



# COUNTERINSURGENCY AND SOVIET FORCE STRUCTURE

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In prosecuting the war in Afghanistan, the Soviet Union fielded ground force units that were unique in their structure and capabilities, and that were previously unknown to Western analysts. Among the most innovative, most heavily employed, and most often effective maneuver units and groupings that appeared in that nine-year conflict were those that integrated motorized rifle, air assault, armor, and artillery subunits under a single commander, and that were supported by strong rotary (and fixed-wing) aviation resources.

In some cases, this kind of force integration was done on a provisional basis for specific actions or operations. In at least two instances, however, permanent units of this

type were constituted for the most demanding counterinsurgency missions. These two units were the identically structured 66th and 70th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigades.

Although both of these units were active in the war, far more has become known about the 66th Brigade than about the 70th. From Soviet military writings, the testimony of Afghan *mujahedin* who were familiar with brigade operations, and information from Soviet soldiers who served in the unit, an overview of the 66th Brigade operations — approaches, successes, and failures — has been developed.

The organization and employment of combined arms brigades in Afghanistan remain instructive in a number of respects. Of particular interest, however, is the potential

application of the combined arms brigade model to the reorganizing of ground and security forces, because today's Soviet planners are influenced by both future external military requirements and the growing internal security demands of inter-ethnic conflict and near-civil war.

When Soviet forces began to withdraw from Afghanistan in May 1988, Western reporters were invited to observe the first departing units. One of the earliest elements to withdraw — and thus the subject of much attention — was unusual in some respects. While mounted on BTR-80 armored personnel carriers and resembling motorized rifle troops in the typical warm weather uniforms and soft-brimmed hats, the unit members also wore the blue and white striped T-shirts associated with airborne, air assault, and special operation forces. In addition, at least some of the troops wore airborne troop collar insignia.

The widely photographed column of BTRs, troops, and escorting Mi-24 attack helicopters were determined to be part of the 66th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade, one of the most active counterinsurgency units in Afghanistan, and a unit structured and employed quite differently from standard Soviet ground units.

Soviet reports assert that the brigade was “among the first to go to the assistance of the Afghan people at the request of their government in December 1979,” a suggestion that the unit was formed before or near the start of the war. At any rate, it was conducting combat actions in Afghanistan by April 1980, probably earlier. Brigade personnel were among the first to be decorated, and Western reporting in the weeks immediately following the invasion pointed to the employment of “paratroopers trained for guerrilla warfare” in an area of operations later identified as that of the 66th Brigade.

Throughout the war, the brigade was based at Samarkhel (near Jalalabad) in eastern Afghanistan, not far from the border with Pakistan. In this rugged, mountainous area with limited road movement options, Soviet units were tasked to deal with a variety of *mujahedin* activities. These included the movement of arms, supplies, and men from Pakistan on their way to points throughout Afghanistan; ambushes and attacks on Soviet and Afghan government units and supply columns; organized attacks on Soviet and government outposts and garrisons by increasingly well-equipped units; and the mining of supply and movement routes.

Geography, climate, and the types and levels of *mujahedin* activity argued for Soviet forces that included a variety of capabilities: There was a need for air and ground mobile components; for elements capable of deploying rapidly and fighting with limited support against small insurgent groupings and columns; substantial firepower in the form of artillery and armor to deal with larger, well armed forces; and strong aviation resources for local mobility and air strikes. The 66th Brigade and its associated aviation support elements constituted a Soviet effort to bring these capabilities together on more than a provisional basis.

Brigade organizations within the Soviet ground forces have always been associated with specialized functions

(airborne, artillery, air defense, surface-to-surface missile, engineer); special missions and roles (assault, exploitation, and security forces); or temporary groupings of various types. Consequently, Soviet brigades have differed widely in size and composition, although, more narrowly, maneuver brigades have had a number of similarities. That is, the tank and mechanized brigades of the 1930s and the World War II era, the experimental brigades of the 1980s that were part of the now-disbanded “New Army Corps,” and even the famous Soviet “combat brigade” in Cuba all constituted a mix of maneuver battalions and combat service/support units. The 66th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade (and the 70th as well) followed this same model.

The 66th Brigade — with an overall strength of about 3,000-3,500 troops and with combat colors that signified its status as a separate line unit — was commanded by a colonel. Its maneuver components comprised five battalions — an assault landing battalion, a tank battalion, and three motorized rifle battalions. Support units included an artillery battalion, a reconnaissance battalion (essentially used as another maneuver component), and other combat and logistic support elements normally associated with a reinforced regimental grouping. The brigade's counterinsurgency role required the integration and grouping of maneuver and support elements in ways not previously seen at this tactical level, and resulted in an organization that was fundamentally different from the standard maneuver units in respect to its employment.

## WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT

The brigade's weapons and equipment included a range of standard (including the latest) light arms and major end items as well as some non-standard equipment. The motorized rifle battalions were equipped predominately with BTR wheeled armored personnel carriers. These included modified BTR-70s with additional firing ports and improved mounts for machineguns to fire at overlooking heights and the newer BTR-80s. BMP infantry fighting vehicles were also found in the brigade. These included BMP-2 models with 30mm cannon (excellent for firing at elevated ground targets), which the unit was reportedly among the first to receive.

Among fire support assets specifically reported to be in the brigade were 82mm “Vasilek” automatic mortars and 30mm AGS-17 automatic grenade launchers, with 120mm mortars also likely. Photographs taken by a member of the unit indicated that the brigade also had AT-4 SPIGOT antitank guided missiles (ATGMs) in at least the manpack version. These assets — mortars, automatic grenade launchers, and ATGMs — were held within battalions and allocated to tailored combat groupings. In addition to standard squad machineguns and antitank grenade launchers (RPGs), personnel weapons within the brigade included 5.45mm assault rifles, both fixed (AK-74) and folding stock (AKS-74) variants, and SVD 7.62mm sniper rifles in higher

than usual numbers. Night vision equipment was also said to be in very good supply. Various kinds of demolition equipment and explosives were standard items as well.

The brigade's tank battalion, which was not employed in many of the brigade's combat actions, is presumed to have had the standard 40 tanks found in the tank battalions of motorized rifle regiments. Many tank units in Afghanistan were equipped with older medium tanks (the T-62 or even T-54/55 models, for example), and this may have been the case for the brigade's tank battalion. According to the memory of one Afghan resistance fighter, however, the battalion was equipped with T-72 medium tanks.

The brigade's artillery battalion was reported to be equipped with 122mm D-30 howitzers. Additional artillery fire support for the brigade was provided by 16-tube 22mm *Uragan* (Hurricane) multiple rocket launchers (40-kilometer range) garrisoned in the brigade's area of operations. One former *mujahedin* commander believed these multiple rocket launchers were under the brigade's operational control but were not organic assets. One former brigade member believed that 122mm multiple rocket launchers also supported the brigade.

Helicopter aviation support for the brigade was provided principally by the Mi-24s Hinds and Mi-8 Hips of a helicopter unit stationed in the same area. So close was the relationship between the brigade and its helicopter support unit that one brigade officer believed the helicopters were subordinate brigade assets. At least, these helicopters provided habitual fire and transport support (as well as command and control platforms) while the brigade operated in its main area of responsibility. When the brigade was committed to another area, aviation support was provided by other units. The brigade also received fire support from fixed wing strike aircraft in some actions. At one point in the war, a four-engine An-12 turboprop flew intelligence collection missions on behalf of the brigade. According to a brigade officer who flew on the aircraft, it contained "listeners" (presumably intercepting *mujahedin* tactical radio communications or using other sensor equipment) who located *mujahedin* units and targets.

## LESS SATISFACTORY

While the brigade was equipped with high-quality major end items, light infantry weapons, and some special equipment, the quality of basic uniform items and associated gear was less satisfactory. Former brigade officers reported that soldiers used their own money to buy footgear suitable for the mountains and that some uniform items wore out long before replacement items were received. Soviet load bearing equipment required too much to be carried at the waist — ammunition, grenades, entrenching tools — and there was a lack of vests to take part of the load. This factor alone was said to reduce personnel agility on missions and to increase discomfort.

Attention to the quality and the training of brigade

personnel clearly increased as the war continued and as shortfalls in personnel performance became apparent. Former brigade officers noted that typical training did not correspond to the requirements levied on the troops. Specifically cited were low proficiency among specialists, low tactical proficiency of "junior commanders and officers," and overall poor physical conditioning for mountain operations. The introduction of poorly prepared soldiers into units requiring high levels of military competence was a problem that no doubt contributed to the substantial number of casualties the brigade suffered at times. As a consequence, efforts were made to select better personnel from the conscript pool for elite units like the 66th Brigade and to provide them with general and specialty training in the USSR before sending them to Afghanistan.

## SENIOR OFFICERS

Some of the more senior brigade officers appear to have been effective in their positions. These include the colonel believed to be the unit's first commander in Afghanistan, then-Colonel V. V. Kolesnik, who was awarded the title "Hero of the Soviet Union" (equivalent to the U.S. Congressional Medal of Honor) in the early days of the war. When the brigade withdrew from Afghanistan, it was commanded by a Colonel Yuriy Timofeyevich Starov, who had been decorated with the Order of the Red Star as well as the Afghan Order of the Red Banner. Starov was given the kind of publicity usually associated with highly regarded officers. One Soviet junior officer who served before the brigade's withdrawal spoke of the confidence he had in the brigade's leadership, particularly the brigade commander (possibly Starov), whom he said he would gladly follow into battle.

A number of other brigade officers — including a lieutenant who became a Hero of the Soviet Union posthumously — appear to have been motivated, well-trained, and competent, and to have maintained cohesive subunits. This was clearly the case, for example, in the reconnaissance battalion (perhaps the best subunit in the brigade), where many or all officers were airborne qualified and seemed to regard their subordinates with genuine pride and affection.

There are clearly other views. One brigade soldier — who defected to the *mujahedin* — described cynical, uncaring officers; ethnic tensions; the hazing of young soldiers by more senior conscripts (an enduring problem known as *dedovshchina*); poor health care, bad food, drunkenness, and drug use; and mindless acts of brutality directed against the Afghan people. Such conditions have been raised more generally by many Soviet soldiers who served in Afghanistan, and no doubt were associated with the 66th Brigade as well. But the *extent* to which they manifested themselves within the brigade is far from clear.

Brigade personnel — officers and other troops — were highly decorated, a distinction that Soviet assessments



highlight as an important measure of unit performance. Perhaps the best insight into unit performance, however, is provided by snapshots of the brigade's employment over more than eight years of combat in Afghanistan.

The 66th Brigade was tasked to conduct special counterinsurgency actions near Afghanistan's border with Pakistan (a border that one brigade officer said they sometimes violated). The brigade's main area of operation was in Nangarhar and Kunarha Provinces, including the 170-kilometer-long Kunar Valley, where much heavy and difficult fighting took place.

The 66th Brigade was capable of operating on a multi-company and multi-battalion scale, as well as in the far more numerous actions involving small, tailored force groupings. As a consequence, brigade missions included large scale sweeps in conjunction with other ground and air units (both Afghan government and Soviet); "punitive" expeditions against villages and populated areas; assaults on *mujahedin* strongpoints and supply bases; and day and night ambushes of *mujahedin* groups, particularly the interception of caravans believed to be carrying insurgent arms and equipment. When the brigade participated in periodic large-scale offensive operations and sweeps, such as those carried out on a number of occasions in the Kunar Valley, the combined arms composition of the brigade was most fully evident. This was particularly notable in regard to armored elements of the brigade — tanks, armored personnel carriers (BTRs), and infantry combat vehicles (BMPs) — which in other brigade actions played limited roles or did not participate at all.

The combat actions that became the brigade's specialty, however, were those that involved tailored groupings of

battalion size or smaller, directed at *mujahedin* targets in the rugged, remote areas of eastern Afghanistan where isolation from main forces was the norm. In this role, standard organizational delineations — brigade, battalion, and company — lost the relevance they have in more traditional operations.

The brigade's allocation of combat resources was based on the routine establishment of non-TOE groupings or subunits. These comprised "detachments," "groups" (a number of which were formed within each detachment), and "armored groups" (also formed within a detachment). These groupings — particularly the detachments — appear to have gained an identity of their own that outlasted the war. Long after the 66th Brigade had withdrawn, for example, former officers with the unit were still referred to as "detachment" or "group" commanders rather than as leaders of a standard subunit like the company.

Detachments in the brigade were typically led by majors. Their size — in terms of manpower and resources — appeared to range between that of a reinforced company and a tailored battalion. These detachments could include infantry, armor, artillery, engineer, and other elements tailored and grouped in ways designed to increase their mobility. They were supported by the firepower resources of a senior commander, and they were tasked to operate with speed and surprise against enemy objectives and forces in relative isolation from the main forces.

The detachments organized their combat power into tailored groups, typically consisting of about 20 to 30 men. Detachments, and possibly their deployed groups as well, were given code names based on jewels or minerals — diamond, opal, and the like — a common practice for Soviet

special operations forces. A group would normally be commanded by a captain or a senior lieutenant, and several groups might take part in an action.

A group — whose exact composition depended on its mission — was built around a platoon size infantry or assault landing element, reinforced by sappers (to clear mines and blow targets), and signal support. A group might be divided into teams (or subgroups) of perhaps eight to ten men to accomplish specific assignments or missions, as in a raid or ambush. Mortars and manpack antitank guided missiles could be included, though some missions clearly emphasized mobility over firepower. Although a number of brigade personnel were parachute qualified, and while armored transporters were organic to the brigade, the terrain and target requirements in Kunarha and Nangarhar Provinces saw groups inserted principally by helicopter or on foot.

An armored group, several of which might be formed within a detachment, consisted of BTRs, BMPs, or tanks — without accompanying infantry — which were tasked to support and reinforce deployed strike groups and carry out separate missions. Their direct employment depended on access routes to engagement areas, which often ranged from poor to nonexistent. When possible, however, armored groups provided fire support for deployed troops, covered their insertion or withdrawal, and blocked enemy routes to and from landing or engagement areas. Armor, of course, was employed also with mounted and dismounted infantry in punitive operations against villages and populated points believed to be centers of *mujahedin* activity, and to guard roads and facilities in the brigade's area of operations.

Artillery support was provided for deployed detachments and groups by firebases formed from the brigade's organic 122mm D-30 howitzers and supporting multiple rocket launchers (220mm and possibly 122mm systems). Both fixed and temporary firebases were established for this purpose. In some cases, D-30s were lifted beneath helicopters to remote firing sites.

## BRIGADE GROUP

In some cases, a brigade group might walk to an objective 20 to 30 kilometers into the mountains. When groups were inserted by Mi-8 helicopter (an increasingly risky undertaking as the *mujahedin* acquired more experience and more sophisticated antiaircraft systems), emphasis was placed on speed. A former brigade officer indicated that helicopters departed immediately after landing the troops, before the aircraft could be targeted by *mujahedin* mortars. Groups and teams would typically walk out to the helicopter landing zones located away from target areas or withdraw entirely over land.

Resupply was never certain and was a particular concern to brigade members when detachments and groups were being supported by unfamiliar helicopter units. Bad weather or restrictive terrain sometimes prevented aerial resupply or medical evacuation. Most often, though, these problems

were said to occur when brigade elements were being supported by a "strange" helicopter unit. Consequently, 66th Brigade soldiers operating in the mountains typically carried loads of "no less than 30-40 kilograms," consisting of ammunition, water, rations, medical supplies, batteries for radios and night vision devices, and so on. Each soldier usually took 9 or 10 loaded assault rifle magazines. Even with this load, subunits sometimes expended most of their ammunition in the first engagement and had little left for a second or third encounter.

Two of the most frequent missions assigned to the brigade were assaults on insurgent strongholds to destroy *mujahedin* groups and supplies, and the ambush of caravans carrying supplies from Pakistan and *mujahedin* groups known to be operating in a given area or in transit to or from an operation. Several examples of specific brigade actions that are known collectively give some insight into typical brigade combat actions.

## ASSAULT GROUP

Typically, an assault group tasked to destroy an insurgent base area or stronghold would land by helicopter in the rear of or on terrain above a target, attack it with speed and surprise, photograph the stockpiled equipment and supplies, and destroy them with explosives. Air strikes by combat helicopters and fixed wing aircraft were sometimes a part of these actions. In some cases, brigade reconnaissance elements were tasked to kill sentries silently and to neutralize antiaircraft machinegun positions before an assault took place.

The insurgent base areas, in some cases at least, were well established, with a system of trenches, well-sited firing positions covering key approaches, and observation points intended to give early warning of enemy movement in the area. One such village stronghold was effectively defended against a motorized rifle unit for two weeks, but a heliborne assault force from the 66th Brigade managed to secure it in a matter of hours by conducting an airmobile insertion right on top of the village. The assault force relied on surprise and shock, quickly destroyed the captured supplies and weapons with explosives, and left the area. Before assaulting the village, brigade personnel established blocking points in the rear of the stronghold and on its flanks to prevent the insurgents from escaping or being reinforced.

In another action, an effort was made to rescue Soviet prisoners. Troops from the reconnaissance battalion were to land by helicopter and inflict a surprise strike on a small mountain settlement where the prisoners were held. Although the troops were said to have executed the mission successfully, they found the Soviet prisoners dead and mutilated.

When possible, the brigade's ambushes were carefully planned and could involve days of waiting along the potential movement routes. According to a former brigade reconnaissance officer, ambushes were most often conducted at night.

After reaching the general target area and selecting an ambush site, the men of the group or team would wait in camouflaged positions for the *mujahedin* force or caravan to arrive. When the insurgents did appear, the ambush force would seek to destroy it with an overwhelming volume of fire. The ambush force would then withdraw over preplanned routes.

In some instances, ambushes were set hastily in response to new intelligence. In this regard, one ambush effort began with the receipt of intelligence about a large pack animal caravan — about 200 pack animals and at least 300 men — moving from Pakistan. A 20-man group under a senior lieutenant was landed by helicopter on the crest of a hill in the caravan's projected path. The lieutenant intended to pin down the large caravan with fire until reinforcements arrived, but his small group quickly became engaged beyond its capacity to defend, and the group's detachment commander decided to send reinforcements.

Another 20-man group, accompanied by a major, was sent by helicopter to the engagement site. It took fire upon landing and found the senior lieutenant wounded, the area under *mujahedin* sniper fire, attacks on the hill under way, and an effort to attack from the rear in progress.

The two groups managed to stabilize the defense, while in the meantime the detachment commander dispatched "several" armored groups to the area. Combat helicopters provided fire support while artillery fire strikes were also carried out. The battle, said to be a long one, was successfully concluded — with the capture of the caravan — through the combined action of the assault landing groups, armored groups, combat helicopter support, and artillery fires.

## AMBUSHES

Other efforts to interdict *mujahedin* groups and caravans ended less successfully with the hunters falling into an ambush themselves. In one 1985 action, for example, a company size force was tasked to respond to a *mujahedin* attack on a convoy in Kunarha Province. A reconnaissance group under a lieutenant was detached from this main force to help locate the insurgent group. As the reconnaissance group moved by mountain trail into the village of Ashkabad, it was ambushed and encircled, with some men in the group wounded.

The main force also fell into an ambush. According to Soviet materials, the lieutenant ordered most of his group to attempt a breakout with the wounded to the main force while he and two other soldiers covered their withdrawal. He and his two subordinates moved from building to building until they reached the edge of the village. At this point, he was wounded and unable to move further. He is said to have continued to fight until he ran out of ammunition, at which point he blew himself and the attacking *mujahedin* up with his last hand grenade, and was posthumously named a Hero of the Soviet Union.

Such incidents as these underscore the kind of environment

in which the 66th Brigade operated. Brigade elements frequently operated in isolated groups and always ran the risk of being overrun by superior or more skillful forces. This put a premium on reconnaissance, on planning and execution by detachments and groups, and on the development of air support, artillery support, and rapid reinforcement by air or ground for units operating in isolation.

The last major brigade action in Afghanistan was its withdrawal in the spring of 1988. This carefully planned and executed undertaking took place over several days in mid-May. During the road march of more than 660 kilometers, at least three *mujahedin* attacks on the departing columns took place before the brigade crossed the Amu Darya River into the Soviet Turkestan Military District, ending the unit's long role in the war.

When the withdrawal of the remaining regular Soviet units from Afghanistan was completed in February 1989, the disposition of these units — and the earlier-withdrawn 66th Brigade — was not announced publicly. Nevertheless, the 66th Brigade remains an instructive model for Soviet force planners and may still have a place in the Soviet order of battle despite the sweeping reductions and reorganizations under way.

## COMBAT RECORD

A distinguished combat record such as that of the brigade has long been one of the Soviet criteria for retaining a unit in active status. In addition, the brigade's long tenure in Afghanistan points to Soviet satisfaction with its organization, capabilities, and performance, while the continued attention given to former brigade officers in the military press — speaking proudly and bitterly about Afghanistan and the Army's current situation — seems to further validate the unit's achievements as being "still relevant."

Clearly, a combined arms brigade structure is applicable to a conventional battlefield. A unit such as the 66th — placing, as it does, greater emphasis on air mobility and rapid maneuver than do heavier force structure variants — may in some respects correspond to emerging Soviet concepts of "fragmented" or non-linear combat. Under this concept, greater emphasis is placed on employing tailored, independent combined arms tactical units and groupings. A brigade with a mix of motorized infantry, air assault, armor, and artillery assets that can be tailored into combined arms detachments, may find a place in a force structure intended to execute these kinds of operations. Such a model may be particularly attractive for a greatly reduced force structure, further limited by a combination of conventional arms ceilings, economic constraints, and changed military requirements.

The brigade clearly played an integral role in the larger operations in the Afghan war, as well as in smaller actions. For example, senior Soviet officers have identified as

particularly successful the 1985 Kunar Valley operation — which took place over the 170 kilometers from Jalalabad to Barikowt. This coordinated series of actions, aimed at destroying insurgent bases and groups, eventually involved the landing of 11,000 troops from helicopters. During the operation, the 66th Brigade operated jointly with other Soviet forces and Afghan units.

Such innovations as the armored groups used by the brigade in Afghanistan are being more generally applied now in offensive and defensive exercises and discussed in the most recent Soviet military literature. The problem of supporting or reinforcing infantry units introduced by air assault or other means, with armored groups advancing on separate axes, was key to a number of 66th Brigade actions.

Other approaches associated with combat action of a “fragmented character” have been highlighted as important lessons learned from Afghanistan that should be broadly studied for their application to warfighting generally. These include, among others, the coordination of air and artillery fire support for small groupings operating in isolation from main forces, and the rapid preparation and delivery of substantial assault landing forces to enemy-held areas. All of these and other basic tactical and special operations skills were integral to brigade operations.

The brigade model may also be reflected in future Soviet force structure innovations designed to deal with inter-ethnic conflict and other internal security tasks — forms of unconventional warfare that have suggested Afghan war analogies to some Soviet commentators. In such areas as Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaidzhan — where heavily armed groups clash with central Soviet authority and each other in both urban and rugged rural settings — requirements for mobile ground forces backed up by substantial firepower have been evident for some time. One Soviet commentator has suggested that these circumstances approximate U.S. concepts of “low intensity conflict (LIC),” and take note of the specialized forces created in the U.S. to deal with a complex mixture of military and civil problems in some LIC environments.

The creation of a tailored brigade-size force to deal with the more serious forms of internal conflict has already taken place in the Soviet Union — but not under Soviet central control. Rather, the new formation was set up under the auspices of the Armenian Republic, whose assertions of autonomy and involvement in some of the most violent inter-ethnic clashes with neighboring Azerbaidzhan have made it a major Soviet internal security concern. More specifically, in November 1990, the Armenian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) announced the establishment of a new unit referred to as a “Militia Detachment of Operational Response” (or OMOR in the Russian acronym).

The unit was to be assigned such internal security tasks

as ensuring public safety, dealing with armed criminal groups and groupings, and protecting government facilities and the republic's leaders. The organization of the OMOR, however, resembled the 66th Brigade model far more than it did a reinforced militia or police unit. It was said to consist of a landing assault battalion, two motorized patrol battalions, an armored patrol battalion, and various support units, including motor transport, firefighting, and sniffer dog companies, and it was being manned by former airborne, naval infantry, and KGB Border Troop or MVD Internal Troop special designation (*spetsnaz*) detachments. Though smaller than the combined arms brigades in Afghanistan, the 1,000-man OMOR was evidently based on the same need to combine battalions for mobility and firepower in unconventional warfare environments.

In May 1991, one OMOR role was highlighted. Soviet MVD internal troops, attempting to halt armed clashes between Armenians and Azeris and being hotly engaged themselves, reportedly detained opposing Armenian forces that turned out to be OMOR elements. They were well equipped with automatic weapons, tactical radios, pistols, eight boxes of ammunition, signal flares, and “special means,” a term used to describe equipment issued to special operations forces (flash-bang grenades, for example). It would seem, then, that unconventional warfare experience and force structure models will not be limited to forces under central Soviet control — nor will future force structure innovations appearing in the USSR be formulated entirely on a perceived “external” threat.

In conclusion, future Soviet ground (or security) force structure may or may not include combined arms brigades like the 66th. The continuing debate over what kind of armed forces are needed and the many other factors that will shape the decisions that are made, will become visible in the months ahead. Clearly, though, the structure and employment of the 66th Brigade in Afghanistan continue to offer lessons to Soviet planners, and perhaps to dissident republics as well. Given the range of security requirements the Soviets face, at least some of these lessons are likely to be applied in the ground force structure that will emerge in the 1990s.

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