

EVOLUTION OF MILITARY OPERATIONS PERCEPTION

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Abstract

The term operation is in military theory and practice commonly used word. Despite appearances, that its meaning is generally clear and does not need more detailed specification, history has shown that its perception was not always identical. The reason is the fact that this concept must continuously adapt to the current state of warfare, which reflects the social conditions of the historical period. Even in present days, in time of complex security crises appear facts which point to the need to revise the meaning of that term.

Keywords

operation, military operation, military art, military science, comprehensive approach



Historical aspects of the term military operation

Historically, the term “operation” comes from Old French (operacion) and Latin (operationem). The term was introduced at the end of the 14th century. It expressed an activity, exercise, work. In the military sense, as »a series of movements and activities«¹, the term was used since 1749.

In this context we can meet with the collocation “military operation” in the works of the classics, such as Carl von Clausewitz and Antoine Henri Jomini. Both authors used the term in a wider perspective and expressed it as an organized military activity at the strategic as well as tactical level of warfare. Clausewitz stated phrases as »kleinen Operationen des Krieges« (small war operations), »Operationsbasis« (operational bases), »Operationslinien«² (lines of operations). Jomini applied this concept in the expression »De Différentes Opérations Mixtes, qui participent a la fois la Straégie et de la Tactique« (blended operations, the nature of which is partly strategic and partly tactical). Analogously to Clausewitz, Jomini developed the theory of »des bases d’operations« (operational bases) and »des zones et des lignes d’operations«³ (operational zones, and operational lines).

1 Online Etymology Dictionary.

2 CLAUSEWITZ, C. von, Vom Kriege. p. 28, 98, 221.

3 JOMINI, A. H., Précis de l’art de la guerre, p. 439, 152, 195.

A different situation existed in the Tsarist Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union. Here, the term began to be used in the context of the introduction of an operational art as a new category of military art, which linked military strategy and military tactics. From the large number of outstanding military theorists that era a particular attention deserves A. A. Svechin, who first introduced the concept of operational art. Svechin based his work on the lessons that stemmed from the specifics of the 1st World War. New factors were represented by the wide battlefields and continuous fronts, a rapid implementation of the industrial revolution findings into military affairs, the mass and resilient armies as well as an inability of total defeat of an enemy in one battle. Svechin articulated that »the expansion of a battle over time and space has led to a situation in which a battle has disintegrated into separate pieces which are evident only in an entire operation«⁴. Further, he put more exactly that »battles are the components of an operation that tactically accomplish a number of missions into which the goal of the operation is divided«⁵. Svechin considered a battle as a mean of an operation and operation as a mean of war. He understood tactics as a mean of an operational art and operational art as a mean of strategy.⁶ Overall it can be concluded that the operation has shifted from the tactical level to the new operational and strategic level. Revolutionary theory of operational art, with the new definition of the operation's status, was practically confirmed during the large operations of Red Army during 2nd World War. Identical perception of operations was continuing in the coming decades. Soviet Military Encyclopaedia defines an operation as »a form of warfare conducting by the operational (operational- strategic) armed forces formations«⁷.

Slovak approach to military operation terminology prior to nato membership

Military science and military art of the Soviet Union as the dominant countries of the Warsaw Pact also influenced the theoretical approaches of other countries united in this military organization. Other countries practically took over the Soviet theory of operations and operational art. An exception was neither former Czechoslovakia, later Czechoslovak Socialist Republic.

In the military terminological standard is stated, that an operation is »a complex of warfare of one or more operational (operational- strategic) formations, one or more types of services in a specific space and time, with a single intention and plan, to achieve specific operational or strategic goals«⁸. To demonstrate the use of the term of operation in conjunction with a large military formation is appropriate to present a definition of an operational task force. "Operational task force is a large military unit of one type

4 SVECHIN, A. A., *Strategy*, p. 271.

5 *Ibidem*. p. 276.

6 ŠILHA, J., *O vojenskom umení*. p. 51.

7 OGARKOV, N. V. et al., *Sovetskaja vojennaja encyklopedija*. p. 64.

8 *Vševojsková operační a taktická terminologie*: 1. díl.

of military service with a variable organizational structure. It is created and designed to perform operational or sub-strategic tasks. According to its assignment, the task force consists of a variable number of combined arms units, arms units, service units, and the command and services authorities. For example a task force is an army (combined, tank, air, air defence and other).⁹ In line with the theory of that time, operations can be divided into army, front and strategic operations.

Military theory concerning the operations of the Army of the Slovak Republic, after becoming an independent country in 1993, continued the trend of previous joint army. The operation was steadily considered »the highest form of activities of the Slovak Armed Forces«¹⁰. Even it was conceded that large strategic operations involving several fronts of an international composition and combined arms operations are unrealistic, operations were still tied to the strategic and operational level (Table 1). The main operational formation, given the reduction of people and equipment in the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic became the Corps.

| Part of Military art | Scope of warfare | Forces participation | Goal of warfare |
|----------------------|--|--|-----------------|
| military strategy | armed conflict strategic defence operation | armed forces of the state | strategic |
| operational art | all other types of operations | operational formation (one or more Corps) | operational |
| military tactics | engagement | formations units | tactical |

Table 1 Position of an operation within the military art of the Army of the Slovak Republic¹¹

An effort to develop the new operational procedures of the Army of the Slovak Republic was reflected in a publication "Preparation and execution of operations", which came into force in early 1997. This document, in essence, did not turn from previous lines and operations situated within the operational and strategic framework. A Corp defence operation was an integral part of a strategic operation of the Army of the Slovak Republic. An operation represented »a complex of warfare, engagements and strokes matched in terms of objectives, tasks, place and time«¹². This regulation until its abolition in 2009 has undergone several modifications, but the linkage between an operation and operational formation replaced only relationship of an operation with "created task forces". Association of an operation with the operational and strategic level on one side and engagement with the tactical level on the other hand, remained unchanged. Shift of the approach to

9 Ibidem.

10 TUREK, J., HOMOLA, J., Základy operačného umenia. p. 51.

11 Ibidem. p. 5. Adopted.

12 S-Oper-1-1 Priprava a vedenie operácií. p. 34.

operations occurred not until the conditions of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic. It has happened after Slovakia's accession to NATO, when the Armed Forces had to adapt to the doctrinal environment of the Alliance.

The Alliance attitude to operation

In the western armies' environment, the concept of operation is for many years standardly used to refer to military action, which is not determined by the size of military unit, type of activity or by the level of its planning and execution.

For example, the Field Manual of the U.S. Army from 1939 stated that »the duration of a tactical operation can seldom be predicted«¹³. Elsewhere in the document, it can be found a text with a meaning that »reconnaissance is the operation of obtaining information in the field ...«¹⁴. A contemporary dictionary of joint military activities of the U.S. Armed Forces defines the operation in two senses:

1. A sequence of tactical actions with a common purpose or unifying theme.
2. A military action or the carrying out of a strategic, operational, tactical, service, training, or administrative military mission.¹⁵

A British military dictionary defines operation in a wider manner as »a generic term which includes the military action to achieve the objectives of a tactical, campaign or strategic plan«¹⁶.

NATO, in the first part of its interpretation, has opted for the definition used by the U. S. Armed Forces and thus an operation is consistently characterized as »a military action or the carrying out of a strategic, tactical, service, training, or administrative military mission«¹⁷. The next part of the definition underlines the link to the fight, wherein an operation constitutes »the process of carrying on combat, including movement, supply, attack, defence and manoeuvres needed to gain the objectives of any battle or campaign«¹⁸. Rigid linkage of an operation to combat is currently restrictive. It makes that the definition does not reflect the real, variable activities of military units employed in a complex operational environment. Another new factor is the participation of non-military actors in the conflict, which would also be taken into account within the new definition.

Previous facts forced a rethink of NATO's attitude to operation. During the year 2013 NATO Standardization Agency lead a lively polemic about this concept. Finally, a new definition has been recommended where »operation is a sequence of coordinated actions with

13 FM 100-5 Operations. p. 55.

14 Ibidem. p. 42.

15 JP 1-02 Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms. p. 194.

16 JDP 0-01.1 United Kingdom Supplement to the NATO Terminology Database. p. O-1.

17 AAP-6 NATO Glossary of Terms and Definitions (English and French). p. 2-O-2.

18 Ibidem.

a defined purpose. Notes: 1. NATO operations are military. 2. NATO operations contribute to a wider approach including non-military actions¹⁹.

From the new definition of an operation, which does not contain an attribute military, is possible to extract the three operation's fundamental elements: actions, coordinated and purpose. Additional notes are critical for the new definition. They further specify the NATO innovative perspective on operation. Without the first note it could be misunderstood that NATO can also use non-military capabilities. Given the fact that the Alliance disposes only of military forces of its member states, this consideration would be wrong. The second note indicates that NATO's operations are affected by numerous factors of the operational environment. At the same time, NATO operations have a direct impact on these factors. NATO's operations contribute to the achievement of wider policy objectives together with the efforts of others (even non-military) actors.

The new definition of the operation is not in conflict with the existing wording used in NATO doctrines, i.e. it does not require extensive reworking the alliance publications. It only provides a new, universal view of operations and helps reach a consensus within a comprehensive approach to the planning and conducting of operations under the leadership of a respected international security authority, the UN optimal.²⁰

Conclusion

For the correct perception of complex and interacting activities which collectively form the operation is essential right orientation in the dynamic evolution of the operational environment. Operational environment, which represents a certain part of a wider security environment, is a complex system of elements and their functional links. Changes in the operational environment, in its natural and social dimensions, have their reflection in the character of current conflicts. If a military contribution in international crisis management wants to be efficient, the operation concept must respond to these changes.

Planning and execution of military activities require military cooperation with other actors participating in the conflict resolution. The so-called comprehensive approach is a determining aspect of the current crisis management.²¹ Awareness of the unreality of a successful resolution of the conflict only with military means, has also led to the need for adaptation of military operations understanding. The current operation must be comprehended as a coordinated sequence of actions, where each actor, military or non-military, contributes its activity to the achievement of a single unifying purpose.

19 Terminology meeting – 24 and 25 September 2013.

20 MAJCHÚT, I., Armed forces as a tool for co-operation. p. 105.

21 GANOCZY, Š., HRNČIAR, M., Analýza operačných faktorov v zastavanom prostredí. p. 636.

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