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SURPRISE AND MASKIROVKA IN CONTEMPORARY WAR

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Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

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SURPRISE AND MASKIROVKA IN CONTEMPORARY WAR

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SURPRISE AND MASKIROVKA IN CONTEMPORARY WAR

The Soviets firmly believe that the nature, means, and potential impact of surprise and maskirovka evolve in consonance with changing conditions and changing times. This conviction is consistent with, if not an inevitable product of, their dialectical view of history. Changes in national attitudes (political, social) and mores, although difficult to measure, are part of the dialectical process. They determine impact and influence the atmosphere in which surprise and maskirovka are employed. More easily understood is the effect that changing technology has on prospects of achieving surprise. It is in this area that the potential effects of maskirovka's future use have been most pronounced.

The introduction of new weapons systems, nuclear weapons, computer technology, and a wide variety of technological innovations has confronted military planners with new problems. The Soviets certainly consider pertinent to the modern era the basic intent, method, technique, and perhaps the basic principles of surprise and maskirovka derived from a study of experience.[1] These basics must, however, be constantly and carefully reconsidered in the light of technological change, to ensure their continued applicability in contemporary or future war. Post-war writings had indicated that the Soviets have sought to keep abreast of those changes.

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Recent Soviet writings on surprise originate from Soviet research on the nature of the "initial period of war", in particular S. P. Ivanov's landmark study of 1974.[2] Subsequent Soviet military theorists have elaborated upon Ivanov's seminal work and have reached the following conclusions regarding the initial period of war:

- the tendency for the massive use of new means of armed struggle to have increasing importance in the initial period of war.

- the tendency for the results of the initial period to have increasing influence over the subsequent course of hostilities.

- the tendency for the scale of military operations to increase.

- the tendency for both sides to use surprise as the most important factor.

- the tendency for the initial period to shorten as a result of improved weaponry.

- the tendency for the role of maneuver to increase in importance.[3]

As a result of Ivanov's and other theorists' work, the Soviets now have a better understanding of the nature and dangers of the initial period of war and the role of deception in it. M. M. Kir'ian has asserted:

> The experience of the Second World War underscores the tendency for the initial period of war to shorten. . . . It also underscores the tendency for an increased scale and decisiveness of combat operations, and the desires of warring sides to achieve considerable results in the initial period of war in order to be able to exercise greater influence over the future course of war.
>
> From the experiences of earlier wars, it is clear that up to this time no one has fully achieved victory over the enemy in the initial period. However, the presence of nuclear weapons and large groupings of

> armed forces located in a high state of readiness, in the case of their surprise use at the present time, as in no earlier time, permits one to achieve in the very beginning of war those results which have a decisive influence on the course and even outcome of war.[4]

Having studied the changing nature of war in its initial phases, Kir'yan pondered the role of surprise in this new context and noted that nuclear weapons could be used either at the beginning or during the course of a war. Whether or not such weapons were used:

> The aggressor will try to unleash war by surprise. In this regard the development of the means for achieving strategic surprise is allotted exceptionally great attention. The experience of war has demonstrated that the aggressor, unleashing war by surprise, usually achieves considerable success.[5]

Kir'yan qualified this statement by noting elsewhere that: "The development of the technical means of reconnaissance [such as radio-electronic] makes the achievement of surprise difficult."[6] Consequently, he emphasized the importance of careful planning and execution of maskirovka measures to capitalize on surprise at all levels of war. Other writers have noted that the growing complexity and number of collection means have produced a veritable flood of information which, if not processed efficiently, can itself cause confusion and contribute to deception.

Theoretical discussions concerning the nature of war have intensified Soviet concern for deception and deepened Soviet understanding of the importance and complexity of maskirovka measures necessary to achieve the critical element of surprise in war.

Contemporary Soviet theorists accord surprise a dominant position in the litany of the principals of war, describing it as: "unexpected action which leads to the achievement of success in battle, operations and war."[7] Surprise, an exploitable and potentially decisive factor at all levels of war, "consists of the selection of time, methods, and means of combat actions which permit the delivery of a blow when the enemy is least prepared to repulse it in order to paralyze his will for organized resistance."[8] Surprise accords a force an advantage which, along with the exploitation of other factors, can produce victory. The stated prerequisites for achieving surprise today echo earlier prescriptions for success. Specifically, surprise is achieved by:

- misleading the enemy as to one's intentions [disinformation]
- maintaining the secrecy of one's own plans
- hiding combat preparations
- the use of new weapons, techniques, and forms of combat
- correct choice of the direction of the main blow and correct timing for its delivery
- unexpected air, artillery, and armor attacks and the surprise use of all types of forces
- rapid maneuver and the decisive actions that forestall enemy response and countermeasures
- conduct of fraudulent actions and deception [dummies, false installations, etc.]
- skillful use of terrain, weather, time of year, and season.[9]

Maskirovka, in its broadest definition, directly applies to five

of these nine prescribed measures and tangentially affects the success of all. The tone of these means remains markedly conventional and traditional.

The Soviets cite three prerequisites for the conduct of successful maskirovka and the achievement of surprise. First, planning secrecy is essential and particularly challenging, since time constraints on contemporary operations rule out reliance on the time consuming process of sequential planning. Today most offensive planning must be simultaneous, making secrecy and control of information more critical. To this end, the Soviets rely more heavily on automation of planning and command and control. Second, as in the past, successful offensive action requires secret assembly and concentration of forces and masking of main attack directions. Last, in a period of increased weapon lethality (non-nuclear as well as nuclear) maskirovka measures are necessary to assure reasonable survivability of forces, prior to and during combat.

To achieve these prerequisites, Soviet theorists recommend employment of a variety of combat-tested means. Communications discipline contributes to planning security and secrecy during the operation, and also provides a basis for communications deception prior to and during the operation. The nature of command and control structures should also be concealed before and during war.[10] This requires masking the initial organization of attacking forces, providing security of command and control posts, and concealing regroupment of forces during an operation.

Skillful use of demonstrations, simulations, and diversionary attacks on false and secondary directions are essential to confuse enemy intelligence regarding the real attack sector.

Disinformation of all types provides the atmosphere for successful development of the maskirovka plan at all levels. Disinformation should play on enemy preconceptions of one's own force, methods of attack, and offensive intentions. In general, disinformation affects the enemy psychologically and conditions him in anticipation to being surprised, as the Egyptians demonstrated in 1973. In particular, disinformation in service of a specific plan can help conceal intent, timing, location, and the scale of an offensive.

In a practical contemporary sense these judgments translate into a wide range of maskirovka practices the Soviets are likely to employ prior to or during any future conflict. The Soviets have always been adroit at the game of political deception, particularly the use of disinformation to exact political gains. In a potential nuclear context, the political aspect assumes greater importance, especially against an opposing coalition whose members lack a definite consensus. Pre-war deception efforts will include sophisticated political efforts to create false impressions regarding Soviet intent, to exploit dissension within the opposition, and to weaken the opposing coalition. These measures will continue into the initial stages of war. Soviet pre-hostility force positioning and selection of military objectives will also seek to divide their enemies politically, as

well as ultimately defeat them militarily.

The Soviets will exploit enemy stereotypes regarding their likely manner of initiating hostilities by encouraging their enemy to believe that full mobilization of the massive Soviet military and economic structure for war is necessary and will require an extensive time period, during which any opponent can marshal adequate defensive forces. Meanwhile the Soviets continue to streamline their warmaking machinery and prepare for rapid, paralyzing initial operations which seek to deny the enemy the will, if not the means, to resist. In this regard, the Soviets have drawn heavily on those experiences that involved surprise, surgical strikes which either accomplished or came near to accomplishing the desired goal: (the low countries, 1940; Russia, 1941; Vistula-Oder, 1945; Manchuria, 1945). As they did in 1939 against Japan and against Germany and Japan in 1944 and 1945, the Soviets will encourage and exploit enemy stereotypes regarding how they operate in war and will seek to take advantage of those stereotypes to surprise and gain advantage over their opponent.

The Soviets continue to recommend use of new operational and tactical methods not anticipated by the enemy. Such methods capitalize on enemy misconceptions and stereotypical views of the Soviets and imply thorough study by the Soviets of how their opponents view them. In a specific sense, the Soviet approach requires careful study of techniques suited to each and every offensive situation and selection of those which are both useful

and unconventional (such as Soviet exploitation of the Japanese stereotypical view of the Soviets in the Manchurian operation).

The ever-present threat of resort to nuclear weapons has compelled the Soviets to re-address the nature of deception prior to and during the initial period of war. This means, in particular, the use of measures to lessen the importance of traditional indicators of impending war, particularly mobilization. In the Soviet view, mobilization means war, almost in the sense that it did in 1914. Therefore, they have examined measures to prepare forces for war without resort to large-scale preliminary mobilization. These measures include provision for rapid, secret, selective pre-war mobilization using a variety of new technical means to reinforce forward-deployed forces, including air, tank transporters, or more imaginative use of rail nets.[11]

Observation of NATO practices indicates the potential for forward stocking of unit equipment that can be quickly manned in a pre-war period by hastily and secretly transported forces. This technique, combined with a Soviet propensity for retaining older equipment in theater after its replacement with newer versions, provides but one means for avoiding the massive movement of manpower and equipment forward on the eve of war. The Soviet system, often used in the past, to generate new units from existing units by use of pre-positioned cadre and weapons, can also marginally increase forward deployed forces without resort to classic mobilization and massive movements. High

peacetime manning levels within major headquarters can similarly provide required headquarters personnel for newly created major headquarters to command and control the expanded wartime force.

All of these measures can generate requisite Soviet force superiorities at the desired times and places during in the initial period of war, particularly in a war begun after only limited preparation time. In this regard, the Soviets have concluded that to achieve the required force superiority it is generally necessary to increase initial wartime force levels by between 50 and 100 percent before hostilities and to mask at least 50 percent of that increase.[12] As preparation times decrease, this reinforcement requirement also proportionality decreases.

The Soviets have long understood the necessity for masking actual wartime force configurations, as well as strength. Hence, it is likely that the peacetime structure serves both administrative functions and the function of maskirovka. By shifting force subordination on a geographical and functional basis, a more useful and streamlined wartime organization will emerge. This organization will be somewhat larger than its peacetime predecessor and will be tailored to conduct wartime operations in concert with Soviet views on the nature of initial offensive operations.

The requirements of wartime maskirovka dictate that the peacetime structure itself periodically change to reflect evolving Soviet force structure - but not enough to raise doubt

in the minds of enemy concerning its wartime appearance. For example, many Western observers believe the 19 division- and five army-Group of Soviet Forces, Germany (GSFG) would produce a single wartime front (figure 1). Study of past Soviet maskirovka practices indicates that such a force, with resubordination of units on a more rational geographical and functional basis and with minimal reinforcement, could actually form two fronts of at least three armies each (four armies each if some Warsaw Pact allies are added) (figure 2). With more extensive use of existing pre-positioned equipment and imaginative pre-hostility reinforcement, this two front force could add significant strength. In either case the Soviets would be far better able to achieve requisite force superiorities, in particular for an attack after more limited preparation time, against a less well prepared enemy coalition.

Thus, the changing nature of war has forced the Soviets to combine new maskirovka techniques at the strategic level with time-tested experiences that have not lost their current applicability.

Certainly modern technology has had an impact on deception on lower levels as well. To the traditional means of maskirovka such as masking, camouflage, radio deception, feints, demonstrations, and disinformation, have been added the more technical means of optical, radio-technical, sound, hydro-

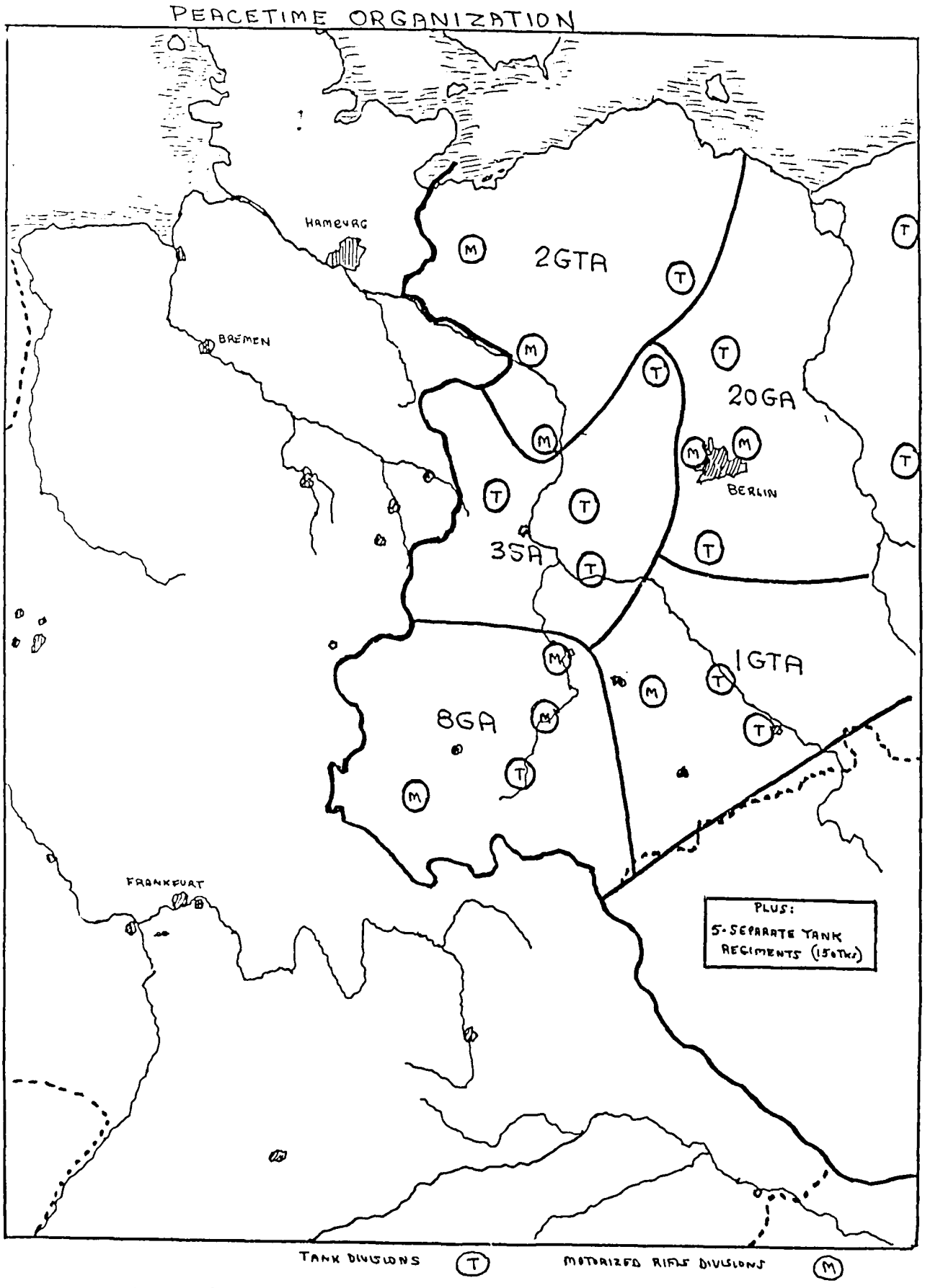
PEACETIME ORGANIZATION
HAMBURG
BREMEN
2GTA
20GA
BERLIN
3SA
1GTA
8GA
FRANKFURT
PLUS:
5-SEPARATE TANK
REGIMENTS (150TKS)
TANK DIVISIONS
MOTORIZED RIFLE DIVISIONS

Figure 1

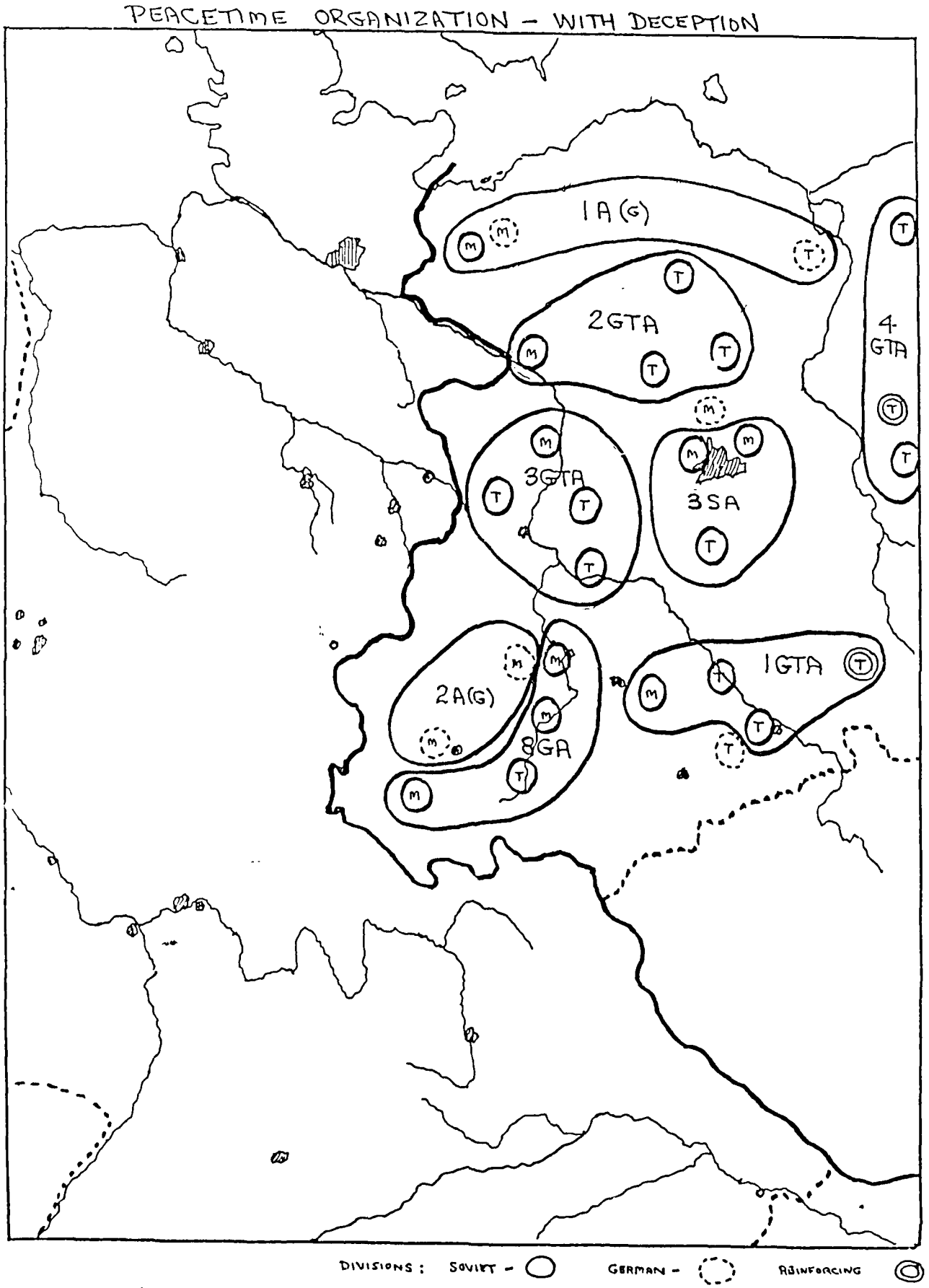
PEACETIME ORGANIZATION - WITH DECEPTION
1A(G)
2GTA
4 GTA
3GTA
3SA
2A(G)
8GA
1GTA
DIVISIONS: SOVIET -
GERMAN -
REINFORCING

Figure 2

acoustic, and radio deception measures--each with a well-defined function and role in the overall deception of the enemy.

All of these maskirovka means, and others, vary with the nature and conditions of the area of operations and are interdependent. Above all, the means must be suited to the end. What is undisputed is the importance of these measures in contemporary combat, for "in contemporary conditions the huge destructive power of weaponry so increases the importance of surprise in armed struggle that its achievement can not only secure successful resolution of assigned missions, but in certain conditions can also decide the outcome of the operation."[13]

Throughout the Soviet military experience there has been a basic continuity in treatment of military surprise and maskirovka. Certainly Soviet intent to use maskirovka to achieve surprise has remained a constant. Lenin's remonstrances that, "in warfare one does not inform the foe when an attack will occur," and, "one must try to catch the enemy unaware and seize the moment when his troops are scattered," seem to epitomize Soviet concerns for maskirovka.[14] The Soviets have long understood the inter-relationship of political (peacetime) and wartime deception, an understanding only heightened by recent studies of the initial period of war.

Soviet study and conduct of maskirovka have been characterized by emphasis of practical measures, and much of their experience has focused on determining what can realistically be achieved in war by maskirovka, rather than what

might be achieved as the ideal. Study goes on today with increased intensity, driven by the firm belief that "the role and importance of operational maskirovka measures in contemporary conditions have grown considerably." Consequently "the problem has an exceptionally great practical significance, and its future theoretical elaboration is one of the actual missions of Soviet military science."[15]

ENDNOTES

1. For details on this experience see David M. Glantz, Soviet Military Deception in the Second World War (London: Frank Cass, 1988).

2. S. P. Ivanov, Nachal'nyy period voyny [The initial period of war], (Moskva: Voyenizdat, 1974).

3. See M. Cherednichenko, "O nachal'nom periode Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny" [Concerning the initial period of the Great Patriotic War], Voyenno Istoricheskiy Zhurnal, No. 4 (April 1961), 28-35 (hereafter cited as VIZh); P. Korkodinov, "Fakti i mysli o nachal'nom periode Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny" [Facts and ideas about the initial period of the Great Patriotic War], VIZh, No. 10 (October 1965), 26-34; V. Baskakov, "Ob osobennostyakh nachal'nogo perioda voyny" [Concerning the peculiarities of the initial period of war], VIZh, No. 2 (February 1966), 29-34; A. Grechko, "25 let tomu nazad" [25 years ago], VIZh, No. 6 (June 1966), 8-15; I Bagramian, "Kharakter i osobennosti nachal'nogo perioda voyny" [The nature and peculiarities of the initial period of war], VIZh, No. 10 (October 1981), 20-27; V. Matsulenko, "Nekotoryye vyvody iz opyta nachal'nogo perioda Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny" [Some conclusions from the experience of the initial period of the Great Patriotic War], VIZh, No. 3 (March 1984), 35-42; A. I. Yevseyev, "O nekotorykh tendentsiyakh v izmenenii soderzhaniya i kharaktera nachal'nogo perioda voyny" [Concerning some tendencies in the changing form and nature of the initial period of war], VIZh, No. 11 (November 1985), 11-20.

4. M. M. Kir'yan, Problemy voyennoy teorii v sovetskikh nauchnospravochnykh izdaniyakh [The problems of military theory in Soviet scientific reference publications], (Moskva: "Nauka," 1985), 123-124.

5. Ibid., 113.

6. M. M. Kir'yan, "Vnezapnost'" [Surprise], Sovetskaya voennaya entsiklopediya [Soviet military encyclopedia] (Moscow: Voyenizdat, 1976), 2:163.

7. Ibid., 161.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid. For an explanation of each method of achieving surprise see M. M. Kir'yan, ed., Vnezapnost' v nastupatel'nykh operatsiyakh Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny [Surprise in offensive operations of the Great Patriotic War] (Moskva: "Nauka," 1986). Hereafter cited as Kir'yan, Vnezapnost'.

10. The Soviets have been masters at concealing actual combat organization of their forces, both during wartime and before the outbreak of war. They did this well against the Germans in June 1942 (although almost for naught) and again in August 1945 against the Japanese. During wartime, although German intelligence maintained a fairly complete Order of Battle for Soviet forces, they were repeatedly deceived regarding specific locations of major units and the organization of forces facing them in critical sectors. See Glantz, Soviet Military Deception.

11. K. M. Keltner, G. H. Turbiville, Jr., "Soviet Reinforcement in Europe," Military Review, April 1987, 34-50, contains an excellent description of Soviet views on and capabilities for rapid reinforcement.

12. This judgement is based on analysis of Soviet deception plans and correlation of forces in ninety operations during the Great Patriotic War.

13. Kir'yan, Vnezapnost', 199.

14. Ibid., 230.

15. Ibid., 195.