

lished in depth with strong reserves, it is likely that the OMG will replace the second echelon. A strong first echelon is more likely to create the necessary conditions for inserting a OMG, and such a first echelon, aided by OMG activities, will not need to be backed by [an inherently vulnerable] second echelon.⁸²

The Operational Manoeuvre Group, whether at Army level (where its strength would be approximately one division) or at the larger Front level (where it would probably be composed of two or three divisions), would include extra resources (especially transport helicopters and gunships, additional self-propelled artillery, extra engineer support such as bridging equipment, significantly enhanced mobile logistic support and additional organic air defence) and co-ordinated air support to facilitate its rapid movement into the enemy rear. The smaller Army-subordinated OMG would be intended, on a modest scale, to harass, disrupt and possibly encircle defenders, block retreats, attack reserves, destroy key enemy C3I assets and capture crucial bridges and roadways in the rear, thus expediting the overall advance of forces in the first day or two of battle. The larger Front-subordinated OMG, committed at a later stage in battle, would be intended to destroy or capture much larger, more important and concentrated targets. In both cases, Operational Manoeuvre Groups would follow thorough, pre-planned instructions designed to achieve the maximum impact. They would *not* be allowed to simply seek out targets of opportunity, a notion that is anathema to Soviet military planners.

To maximize the effectiveness of both types of OMG, the Soviets have placed increasing emphasis on the pre-emption of all NATO resources that might threaten or block the insertion of OMGs, especially NATO aircraft and front-line ground defences. This has placed special demands on Soviet tactical air power as well as artillery (including rockets and mis-

siles). It is no coincidence that Soviet divisions (both tank and motor rifle) have acquired significantly increased mobile firepower. In addition, front-line units of the GSFG have apparently received massive additional discretionary artillery assets. The increased importance of Operational Manoeuvre Groups has increased the associated importance of airborne and air-mobile (helicopter borne) combat forces – including the *Spetsnaz* or special forces – whose coordinated use would be crucial to the effective insertion of OMGs and the disruption of the NATO rear.

Probably the most important thing to understand about OMGs is the fact that they are *not* (as some would argue) the central feature of Soviet conventional doctrine *per se*, even if they do idealize its very aggressive use of armoured forces. Operational Manoeuvre Groups are but one, admittedly important, aspect of evolving Soviet conventional operational plans. By themselves, they cannot function effectively in a hostile environment. They are intrinsically high-risk formations that depend upon the coordinated initial use of massed, front-line artillery and armour as well as large-scale counter-air interdiction and continued close-air support. Nevertheless, they are an important part of what appears to be a carefully integrated and extremely offensive Soviet conventional military capability in Europe.

From the standpoint of Confidence-Building Measures, given the great sensitivity of CBMs to surprise attack concerns, the most important aspect of contemporary Soviet conventional doctrine and capabilities may be tactical air power rather than Operational Manoeuvre Groups. Without effective air offense and defence, all Soviet ground force manoeuvres would be extremely vulnerable to NATO air strikes. This point is well made by Hines and Peterson:

The OMG is the most novel and hence, in Western perceptions, the most threatening aspect of evolving Soviet strategy for land warfare. ... Ironically, improvements in the operational concepts of the air and anti-air operations, and the quantum advances in the quantity and quality of the aircraft and missiles that support them, represent a much greater threat to NATO than does the OMG. Successful air and anti-air operations would give theatre strategic fire superiority to the Warsaw Pact, in

⁸² C. J. Dick, "Soviet Operational Manoeuvre Groups – A Closer Look," see ref. 36 p. 773. Some recent treatments of Soviet conventional doctrine do not seem to appreciate this rather important – and ongoing – transformation in Soviet force structure and operational planning. They continue to concentrate on questions about the Soviet "second echelon". As a practical matter, the growing attractiveness of the OMG may well have eclipsed "two echelon" thinking in the Soviet Union.

