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Differences in Russian Military Planning Underscore Importance of "Thinking Red"

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Russian operational military planning places emphasis on strategic assessments, historical analysis, and mathematical formulations to reduce the uncertainties of battle, ensure a common approach to planning, and outpace Western processes. Russian tactical military planning is based on political direction, advice from senior commanders, and assigned mathematical calculations. Both operational and tactical planning prioritize form and mathematics, in contrast to U.S. planning focused on commander's intent and course of action (COA) development. To emulate Russian planning, U.S. and partner analysts could examine military problems through functional analysis instead of the military decisionmaking process (MDMP). This approach may provide the U.S. Army better intelligence products; advice to commanders; and emulation of the threat in wargames, exercises, and training.

RUSSIAN OPERATIONAL MILITARY PLANNING

Russian operational military planning places emphasis on strategic assessments, historical analysis, and mathematical formulations to reduce the uncertainties of battle, ensure a common approach to planning, and outpace Western processes.[1] Russian planners likely consider NATO tools that rely on standardized frameworks as too restrictive and slow since Russia assumes each conflict requires its own logic.

Russian planners conduct continuous strategic assessments about the type of action they may need to employ against specific adversaries. Planners conduct a broad inquiry into an adversary's military capabilities, political and military strategies, technical capabilities, economy, and culture. The planners examine what they call adversary "Forms and Methods," which include all organizational structures, weapons, and tools. This examination is a continuous process that is updated as new information is received.[2] Through this evaluation, Russia decides if direct, indirect, or asymmetric action is required.

Russian military thinkers believe historical lessons provide elements of warfare that are "law-governed," enabling the prediction of standard mathematical trends.[3] For Russian planners, history provides laws of war that are a basis for scientific analysis. This foundation applies the quantitative and qualitative aspects of historical conflicts to predict the general direction of the conflict and the implications of different force ratios in combat and is known as correlation of forces and means (COFM).[4] The Russian COFM calculation is more than just analysis of opposing sides' equipment. Russian processes also attempt to account for higher-level combat systems versus systems as well as the quality of equipment, interfaces, and human operators on both sides.[5]

Planners use these COFM formulations to determine forces needed to ensure success on the battlefield for specific tasks. The calculation plots a curve that describes the rate of change during combat. It ends with the annihilation of one side and the percentage of loss suffered by the victor.[6] Fighting to the last man is rare, so a point of surrender is assessed, and variables are adjusted for the preferred retention of Russia's own forces at the point of victory. The approach is fundamentally deterministic, assuming everything that happens is predetermined—regardless of external will—and it does not account for different components having varying capabilities and vulnerabilities.[7] Modern Russian COFM analysis involves computer-based calculations that help planners decide force compositions and COAs.[8] The values are provided by higher formations and capture intangible and qualitative factors like fighting spirit, training, strategy, weather, terrain, and random variables indexed over time to reveal average values.[9]

TRADITIONAL RUSSIAN PLANNING RATIOS			
Delay		1:6	
Defend (from a prepared position)		1:3	
Defend (from a hasty position)		1:2.5	
Attack (a fortified position)		3:1	
Attack (a hasty position)		2.5:1	
Counterattack (against a flank)		1:1	

Figure 1: Early 1990s COFMS Diagram (Source: TRADOC G-2)

RUSSIAN TACTICAL MILITARY PLANNING

The Russian tactical commander and his staff conduct planning and mathematical verification based on political direction, advice from senior commanders, and the assigned COFM calculations.[10] Using political direction and advice from headquarters, the commander completes his personal analysis of the mission to formulate a plan to provide to his staff. The staff assesses feasible COAs using a decision matrix, similar to an analysis of competing hypotheses. This decision matrix includes variables from COFM calculations and graphical calculating charts that help the staff rapidly determine frontages, rates of advance, duration and density of fire, and expenditure of ammunition.[11, 12] The commander then chooses his preferred COA and issues a combat order. This takes the form of a battle map and written annex, detailing tactical missions, objectives, phase lines, and targets.

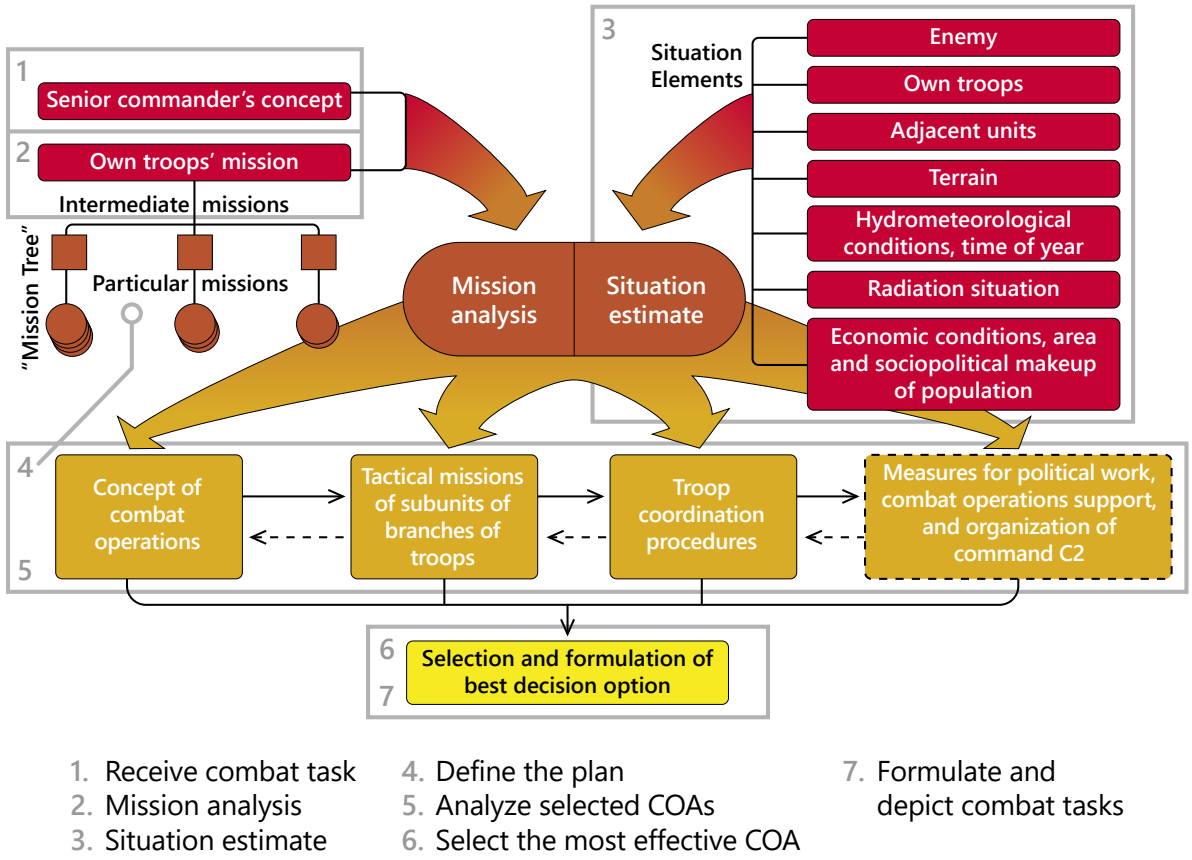

Figure 2: Russian COA Development Steps (Source: TRADOC G-2)

The procedural nature of this process is deliberate, as it supports smaller staff sections and reduces chances for subordinate commanders to exercise initiative. Russian tactical formations employ smaller staffs than comparable U.S. units. For example, a Russian motorized rifle regiment has only five personnel in its operations section, whereas a U.S. Stryker brigade combat team's operations section consists of 56 Soldiers.[13] Additionally, the Russian mathematical verification process is not conducted below the regimental level.[14] Lower tactical formations are not expected to independently plan. Instead, they assign forces to complete tactical tasks from a higher echelon with published combat regulations via deliberate battle drills that require minimal orders or decisionmaking.[15] These regulated procedures and strict hierarchies make it difficult for tactical commanders to act on their initiative; tactical agility is achieved through each commander's knowledge of their forces.[16]

HELPING A WESTERN ANALYST PLAN LIKE A RUSSIAN PLANNER

Russian planning focused on form and mathematics differs greatly from U.S. planning, which is focused on commander's intent and creative COA development. Russian planners seek to provide subordinate commanders with guidance on what capabilities, formations, and actions they require to accomplish a mission. Their processes minimize uncertainty and creativity by using formulaic and mathematical verification. This approach seeks to enable tactical echelons to execute well-rehearsed

U.S. Military Decisionmaking Process	Russian Planning Process
Provides Guidance and Direction	Provides Guidance
Staff Creative Thinking	Mathematical Verification
Maximizes Tactical Initiative	Relies on Well-Rehearsed Battle Drills
Enables Mission Command	Requires Rigid Command and Control

Figure 3: Comparison of Planning Methodologies (Source: TRADOC G-2)

battle drills to accomplish the mission with minimal decisionmaking. The U.S. MDMP, on the other hand, seeks to provide subordinate commanders with purpose and options to accomplish a specific mission. It is driven by a commander's vision, intent, and guidance and the staff's creative thinking to offer multiple COAs. The U.S. approach seeks to maximize tactical commanders' initiative to accomplish the overall mission.

Western analysts using MDMP or similar processes to emulate Russian planning risk failures related to mirror imaging; however, functional analysis is an alternative analytic framework to better emulate Russian planning. Figure 3 outlines a process by which a Western analyst might structure their planning process to more closely align with the Russian planning process. This framework focuses thought processes on function over form and weights "what" must occur to accomplish a mission over "how" to accomplish the mission. This process uses the same "what" versus "how" methodology to examine the adversary approach to the problem. This method is taught by the U.S. Army TRADOC G-2 and the British Army's Task Force Hannibal as part of the Threat Tactics Course.

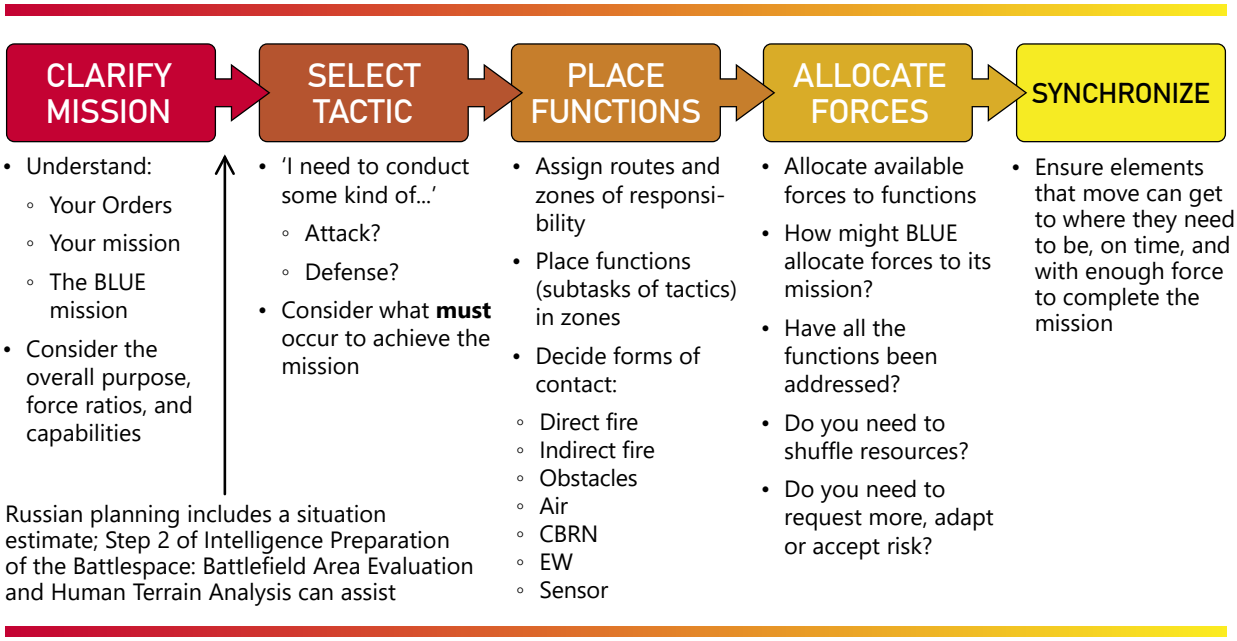

Figure 4: Functional Analysis Framework (Source: TRADOC G-2)

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE U.S ARMY

Better understanding Russian planning processes can provide the U.S. Army with options to create improved intelligence products; provide more adversary-informed advice to commanders; and better emulate the adversary in wargames, exercises, and training.

- Intelligence analysts could use Russian functional frameworks to identify how Russian forces likely assess their COFM relative to the supported unit. This could help uncover potential vulnerabilities and areas the adversary may be trying to exploit.
- Planners could exploit the rigidity inherent in Russian plans, which are often designed to achieve a specific, predetermined outcome. With an accurate assessment of the Russian end-state, planners could use their creativity to generate multiple options for the commander that would create unexpected events the Russian systems likely cannot effectively counter.
- Wargamers seeking to accurately emulate Russian commanders and staff could base their emulated force compositions and COAs on more rigid mathematical-based COFM calculations. This may reduce the amount of mirror imaging and provide a more realistic training environment for the Army, although this approach may also restrict the OPFOR's flexibility and lessen the difficulty of the training.

ENDNOTES

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