

Although far less dramatic in technological terms, the steady development, production and deployment of Soviet main battle tanks, armoured personnel carriers, self-propelled howitzers and mortars, rocket launchers as well as mobile anti-aircraft artillery and missile systems are also impressive and worrisome. These developments acquire special significance when viewed in the context of Soviet conventional military doctrine and its growing emphasis on "Operational Manoeuvre Groups" and related concepts. The raw production figures alone are very impressive. Recent American estimates place Soviet 1974-1983 production figures for tanks at 23,700 (6,250 for the United States), other armoured vehicles at 45,500 (6,000 for the United States), and field artillery, mortars and rocket launchers at 26,000 (1,575 for the United States).⁷⁸ 1983 Soviet production figures alone are substantial: 2,700 tanks, including 1,200 T-80s (versus a NATO combined figure of 1,650); 4,500 "other" armoured fighting vehicles (versus a NATO combined figure of 2,280); 1,700 towed field artillery pieces (versus 335 for all NATO states); 1,100 self-propelled artillery pieces (versus 155 for all NATO states); and 700 multiple rocket launchers (versus 95 for NATO). If other WTO states' production figures were added, WTO numbers would increase by about 25%.⁷⁹

The combat effectiveness of these systems is an equally important (if more controversial) consideration. Although there is some question about the actual effectiveness and quality of all current Soviet military equipment, analysts consider it to be (at least) well executed in most respects and increasingly sophisticated. Soviet tanks are frequently cited as typical examples of Soviet military design practices, with the T-80 standing as the current embodiment of those principles (both good and bad). Other good illustrations include the BTR-70 (APC), the BMP-70 (or BMP-2) MICV, the 2S-1 (M1974) 122-mm self-propelled howitzer, the 2S-3 (M1973) self-propelled 152-mm howitzer, the 2S-5 (M1981) 152-mm gun, and the BM-27 mul-

tipule rocket launcher. One could also mention a whole new generation of surface-to-air anti-aircraft missiles (SA-10, SA-11, SA-X-12 and SA-13) and the follow-on on to the famous ZSU-23-4.

In virtually any category of Soviet conventional (or nuclear) weapon systems, one encounters the same picture of substantial qualitative improvement. Obviously, no effort has been made here to provide an exhaustive description (let alone complete analysis) of Soviet conventional weapon systems. This section is merely intended to illustrate how one can produce an aggressive yet factually correct characterization of Soviet military capabilities. A more analytically sophisticated evaluation of the true quality of Soviet weapon systems – and the threat that they pose – would probably be less stark, but the basic thrust of Soviet developments is hard to contest.

The Soviet Union may very well have large (and growing) numbers of good (and improving) quality tactical aircraft, main battle tanks and self-propelled howitzers as well as large numbers of reasonably well-trained personnel. Such observations (whether narrowly true or not) are not as informative as they might at first seem unless they are related to a larger operational context. In this case, the larger context is Soviet military doctrine and its growing concentration on extremely aggressive, very rapid, large-scale conventional offensive ground and air operations. According to a number of well-informed analysts, an important feature in these recent (and continuing) doctrinal revisions has been the emergence (actually, the re-emergence) of the Operational Manoeuvre Group as the cutting edge of Soviet offensive operations. However, the more important development has been the ongoing creation of progressively larger and more powerful organic Soviet military structures (and concomitant strategies) which now effectively operate at the



⁷⁸ "The New Five-Year Defense Plan," *Air Force Magazine*, April 1984, p. 83.

⁷⁹ Figures from *Soviet Military Power 1983* (Washington: USGPO, 1983), pp. 78-80 and *Soviet Military Power 1984* (Washington: USGPO, 1984), p. 98.

