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THE ROLE OF AIRMOBILITY IN SOVIET MILITARY DOCTRINE.(U)
APR 75 T J MINNEHAN

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STUDENT RESEARCH REPORT

MAJ. THOMAS J. MINNEHAN

THE ROLE OF AIRMOBILITY
IN SOVIET MILITARY DOCTRINE
-1975-

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FOREWORD

This research project represents fulfillment of a student requirement for successful completion of Phase III Training of the Department of the Army's Foreign Area Officer Program (Russian).

Only unclassified sources are used in producing the research paper. The opinions, value judgments and conclusions expressed are those of the author and in no way reflect official policy of the United States Government; Department of Defense; Department of the Army; Department of the Army, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff of Intelligence; or the United States Army Institute for Advanced Russian and East European Studies.

Interested readers are invited to send their comments to the Commander of the Institute.

RICHARD P. KELLY
LTC, MI
Commander

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SUMMARY

Based upon their analyses of the nature of future war, the Soviets, in recent years, have significantly improved the combat mobility of their ground forces, both on the ground and through the air. The air dimension of this improved mobility, with the airborne forces and the airmobile capability, has received increased comment recently in the Soviet military press. Demonstrations of the airborne and airmobile capability have been noted in recent large-scale maneuvers. This analysis, based upon the discussions in the military press and the demonstrations of the capabilities, analyzes the doctrine of Soviet airmobility and attempts to place it in context within overall Soviet military doctrine. Conclusions of this analysis are that: (1) Soviet development of airmobility lags that of the US, particularly in the development of combat helicopters; and, (2) the role of airmobility in doctrine is secondary and supplementary to the role of airborne operations.

A

In the last ten years, the Soviets have pushed ahead with several programs designed to upgrade qualitatively the capabilities of their conventional theater forces. Among these modernization programs are those designed to improve the ground and in the air. Western analysts have commented at length on the significant improvement accomplished in the combat mobility of the Soviet land forces on the ground, but relatively little notice has been paid to the continuing Soviet efforts to expand the combat mobility of the ground forces through the air.

The Soviets have indeed made significant progress toward expanding their air lift capabilities at the theater and strategic level, as well as at the tactical level. At the theater and strategic level, increased air transport lift with the Soviet Military Air Transport has been developed to expand the range of Soviet military power, thus offering much more flexibility in the planning and execution of theater and strategic operations. The Soviets reportedly now have the air lift capability to move three airborne divisions with limited equipment up to 1000 kilometers, delivering them at critical points in the tactical scheme within two hours of alert notice.¹ Continued expansion of their long-range heavy transport will greatly increase this capability. At the tactical

level, the Soviets now have in their inventory some 2,500 helicopters of all types including heavy lift craft.² This adds significantly to the Soviet capability to move troops and materiel on the battlefield.

The reasons for this massive development are clear. In recent years, the Soviets appear to be extremely preoccupied, almost obsessed, with the need for increased mobility on the battlefield. This seeming preoccupation undoubtedly is the result of their analyses of the demands of future war. These demands, clearly revolutionized in the minds of the Soviets by the introduction of tactical nuclear weapons, place a tremendous requirement upon their combat forces to operate in greater depths on the front, and to be capable of conducting operations at a much greater tempo than in past wars, specifically in comparison to operations conducted during WW II. The requirement to operate in depth also includes the requisite for Soviet forces to disperse rapidly and to concentrate and mass for operations even more rapidly in order to exploit tactical nuclear strikes.

Rapid concentration of forces and exploitation attacks have been and remain basic tenets of contemporary Soviet military doctrine but these tenets appear to have received much more emphasis in recent analyses. This increased emphasis undoubtedly is related to the shift in priorities back towards conventional theater force modernization, which occurred after the ouster of Khrushchev in 1964.

A noted Soviet military theorist, Colonel A. A. Sidorenko, underscored the fundamental tenet of contemporary military doctrine, the importance of gaining and maintaining the offensive, when he stated that "the offensive is the only type of combat action... which attains the complete rout of the enemy and the seizure of important objectives and areas."³ He went on further to sum up the Soviet view of the character of military operations in any future war by pointing out that "the essence of the offensive consists of having troops. . . destroy the enemy with all available means and, exploiting the results obtained, advance swiftly into the depths of his disposition."⁴ Thus, the character of Soviet military operations in any future conflict can be seen in Sidorenko's description that:

Under contemporary conditions, the utter rout of the enemy in a short time and the seizure of important areas are obtained by the launching of nuclear strikes, the skillful employment of the powerful fire of conventional weapons, the swift advance by tank and motorized rifle troops to a great depth in coordination with aviation and airborne forces, the bold emergence in the enemy's flanks and rear, and his destruction in detail.⁵ (emphasis added)

Clearly, from this description with such emphasis placed upon offensive operations, it is evident that a very high premium is placed upon the combat mobility of Soviet ground forces in any future war. It is also clear that great importance is placed upon airborne forces operating in the 'enemy's flanks and rear in conjunction with 'the swift advance by tank and motorized rifle troops.' A number of Soviet writers have pointed out that airmobile operations⁶ with the utilization of the helicopter in combat assaults offer one answer to the

increased demand for combat mobility to deliver troops in a combat configuration into the enemy rear or wherever advantageous to the tactical plan. It was noted that "with the appearance of nuclear weapons (on the battlefield) and the refinement of the conventional means of destruction and mechanization of forces, the significance of the airmobile assault has grown significantly."⁷ This source then went on to point out the advantages of increased mobility and flexibility which the airmobile capability offered the senior commander.⁸ Another writer, Colonel Samoilenko, went further in arguing that airmobile operations offered advantages not inherent in airborne operations, that of more "compactly and accurately" landing troops in a combat configuration close to their objectives area.⁹ It can easily be seen that the significance of airmobility on the modern battlefield has been recognized. This recognition no doubt has provided the impetus for the development of an airmobile doctrine and capability. It is difficult to determine, however, the exact role that airmobility plays in Soviet military doctrine. This difficulty is related to the fact that there has not been any authoritative statement made on the subject in the open press by the top Soviet military leaders. This is in contrast to the number of statements made concerning the role of airborne forces by such military leaders as Marshal Grechko, Minister of Defense.¹⁰

Therefore, it seems necessary, with this increased effort to develop an airmobile capability, and the ambiguous role thus far attributed to utilization of the capability in doctrinal discussions, to analyze the information available in

Soviet military sources to place the capability in overall perspective within the general context of Soviet military doctrine. This assessment of present trends and developments should be particularly useful in evaluating the impact of an airmobility capability upon overall force structure, specifically upon the airborne force structure, and its relationship in Soviet military doctrine with the role of airborne forces.

It should be pointed out at the outset that Soviet military press discussions, however informative and illuminating, are extremely limited in any discussion of command relationships and specific subordination arrangements during combat operations. These sources are even more limited in any specific discussion of Soviet equipment and technology. Thus, this analysis will avoid any discussion of command relationships or hardware comparisons.

One can, however, (and it seems necessary to do so) place the level of Soviet technology in helicopter development in a general perspective with the level of US development. There does not seem to be any question that Soviet progress in the field of combat helicopter technology lags US development by several years. Granted, the Soviets have achieved notable progress in developing and producing a variety of helicopters, particularly heavy lift craft. But in refining their helicopters to adapt to combat conditions (i.e., to meet the demands for increased maneuverability, speed, and versatility), the lag seems readily apparent.¹¹ The reasons for this lag are not

entirely clear. On one hand, the particular demands of the Vietnam conflict provided added impetus to the American military and industry to refine and improve existing technology in the early 1960's. On the other hand, there is not enough evidence available in the Soviet press to indicate whether the present level of technology simply reflects their best efforts in that field, or the lag is due to a late start in development because of a reluctance to accept the helicopter as a combat vehicle as opposed to a rear area transportation and heavy lift vehicle. In any case, it now seems clear that the Soviets are moving to reach US levels of technology in this field. Evidence to support this contention is numerous, but possibly the most significant is the fact that, according to General Brown, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Soviets are now introducing into their force structure the "Hind A," an entirely new helicopter.¹² Little is known about this craft except that, as General Brown noted, it can carry 16 combat troops, or, more significantly, in a ground support role, it can be equipped with 57 mm rocket pods and anti-tank missiles.¹³ The significance of this latter capability will be discussed later.

Thus, in recognizing the progress the Soviets have achieved and the level of development in the field of airmobility, it is important to ask the question: How do the Soviets propose to utilize their airmobile assets within the general scheme of tactical maneuvers? As delineated in their open press discussions

concerning this question, it is evident that the Soviets envision three general categories of employment for airmobile forces: disruption, exploitation, and supportive operations. In disruption operations, airmobile units would be dispatched into the enemy rear to attack command, communication, and logistic centers with the goal of tying down security and reserve forces, as well as disrupting the enemy rear-area command and supply functions. Exploitation operations would be planned to exploit friendly tactical nuclear strikes with the seizure of key terrain features or objective areas where enemy defenses have been either destroyed or seriously weakened as a result of the nuclear strikes. Finally, supporting operations are: river crossing assaults (airmobile seizure of one or both sides of the crossing site), a meeting engagement (seizure of key terrain features to facilitate the deployment of friendly forces and to hinder the development of enemy forces), and operations in difficult terrain where the seizure of passes, defiles, etc., would facilitate the advance or defense of the main body. Another example of possible supporting airmobile utilization which has obvious strategic implications is airmobile assaults during amphibious operations. Airmobile operations are foreseen as being conducted either before the main landing, or during the landing to facilitate the movement of the main body of amphibious troops.¹⁴

The largest unit thus far mentioned in the press to be utilized in these operations is the motorized rifle battalion

reinforced with light to medium artillery (up to 122 mm), anti-tank guided missiles, engineer, air defense (up to 37 mm), and other elements, depending upon the mission and such factors as terrain, enemy, etc.¹⁵ The helicopter lift to transport the reinforced battalion would normally come from the Frontal Aviation Unit (division or army) located, in wartime, at the Front level. The Soviet line division has very little organic helicopter lift capability. Those helicopters organic to the division are used primarily for reconnaissance, liaison, and messenger service. The innovation of command and control from the air has not yet been widely implemented in the Soviet military forces.

Arguments can be stated for or against the need for organic lift for ground forces. The US experience in Vietnam was not conclusive in this regard. It certainly could be argued that the fully airmobile army divisions were highly effective in utilizing their organic lift capabilities. But it could also be argued that a great deal of lift was tied up and possibly wasted or squandered just because it was readily available. Other variations of control such as an operational control basis (which the Soviets utilize in various forms) have equally obvious advantages and disadvantages. The biggest advantage with this type of arrangement is that the airlift assets are freer to support more area and more units, thus freeing the supported (ground) unit from logistic responsibilities for the

supporting (aviation) unit. The disadvantage is that the airlift must be shared among units in a respective area of operation, thus limiting the availability of the aviation units and complicating coordination and planning requirements. The US Army's evaluation of its own experience and utilization of airmobility is not conclusive.¹⁶ Present doctrine contained in FM 57-35, however, clearly states that it is preferable to use aviation assets on an operational control basis,¹⁷ which is similar to Soviet concepts.

Examination of Soviet written discussion concerning the juncture between aviation and ground units reveals that an extremely high premium is placed, as might be expected, upon thorough planning and coordination. Whenever an airmobile operation is directed by the "senior commander" (in the context used, probably the front or army commander¹⁸), the aviation "subunit"¹⁹ representative and the battalion commander plan all phases of the operation from embarkation to debarkation and the subsequent ground operations and resupply. The planning process is normally conducted in a backward sequence, i.e., from operations in the objective area back to embarkation and staging operations. Moreover, the support required throughout the entire operation is arranged and coordinated with the respective unit representatives and appropriate support agencies.²⁰ It is not clear from the discussions just at what level the support is arranged, but it seems likely that the staffs of

the division as well as the army would be involved, since fire support and logistic support are so centrally controlled in the Soviet Army.²¹ It does seem clear, however, that the primary responsibility for planning and coordinating the entire operation rests upon the shoulders of the commander of the motorized rifle battalion.

In addition to their stress upon detailed planning and coordination, the Soviets emphasize heavily the need for a high degree of training and psychological preparation. As one author points out, the Soviets believe that any line unit can be trained to participate in an airmobile operation in a short period of training, which is in contrast to airborne operations where the troops require extensive specialized training.²² In the opinion of another writer, motorized rifle, artillery, and other "specialized sub-units" can be prepared to participate in an airmobile operation in 8 to 10 hours of training time. This training would include 2 to 3 hours for familiarization with helicopter characteristics and data, instruction concerning the procedures for embarkation and disembarkation of troops, and the proper procedures for loading, off-loading, and securing equipment and supplies. The remaining 6 to 7 hours are to be used for instruction in combat formations and operations in the objective area, which would include types of missions and activities to be assigned to airmobile forces. Assistance in organizing and conducting the training is to be drawn from the

higher level staffs as well as from the aviation units.

Helicopter mock-ups are to be utilized to the maximum.²³ It is desirable to conduct the training under the most realistic conditions, closely resembling conditions which might be encountered in combat (i.e., night-time operations as well as operations during bad weather or in poor visibility).²⁴ Although special emphasis is placed upon the fact that all Soviet Army units are capable of being trained for participation in airmobile operations, it is interesting to note that during the large-scale maneuvers "Dnieper," conducted in 1967, airborne troops were used in an airmobile assault with helicopters. In this particular exercise, it appeared that these airborne troops constituted some sort of small airmobile reserve to be committed at the discretion of the "Eastern" (Front) commander.²⁵ Utilization of the elite airborne troops in this manner could suggest that: (1) there were not any regular line troops sufficiently trained at this time to conduct an airmobile assault, and (2) utilization of an airmobile force required it to be specially constituted and held in a reserve status prior to commitment. This latter possibility is contrary to the presently stated concept that all units are capable of participating in airmobile operations, without extensive prior preparation, during the conduct of normal combat operations.²⁶ In other words, it could be stated that the level of training of their regular line troops did not allow the Soviets to conduct an airmobile assault in the manner prescribed in their doctrine on the subject. Another possible explanation, however, for the utilization of

elite troops is the possibility that the senior military leaders merely desired to demonstrate the capability, and therefore decided to utilize the most highly trained and qualified troops available. The evidence does not conclusively support either explanation.

As previously mentioned, the Soviets also recognize another important aspect of training, in addition to the tactical and other specialized training particular to airmobile operations, that of intense political/psychological preparation. This is based upon a recognition of the extreme stresses to which airmobile troops are subjected during particular airmobile operations such as assaults in enemy-held areas where small-unit actions would be conducted on an independent or semi-independent basis. In the opinion of Soviet writers discussing the subject, these stresses require a much higher degree of psychological preparation than normal. In addition to this intensified psychological preparation than normal (suggesting elitist units), it is also suggested that the personal fighting qualities of the troops themselves be on a much higher level than normal. For example, they must demonstrate a higher degree of initiative, aggressiveness, resourcefulness, dedication, etc.²⁷ One cannot help but conclude that, should all of the suggested prerequisites for airmobile troops and their training be satisfied, the ultimate result would be another elitist-type unit in addition to the airborne units which

already exist with the Soviet force structure. This is, however, contrary to the basic tenet concerning the development of an airmobile capability which has been delineated in the military press. This tenet, of course, is that the capability must be developed and employed, utilizing regular line troops. Moreover, there is no evidence in the press commentary concerning recent training exercises to support this elitest image.²⁸ Thus, there is an evident contradiction between the basic tenet of the development of the capability and the ultimate product as foreseen by several military writers who were writing in a semi-official or official status. This contradiction undoubtedly contributes to the apparent ambiguity in Soviet military doctrine concerning the role of airmobility. In any discussion concerning the role of airmobility on a modern sophisticated battlefield, the question immediately arises as to the survivability of the helicopter in such an environment. The Soviets clearly recognize the vulnerability of the helicopter in a mid-intensity conflict as well as the vulnerability of airmobile operations in general. This vulnerability is attributed to several factors. First, the helicopter itself is considered to be highly vulnerable to ground fire of all types-handheld rockets, small arms, and the sophisticated air defense systems. The helicopter is recognized to be equally vulnerable to attack from enemy fighter aircraft. To reduce this vulnerability, the basic

handbook on airmobile operations dictates that the air routes to and from the objective area be carefully selected in order to overfly lightly defended areas and to avoid, of course, the heavily defended areas. Where this is not possible or feasible, it is specified that the anti-air defenses must be neutralized with air support, artillery, and tactical surface-to-surface rockets.²⁹ "Nap-of-the-earth" flying is also recommended to reduce the effectiveness of ground radar and ground fire.³⁰ Accompanying fighter escort is seen as a necessary requisite to those airmobile operations which face serious threats from enemy air attacks.³¹ Second, the complexity of airmobile operations is seen as contributing to a vulnerability through a possible break-down in coordination and communication with supporting arms. Thus the necessity for extremely careful planning and coordination is strongly emphasized. Finally, the necessity to concentrate in staging areas as well as in landing areas causes airmobile forces to be extremely vulnerable to enemy countermeasures. The Soviets believe this can be countered by strict adherence to security measures such as radio discipline (silence), camouflage, and rapid movement to the staging area and rapid deployment and movement from the landing area.³²

Concerning the subject of air support for airmobile operations, it seems certain, although it is not stated explicitly, that the Soviets believe that air superiority, at least local

superiority over the immediate tactical area of operation, is an important requirement for any airmobile operation. For this reason, heavy emphasis is placed upon the need for strong air support for all airmobile operations, both during flight to the objective area and in the objective area itself.³³

In this field of air support, an obvious gap exists in their discussions concerning the use of armed helicopter support. Developments in this field in the "Western armies," particularly American developments, are frequently mentioned and discussed but no mention is made of the Soviet development of this capability. In discussing the US achievements in armed helicopter development, these authors seemed to be clearly arguing the merits of armed helicopters on the modern battlefield. Colonel Belov, a Doctor of Military Science, argues that, based upon US tests and experiments, it is now clear "that the armed helicopter has become an extremely effective weapon. . . in anti-tank warfare."³⁴ He went on to point out that the armed helicopter (in this case, the Huey Cobra) has also been found to be extremely effective against other helicopters, using mounted 20 mm and 30 mm cannon and a mounted "Red Eye rocket system."³⁵ He concluded by saying that it is evident that "the preliminary, speculative conclusions concerning the vulnerability of the helicopter have turned out to be exaggerations."³⁶

It is this last statement that may provide a clue as to why the Soviets have not developed an armed helicopter nor have they allowed for its utilization in a support role in their doctrinal discussions on airmobility. Soviet fears concerning the vulnerability of the helicopter may have precluded them from moving ahead earlier in this field. To be sure, they have armed some of their existing helicopters with rocket pods and machine guns, but they have not introduced an armed helicopter, designed solely for that role. And, judging from General Brown's statement, introduction of the 'Hind A' is simply an effort to utilize a utility helicopter, one which can be adopted for both troop carrying and ground support roles.³⁷ Although this helicopter is no doubt an improvement over existing Soviet helicopters employed in these roles, it does not indicate that the Soviets have wholeheartedly embraced the concept of armed helicopter support on the battlefield. And it is not likely, based upon analysis of past Soviet military developments, that the Soviets will include provisions for utilization of the armed helicopter in their doctrine until the capability has been refined and accepted.

Thus, after this evaluation of the Soviet development of the Soviet development of the airmobile capability and its associated doctrine, it is now necessary to analyze its probable role in overall Soviet military doctrine. The specific question that must be addressed in this analysis is the relationship between airmobile employment and the employment of

airborne forces. To do this, it is necessary to examine the large-scale military maneuvers in which the Soviets employed both airborne and airmobile combat assaults.

In addition to the 'Dnieper' exercise, previously mentioned, the Soviets conducted the 'Dvina' exercise in 1970 and the 'Yug' exercise in 1971. In all three exercises, the emphasis seemed to be on demonstrating and testing the combat mobility of the exercise forces. The airmobile assault conducted in Dnieper appeared to be conducted almost in isolation of the general tactical scenario but the airmobile operations in the latter two exercises appeared to be more closely integrated into the general scheme of maneuver. First, with Dvina, an airmobile assault was conducted into the enemy's rear to seize an enemy "firing point" and to secure and organize the defense of a portion of a large forested area. This was followed up with helicopter-landed light tanks, armored personnel carriers, and other vehicles. The entire operation required only "several minutes."³⁸ Mention was also made of a subsequent river crossing operation of the Western Dvina River, in which an airmobile assault was conducted to seize a bridgehead on the opposite side of the river. This operation also included the helicopter landing of light tanks and armored personnel carriers.³⁹ During the Yug exercise, an airmobile assault was also conducted to seize a bridgehead for a forced river crossing operation.⁴⁰ In all three exercise,

large-scale troop and equipment drops by parachute were conducted from heavy aircraft, to be followed up, in some cases, by heavier air-landed elements. These airborne drops were conducted deeper into the rear of the "enemy" to seize larger key objective areas, or to cut off the retreat of the "enemy forces" retreating from the river defensive line. 41

From an examination of the press descriptions of these exercises, however vague and nebulous they may be, it is possible to form a delineation of the missions and roles of airmobile and airborne operations. Obviously, the airborne forces have a greater reach and a heavier lift capability. Thus, they would be better suited for long-range, large-scale vertical penetrations into the enemy rear. But these types of operations seem to require a significant amount of planning and preparation time. At the immediate tactical level, this time is not necessarily available. Therefore, in a fluid and fast-moving tactical situation, where the requirements of response and versatility play such important roles, it seems logical that airmobile forces would be much more adaptable. It therefore seems that the Soviet airmobile forces (or capability) are designed to be supplementary or complimentary to the larger-scale, longer-range airborne operations.

It is appropriate at this point to examine briefly the Soviet development of the airborne concept and status of this concept today in the Soviet force structure. The Soviets were

the first world power to begin development of airborne concepts and doctrine. They began experimenting in the early 1930's, first with small unit drops, and later, in 1936, with a well-publicized larger drop. This was well before Great Britain and the US began such efforts, and at least a year ahead of similar tests and field trials by Nazi Germany.⁴²

Since then, the Soviets have been in the vanguard of airborne development and application, although their wartime experiences in this field were certainly less than successful. This lack of wartime success has not deterred the Soviets from continuing to believe in the value of airborne forces for they have maintained the largest standing airborne force in the world, reportedly seven divisions.⁴³ These divisions are to be committed to combat at three levels of employment: strategic, operational, and tactical, depending upon the depth of the vertical penetration and the type of mission assigned to the airdropped (or airdropped) forces.

Indeed, the Soviets seem preoccupied with the elitist image of their airborne forces. Their airdrops during training exercises and maneuvers receive heavy publicity in Krasnaia Zvezda, the Soviet military daily newspaper. Moreover, their drops always seem to be witnessed by a large number of Party dignitaries and high military officials. After these drops, the custom seems to be for these dignitaries or officials to personally meet with the airborne troopers and officers. These meetings are closely observed by press representatives, of course.⁴⁴

At this point, it is necessary to look at the conclusions from this analysis concerning the Soviet development of an airmobile capability and its role in Soviet military doctrine. First, it is evident that the Soviets, with their development and utilization of heavy-lift helicopters and other light craft, recognize the merits of this vehicle in a troop and cargo-carrying role. Moreover, based upon their numerous discussions on the subject, it seems certain that they recognize the value of an airmobile capability in their modern military force structure with its emphasis upon the combat mobility of its ground forces.

But there has been a seeming reluctance for the Soviets to accept completely the helicopter as a combat vehicle designed to deliver troops under fire in a combat configuration upon an unsecured objective area. This reluctance has also been applied to accepting the role of the armed helicopter in a ground support role. This latter aspect has apparently contributed to the delayed development of an armed helicopter and to the complete absence of any discussion of its role as a ground support aircraft in doctrinal discussions on airmobility. In general, it seems evident that this reluctance has contributed to a general lag behind the US in the airmobile capability, and to a specific lag in the development of the helicopter as a combat vehicle.

The reasons for this lag are clear. The Soviets seem pre-occupied with the vulnerability of the helicopter on the

battlefield. The Soviets are no doubt aware of the helicopter losses suffered by the US in Vietnam from increasingly sophisticated ground fire. They are also undoubtedly aware of the lessons of the 1973 war in the Mid-East, where the helicopter (and indeed all aircraft) was extremely vulnerable to highly sophisticated anti-aircraft fire. But perhaps the best indication of this preoccupation with the vulnerability aspect is their analysis of Western developments in the field of helicopter development (primarily armed helicopter development). The general tone of these articles, written by high-level military theoreticians, is one of persuasion in arguing against exaggerating the vulnerability of the helicopter, and in lauding its merits on the modern battlefield. It is apparent that this message is directed at anti-helicopter critics within the Soviet Ministry of Defense.

Secondly, in developing the airmobile capability, the Soviets seem to have assigned a secondary or supplementary role to airmobility within the broad spectrum of military doctrine. This is particularly evident when comparing the roles and relationships of airmobile forces versus airborne forces. The largest unit mentioned thus far in any discussion of airmobile assaults is the motorized rifle battalion, reinforced with light to medium supporting elements. This is in sharp contrast to the large-scale airborne divisional drops, reinforced with air-dropped or airlanded medium to heavy supporting elements. There does not seem to be any doubt, judging

from the comparative publicity associated with these respective training operations, that the airborne presently enjoys a favored status with the high-level Party and military officials.

Indeed, the Soviet view of future war and their analysis of the probable operating areas may suggest that the secondary role for airmobile forces is necessarily the proper one. In the probable operating area of Central Europe, where weather and many built-up areas present more serious limitations to helicopter operations, the Soviets may have concluded that the airborne operations would be more feasible. In addition, the Soviets, with their penchant for overwhelming force and large-scale operations, could logically believe that large-scale helicopter operations are neither necessary, feasible, nor "cost-effective," when airborne forces can satisfy the requirements for large forces more quickly and effectively.

It is clear, however, that the Soviets foresee a definite supporting role within their military doctrine and force structure for airmobility. What is not clear at this time is whether they intend to expand this role and capability dramatically, or merely to refine it and retain it in its present status. Future developments, such as the development of the armed helicopter (designed strictly for that particular role), or the organization of an airmobile unit with organic helicopter lift, would definitely point to an expansion. Failure to accomplish one or the other would indicate, more or less, the maintenance of the status quo.

FOOTNOTES

¹"Military Notes" (source cited as ASMZ, 1972, Switzerland), Military Review, LII, No. 4 (April, 1973, p. 100.

²Military Balance 1974-75 (London: Institute for Strategic Studies, 1974, p. 10.

³A.A. Sidorenko, Nastupleniya (The Offensive), Moscow: Voenizdat, 1970, p. 3.

⁴Ibid, p. 4.

⁵Ibid, p. 3.

⁶A definition of terms seems necessary in any discussion of Soviet airmobile and airborne operations, since the concepts and terms themselves are sometimes confused by Western analysts. The Soviets, in their Tolkovyi Slovar Voennykh Terminov (An Explanatory Dictionary of Military Terms), Voenizdat, 1966, p. 94, define Vozdushnyi Desant (VD) (Air Assault), as "the transportation of ground troops into the rear of the enemy by military transport aviation for military operations or reconnaissance." A VD may utilize parachute or air-landed forces or both. The distinction is made as to airmobile operations, normally understood in the West as helicopter-delivered forces, by referring to these type of operations as a Takticheskiy Vozdushnyi Desant (Tactical Air (Airborne) Assault). These distinctions are utilized in discussions by Soviet analysts in the Soviet military press.

⁷E.S. Lytov and P.T. Sagidak, Motostrelkovyi Batal'on V Takticheskoy Vozdushnoy Desante (A Motorized Rifle Battalion in a Tactical Airborne Assault), Moscow: Voenizdat, 1969, p. 6.

⁸Ibid, pp. 8-10.

⁹Ia. Samoilenko, "Takticheskie Vozdushnye Desanti" ("Tactical Airborne Assaults"), Voennyi Vestnik (January, 1968), p. 37.

¹⁰See, for example, the role of airborne forces as defined in a statement by Marshal Grechko, "Nesokrushimyi Shtit Rodiny" ("Indestructible Shield of the Homeland"), Krasnaya Zvezda, February 23, p. 2.

¹¹A brief examination of the respective capabilities of Soviet and American helicopters, as listed in Jane's All the World's Aircraft. London: Jane's Yearbooks, easily supports this contention. For example, the mainstays of the Soviet helicopters used in airmobile operations, the MI-6 and MI-8, were introduced into service in 1957 and 1961 respectively, and reflect the level of technology of the that time period in the SU. The Soviet efforts since that time have been directed primarily towards heavy lift craft with the introduction of the MI-10 (a modified MI-6) in 1961 and the MI-12 in 1969.

All of these models, in comparison to American craft in service or in testing, in terms of suitability for combat, appear to be relatively cumbersome, unwieldy, slow, and lack maneuverability. The introduction of the MI-24 Hind A appears to be an attempt to correct some of these deficiencies.

¹²Gene Famiglietti, "Russian Ground Units Improving Hill Told," Army Times, March 5, 1975, p. 22.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴V. Osetrov and V. Titov, "In the Enemy Rear," Soviet Military Review, (September, 1971, p. 23.

¹⁵Lytov and Saqidak, p. 13.

¹⁶See John J. Tolson, Vietnam Studies: Airmobility 1961-1971 (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1973), pp. 66-68, 83-85, 253-256.

¹⁷US Department of the Army, FM 57-35, Airmobile Operations, (Washington, D.C.: 25 March 1971), p. 5.

¹⁸M. Tichkov, "Batal'on v Takiticheskom Vozdushnom Desante" ("A Battalion in a Tactical Airborne Assault"), Voennyi Vestnik, (July, 1973), p. 42.

¹⁹The Soviet term "podrazdeleniye" ("sub-unit") usually refers to a battalion-size unit of a specific branch of troops, usually belonging to a larger unit. In this case, helicopter aviation, it is probably a squadron.

²⁰Tichkov, pp 42-44.

²¹John Erickson, Soviet Military Power (London: Royal United Services Institute, 1971), pp. 69, 76.

²²Samoilenko, p. 37.

²³K. Urtaev, "Batal'on v Vozdushnom Desante" ("A Battalion in an Air Assault"), Voennyi Vestnik, (March 1971), pp. 20-21.

²⁴Ibid., p. 25

²⁵USSR Ministry of Defense, Dnepr (Dnieper), (Moscow Voenizdat, 1968), pp. 69-70, 73.

²⁶ Lytov and Saqidak, pp. 49-50.

²⁷ Ibid, pp. 64-67.

²⁸ In "Po-Frontomy" ("Along the Front"), Krasnaia Zvezda, February 2, 1975, p. 1, for example, reports indicate that a regular motorized rifle battalion from the Group of Soviet Forces-Germany was engaged in an airmobile assault in the course of "normal" training.

²⁹ Lytov and Saqidak, pp. 14-17.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 12.

³¹ Tichkov, p. 46.

³² Lytov and Saqidak, pp. 73-80

³³ Tichkov, p. 46.

³⁴ M. Belov, "Ataka na Vertoletakh" ("An Attack with Helicopters"), Krasnaia Zvezda, January 24, 1975, p. 3.

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Famiglietti, p. 22.

³⁸ USSR Ministry of Defense, Dvina (Dvina), (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1970), pp. 93-94.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 144

⁴⁰ "Brosok cherez Reku" (Assault across a River"), Krasnaia Zvezda, June 17, 1971, p. 2.

⁴¹ Dnieper, pp. 73-77, Dvina, pp. 76-86, and "Visazhivaemaia Vozdushnodesantnaia" ("The Airborne Division Lands"), Krasnaia Zvezda, June 16, 1971 p. 2.

⁴² Kurt Student, "Airborne Forces" in B.H. Liddell Hart The Soviet Army London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1956, pp. 376-77.

⁴³ The Military Balance 1974-75, p. 9.

⁴⁴ For example, the airborne drop in the exercise 'Yug' was witnessed by Marshal Grechko and other military dignitaries and it was well covered by the press in "The Airborne Division Lands."

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