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Imagery analysis report

Soviet Independent Airborne Brigades (S)

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SOVIET INDEPENDENT AIRBORNE BRIGADES (S)

1. (S/D) Seven airborne armored personnel carrier (BMD)-equipped Soviet airborne units have been identified since January 1980. Five of the units are in border military districts (MD) of the Soviet Union, [redacted] and one is in Afghanistan (Figure 1). Each of these units appears to contain at least a battalion of BMD reinforced by artillery and motor transport assets.

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Aktogay

2. (S/D) The airborne unit at Aktogay Army Barracks AL-1/SA-6 Regiment [redacted] appears to be a composite or brigaded unit* containing elements of two BMD battalions, a signal unit, an artillery unit, and a motor transport unit (not illustrated). The two BMD battalions contain 55 BMD—including 17 of the new modified version. The signal unit contains at least two R-409 CATS PAW and ten R-125 communications van trucks. The artillery unit contains one antiaircraft (AA) battery with eight ZU-23 AA machine guns, a rocket launcher battery with six multiple rocket launchers (MRL) M-1975, a howitzer battalion with twenty 122mm howitzers D-30 (only three illustrated on imagery), and a mortar battalion with twenty-three 120mm mortars (Figure 2).

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3. (S/D) [redacted] parachutes were seen on the ground near the unit, indicating this is an active unit.

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4. (S/D) A training area consisting of an airborne obstacle course, harness stocks, and a jump tower was identified northwest of the installation in late August.

5. (S/D) Aktogay is approximately 120 nautical miles (nm) north of the Sino/Soviet border in the Central Asian MD.

Brest

6. (S/D) The second brigade was found at Brest Army Barracks Southeast AL-2 [redacted] on the Soviet/Polish Border in the Belorussian MD (Figure 3).

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7. (S/D) A parachute jump tower, seven canvas-covered probable BMD, and nine GAZ-66 cargo trucks were seen at Brest AL-2 [redacted] Six armored vehicles, 15 GAZ-66, and eleven 122mm howitzers D-30 were observed [redacted] at least 100 parachutes were being packed in the installation.

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8. (S/D) The vehicle parks where the airborne equipment was seen have the shed capacity for approximately 330 vehicles and formerly housed an engineer battalion of a second-generation motorized rifle division.

9. (C/[redacted]) Soldiers wearing uniforms of the motorized rifle and tank branches, with military parachutist badges, and airborne troops (VDV) were reportedly seen in Brest [redacted] [redacted] The sightings of various military branch uniforms with parachute badges lends further credence to a brigade structure for this unit.¹

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*Brigade: a formation of troops from different service branches and special troops from the various Services, consisting of several battalions and special subunits.¹

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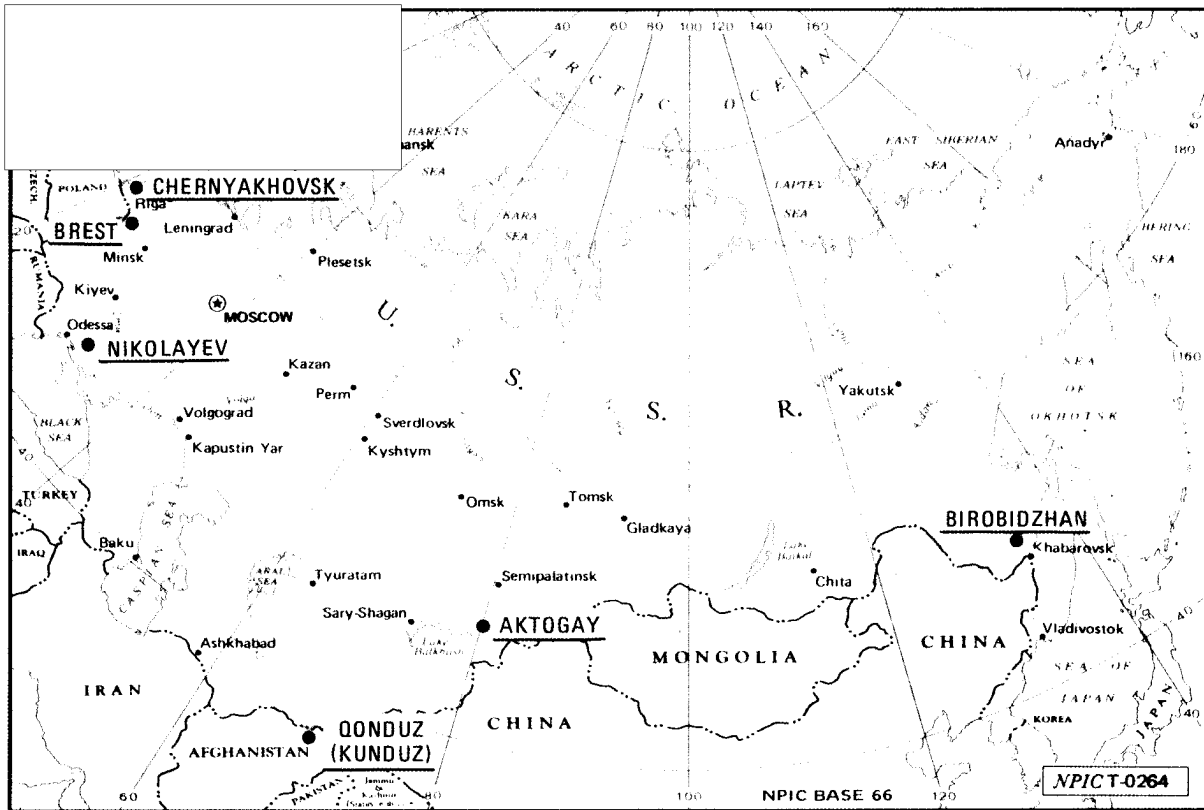


FIGURE 1. LOCATIONS OF SOVIET INDEPENDENT AIRBORNE BRIGADES

Chernyakhovsk

10. (S/D) The third brigade was found at Chernyakhovsk Army Barracks North AL-3 [redacted] Equipment seen at that time included 38 BMD and 89 GAZ-66 cargo trucks. [redacted] twenty-five 120mm mortars and eighteen 122mm howitzers D-30 were seen with this unit. [redacted] 14 additional BMD were observed with the brigade, apparently forming a second BMD battalion. Although no airborne training devices have been identified at this installation, a jump tower is in the ground forces training area adjacent to the barracks. Chernyakhovsk is approximately 26 nm north of the Soviet/Polish border in the Baltic MD (Figure 4).

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Nikolayev

11. (S/D) The fourth brigade is at Nikolayev Army Barracks AL-6 [redacted] in the Odessa MD (Figure 5).

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12. (S/D) [redacted] a parachute jump tower under construction and three BMD were seen at Nikolayev AL-6. [redacted] three 122mm howitzers D-30 were seen at this installation. Fourteen BMD and eighteen 122mm howitzers were present [redacted] Nikolayev Army Barracks AL-6 formerly housed an amphibious tank regiment. The barracks had been virtually unoccupied since May 1979.

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Birobidzhan

13. (S/D) The fifth brigade is at Birobidzhan Motorized Rifle Division Headquarters/Bar-racks AL-1 [redacted] in the Far East Military District (Figure 6). [redacted] BMD, 33 parachutes, and a jump tower and harness stocks were identified in the installation.

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14. (S/D) The jump tower and harness stocks were under construction [redacted] [redacted] the tower appeared complete, and nine parachutes were present. BMD were first seen here [redacted] when four were seen.

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Qonduz

18. (S/D) Elements of an independent airborne brigade were first identified at Kunduz (Qonduz) Airfield [redacted] Afghanistan (Figure 8) [redacted] when a BMD company was seen. The unit contains at least two BMD battalions, one 122mm howitzer D-30 battalion, one GAZ-66 rocket launcher battery, one 120-mm mortar battery, a signal unit, and a motor transport unit.

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Conclusion

19. (S/D) A comparison of all seven brigades shows at least one BMD battalion with artillery and motor transport assets as the basic unit structure.

20. (S/D) Although the mission and subordination of the brigades are unknown, some possibilities can be examined. If all of the known Soviet airborne (VDV) divisions retain their present unit structure, these apparently independent brigades could represent an additional capability to rapidly deploy highly mobile, lightly armored forces to support frontal operations. Another possible role for these units could be as a special operations unit. The Soviet Special Operations Forces (SOF) units appear to use light infantry weapons. These new brigades could represent a more heavily equipped force for rear area actions.

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