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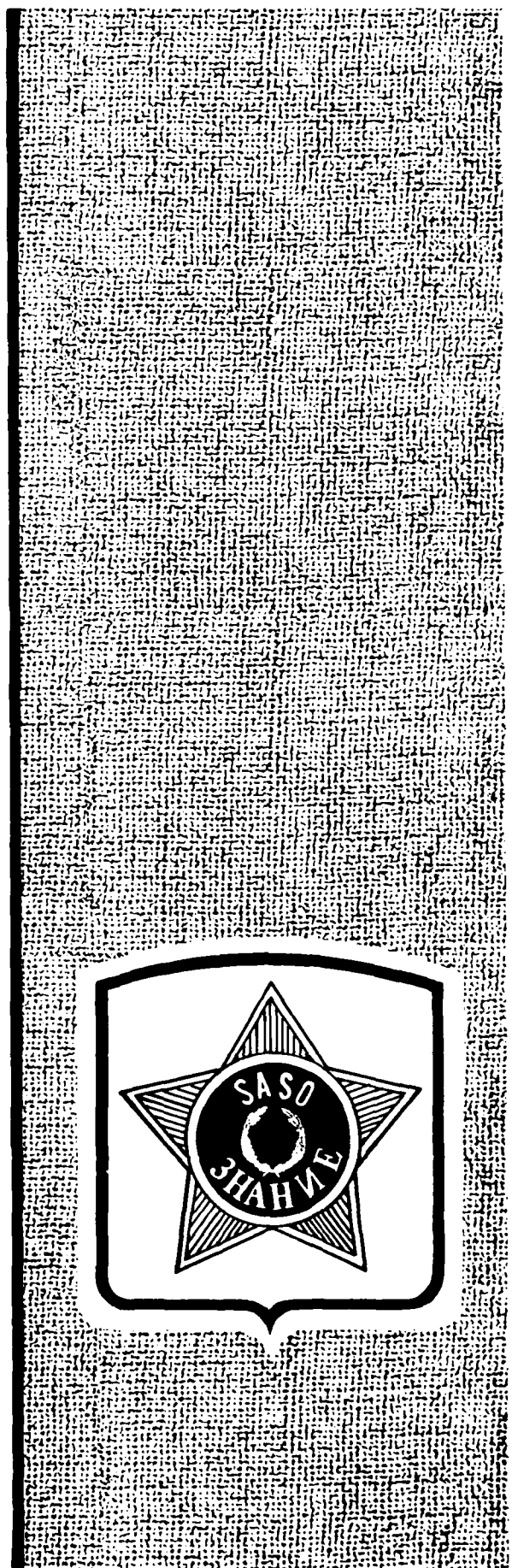
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WARSAW PACT VIEWS ON TRENDS
IN GROUND FORCES TACTICS

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
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|--|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank) | 2. REPORT DATE SEP 1989 | 3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED FINAL | |
| 4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE WARSAW PACT VIEWS ON TRENDS IN GROUND FORCES TACTICS | | 5. FUNDING NUMBERS | |
| 6. AUTHOR(S) HAROLD S. ORENSTEIN | | | |
| 7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY SOVIET ARMY STUDIES OFFICE ATTN: ATZL-SAS FORT LEAVENWORTH, KANSAS 66027-5015 | | 8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER | |
| 9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) | | 10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER | |
| 11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES | | | |
| 12a. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT STATEMENT A APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION IS UNLIMITED | | 12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE | |
| 13. ABSTRACT (Maximum 200 words) | | | |
| 14. SUBJECT TERMS WARSAW PACT COUNTRIES, AIRLAND BATTLE, HELICOPTERS, HIGH-PRECISION WEAPONS, FUTURE BATTLEFIELD | | | 15. NUMBER OF PAGES 8 |
| | | | 16. PRICE CODE |
| 17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT UNCLASSIFIED | 18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED | 19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED | 20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT |

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by

Dr. Harold S. Orenstein
Soviet Army Studies Office
U. S. Army Combined Arms Center
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

September 1989

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Warsaw Pact views on trends in ground forces tactics

by Dr Harold S. Orenstein*



Current and expected changes in ground forces tactics are described in an article entitled "Anticipated Directions for Change in Ground Forces Tactics" that was published in the Polish Ground Forces Review PWL (Przegląd Wojsk Lądowych) in September 1986. The author, Col Stanisław Koziej, distinguishes five major trends that are examined in this article in the light of subsequent Polish and Soviet publications on the matter.

Air-land operations

The change of the conventional land battlefield into an air-land battlefield has attracted much attention in the Soviet and East European press. Koziej frankly states, "The formation of the theory and practice of air-land combat operations must be acknowledged as the most significant trend in modern ground forces tactics."¹ The helicopter is becoming the third basic means

of combined arms combat (after tanks and infantry fighting vehicles, or BMPs). New air-assault helicopters are providing the basis for establishing new types of formations and units, specifically air-assault and air-mechanised;² this, in turn, is leading to an evolution of ground forces into ground-air forces – the vertical dimension is becoming ever more important. This trend is also reflected in the 1987 edition of the Soviet primer *Taktika* [Tactics]. When

compared with the previous (1984) edition, the 1987 edition focuses substantially greater attention on the significance of the US Army AirLand Battle doctrine:

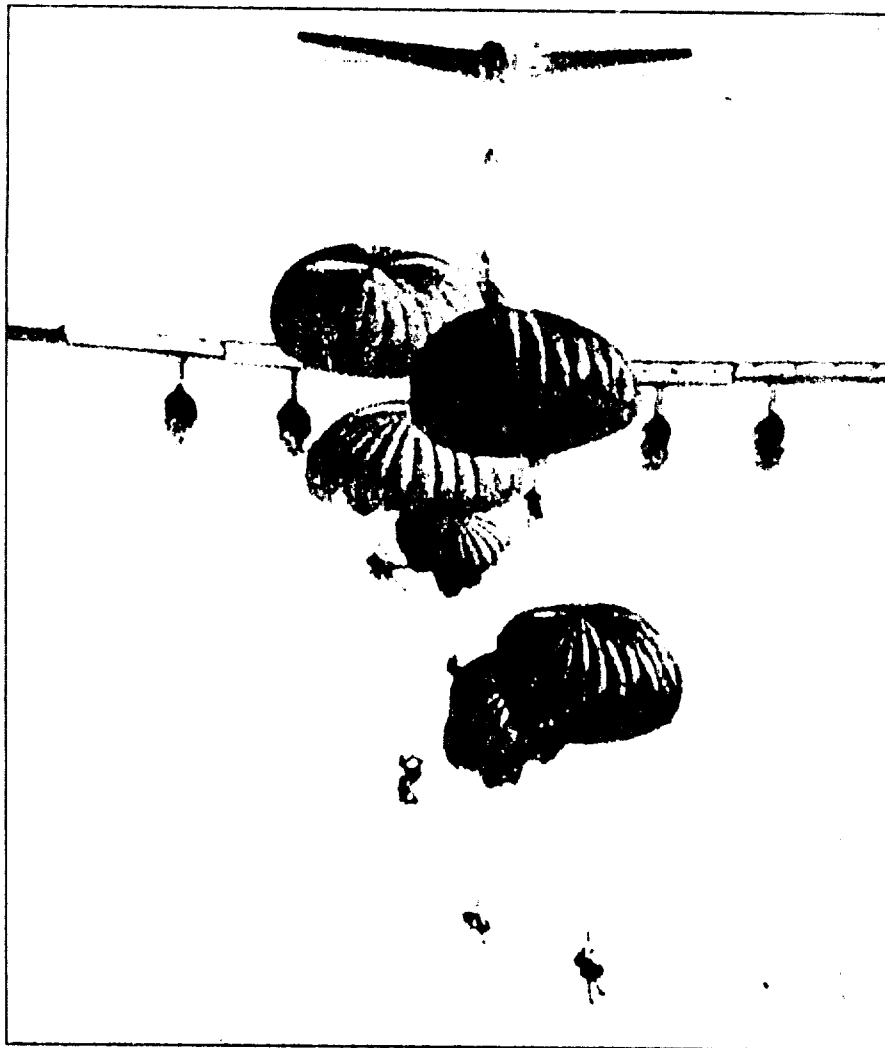
The offensive bears a clear land-air nature.³ This means that in achieving success in battle primary significance is given to the firm and uninterrupted control of various forces; precise organisation of joint operations with aviation, tactical airborne landings and helicopter subunits; and reliable cover of subunits from enemy air strikes.

This was also quoted in the 1984 edition; however, only the 1987 edition goes on to say:

The land-air nature of the offensive creates favorable conditions for the use of more decisive methods of routing the enemy, such as, for example, deep envelopment from the air, delivery of combined land-air strikes by forces of troops of the attacking echelon from the front in combination with a strike from tactical airborne landings from the rear and aviation and combat helicopters from the air.⁴

The 1987 edition also forecasts that under the influence of modern weapons and the greater saturation of ground forces with aircraft, the battle formation of troops in the offensive will consist of two echelons: a ground echelon, the mission of which will be penetrating the enemy's defense and developing success that has been achieved into the depth; and an air echelon, created for enveloping defending battle formations from the air and inflicting strikes against them from the rear.⁵

The vertical dimension attaches greater importance to *simultaneous* rather than *sequential* operations over the entire depth of a formation. This becomes more pivotal in that more weapon systems, command



* The author is a defense analyst at the Soviet Army Studies Office, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas USA

Air-land combat operations are considered the most significant trend in modern ground forces tactics by Warsaw Pact military analysts. With simultaneous operations encompassing the entire depth of a formation, the rear of the battlefield will no longer be a "safe" area. Shown here are paratroopers being dropped by an Il-76 Candid.



posts, communication centers, airfields and "usual" rear support facilities will be located in the depth. The battlefield will encompass the entire formation, and the rear will no longer be a "safe" area.

The helicopter is important not only for transport, but also as a means of battle. One illustrative article includes drawings and detailed descriptions of various maneuvers involved in a helicopter-to-helicopter battle expected on a future battlefield.

Battlefield developments will require new technology, which in turn will require training qualified personnel. The most advanced equipment available is ineffective without users capable of taking advantage of it. Corresponding to the rapid development of helicopters there is a need to accelerate research work concerning their use. Training is viewed not only as an intellectual problem, but also as a psychological one concerned with mental adjustments and changes in perspectives down to the tactical level of command.

There is no doubt that under the influence of the rapid development of helicopters air-land tactics will become dominant at the threshold of the 21st century. It is a question of a particular change in the attitude of the tank man and infantry man, and his transformation into an officer who will be capable of perceiving and evaluating the battlefield not only from the height of a tank or BMP turret, but also, and perhaps most of all, from the height of a helicopter.

Increased troop mobility

This trend affects three major areas: it reduces the effectiveness of precision weap-

Airborne landings, raids and diversions are seen as instrumental for operations within enemy formations that are "split from within" (by raids, airborne landings and diversions) rather than being crushed from without (by penetration, encirclement or blockade). Here troops have been landed by an Mi-8 Hip.

ons, it reduces the effectiveness of reconnaissance; it allows for rapid reassembly in a selected area.

The range and accuracy of precision weapons give rise to the need for greater dispersal of forces. Concentration and assembly areas must be larger; reserves, second echelons and forces approaching from the rear must arrive in smaller groups over larger areas in order to present the enemy with as great a number of scattered, less vulnerable, potential targets as possible.

For the purpose of reducing losses from enemy precision weapons, advancing subunits must overcome open sectors of terrain at the maximum allowable speed, increase the distance between subunits and combat equipment, and not permit the massing of troops or column halts.¹⁰

Improvements in enemy reconnaissance and observation methods and instruments (night-vision equipment, infra-red systems, etc.) not only have broadened the spectrum of conditions under which they are successfully conducted, but also have reduced the time necessary to collect and process data.¹¹ Therefore, to make reconnaissance information obsolete as quickly

as possible, it is advisable for troops to change halt areas frequently.

Since one's own forces are approaching in a dispersed fashion, they must be regrouped in a designated area as quickly as possible, not only to create superiority on a decisive direction at a crucial time, but also to frustrate enemy reconnaissance and provide maximum effectiveness of one's own force concentration.

Operating within enemy formations

The role of elements operating within an enemy formation is expanding with the increased importance of simultaneous operations over the formation's entire depth. It is still considered of primary importance to reduce enemy nuclear potentials, and elements such as separate units, raid units, and tactical airborne units sent from an operational maneuver group operating in the depth of an enemy formation can be very effective against operational-tactical rocket subunits, special munitions depots, and nuclear-capable aircraft still standing at airfields.¹² Such activity changes the classical concept of crushing a formation from without (by penetration, encirclement and blockade) into one of splitting it from within (by raids, airborne landings and diversions).

Attention has also been given to the problem of the eventual need for the raid subunit to link up once again with the main forces by either defending the area under control until the approach of the main forces, breaking through to one's own forces or withdrawing from the enemy formation under pressure of a strike from superior forces.¹³

Close contact with enemy forces precludes, or at least limits, the enemy's use

of long-range precision strike weapons, as employment of such weapons under these conditions would result in losses to both sides. While this does not necessarily curb their employment completely, in such a situation their use would certainly be severely curtailed.

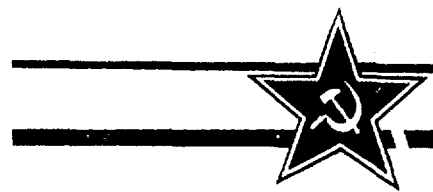
Initiation of battle at greater distances

This affects both offensive and defensive strategy, reflecting the consequences of the development and improvement of precision weapons. The Soviets treat these as a new class of weapons, designating the category (*vysokotochnoye oruzhiye*, literally "high-precision weapons") by an acronym (VTO). *Taktika* (1987) defines these weapons as including "reconnaissance-strike (fire) complexes, automated fire-control systems, anti-tank rocket complexes, self-guiding field artillery rockets, anti-radar rockets, and guided aviation bombs and clusters."¹² While *Taktika* (1984) briefly discusses the concept of reconnaissance-strike (fire) complexes, citing some systems, such as the US "Assault Breaker", by name, the 1987 edition provides much more specific information about their precision, range and strike capabilities.¹³

We also see the addition of these weapons to the "litanies" of weapons and other combat means that appear frequently throughout the book. To illustrate, the author states that

with the beginning of the fire preparation of the enemy attack, defending subunits must inflict fire strikes against means of nuclear attack which have appeared, *ground elements of the enemy's precision weapons*, his artillery, anti-aircraft and radar means, tanks, combat vehicles, armored

The impact of precision-guided weapons and munitions on current tactical trends is discussed at great length in recent Warsaw Pact military publications. While the effects of precision-guided weapons can be reduced by troop mobility and dispersal, their psychological effects on the soldier have to be especially addressed. The abandoned US Assault Breaker program is cited as an example of the "reconnaissance-strike" complex. This artist's impression, showing the Boeing proposal for the Assault Breaker program, illustrates the principles of a stand-off anti-tank missile system with terminally guided submunitions.

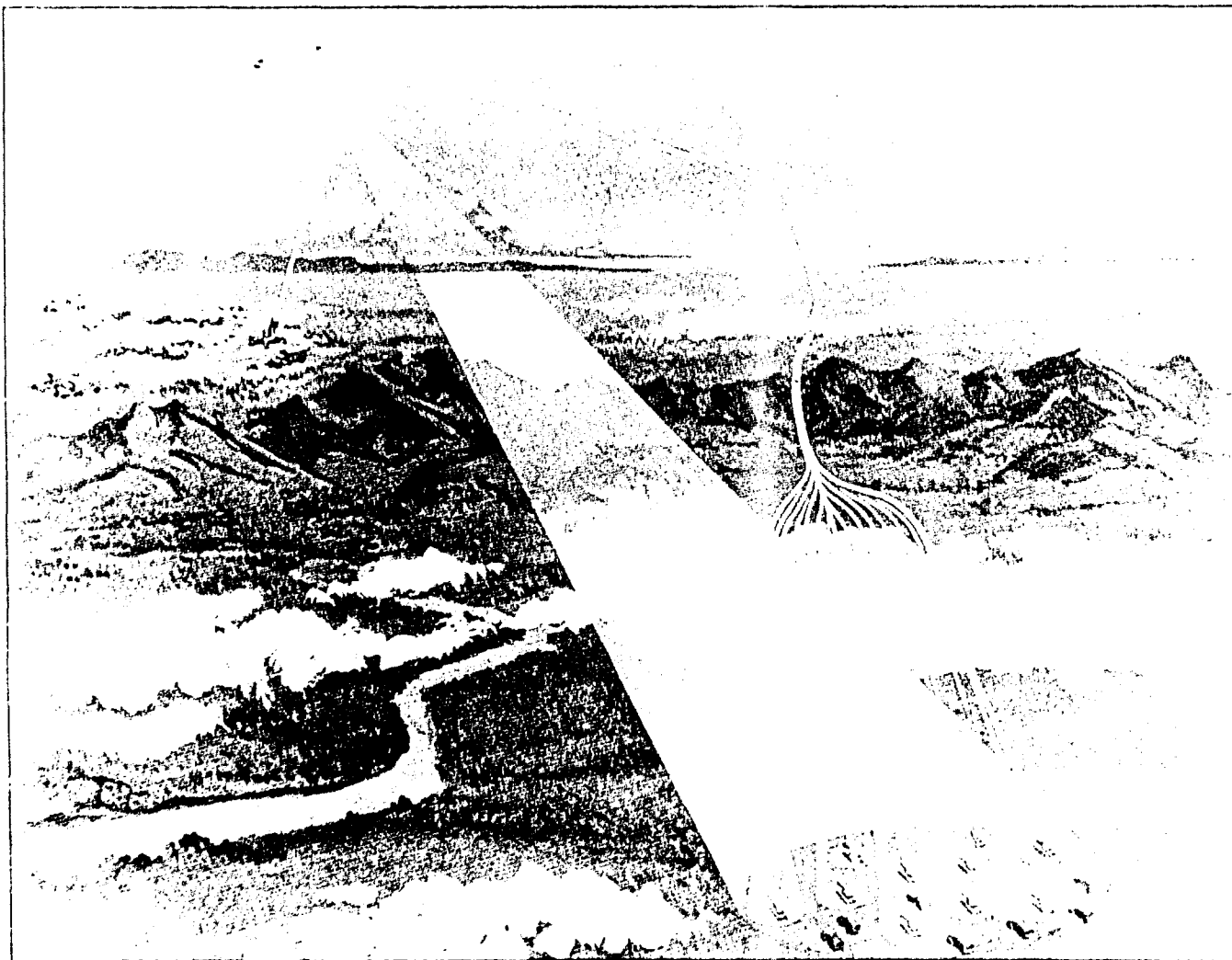


personnel carriers, and infantry advancing or preparing for the attack.¹⁴

In addition to focussing on the features of these weapons, emphasis has been put on their psychological effects on the common soldier. The consequences of using these weapons as a factor affecting the soldier's ability to fight, vis-à-vis his moral, political and psychological fortitude, are being examined. Methods are discussed for countering the effects of such weapons, including the following suggestions:

- demonstrating to soldiers that, with a similar level of technology for the opposing sides, it is not so much the technology but the man that is the deciding factor;
- convincing soldiers that the technical excellence of precision weapons has its limits.¹⁵

Developments arising from the introduction and improvement of precision weapons continue to have a profound effect on the defense, resulting in, among other things, changes in the very notion of de-





The helicopter, both in its transport and its combat roles, constitutes an essential component of the increasingly important vertical dimension of the future battlefield. Attack helicopters like this Mi-24 Hind are becoming the third basic means (in addition to tanks and BMPs) of combined-arms combat.

fense. Examining the issue from a strictly quantitative perspective, one notes that the number of pages in *Taktika* (1984) devoted to the chapter on the defensive battle has doubled in the 1987 edition, the latter now including two new sections, "Preparation of the Defense" and "Disengagement and Withdrawal".

Qualitatively speaking, there has been a re-evaluation of the Clausewitzian concept of the defense as merely "waiting for the blow," where, although the defender can choose the location of an imminent battle, thereby taking advantage of terrain features, the attacker chooses the time for the commencement of the battle. This is no longer true. Going over to the defense is not necessarily an action into which one is forced - it can be an intentional move, it is not necessarily an action associated with impotency, paralysis, resignation and hopelessness - it can be dynamic and mobile: "The defense is not necessarily an attribute of a weaker enemy at the mercy of initiative and strikes. It is not necessarily an approach to defeat. It may also be a planned path to victory."¹¹

In early 1988, *Zolnierz Wolnosci* published a series of articles that discussed the nature of defense. Now that the defender can reach the enemy at pre-battle positions, the former can decide not only where the battle will take place, but also when it will begin. The use by both sides of weapon systems with powerful strike capabilities will lead to rapid, numerous and sudden changes in the combat situation, resulting in frequent occurrences of the defender's going over to the offensive

The Warsaw Pact has declared the defensive nature of its military doctrine, such a doctrine must necessarily be evaluated in the light of an understanding of just what is meant by "defensive doctrine":

If up to now military doctrine, as instructions for operations in the military sphere, indicated a potential enemy, the nature of a potential war, and the means of preparing for and conducting it, then a defensive military doctrine, first and foremost, puts forth its intention in the area of preventing wars; however, in case [war] is unleashed by an aggressor, the doctrine puts forth the intention of repelling the attack and routing the forces which have been brought against one.¹²

In fact, the line of demarcation between the offensive and the defense is no longer a clearly defined one: for example, does "repelling the attack and routing forces" conclude with the re-establishment of the original borders, or does it extend to a continuation of the counteroffensive beyond those borders? A precise grasp of the definition of defense continues to be an exceptionally important factor in negotiations for arms reductions, especially when dealing with categories of weapons to be



reduced or eliminated on the basis of their offensive or defensive classification

Information and automation

This is the fifth and final trend discussed in Koziej's article. The move to automation and electronics on the battlefield is reflected in advances in remote-controlled reconnaissance, automated troop control, reconnaissance-strike (fire) complexes, satellite communications (used even at the lowest tactical level), automated systems for directing fire and radio-electronic warfare. On a future battlefield, proper management of information will not only assist strike systems, but may even independently prejudice the outcome of an engagement. By influencing the enemy's control system, mainly by affecting his intelligence system, one can steer him in the direction of one's own intentions. As reconnaissance improves, systems for countering it must also improve, which, in turn, stimulates further developments in reconnaissance, and so forth. Articles such as "The Connection Between Reconnaissance and Maskirovka," and "Radio-Electronic Reconnaissance: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow" are among several that are exploring this area of continued importance.

* * *

On 13 May 1988 in *Zolnierz Wolnosci* there appeared another article by Colonel Koziej, "Is There At Least Hope?", dealing with disarmament of conventional weapons and forces. Much of his discussion revolves around major influences that will determine the form of a future battlefield. The trends analysed in Koziej's previous article were again put forward, which confirms their undiminished validity. The cited materials are only a small part of available information that must be studied, for only by doing so can we approach larger issues such as arms control negotiations and force restructuring with a clearer picture of Warsaw Pact concerns and positions. ♦♦

Notes

1. Stanislaw Koziej, "Articulated Directions for Change in Ground Forces Tactics", *PWI*, 9 September 1986, p. 5.
2. Ibid. p. 7.
3. See also James F. Holcomb, *Recent Developments in Soviet Helicopter Tactics*, March 1988, Soviet Studies Research Center, RMA, Sandhurst, and James F. Holcomb and Graham H. Tarbasch, "Soviet Desert Forces", *JDR* 9 and 10, 1988.
4. V.G. Bozhatovskiy, *Taktika*, Moscow, Voennoye Izdatel'stvo, 1987, p. 179.
5. Ibid. p. 206.
6. Jaroslaw Kowarski, "Helicopter Air Warfare", *PWI WOPK*, 6 June 1987, pp. 9-15.
7. Koziej, p. 8. The author goes on to warn the problem, to that of the cavalry adjusting to the introduction of tanks earlier this century.
8. *Rezim* Forces, pp. 187-189. This statement is not based on the 1984 outline.
9. See, for example, Stanislaw Mroczko, "Concepts Between Reconnaissance and Maskirovka"

PWI WOPK, 5 May 1988 pp. 7-9; Zbigniew Groszek, "Radio-Electronic Reconnaissance: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow", *PWI WOPK*, 6 June 1988 pp. 127-23.

10. Zbigniew Kuczmanski, "Destruction of Important Targets on the Battlefield", *PWI*, 2 February 1987 pp. 122-23.

11. Stanislaw Koziej, "The Final Phase of the Raid", *ZW*, 14 November 1986, p. 5.

12. *Rezim* Forces, p. 24.

13. Ibid., see especially pp. 23-25.

14. Ibid. p. 381.

15. See, for example, Josef Haczek, "Preparation for Activities Under Conditions of Using New Means of Battle", *PWI*, 3 March 1987, pp. 115-18.

16. Zdzislaw Gatyka, "Another Way of Looking at Defense", *ZW*, 15 January 1988, p. 2.

17. Tomasz Macha, "Defensive Military Doctrine - The Essence of Changes", *ZW*, 13 July 1987, p. 3.