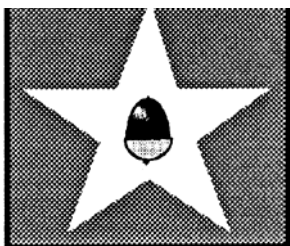


Conflict Studies Research Centre

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**Maskirovka In Yugoslav
Military Thinking**

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MASKIROVKA IN YUGOSLAV MILITARY THINKING

YUGOSLAV MILITARY DOCTRINE

For the last three decades, Yugoslavia subscribed to the doctrine of “total national defence” as the only way of resisting a massive, surprise invasion (such as that visited on Czechoslovakia in 1968) without help from outside. This strategy, and consequent organization for the conduct of war, owed much to the country’s experience of World War II.

The army comprised two elements, the Operational Army (the YNA, or active army) and the Territorial Defence Forces (the TDF), a mass mobilization force comprising two elements – territorial units, which were to operate in their home localities, and partisan units which were more mobile and flexible and could be deployed anywhere. To give the TDF teeth and assist mobilization, weapons caches were established in major enterprises and supply dumps and even significant defence industries were positioned in easily defended mountain locations.

The strategic concept envisaged a defence conducted in two, or if necessary, three, phases designed to exhaust the invader in a long war; he would be able to conquer territory, but not to hold it without constant struggle and attrition which he would come to see was not worth the effort required.

- **Phase I.** The YNA would conduct a conventional manoeuvre defence in the vulnerable Danubian lowlands, giving ground as slowly as possible consistent with preserving considerable elements of the force structure and winning time for the completion of the mobilization of the TDF. This phase was expected to last about a week.
- **Phase II.** Together, the YNA and the TDF would conduct a manoeuvre defence in depth, taking advantage of the mountainous terrain. The object would not be to hold ground but to inflict delay, disruption and casualties on the invader while refusing to engage in a decisive battle where the enemy’s superior numbers would prevail. Although operationally on the defensive, the emphasis was to be on the tactical offensive to wear the enemy down. TDF units would spring to life to wage unconventional warfare on the enemy flanks and in his rear, launching surprise attacks at unexpected places and times and using unpredictable tactics. The whole occupied area would become a battleground and the enemy would be forced to devote ever larger resources to holding down a hostile population and protecting lengthening, vulnerable lines of communication. With his resources increasingly overstretched and dispersed, the invader would inevitably leave elements of his main force open to conventional attack by the YNA, which would be able to achieve temporary, local superiority.
- **Phase III.** As a last resort, if the country was totally occupied and conventional operations became impossible, then all forces would wage a prolonged partisan struggle, similar to that of 1942-45, to prove that, while the country could be swallowed, it could not be digested.

MASKIROVKA IN YUGOSLAV MILITARY THINKING

The concept of total national defence accepted that Yugoslavia would face greatly superior forces from the outset. The enemy's defeat, ie, the destruction of his will to persevere with the conflict, could only be achieved by avoiding operational disasters while inflicting upon the enemy a myriad of tactical defeats that would convince him that the war was unwinnable. For this reason, the YNA and TDF placed great stress on "the art of command and control and the tactical skill of each separate unit, even the smallest one, and of each individual", and also on, "camouflage, the concealed changing of positions, infiltration through the gaps in the enemy combat positions, *ruse de guerre* and the utilization of every opportunity to attack". Given this approach to warfighting, the Yugoslavs, drawing on their own, rich wartime experience and Soviet teaching, enthusiastically adopted the Soviet concept of *maskirovka* as an element of combat support essential to force protection and both defensive and offensive success.

Maskirovka is defined in the 1978 Soviet Military Encyclopaedia as follows: "A means of securing the combat operations and daily activity of forces; a complex of measures designed to mislead the enemy as to the presence and disposition of forces and various military objects, their condition, combat readiness and operations and also the plans of the commander....*Maskirovka* contributes to the achievement of surprise for the actions of forces, the preservation of combat readiness and the increased survivability of objects". It is a concept that combines the use of cover, concealment and camouflage, operational security, deception and misinformation. It thus comprises a mix of both passive and active measures. So central is it to Yugoslav and Soviet military thinking that it is described as a "mandatory form of combat support". *Maskirovka* is practised at all levels of military art.

- Strategic *maskirovka* is carried out at national and theatre levels to mislead the enemy as to political and military capabilities, intentions and the timing of actions. In these spheres, as war is but an extension of politics, it includes political, economic and diplomatic active measures as well as military.
- Operational *maskirovka* is conducted at *front* and army levels to conceal the operational plan, the extent and nature of preparations and thus to mislead the enemy as to the scope, scale, axis and timings of the operation.
- Tactical *maskirovka*, executed by divisions, units and sub-units, aims to conceal battle preparations and to wrong-foot the enemy through feints, ruses and demonstrations.

The aim of *maskirovka* is to help in the achievement of surprise. As Red Army Field Regulations (1944) inform the reader, "surprise dumbfounds the enemy, paralyses his will and deprives him of the ability to offer organized resistance". Misled as to force ratios and expecting an attack (or defence/counter blow) at a different time and/or place and on a different axis, the enemy will be maldeployed and working to a decision which does not accord with objective circumstances. His subsequent decision making will be complicated and probably delayed and he may be persuaded to deploy his reserves belatedly and /or on the wrong axis. He will thus be forced to engage in combat in unfavourable circumstances, possibly with troops demoralized as a result of being surprised. Surprise is achieved by:

- keeping the plans for forthcoming actions secret and leading the enemy to expect something quite different;

- the swift regrouping of forces and their concealment, enabling the concentration of overwhelming force at the decisive location and time;
- the unexpected opening of annihilating fire and the mounting of unexpected and swift attacks;
- the employment of weapons and/or combat methods unexpected by the enemy.

Methods used in *maskirovka* include the following:

- ensuring the secrecy of plans through strict operational/communications security, the limited distribution of plans and the elimination or limitation of indicators that will be of use to enemy intelligence;
- concealing real concentrations and targets from enemy reconnaissance and altering the external appearance of objects;
- destroying/repelling enemy reconnaissance and interfering with its technical capabilities;
- setting up false concentrations (including dummy radio nets and radars) and false targets;
- enforcing sound discipline and using artificial noise in false concentrations;
- feint/ demonstrative actions by real forces, often followed by covert regrouping;
- disseminating false information and rumours;

For *maskirovka* to be successful, several conditions must be met.

- Deception must appear credible to the enemy. Ideally, it should accord with the carefully planted and nurtured expectations of the enemy commander. Often, it will be enough to present an ambiguous picture, for then the enemy will choose to believe that which accords with his expectations.
- The *maskirovka* plan must complement the real plan; elements of the latter divined by the enemy must be explicable within the context of the former.
- The *maskirovka* plan must be worked out at the highest practical level. It must be the responsibility of a single commander and staff. These must identify the missions to be accomplished at each stage and specify the details of the nature, location and timing of tasks to be executed by designated formations and units; otherwise, inconsistencies will appear which will prejudice credibility. They must monitor the implementation of passive measures to ensure their effectiveness and also the enemy reactions to determine whether or not deception is working. They must be prepared to recommend and implement changes and development of the plan in the light of enemy reactions.
- The principles of naturalness, diversity, continuousness and imaginative activity must be followed. At all costs, stereotype must be avoided as fatal to credibility.

CONCLUSION: MASKIROVKA UNDER CONTEMPORARY CONDITONS

The difficulties in implementing *maskirovka* plans have grown immensely as the sophistication of ISTAR assets available to advanced armed forces has increased and their numbers have proliferated. At the same time, *maskirovka* has grown in importance. The destructive power, accuracy and speed of reaction of modern weaponry is now such that the concealment of real forces and the convincing simulation of dummy targets to draw fire is critical to the very survival of combat effective forces, never mind to victory in battle. It is particularly important in the initial period of war (the period of mobilization, concentration, deployment and the first battles). An attacker that succeeds in misleading the enemy may be able to deliver such a devastating first strike that the outcome of the war will be decided by

it. Conversely, a defender who manages to conceal his forces and preserve their combat effectiveness while at the same time convincing the attacker that his strikes have been effective may find himself in a strong position to repulse invasion.

The conclusion drawn from these trends by Russian theorists is not that *maskirovka* has become too difficult but that more resources must be devoted to it and these must grow in sophistication to defeat modern ISTAR. Thus, for instance: wooden mock-ups will no longer suffice in simulations - dummies will need to have visual, thermal and radar signatures that resemble real equipments; smokes will have to be bispectral to defeat thermal as well as visual acquisition; ECM will have to be used to simulate airfields and bridges, etc, to confuse airborne radars.

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