG provides an earlier and more vulnerable target for the opponent by massing forces forward on the axis of the main offensive effort, a situation Sokolovskiy had warned against in his standard work of the 1960's on military art. (26)

Sokolovskiy, however, was writing for a doctrine of nuclear attack, when there was a premium placed on dispersal and lower attacker/defender ratios were required to achieve a breakthrough. It is difficult to see how the OMG is any more vulnerable behind the FLOT than first or second echelon forces, except when moving through the first echelon to take up position for committal against prepared defences. The Soviets intend to use extensive deception to hide OMG manoeuvres before the penetration.

The OMG is therefore not invulnerable. It has a number of weak spots, not the least of which being the dependence of the concept on pre-emption of enemy mobilization. Even if the OMG is able to penetrate deployed defences without severe loss, it must contend with mobilized enemy reserves in the rear which can prevent it from accomplishing its mission.

But an OMG successfully inserted during a pre-emptive attack must cope with restraints on its mobility, weak logistic links, the need for immediate air superiority, and a C3 structure which could collapse under the pressure of the modern battlefield. The Soviet military is striving to overcome the traditional docility and fear of the Soviet officer. The Soviet officer corps in the near future may still not be up to the tasks required of it in wartime.

Chapter 3

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Chapter 4

NATO Doctrine and the OMG

The Shift to Deep Strike

At the same time as the OMG concept and the general restructuring of the offensive were being developed and refined in the Soviet Army, the US Army was developing its AirLand Battle strategy and NATO was examining doctrinal changes which produced Follow-on Forces Attack (FOFA), also known as the Rogers Plan after the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, or as Deep Strike. The OMG in fact eventually became a selling point for these new doctrines.

The Soviets were, of course, not the only party concerned with and examining NATO's weaknesses. Staff at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) made an assessment of forces in Allied Command Europe (ACE) in 1979-80 that revealed deficiencies "which would clearly lead to lowering the nuclear threshold if not corrected." (1) Staff planners then examined how ACE forces could overcome these deficiencies and improve their capabilities, including the exploitation of new technological developments.

The focus of planning on interdiction of Warsaw Pact second echelon forces was modified by study of Zapad-81 to include what was known about the OMG. Recommendations to enhance conventional

capabilities to detect, identify, target and destroy Warsaw Pact follow-on (second echelon and OMG) forces were included in the October 1981 ACE Force Proposals and the December 1981 SACEUR assessment for the NATO Defence Planning Committee. Follow-on Forces Attack was adopted as a long-term planning guideline by the Defence Planning Committee in November 1984, and the 1983-88 Force Goals contained a commitment to strengthen conventional defence capabilities, including the exploitation of current and new technology for FOFA. (2)

FOFA is an attempt to solve NATO's dilemma in defending against a Warsaw Pact attack. In order to obtain the time necessary to make the decision on nuclear use, NATO must trade space for time. But ACE does not have space to trade, due to West German poolitical considerations necessitaing a doctrinal commitment to forward defence against an offensive at the Inter-German Border. NATO planners perceived weaknesses in conventional forces which made forward defence non-viable unless doctrinal changes were made and conventional capabilities improved. This conventional weakness implied that NATO would have to resort to tactical nuclear weapons soon after a Warsaw Pact attack, an option that had become increasingly unpopolar in Western Europe after the decision to deploy new theatre nuclear weapons in 1979.

FOFA tried to get around the forward defence dilemma and raise the nuclear threshold, soothing European public opinion, by

using conventional technology to extend the battle into enemy territory. The political difficulty of trading West German space for time would be balanced by moving the battlefield as far into the enemy's space as target acquisition systems and conventional weapons would permit. A surveillance and targetting infrastructure would be developed to direct missiles and manned aircraft against airfields, fuel and supply dumps, C3 facilities, bridges, road junctions, railheads, massed combat forces and other targets in Eastern Europe and the three westernmost Military Districts of the Soviet Union. Adding depth to the battlefield on the Warsaw Pact side aimed to lessen the pressure exerted on the NATO forward defence, by isolating the first echelon through attacks on follow-on forces and the supporting structure.

It is noteworthy that the OMG and FOFA, both developed during the late 1970's and the start of the 1980's, emphasize attacks on the same types of targets, although through different means. The planners at SHAPE had come to share the Soviet officer's priority on carrying destruction and disruption to the depth of the enemy's deployment.

The Warsaw Pact advance visualized in the FOFA concept is the classic Soviet echeloned force structure, with follow-on echelons "piling on" to the first echelon to provide the momentum of the offensive and push the lead units through like water bursting through a dam. The Soviet offensive relies on multiple,

phased axes of advance, with the second echelon achieving planned time and space objectives. Such a force structure is vulnerable in that attacking on predetermined axes restricts movement, large formations limit tactical surprise, massing for the breakthrough and dispersing quickly calls for detailed planning and precise timing for movement and fire support, massing provides easier detectability, and tasking of combat and logistics support units limits the flexibility of commanders. (3)

The vulnerability of the second echelon, seen as the decisive element of the Soviet offensive, was attractive to SHAPE planners. Deep strikes which disrupted the second echelon's movement and timing could throw off the momentum of the offensive and isolate the first echelon at the forward edge of the battle area (FEBA).

The deep interdiction role in itself is not new. NATO commanders have always tried to target rear areas and follow-on forces, but lacked adequate target acquisition capabilities and conventional weapons systems of sufficient range and accuracy. The emphasis on deep interdiction in FOFA is new, as are the Emerging Technologies (ET) integral to the concept. Previously, deep strike missions could only be performed by manned aircraft, but advanced information and guidance technologies has made possible the development of missiles for deep interdiction.

Deep operations for NATO has usually applied only to the air

dimension. Unlike the Soviets, NATO has not visualized operations in depth by ground forces, although the idea of deep thrusts into Warsaw Pact territory has been raised in unofficial circles, for example by Samuel Huntington. Such attacks are perceived as too provocative and risking a Soviet nuclear response.

ET makes FOFA a very "high tech" strategy emphasizing the role of the "chip" in military actions. One US Army general says that exploiting the microchip allows friendly forces to see deep, see the battlefield more clearly than the enemy, seize the initiative, apply manoeuvre and firepower against numerically superior forces, neutralize and destroy the enemy's "eyes," and classify and analyze data. (4)

The ET systems under consideration for FOFA include surveillance, target acquisition, electronic warfare, and C3 systems. The Joint Surveillance and Target Attack Radar System (JSTARS) programme was initiated by the Pentagon in 1982 to detect and transmit information on moving targets with airborne radars. The Joint Tactical Information Distribution System (JTIDS) has been adopted throughout NATO for jam-resistant data and voice transmissions.

ET also, of course, includes an array of weaponry. For use against fixed targets there will be airfield denial weapons, the advanced cruise missile, the Axe (which uses the booster of the

Trident submarine-launched ballistic missile), and the CAM-40 (a version of the Pershing II missile), among others. Against mobile targets, the major system under development is the US Joint Tactical Missile System (JTACMS), with candidates for inclusion being the T-16 (a variant of the Patriot surface-to-air missile) and the T-22 (a version of the Lance missile), both developed under the Assault Breaker programme. Much emphasis has been placed on submunitions which can guide themselves to enemy tanks.

An American Doctrine of Manoeuvre: AirLand Battle

Although General Rogers and other NATO senior officers have consistently denied it, there has been considerable American doctrinal and technological influence on FOFA, the latter being evident from the list of ET systems, many of which are US Department of Defence projects. NATO investment in ET resulted from the December 1982 initiative by Defence Secretary Weinberger at the Defence Planning Committee. The US Army had developed its own doctrine, AirLand Battle, in 1977-82, and the US armed services had begun investing heavily in the ET systems on which the doctrine relied. It was in the US interest to develop a European market for ET to cut acquisition costs, and to gain acceptance of AirLand Battle by the allies who would be working with it in Europe.

AirLand Battle, adopted by the US Army in the 1982 version

of Field Manual 100-5 which replaced the 1976 edition, was a response to several major issues arising in the late 1970's. A number of major weapons systems were coming on stream as a result of post-Vietnam research and development. This R and D had caused a proliferation of competing technologies in C3 and precision-guided munitions, and a unifying concept of operations was felt to be necessary. (5)

The most important stimulant for doctrinal change was the debate over whether the Army could carry out its doctrine of "active defence" without giving up terrain. Army commanders believed that, using the strategy in 1976's Field Manual 100-5, they could beat the leading Warsaw Pact echelons but the initial battle would leave US units ineffective and the enemy follow-on forces intact.

The active defence doctrine stressed attrition of the enemy. In the soldier's view, this forfeited the advantage of manoeuvre to the enemy's follow-on forces, which could byppass strongly defended areas and join the battle in full strength at the time of their choice. (6) US comanders did not want to yield the initiative to the attacker.

The shift away from active defence was affected by currents in the Pentagon during the early years of the Reagan Administration, as official pronouncements emphasized victory in warfare, whether the conflict be conventional or nuclear. The

doctrine for the armed services became much more active and victory-oriented, as in the US Navy's Maritime Strategy which visualized operations against the Soviet fleet in Soviet coastal waters.

AirLand Battle places the priority on victory rather than fighting the enemy to a standstill. The chief reason for attacking is stated as being the destruction of enemy forces. It distinguishes between the tactical and operational levels, and does not separate nuclear war from operations in a nuclear-potential environment. In these respects, and in the concept of deep attack, it is much closer to Soviet themes and concepts than previous American military thought.

AirLand Battle has a more flexible and manoeuvre-oriented outlook than active defence. Success in battle in the AirLand concept requires the characterization of thinking and operations by initiative, depth, agility, and synchronization.

These principles appear throughout AirLand Battle writing. Units must fight to gain and retain the initiative. Commanders must shift their forces and fires to points of enemy weakness faster than the enemy can respond. The enemy will be attacked in depth with coordinated air and ground fire and manoeuvre to prevent his massing and to isolate him on the battlefield. AirLand Battle literature actually reads much like Savkin's writings on military art.

The US doctrine mirrors Soviet military art in advocating fast-moving attacks following reconnaissance units or successful probes through gaps in enemy defenses, shifting strength quickly to widen penetrations, and carrying the battle deep into the enemy rear before he can recover from the shock of the initial assault.

There are a number of forms of deep attack in AirLand Battle: attack by fire to delay the arrival of enemy forces in the battle area, permitting isolation and defeat of the enemy forces in contact; attack by fire to prevent enemy interference with a friendly counterattack; engaging follow-on echelons to deprive the enemy offensive of momentum; and destroying or neutralizing targets which pose threats or whose elimination provides an advantage, for example, a bridge. (7) The third, striking follow-on echelons, reflects the same model of the Soviet offensive underlying AirLand Battle as FOFA.

This is the first American doctrine to adopt the Soviet practice of distinguishing between the tactical and operational levels. At the tactical level, US division commanders fight Soviet first echelon divisions and "see" the second echelon divisions of the Soviet first echelon armies. At the operational level, corps commanders fight the first echelon armies and find and disrupt the advance of the second echelon divisions of the first echelon armies, while "seeing" the second echelon armies of the first echelon Front. AirLand Battle recognizes that all

Soviet formations can be echeloned and are part of the echeloning of higher formations; FOFA writings tend to toss around the term "second echelon" much more loosely.

AirLand Battle and FOFA obviously share a stress on deep attack, coordination of operations between branches and services (especially the Army and Air Force), and a reliance on ET. General Rogers' statement that "while there are a few similarities between the ACE FOFA sub-concept and the US Army AirLand Battle, they were developed independently" (8) does not ring completely true, especially as US officers participated in the planning for both.

Rogers does state that FOFA does not visualize the integration of nuclear and chemical firepower into the deep strike role, that FOFA does not include the possibility of preemptive strike as does AirLand Battle, and that FOFA does not include ground attacks across Warsaw Pact borders, which is possible as an AirLand Battle manoeuvre.

Limitations on Deep Strike

It is worth noting problems experienced with FOFA and AirLand Battle, independent of how these strategies interact with Soviet doctrine.

A major limitation on deep strike concepts is cost. NATO

must divide its resources for Central Europe among forward defence, deep strike, and reserve tasks. ET is expensive; JTACMS will cost an estimated \$14 billion in production, and the Northrop NV-150 stand-off weapon will cost \$300,000 a copy. (9) It is little wonder that the Americans sought to lengthen production runs and cut costs. European governments balk at this expense. Rogers asked for a real increase in defence spending of seven percent annually to fund deep strike systems, while many NATO members have yet to meet their 1978 commitment in principle to increase defence expenditures by three percent a year.

All of this expensive weaponry is not without its problems. Some weapons components have failed in tests. There has been no testing in which all of the components of deep strike - airborne radar, missiles, and submunitions - have successfully been used together. (10) The most comprehensive testing, that of the US Assault Breaker system, has been plagued with problems.

NATO command and control suffers from the same problem as the Soviets on the modern battlefield, the difficulty of evaluating and disseminating the vast amount of data flowing into the decision-making process. ET surveillance and target acquisition systems have increased the information flood but have not simplified the task of sorting out and communicating useful data.

AirLand Battle and FOFA are very dependent on the gathering

and dissemination of signals intelligence gleaned from enemy electronic transmissions. But intelligence-gathering is limited by Soviet maintenance of electronic silence, as in the OMG form-up period. Another major dependence of these concepts is overhead air coverage, which cannot be maintained during darkness and bad weather, favourite Soviet times to exploit surprise.

While targetting objectives in the enemy's depth is the focus of FOFA, NATO artillery is not yet sufficient in numbers or lethality to destroy the full spectrum of first echelon targets, (11) let alone the second echelon, as one of the originators of AirLand Battle, Steve Doerfel, pointed out. Likewise, the capability to perform the necessary deep air reconnaissance is questionable given the limited air assets assigned to other tactical missions. (12)

It is noteworthy that the original interdiction studies for deep strike were conducted assuming NATO air superiority. Deep interdiction missions would be considerably less cost-effective in practice, under realistic battlefield conditions with a strong Warsaw Pact air defence and air offensive. (13)

Finally, it is worthwhile to assess whether FOFA would in fact fulfill its primary selling point to the European public and raise the nuclear threshold.

FOFA has by no means reduced the importance NATO attaches to

its nuclear forces. The role of NATO conventional forces is still described as preserving ACE long enough to allow a decision to be made on nuclear escalation, and to protect nuclear delivery vehicles and C3 infrastructure to keep escalation viable. General Rogers states that "we have no intention of suggesting that we do away with NATO's option to be the first to use nuclear weapons." (14)

Many of the deep strike systems are dual-capable. Attacks using nuclear-capable weapons on the Western Soviet Military Districts and on targets supporting Soviet theatre nuclear forces, such as radars, airfields, and command bunkers, puts pressure on the Soviets to use nuclear weapons to destroy this nuclear-capable deep strike apparatus or to undertake a nuclear response to attacks on nuclear weapons-related targets. One US analyst, Dennis Gormley, concludes that deep strike strategies "could heighten the risks of war during crises for the same reasons that Soviet missiles do" and "create strong hair-trigger incentives for pre-emptive attack." (15)

Deep Strike in the Context of Soviet Doctrine

There has been little assessment of FOFA and AirLand Battle in the context of how they would interact with Soviet doctrine, despite provocative analyses by experts such as Dr. Steven Canby. Yet a NATO doctrine does not stand on its own; it must be examined from the viewpoint of the potential enemy and take into

account its effect on enemy doctrine and the enemy doctrine's effect on it.

The threat assessment of the Warsaw Pact offensive used in both strategies is based on a model of Soviet operations that emphasizes the use of second echelons and the dependence of the advance on follow-on forces. But the assumptions of NATO planners in using this model are questionable.

Per Berg and Gunilla Heroli, in their assessment of FOFA for the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, point out that at the theatre level, the Warsaw Pact second strategic echelon will consist mainly of forces in the western Soviet Union. The interdiction of these forces moving westward will have only a marginal and delayed effect on the offensive in Germany, due to the long range, the number of alternate routes for force movements, (16) and the Soviet emphasis on pre-empting with most of the necessary forces already in place. The offensive, if not blocked by the NATO forward defence, would have seized most of its objectives by the time deep strikes against the deep rear had much effect.

As shown by Donnelly (ironically, in the same issue of NATO Review as appeared Rogers' defence of FOFA), echeloning below the TVD level is not carved in doctrinal stone for the Soviets. Fronts are likely to deploy their armies in two echelons only if strong enemy defences are encountered. AirLand Battle seems to

have a better understanding of this than FOFA, as it emphasizes battlefield interdiction up to 150 km.

The depth of Soviet formations and their structure will therefore vary according to the commander's assessment of the enemy defences and the achievement of surprise, and the terrain. If Fronts, armies, corps, and divisions may or may not have a second echelon, and would not in the preferred Soviet scenario for the offensive, the emphasis on slowing the attack by interdicting the second echelon becomes questionable. The deep attack may be in a continual "hold" pattern, using valuable surveillance and target acquisition resources in what a US Army officer skeptical of AirLand Battle calls "a potentially fruitless search for the elusive second echelon." (17)

NATO has to create a strong, rapidly deployable forward defence in order to force Soviet commanders to echelon their forces. Without a strong defence at the FEBA before the Soviet offensive begins, there will be no second echelon below the TVD level for deep strike targetting. Once again, the question arises of the split in NATO resources between the forward battlefield and the enemy's depth.

The apparent incorrect understanding of Soviet operational concepts is compounded by another crucial error in threat assessment. The follow-on echelons, which may or may not exist, are seen as the most dangerous element of the Warsaw Pact

7
offensive, when it is OMG deep operations that now represent the greatest threat to the defenders.

Rogers claims that the OMG was considered in developing FOFA, with the original premium on interdicting the second operational echelon being changed in light of the introduction of the OMG in Zapad-81. SHAPE then began referring to all Warsaw Pact forces behind the troops in contact as "follow-on forces."
(18)

However, FOFA still downplays the importance of the OMG in favour of the second echelon, and the recognition of the OMG did not change the emphasis on second echelon targetting. Lip service is paid to the OMG in statements that ACE will target "these follow-on forces (which include the Operational Manoeuvre Groups) before they hit our General Defensive Position" (19) and the OMG is used by FOFA and AirLand Battle proponents to sell their strategy of follow-on force interdiction.

The failure of these deep strikes concept to accurately depict Soviet echeloning practices and to realize the importance of OMG deep operations stems from the failure to recognize the embrace of surprise and the pre-emptive offensive by the Soviets. A surprise attack before NATO can fully mobilize and deploy its forward defences enables the Soviets to dispense with the second echelon and to commit the OMGs early. Therefore, OMGs cannot be targetted behind the FEBA in most cases, unless deep strike is

used to pre-empt the Soviet surprise offensive, an option rejected by NATO.

Rogers claims that SHAPE has taken into account analyses of the OMG "so long as they are in consonance with other nations' intelligence inputs." But the second echelon attack concept had no doubt acquired enough bureaucratic momentum by the time OMG operations were analyzed in 1981-82 that SHAPE saw in the OMG what it wanted to see - a new threat significant enough to sell improvements to NATO's conventional capabilities but still fitting the FOFA model of the Warsaw Pact offensive.

Rogers maintained his view that "the OMG is only one Soviet option for employing follow-on forces" and that the Warsaw Pact advance is still characterized by the "water bursting through a dam" momentum provided by "piling on" of the second on the first echelon. (20) He apparently does not appreciate that the offensive is characterized more by probing for the points of least resistance and exploiting them, a method more like probing with a pitchfork than a torrent of water.

The OMG concept and the optional nature of echeloning under the doctrinal umbrella of the pre-emptive umbrella significantly reduce the vulnerabilities FOFA hopes to exploit. The benefits of deep attack disappear as there are no massed formations for the breakthrough backed up by deeply-stacked second echelon formations, all vulnerable to air attack; the timetable for road

movements and fire support is no longer as elaborate and vulnerable to disruption; the axes of advance, probing for gaps in the defence, are not so easily targetted; and the more flexible system is not so easily disrupted by targetting the "top down" command structure.

Canby, in a scathing article on FOFA and the OMG, notes that when echeloning is used the elimination or disruption of the reinforcing second echelon would indeed leave the first echelon unsupported and vulnerable. But this vulnerability could only be exploited if the defenders could mount large-scale counterattacks to contain and destroy OMGS. If NATO had such a capability, it would not need deep attack capabilities in the first place. (21)

The OMG poses a special problem for AirLand Battle, which visualizes ground as well as air attacks on follow-on forces. If a US corps commander were able to detect a Front-level OMG before its committal, it would become his target of opportunity; however, unlike typical second-echelon formations moving into position, the OMG would be formed up and combat-ready for a meeting engagement with US ground forces.

Thus, US units launched in a deep attack against an OMG could find themselves engaged in a decisive battle with a Soviet corps- or army-sized force, without the means to rapidly withdraw or extricate themselves. Units conducting ground attacks on targets in the enemy's depth, such as road junctions, bridges,

and resupply points, to prevent reinforcement of a Soviet Front or army could find themselves in unexpected combat with an OMG. In either case, AirLand Battle deep attack designed to prevent the piling on of second echelon formations could evolve into a decisive battle, possibly leading to defeat for the US force. (22)

Canby summarizes the situation in his point that FOFA may be "ideal from the Soviet standpoint; it optimizes the advantages of the OMG method. The vulnerabilities it seeks do not exist, while it itself is uniquely vulnerable to the OMG concept." (23) One US Air Force officer describes AirLand Battle, and by extension FOFA, as "a lemming-like rush to find and destroy non-existent second echelons while Soviet/Warsaw Pact front ranks tear through NATO territory." (24)

NATO's choices in dealing with OMGs which have successfully penetrated into the rear are not attractive. A counterattack against the OMG would use up scarce and valuable reserves at a time when forward defences were either being hastily thrown up or had been breached by the OMG and first echelon breakthroughs, and required reinforcement. Abandoning the forward defence and forming a line further back would be politically difficult for ACE, and it would not be easy to form a stable defence with a sizable enemy force in the rear with the mission of preventing such a new line from being formed, blocking withdrawing NATO forces. Trying to move or adequately defend all of the possible

targets for OMGs, airborne and air assault raids, and special forces would be physically difficult and further strain NATO resources.

Destroying the OMG with the deep attack apparatus would be difficult, as the surveillance and targetting systems would be occupied with finding second echelon targets, and are designed to detect and target forces behind enemy lines, not close by. It would not be easy to target a rapidly moving OMG interspersed with NATO units and population centres, while the OMG destroyed the weapons systems, logistics, and C3 necessary for such an attack. Using nuclear weapons against the OMG encounters the same obstacles, as well as the political difficulties of nuclear release. (25)

The OMG, once it penetrates into the NATO depth, deprives NATO commanders of the time to produce an effective, measured response; the effect of the OMG would be out of proportion to its size, as armies caught off balance need to trade space for time to recover, a dilemma of which the Soviets are well aware from 1941 and an option which NATO does not possess and which FOFA tries to rectify.

The OMG's effect is compounded by the neglect of the rear by NATO, continued in FOFA and AirLand Battle. Few NATO installations are hardened, although this situation is improving somewhat. Communications sites, port facilities, storage depots;

and so on, are all at lightly defended locations well known to the Warsaw Pact, mostly within 500 km of the Inter-German Border.

A high percentage of the forces in rear areas are support troops, as NATO formations have much longer administrative and supply tails than do Soviet ones. Half of a US infantry division's strength consists of headquarters and support troops. (26) These troops are only trained as infantry in perimeter security or defence against small raiding parties. Combat organization and training are rudimentary, especially in the operations of weapons such as machine guns and anti-tank weapons. Therefore, tens of thousands of US troops, and more among the other NATO allies, will only have a minimal impact on the forward defensive effort, and can do little against Warsaw Pact deep operations.

Defending Against the OMG

The solution to the problems of defending against Soviet deep operations appears not to be expensive, "big ticket" deep strike strategies, but more low-key improvements in NATO's conventional forces and doctrine.

The OMG concept has vulnerabilities which can be preyed upon, especially its logistic weakness and the resultant fact that the OMG must avoid unexpected combat in order to maintain its rate of advance and conserve fuel and ammunition.

No all-encompassing doctrine is necessary for operations to exploit such vulnerabilities. Small units, especially West German territorial reservists who know their areas, can be used to harass OMGs and their overland supply links, and destroy supplies which the OMG can use. Shervais advocates the supplementary use against forward detachments, and by corollary OMGs, of fixed-wing ground attack aircraft to suppress air defences, helicopters to hit tanks and personnel carriers, and electronic countermeasures to limit C3 flexibility and prevent air support from the main body. (27)

Strengthening of NATO rear area defences is necessary. West German reserves should be trained in anti-OMG harassment, such as "sponge tactics" to slow down armoured columns in towns through attacks by swiftly moving anti-tank teams, and made an integral part of exercises involving simulated OMG penetrations. Edward Corcoran recommends the formation of Area Combat Troops units as a trained security force for rear-area installations, to guarantee the mobility of regular combat forces. (28)

The best weapons against the OMG already exist to a large extent, such as the man-portable ATGM and surface-to-air missile distributed among reserve and rear-area units to hit OMG vehicles and helicopters. The Soviet literature realizes the threat NATO's remote mine-laying capability poses to the freedom of action of formations operating in depth. Effective air defence of airbases would preserve NATO ground attack air assets from the

Warsaw Pact air offensive and threaten the air superiority envelope crucial to the OMG.

Defence against OMGs must also include forward defence, not just in terms of weaponry as the key element for the Soviet offensive is not only the quantity but also the quality of NATO defences. If NATO can improve the rapidity of its deployment of forward defences, OMG insertion is greatly complicated, and echeloning is forced, making the offensive becomes vulnerable to deep interdiction. Faster deployment may completely deter the Warsaw Pact attack, as its gains are contingent on pre-emption. The French FAR (Force d'Action Rapide) is one step in this direction, being a rapid deployment force for Germany.

However, it should also be taken into account that a NATO forward defence so rapidly deployable and strong as to prevent a Warsaw Pact offensive and rule out a pre-emptive offensive as an option might have the effect of shifting Soviet doctrine to dependence on nuclear or chemical weapons to achieve the breakthrough.

Chapter 3

Footnotes

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Conclusion

This examination of the roots and modern operations of the OMG, shows that hard-and-fast answers in the Western debate over the OMG are not easy to arrive at. One can offer the opinion that, for example, encircling enemy reserves may be a greater priority for the OMG than destroying headquarters, but unless one is a Warsaw Pact officer trained in OMG formation and operations, it is impossible to know for certain.

The evidence from the mobile group experience, Soviet exercises, and general Soviet practice has shed light on several points of contention. It appears that both Front- and army-subordinated OMGs can exist, although the Soviets may prefer to use the latter in most combat situations. OMGs would be committed with the pre-emptive offensive, with committal being delayed by the presence of strong defences. The OMG would therefore be the advanced echelon of the offensive in most cases, forming part of the second echelon if strong defences must be penetrated. While the Soviets retain the nuclear and chemical options for use if necessary to achieve the breakthrough, the OMG would typically penetrate into depth through gaps in the pre-emptive offensive case or under an umbrella of air and artillery firepower. OMG missions would vary, and can include the full spectrum of possible OMG tasks: encirclement of enemy forces, seizure of objectives to facilitate the advance of the main force, and destruction of targets, especially nuclear systems.

As for the overall importance of the OMG concept, one cannot separate the OMG from the restructuring of Soviet forces and strategy to meet the requirements of the shift from nuclear to conventional operations.

US Department of Defence analysts have stated that the OMG has become "sensationalized" and that this threat inflation "has distorted analysis and inhibited a balanced assessment of a complex problem." (1) Critics frequently reiterate that the OMG is not really novel, but simply a successor to previous Soviet concepts of deep operations.

However, any element of Soviet doctrine is not really novel, as it is possible to find similarities between most elements of modern Soviet military thought and predecessors in the Great Patriotic War and Imperial Russia. The Soviet Army is one of the most historically-minded militaries, and is very conscious of its roots in the Czarist army and the Revolution. Of course, most older armies are aware of their history, as a glance at the walls of most Canadian officers' messes shows.

The OMG "threat" has been distorted somewhat by writers who are beating the drum for particular weapons programmes, or who do not recognize limitations on the OMG, such as logistics and command and control. Others, however, downplay the significance of the OMG by not recognizing improvements in the OMG concept over the mobile group, such as the addition of the air element.

Some make the error of separating the OMG from the pre-emptive offensive doctrine and attach too much significance to NATO blocking the OMG breakthrough.

It has become increasingly popular to treat the Soviet army- and Front-level short-range missiles as the "real" threat to Western Europe, although this school rarely mentions that such missiles as the SS-21 and SS-23 are part of the fire support for the OMG.

Sensationalization on both sides of the debate aside, the OMG is a useful adjunct to Soviet strategy and, despite the limitations on the concept, would significantly aid the Soviet offensive in Central Europe. The skillful use of OMGs could indeed increase the chances of a Soviet victory, although it is doubtful that they could achieve the aim of the Soviet deep offensive, prevention of NATO use of nuclear weapons.

The OMG is especially useful to the Soviets at a time when NATO is focussing its energies on a Warsaw Pact second echelon which is not an essential part of a pre-emptive offensive. The ability of the OMG to disrupt NATO in deep operations would decrease were the Alliance to strengthen its rear area defences and rapid deployment capability for forward defences.

Is the OMG concept stabilizing or destabilizing for

deterrence in Europe? The answer seems to be the latter. The OMG is destabilizing to the balance in Central Europe to the extent that it strengthens a Soviet doctrine to rapidly defeat NATO, regardless of how successful this doctrine would be in reality. However, this destabilizing influence does not indicate an imminence of war or the crumbling of the West's defences so long as the central strategic balance remains stable.

This makes it necessary for NATO to take defensive moves against possible Soviet deep operations, moves which look cheap in comparison with ET for FOFA. Not only the OMG threat must be dealt with, but attacks by airborne and heliborne troops and special forces must be considered.

Destabilization is furthered when the OMG is placed in the context of the overall Soviet doctrine emphasizing pre-emptive attack. The apparent Soviet stress on a swift "off the cuff" strike does not aid crisis stability and places both sides on at least a conventional hair trigger during periods of political tension.

The destruction of NATO nuclear assets by the OMG and other elements of the Soviet offensive spurs the nuclear escalation the OMG-led offensive seeks to avoid. NATO commanders would be placed in a "use them or lose them" situation regarding tactical nuclear weapons deployed in forward areas, forcing the launch of the weapons to prevent their loss.

Also important in the deterrence equation is the NATO perception of Soviet tactical nuclear forces. The Soviets may see their nuclear capability as making it more likely that they can achieve their objectives without fighting at the nuclear level, but NATO does not share this perception. This applies in a mirror image to Soviet perceptions of NATO nuclear forces. The maintenance of theatre and tactical nuclear forces by both sides legitimizes the planning of pre-emptive nuclear strikes to prevent their use.

The avoidance of nuclear escalation is affected as well by NATO's deep strike orientation. There is a nuclear escalatory potential in FOFA, due to the use of dual-capable systems for attacks on rear-area targets supporting Soviet nuclear forces. The proliferation of dual-capable systems increases the range of targets for OMGs and other Soviet forces, and may spur the use of low-yield warheads to destroy NATO deep interdiction systems.

Some Western analysts, such as Dennis Gormley, criticize deep strike strategies as encouraging a Soviet nuclear response and advocate that NATO instead adopt "defensive" measures in deploying an anti-tactical missile (ATM) network to cope with the "new threat" of Soviet short-range missiles.

However, such a move would only worsen the situation regarding nuclear escalation. As with strategic missile defences, ATM systems do not appear so defensive to the other

side. ATM protection against a first strike can be even more effective against the smaller retaliatory strike, if the side possessing ATMs struck first. The Soviets could perceive that a NATO possessing ATM defences might be tempted during a crisis to launch a nuclear and/or conventional first strike, anticipating that ATM defences could destroy any Soviet short-range missiles launched in retaliation. This increases the Soviet incentive to pre-empt, whether with nuclear strikes or with a conventional offensive to rapidly destroy the NATO nuclear and ATM infrastructure.

Improvements in nuclear and conventional forces by both sides in Europe have therefore eroded deterrence, with the OMG being one destabilizing element in the "big picture." Regarding Sino-Soviet deterrence, the OMG appears to increase the probability of a rapid victory in a conventional offensive over-running northern China, and thus tilts the balance further towards the Soviets. However, the Chinese nuclear capability remains a wild card in Soviet calculations.

Opinions differ on the survivability of the Chinese nuclear force. The air and sea legs of the Chinese nuclear triad could likely be eliminated, but the Soviets would have to use nuclear weapons themselves to destroy the Chinese land-based missile force in its silos and caves. The command and control problems of a nuclear attack on the small Chinese nuclear force are smaller than those of a first strike on NATO or the continental

United States, but nuclear use risks nullifying any gains by provoking a superpower confrontation.

The OMG therefore is not the key to Soviet domination of the battlefield, but does form part of a Soviet offensive strategy which poses a significant problem for NATO's defensive capability and detracts from crisis stability. Moves by both sides in Europe are in fact destabilizing.

The OMG concept would remain largely unaffected by foreseeable arms control agreements in Europe. An agreement under the Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions regime would not reduce Warsaw Pact force levels below the point where there would not be sufficient forces to form an OMG to support an army or Front. Confidence-building measures on the Stockholm model can limit somewhat the ability to launch a surprise attack camouflaged by unannounced exercises, but the pre-emptive offensive can be masked in other ways.

The resurrected mobile group may be here to stay in Soviet doctrine, at least until some new revolution in military affairs forces a fresh restructuring of forces and strategy. There are a number of directions in which the OMG concept may move in the future, however. ATM systems, if deployed by NATO, may become priority objectives for the OMG to destroy or to target for attack by higher formations. The Soviets can work to make the OMG more effective by rectifying command and control problems,

requiring further reforms in officer training, and augmenting air defence and heli-lift capabilities. A more rapidly mobilizable NATO forward defence may require a further increase in Soviet artillery assets to achieve the breakthrough, or the use of nuclear and chemical attacks to breach defences.

The performance of Soviet officers is the factor that can largely make or break the OMG, with the possibility of fully exploiting the disruptive potential of the OMG limited until at least the mid-1990's by the caution and deference ingrained in Soviet commanders.

General Romeyko-Gurko would no doubt be pleased with what his military descendants have done with mobile deep operations. That such operations have limitations was demonstrated by the experiences of the mobile groups. But this does not reduce the shock felt by NATO officers as a heavily-armed OMG tears through their sector, spreading destruction and panic. The shock may not last long, however, for these officers may soon hear the sound of helicopter blades outside their headquarters as helicopter-launched missiles announce the presence of an OMG's air assault element...

Footnotes

Conclusion

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