

Describing Russian Infantry's Breaching and Clearing Techniques

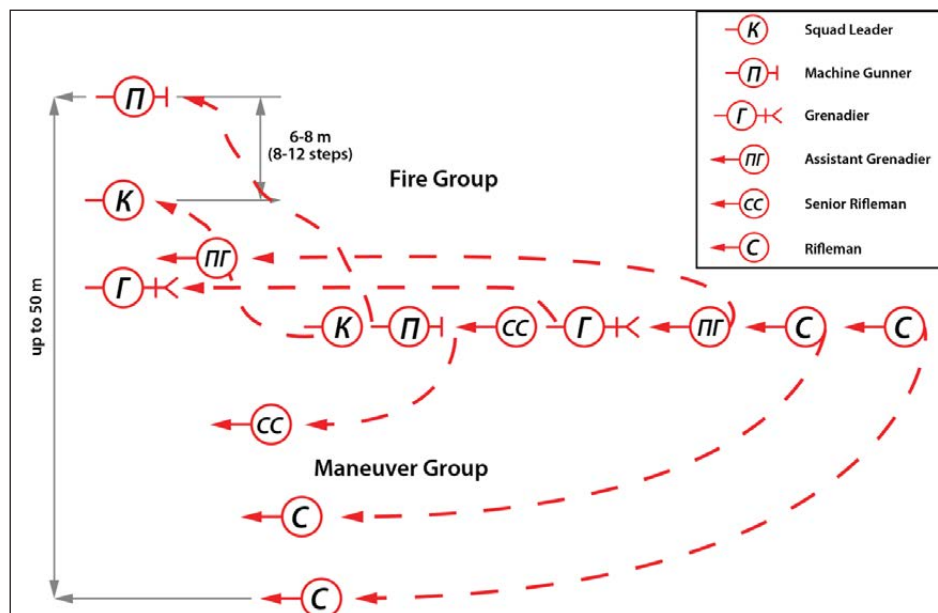
DR. LESTER W. GRAU
DR. CHARLES K. BARTLES

Breaching entryways and clearing buildings, particularly in urban combat, are particularly complex and dangerous infantry tasks. These techniques are not universal, but the organization and equipment of a nation's infantry squad seem to determine size, composition, and weaponry of this choreographed combat. In terms of size and organization, the four-man stack has been part of U.S. infantry training for urban combat for a long time. Apparently, its origins were based on the nine-man infantry squad, where each squad could form two similarly armed four-man stacks with the squad leader controlling them. This is not the Russian model.

To begin with, a Russian motorized rifle squad mounted on a BMP (*Boyevaya Mashina Pyekhota*) infantry fighting vehicle has a two-man vehicle crew — the driver-mechanic and the gunner — and a seven-man dismount squad with the squad leader acting as the vehicle commander. The dismount squad functions with a fire support group, including the squad leader, machine gunner, grenadier, and assistant grenadier, along with a maneuver group that includes a senior rifleman and two riflemen. Unlike the U.S. Army infantry squad's symmetrical fire teams, the Russian maneuver group moves and assaults while the fire support group, along with the BMP, provides covering fire. Their roles are seldom interchangeable.

In the fighting in Ukraine, full-strength Russian motorized rifle squads are a rarity, and many BMPs or BTRs (*Bronetransportyory*) are manned with only five dismounted infantrymen. In these cases, the more heavily armed fire support group may be fully manned and equipped, while the maneuver group may have fewer soldiers and weapons. To make up for this disparity, Russians rely on their overmatch in artillery to assure their missions. However, artillery cannot do everything. Clearing and breaching buildings remains the exclusive job for dismounted infantry of the maneuver group.

Figure 1 — Russian Motorized Rifle Squad on Foot Moving from Column to Line



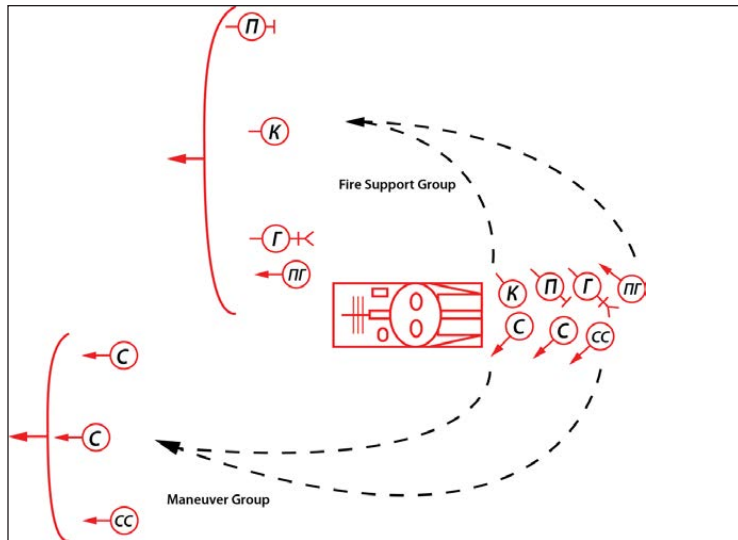


Figure 2 — Deployment of the Motorized Rifle Squad from Behind a BMP

The figures on the following pages illustrate basic building clearing techniques taught to spetsnaz (special operations) candidates, first as individuals and then as part of a three-man breaching stack. The individual soldier learns to move down a corridor, find the enemy, and react quickly and decisively while firing. He is trained not to move directly across a T-intersection but to be wary of intersections and angled corridors. The soldier is taught not to hug the wall since an enemy might detect the soldier and fire into leading exposed parts of the soldier or into the soldier's corridor trying for a ricochet to kill him (see Figure 3; the enemy is in blue).¹

If fired at from around a corner, the soldier returns fire while moving sideways (step-drag) to increase his field of vision and engage the enemy (see Figure 4).²

If not fired on at close range at an unsecured intersection, the soldier still moves sideways [step-drag] ready to engage. In this manner, the soldier has a greater chance of detecting the enemy, even if located some distance from the corner (see Figure 5).³

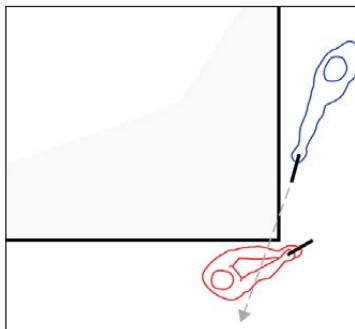


Figure 3 — Position of the Firer while Firing from a Corner

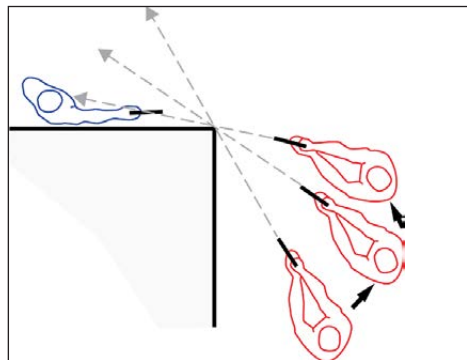


Figure 4 — Approaching a Corner

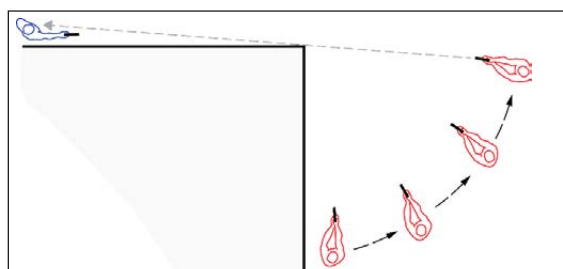


Figure 5 — Gaining a Field of Vision around a Corner

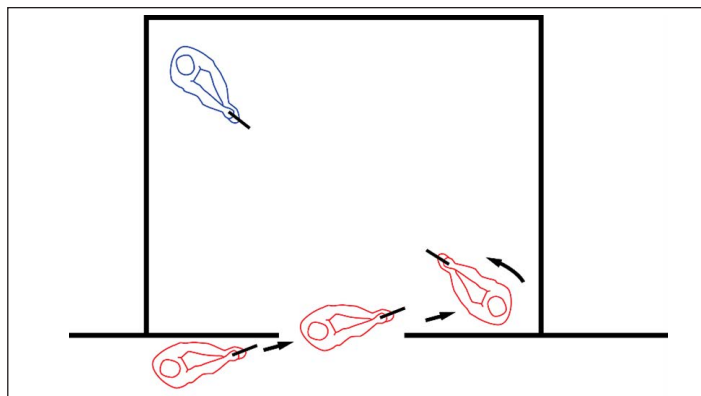


Figure 6 — Single Shooter Entering an Inhabited Room⁴

When approaching a door, it is safer and better to first inspect the room through a narrow slit of a partially open door and then fully open the door. The soldier controls the possible zone of fire with his weapon and then enters the room in the same manner as a T-shaped corridor (see Figure 6).

Stairs

Stairs and stairwells are particularly dangerous while clearing a building. The stairway entrance, stairway turns, and the area under and above the stairs must be kept covered by weapons. While moving on the stairs, the soldier must avoid the areas of the stairway where an enemy can shoot him from above or below. He approaches the stairs as one would approach a doorway, observing the entire area and the entry and exit to the stairwell. He then flattens his back or belly to the stairs while making a turn. At every step, he maintains the maximum cover and observes the entire area (see Figure 7).

When climbing the stairs, he is very observant and keeps the barrel of his weapon pointed in the direction of possible danger (see Figure 8). He remembers that some stairs have open spaces under each step through which an enemy can fire.⁵ Upon receiving the order to clear an unfamiliar building, it is necessary to evacuate the wounded, redistribute ammunition, suppress enemy firing, and so on. When training cadets, the Russian trainers issue blank ammunition to prepare them for the actual event.⁶

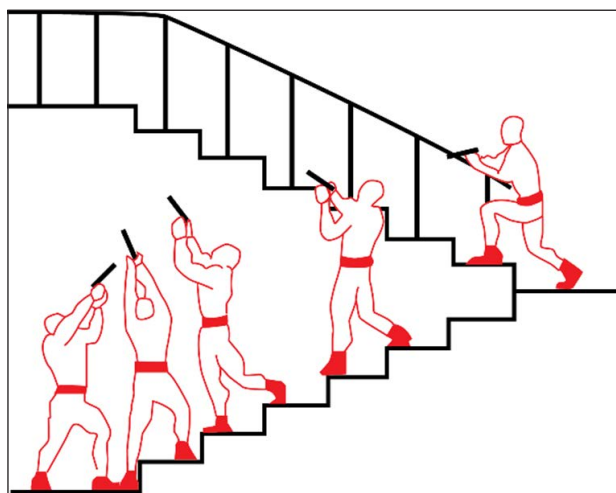


Figure 7 — Movement along a Stairwell (at the Turning Point)

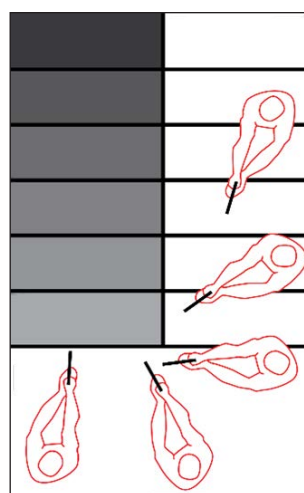


Figure 8 — Movement along a Stairwell (while Climbing)

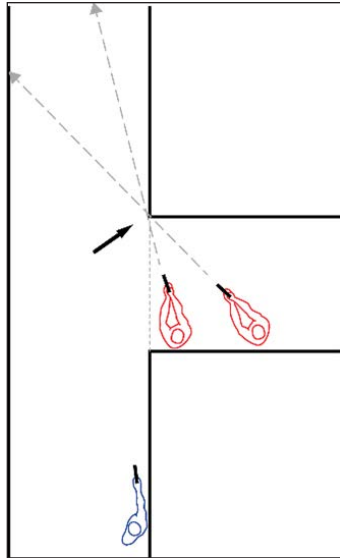


Figure 9 — Viewing a T-shaped Corridor

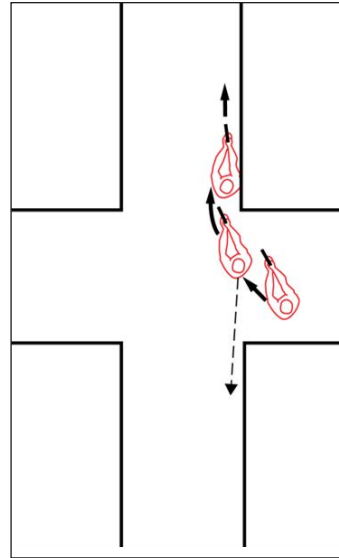


Figure 10 — Entering a T-shaped Corridor

Three-Man Stack

After the soldier has mastered firing at corners and intersections, team training begins. Team members learn to keep their backs to the corridor wall to put maximum fire and ricochets down the intended corridor of advance (see Figure 9). When entering a T-shaped corridor, the lead soldier searches in one direction and moves quickly in the desired direction through the new corridor, staying on the right-hand side.⁷ The second man checks the corridor behind him and, if necessary, clears it and follows, as does the third. If facing a corridor intersection, the open-facing corridor is searched first and then both sides of the corridor are searched (see Figure 10). The first shooter is the leader who directs the combat formation and views and evaluates every obstacle. The second shooter covers the leader, and the third shooter covers the group and their rear. During their movement down a corridor, the group is close together with weapons at the ready for tactical contact and to take their sector under fire (see Figure 11).⁸

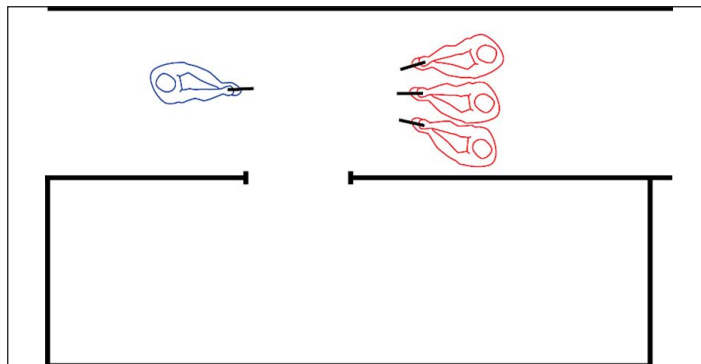


Figure 11 — Movement from a Corridor into a Room (Step 1)⁹

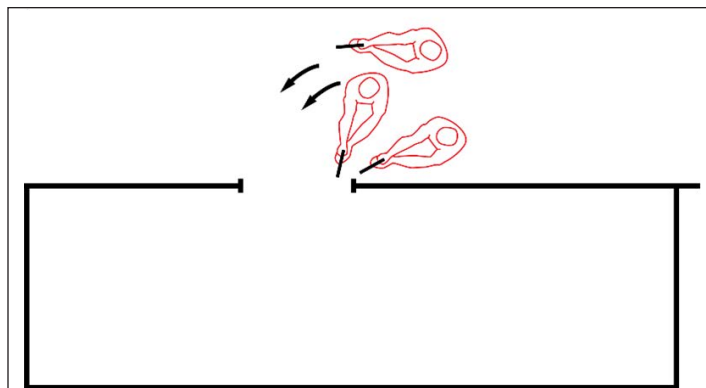


Figure 12 — Movement from a Corridor into a Room (Step 2)¹⁰

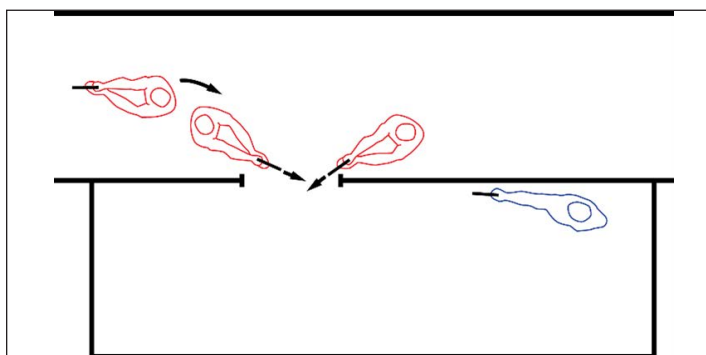


Figure 13 — Movement from a Corridor into a Room (Step 3)¹¹

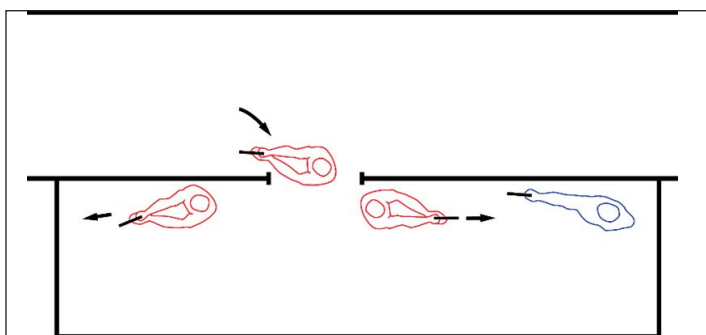


Figure 14 — Movement from a Corridor into a Room (Step 4)¹²

When the stack approaches a door, the second and third shooter break off. One moves to establish a firing sector into the room, and the other covers the corridor. The leader covers the opposite firing sector into the room. The leader and second shooter then enter the room in opposite directions while the third shooter backs into the room (see Figures 12, 13, and 14).

When approaching an intersection, the leader and second shooter move back-to-back in the last portion of the corridor and observe as much of the intersecting corridor as possible, looking for an enemy along the near wall. The third shooter covers them from the rear. Then the first and second shooter step-drag into the corridor for better visibility. The third shooter then turns around and aims down the unchecked area of the corridor. Then the first and second shooters begin movement. One follows the other, maintaining some distance between them. The third shooter then follows them backwards covering their rear.

Regarding weapons and training, the relatively small Russian breaching and clearing team aims to combine its small arms weapons with practiced agility. The RPG-7 grenade launcher is clumsy inside a building and

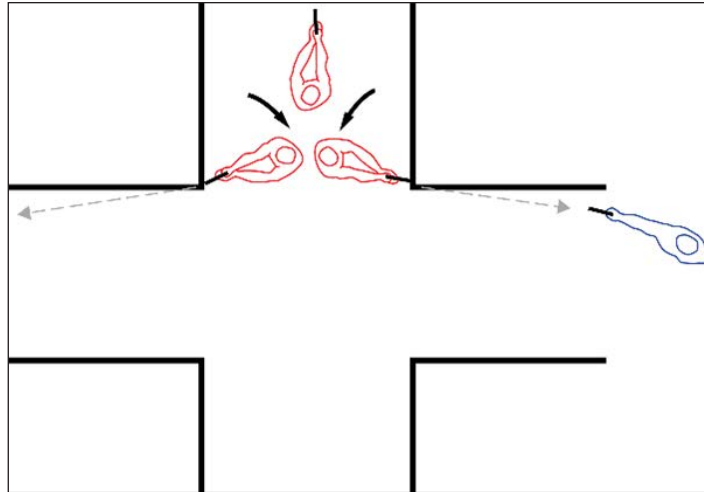


Figure 15 — Method of Controlling an Intersection within a Building (Step 1)¹³

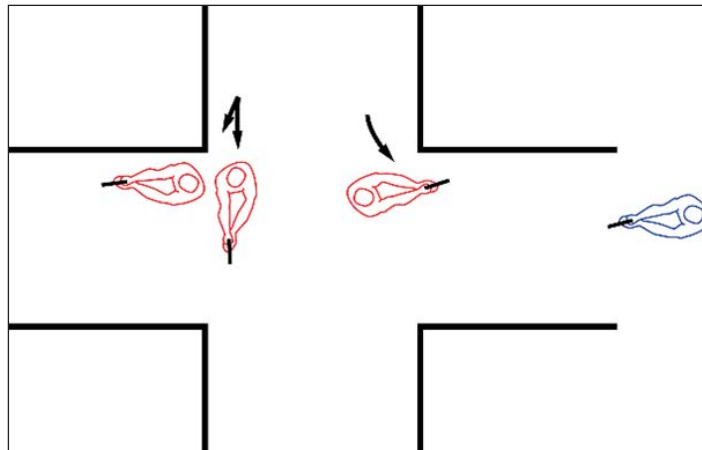


Figure 16 — Method of Controlling an Intersection within a Building (Step 2)¹⁴

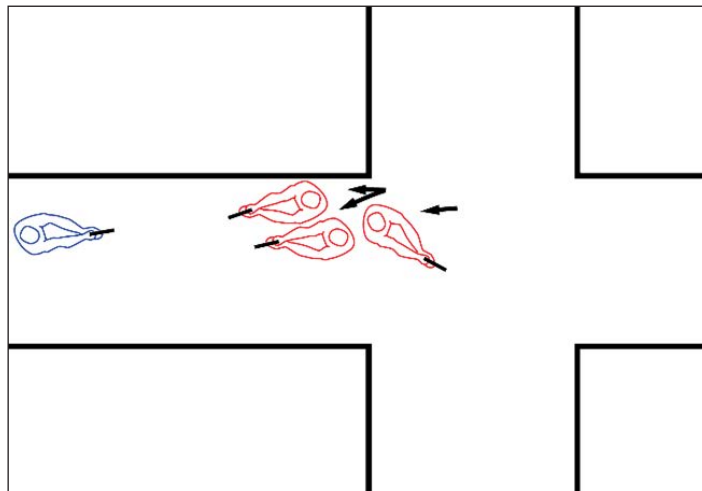


Figure 17 — Method of Controlling an Intersection within a Building (Step 3)¹⁵

usually a hazard to all when fired from indoors, and machine guns in close quarters have their limitations as well. For the Russian breaching team, pistols and assault rifles are better suited for the close quarters and close ranges involved in clearing buildings. In 2018, the Russian Federation introduced tactical shooting for inclusion in the training of contract motorized riflemen.¹⁶ The Russian Army is now introducing tactical shooting with the goal of enveloping the reflexes and muscle memory for close-in, accurate, rapid gunfights commonly found in urban terrain. Like the U.S. Army, the Russian Army previously restricted tactical shooting training to elite direct-action forces but is now conducting it as part of regular unit training for all its longer-term contract infantry. Fitting this into the regular training year is a challenge but, if successful, would produce more effective squads and platoons.¹⁷

Tactical shooting and the Kalashnikov assault rifle go hand-in-glove. The issued 9mm MP-443 “Gratch” or the older Makarov pistol are also well-suited for this close quarters combat training.¹⁸ The infantry mission of clearing buildings requires special techniques which go well with tactical shooting training. Tactical shooting training for all the longer-term contract infantry, which includes motorized rifle, airborne, spetsnaz, border guards, and National Guard soldiers, is a lofty, perhaps unattainable, goal. And that training must be repeated regularly. Most likely, the elite forces are getting it first. This will not be part of shorter-term conscript soldier training due to all the other basic training and skill development that must be accomplished in their short period of service.

After mastering these beginning techniques, training may expand to the use of grenades, smoke grenades, demolition and pyro techniques, and flash-bangs. Follow-on training in the use of supporting machine guns and grenade launchers — as well as climbing ladders, battering rams, special-purpose demolitions, and the like for building clearance — can also be introduced.

Building clearing techniques are not universal, but the table of organization and equipment of any infantry squad seems to determine size, composition, and weaponry. Because of the size of the Russian dismounted squad, breaching and clearing teams are smaller. Their ability to train to be agile — even to have the muscle memory — with fewer, lighter weapons is also key. For this reason, though training for infantry breaching and clearing teams have expanded beyond just elite units in the Russian armed forces to include regular units, naval infantry, and National Guard, it remains an advanced technique that longer-term contract soldiers will do most competently. In those units, mission accomplishment can be counted with the smaller size, lightly armed teams. However, dismounted Russian squads without those more experienced, specially trained members will be greatly challenged in this dangerous task.

Notes

¹ S. Katanskiy, A. Dryzhinin, G. Sergienko, “Врагу за стенами не скрыться” [The enemy next to the walls is not concealed], *Армейский Сборник [Army Digest]*, August 2022, 206.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid, 207.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid, 206.

⁸ Ibid, 207.

⁹ Ibid, 208.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ For this article, tactical shooting is specialized firearms training designed for close, quick, accurate combat involving firing multiple rounds to kill or disable another gunner. Such training is designed for law enforcement and military personnel and usually employs compact rifles, pistols, or shotguns.

¹⁷ Aleksandr Pinchuk, "It has been decided to introduce a New Applied Military Discipline to the Troops," *Krasnaya Zvezda*, www.redstar.ru, 30 August 2019.

¹⁸ The MP-443 Gratch [Rook] is replacing the Makarov semiautomatic pistol. The Gratch fires the 9x19mm Luger round and has an 18-round magazine. The Makarov, first issued in 1951, fires the less-powerful 9x18mm Markarov round from an eight-round magazine.

Dr. Les W. Grau, a retired Infantry lieutenant colonel, is research director for the Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO) at Fort Leavenworth, KS. His previous positions include serving as senior analyst and research coordinator, FMSO; deputy director, Center for Army Tactics, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth; political and economic adviser, Allied Forces Central Europe, Brunssum, the Netherlands; U.S. Embassy, Moscow, Soviet Union; battalion executive officer, 2nd Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, Republic of Korea and Fort Riley, KS; commander, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Support Brigade, Mannheim, Germany; and district senior adviser, Advisory Team 80, Republic of Vietnam. His military schooling includes U.S. Air Force War College, U.S. Army Russian Institute, Defense Language Institute (Russian), U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Infantry Officer Advanced Course, and Infantry Officer Basic Course. He has a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Texas-El Paso, a master's degree in international relations from Kent State University, and a doctorate in Russian and Central Asian military history from the University of Kansas. His awards and honors include U.S. Central Command Visiting Fellow; professor, Academy for the Problems of Security, Defense and Law Enforcement, Moscow; academician, International Informatization Academy, Moscow; Legion of Merit; Bronze Star; Purple Heart; and Combat Infantryman Badge. He is the author of 13 books on Afghanistan and the Soviet Union and more than 250 articles for professional journals. Dr. Grau's best-known books are *The Bear Went Over the Mountain: Soviet Combat Tactics in Afghanistan* and *The Other Side of the Mountain: Mujahideen Tactics in the Soviet-Afghan War*.

Dr. Chuck Bartles is an analyst and Russian linguist with FMSO at Fort Leavenworth. His specific research areas include Russian and Central Asian military force structure, modernization, tactics, officer and enlisted professional development, and security-assistance programs. Dr. Bartles is also a space operations officer and lieutenant colonel in the Army Reserve who has deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq and has also served as a security assistance officer at embassies in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan. He has a bachelor's degree in Russian from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, a master's degree in Russian and Eastern European studies from the University of Kansas, and a PhD from the University of Missouri-Kansas City.