# PLANNING DECEPTION AT THE OPERATIONAL LEVEL OF WAR

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*Deception has long been an essential component of military operations. It can be considered a tactic as old as warfare, having been used since immemorial times. From Sun Tzu's "Art of War" to the present days, military strategists have recognized its power to turn the tide of conflict. Although, over the years, the methods, means and techniques specific to it have continuously evolved, along with technological developments, its basic principle remains the same: portraying a false reality to the adversary that leads to the materialization of operational opportunities, by causing the adversary to adopt courses of action disadvantageous to him. As the battlefield has become increasingly complex, the ability to deceive the adversary has also become an increasingly important asset to the success of military operations. Today, in an era of instant and abundant information, deception has paradoxically become more difficult to achieve and more critical to operational success. The deceptive action of the Ukrainians at Kherson last September against the Russians once again demonstrated its importance on the modern battlefield.*

*However, many military planners tend to overlook this key aspect of military strategy despite its importance. This oversight can lead to grave consequences in the modern battlefield, where the enemy's ability to gather intelligence can hinder operational success. For this reason, the present paper is an analysis of how deception actions can be integrated into the operational planning process at the operational level in order to maximize the chances of their success and, consequently, the military operation success. The need for such a scientific approach arises from the complexity of the deception process, which places a special emphasis not only on the thoroughness in planning these actions but also on the need to integrate and synchronize them with other military actions.*

*Keywords: deception; planning; operational level; information; war;*





ROMANIAN MILITARY THINKING

## INTRODUCTION

War has always been a significant part of human life. People have engaged in armed conflict for a variety of reasons, including territory, political power, natural resources, religion, and ideology. Throughout history, wars have been fought in various forms, from small clashes between neighbouring tribes or states, to large-scale global conflicts such as the two world wars. Nevertheless, the fundamental nature of it remains essentially unchanged. It is a clash of wills, a violent struggle, and a chaotic endeavour. War is often a mix of elements such as friction, fog, uncertainty, manoeuvres and deception. It is a multifaceted and complex undertaking that can have devastating effects on both sides involved in the conflict.

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One of the key features of warfare is considered to be deception. It has long been seen as a huge enabler for military success. We might even state that it is rooted within its very own nature. Man has always tried to come up with solutions to surprise its opponent in order to gain a position of advantage. Regardless of the character of war, deception has been a constant of almost every confrontation. One might even argue that deception is as old as conflict itself. Oldest examples dates thousands of years ago. One of the most famous examples takes us back to ancient Greece. It is well-known the case of the Trojan Horse, which was a decisive ruse that facilitated the Greeks access into the well defended Troy city during the Trojan War, more than 3000 years ago. Since then, history is full of examples that emphasise the importance of deception throughout military conflicts.

However, considering the complexity of the contemporary operating environment, the ability to identify feasible solutions to the problems encountered on the battlefield has grown exponentially. This aspect puts huge emphasis on the operations planning process as the way to come up with those solutions that can bring about the desired conditions for the envisioned end-state of the conflict.

Furthermore, today's operating environment stresses the importance of synchronizing the effects of all military services across the whole spectrum of operational domains to achieve the strategic aims. Understanding that the whole is greater than the total of its components is of utmost importance to achieve success in modern conflicts. As a consequence, getting the complete joint impact is crucial in order to dominate the opponent, thus emphasizing the importance of the operational level to plan and synchronize those effects.

While NATO's operational doctrine does provide a framework for incorporating the three concepts highlighted before – deception, planning and operational level –, this framework does not address the full range of elements related to this topic. Despite it, western armed forces have recognized the importance of conducting deception operations and have recently developed specific doctrines to address the subject, but there's still room for improvement in this area.

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In light of the above-mentioned aspects, the research addresses the following primary question: *Considering the importance of deceit in modern warfare, how can western armed forces deception planning be optimized at the operational level?*

In this regard, the article's primary goal is to identify how deception can be better integrated in the *operational level planning process (OLPP)* to enable improved outcomes on the battleground.

In order to identify solutions to the problem presented before we have tried to provide answers to the following subsequent research questions:

- *Why does the operational level of war really matter and what are its main features?*

- *What benefits can planning at the operational level bring and which are key considerations with respect to the OLPP?*

- *How does deception work at this level and what are the main benefits of integrating deception in the overall concept of operations?*

- *What are the specific activities that need to be integrated within the OLPP, and how?*

In this respect, the paper contains two key aspects that operational level commanders as well as key planning, operations and intelligence staff should be interested in. First, our article explains why militaries





should use deception at the operational level of war, thus providing a solid background for the importance of the research theme to the community of researchers in the warfare domain. Second, it provides a suitable solution to integrate two extremely important processes at the operational level: the OLPP and the deception process.

To this end, we first conduct a comparative analysis of some representative western actors' planning processes to include, NATO, the US, or Canada. The aim of choosing this research method is to find similarities between the processes in order to better integrate the deception process steps, which are also analysed in this paper.

Moreover, we have used the qualitative method of content analysis to detect patterns with respect to deception theory in the western military doctrines. This method provided our research with the specific concepts used in deception operations as well as with the concrete steps one should consider when planning such actions.

Based on the information obtained regarding to the OLPP and deception process, we have then used deduction to optimize the OLPP in order to be better suited for planning deception operations as well.

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## THE OPERATIONAL LEVEL OF WAR

The level of war at which major battles and campaigns are organized, coordinated and conducted to achieve strategic objectives is known as the *operational level of war*. It is the stage where commanders apply their own expertise to develop optimal solutions to the problem they are facing. The operational level of operations plays a critical role in any conflict, providing the link between strategic planning and tactical execution. Effective operational planning and good coordination of actions at this level contribute to the success of missions and the achievement of strategic objectives. However, they require a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the operating environment by addressing all aspects related to the physical, geographical, political, economic and social context, as well as the relationships between them. Nowadays, in the context of evolving technology, the global security environment and the nature of current conflicts, the operational level continues to remain a critical component of modern military operations, with the responsibility to coordinate and execute military

actions in an efficient and adaptive manner, in accordance with the strategic objectives and the specific context of the conflict. It bridges the gap between the strategic and tactical levels of war, providing a framework for the planning and execution of military operations. We consider that, in today's operational environment, the importance of the operational level of war cannot be overstated, the following arguments sustaining this statement:

❖ *Complexity of modern warfare.* The complexity of modern warfare is the result of a combination of technological, political and socio-economic factors that influence the way they are planned and conducted. In this context, modern warfare is characterized by a high degree of complexity and uncertainty. Contemporary operating environment can be characterized as being volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (TC 7-102, 2014, pp. 1-2). All the mentioned aspects amplify the pressure on military forces to find proper solutions to the problems encountered. The operational level of war provides a structured approach to understanding the complex operational environment, and enables military planners and decision-makers to develop effective strategies to achieve operational objectives.

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❖ *Integration of multiple domains.* Military operations in the modern era often require the integration and synchronization of multiple operational domains. It is due to the increasingly complex nature of today's threats and challenges, which require multidimensional and interconnected approaches. Contemporary operations often involve the combination of land, sea, air, cyber and information efforts. The integration of these operational areas allows for creating a synergistic effect and maximizing the results obtained. In addition, military structures should address the cognitive effects generated in the information environment, an increasingly significant element for the way current conflicts are conducted. In this respect, the operational level of war provides a framework for coordinating these disparate elements, ensuring that they are integrated and synchronized to achieve operational objectives.

❖ *Importance of joint and multinational operations*. Joint and multinational military operations have become a constant in today's security and defence environment. It is due to the need to address





complex global threats and respond to cross-border challenges to ensure stability and security in a complex and interconnected world. Multinational military operations bring innumerable benefits as well as a number of challenges. Perhaps the most important of them is the interoperability of forces, whether procedurally or technologically, but especially cognitively. In this regard, the operational level of war establishes a common language and framework for planning and executing joint and coalition operations, ensuring that all partners and all force categories are aligned and synchronized toward the achievement of common objectives.

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❖ *Need for adaptive and agile operations*. Modern operational environment is characterized by rapid change and uncertainty. It requires a flexible organization that can easily transform and adapt to the circumstances in order to overcome difficulties on the battleground. The need for adaptive and agile military operations can be considered another dimension of the complexity of modern warfare. In the face of an ever-changing security environment, the armed forces must be able to rapidly adapt and adjust their strategies and tactics to meet the threats and challenges specific to the battlefield. It implies flexibility in the planning and execution of military operations, as well as the ability to make quick and effective decisions in real time. The operational level of war offers a framework for adaptive and agile operations, enabling military forces to quickly adjust their plans and tactics in response to changing conditions on the battlefield. It ensures a coherent adaptation for all services involved in conflict, but also provides consistency with respect to generating operational effects in support of the military objectives.

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❖ *Importance of information and intelligence.* Information and intelligence are critical components of modern military operations. The information environment has grown exponentially and has a huge impact on the conflict outcomes. Information is an increasingly valuable asset in modern conflicts. They are essential for making informed decisions, detecting and assessing threats, coordinating operations and monitoring outcomes. The ability to collect, analyse and use the appropriate information can make the difference in achieving strategic and operational advantage in a complex and dynamic theatre

of operations. Today, timely access to accurate information can be an extremely important advantage for the success of military operations. The operational level of war ensures a framework for the collection, analysis, and dissemination of information and intelligence, enabling military forces to make informed decisions and maintain situational awareness on the battlefield. The ability to collect information with sensors specific to different services, as well as their integrated analysis, considerably supports the reduction of the risk of misunderstanding the operational situation.

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Considering the facts highlighted before, the operational level of war plays a key role in modern warfare, being a framework for understanding the complex and uncertain operating environment, integrating multiple domains and partners, conducting adaptive and agile operations, and leveraging information and intelligence. It also facilitates the coherence of the tactical level activities to generate specific operational effects that can shape the environment in accordance with the strategic objectives.

The practice of deception has been a fundamental element of war since ancient times and has played an essential role at the operational level as well. Both concepts, operational level of war and deception operations, are intricately linked, as the latter, at this level, can be crucial in creating confusion, exploiting vulnerabilities, and achieving strategic goals by providing the opportunities needed to gain the upper hand on the battlefield. However, considering the complexity of the contemporary environment, the need to develop proper solutions has increased in importance as well. It also affects deception and puts huge emphasis on the planning of operations, which is actually the main function of this level.

## PLANNING OPERATIONS AT THE OPERATIONAL LEVEL

Planning is of utmost importance to any military operation. It is the first stage of the operation process and all other stages depend on the quality of its products. It allows proper coordination of resources, the creation of achievable goals, and the development of strategies that takes into account potential obstacles and contingencies.





In addition, through planning, potential risks and threats are analysed and identified before the operation begins. It allows for preventive measures to be taken and appropriate countermeasure strategies to be implemented. Planning helps to anticipate difficult situations and prepare appropriate solutions.

Operational-level planning also ensures effective coordination between the various military components of the military operation, such as land, air, or naval forces. It makes it easier to synchronize actions and avoid confusion or counterproductive actions. Through planning, effective links and communications are established between units and commanders.

Moreover, planning allows the development of alternative plans in case the situation changes or unpredictability occurs. Flexibility in planning allows adaptation to new information and modification of the operational approach to cope with situational changes. By taking the time to plan ahead, military operations can be undertaken with greater confidence and assurance of success. *"Planning is the art and science of understanding a situation, envisioning a desired future, and determining effective ways to bring that future about".* (FM5-0, 2022, pp. 1-1)

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Planning is an important part of any endeavour, as it provides a roadmap for achieving desired goals. It is the process of envisioning a desired future and develop the necessary steps to bring it about. It entails understanding the current state of affairs and then utilizing that knowledge alongside the experience to create a plan that will help to achieve the desired goal. The planning process requires clear objectives and measurable actions that can be monitored along the way. It can help ensure that progress is made towards the desired outcome in an efficient and effective manner.

Planning is the first step in solving a problem. Unless for pure luck, there is no way one can address and solve a situation without a plan. The more complex the circumstance, the more pressure on the precision of the planning process. As a consequence, planning is a valuable tool for any organization or individual looking to achieve their goals.

Moreover, the complexity of the current operating environment specific to military operations requires rigorous and adaptable planning, emphasizing the importance of the fidelity of this process. Hybrid threats, the volatility and uncertainty of the contemporary environment, advanced technology, the involvement of non-state actors, and political and social factors are just some of the complex elements that military commanders must contend with. Military operations planning at the operational level must integrate all these aspects and identify effective solutions to meet complex challenges. A detailed analysis of the operating environment, the anticipation and countering of threats, the use of advanced technology to optimize the process, as well as a comprehensive approach that takes into account the other actors in the area of operations and synchronizes the objectives of own planning with theirs is necessary. Thus, military operations planning must be adaptable and allow for real-time adjustments to respond to unexpected changes and ensure success in a complex and unpredictable operating environment.

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Proper planning can bring several benefits to any military organization (MCDP5, 2018, pp. 1-5 - 1-8):

- it can be crucial to gaining the upper hand by foreseeing events and act deliberately and efficiently before the opponent can;
- it can lessen the inevitable lag between decision and action on the battleground;
- in complex situations, planning is crucial to bring about the proper solution to the problem encountered. A well-structured and detailed planning allows the analysis of the complex situation and the identification of effective options and strategies to address the problem at hand, providing a structured framework and clear guidelines for effective actions;
- unfamiliar circumstances where expertise is lacking stresses the importance of planning. In unfamiliar circumstances and in the absence of previous experience, planning plays a crucial role in identifying options, assessing risks and adequately preparing the operation, as well as in ensuring its flexibility and adaptability to contingencies that may arise.

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Centuries ago, Napoleon stated: *"Nothing succeeds in war except in consequence of a well-prepared plan"*. This assertion is just as relevant today as we have shown before. However, developing a sustainable plan that delivers the benefits outlined above requires a structured planning approach. At the operational level, it is represented by the operational level planning process (OLPP). The OLPP is a systematic approach to planning that provides a comprehensive framework for developing and implementing plans at the operational level. It includes a range of tools and techniques that enable organizations to identify and analyse their strategic objectives, assess their resources and capabilities, and develop detailed action plans to achieve their goals.

Besides the above-presented benefits of planning, we consider that the planning process itself provides a huge advantage for the military force in that it ensures the same level of understanding within the HQs with respect to the situation and the solutions identified for solving the problem. One of the novel elements of the updated NATO Allied Joint Doctrine, AJP-01, released last December, in comparison with its previous version, is the fact that it acknowledges the importance of understanding in military affairs as a key enabler for success. Its significance is demonstrated by the fact that it has an entire annex devoted to it. *"Understanding is one of the cornerstones of our military philosophy and it is implicit in applying the tenets of doctrine".* (AJP-01, 2022, p. 95)

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In *table no. 1* we have made a comparative analysis of the operational level planning processes within the armed forces of several western international actors. The criterion upon which we made the comparison was represented by the activities specific to planning processes. We conducted this analysis to identify similarities in order to establish a common operational level planning framework upon which an integrated deception planning process model was subsequently developed.

The comparative analysis carried out in *table no. 1* highlights the fact that, although the names of the stages are slightly different, the activities carried out within them are generally the same. Considering our effort to integrate activities specific to deception actions into the OLPP, any of the processes previously presented can be used for

our further purposes. However, given the fact that NATO is the most important international actor and all the other actors in the analysis are part of it, we will continue to develop our deception process based on NATO's OLPP that is integrated in the Allied Joint Doctrine for the planning of operations, AJP-05.

*Table no. 1: Operational level planning processes – comparative analysis (authors' conception)*

| **NATO** (COPD, 2021, pp. 4-3) | | **NATO** (AJP-5, 2019, pp. 4-1) | **US** (JP5-0, 2020, pp. III-11) | **CAN** (CFJP5.0, 2008, pp. 4-1) (CACSC-PUB-500, 2018, p. 12) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Initial situational awareness of a potential / actual crisis | | 1. Initiation | 1. Planning Initiation | 1. Initiation |
| 2. Operational appreciation of the strategic environment | | | | |
| 3. Operational estimate | 3a. Mission analysis | 2. Mission analysis | 2. Mission analysis | 2. Orientation |
| | 3b. COA development | 3. COA development<br>4. COA analysis<br>5. COA validation and comparison<br>6. Commander's COA decision | 3. COA development<br>4. COA analysis and wargaming<br>5. COA comparison<br>6. COA approval | 3. COA development |
| 4. OPLAN development | 4a. CONOPS development | | | |
| | 4b. OPLAN development | 7. Plan development | 7. Plan or order development | 4. Plan development |
| | | | | 5. Plan review |
| 5. Execution | | | | |
| 6. Transition | | | | |

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## BENEFITS OF EMPLOYING DECEPTION

*"The fundamental nature of war does not change. It always involves a clash of wills, violence, friction, fog, maneuvers or deception"* (Tammen, 2021). Over time, deception has been a constant in armed conflicts. The reasons can be understood by referring to the benefits it can offer in the operational approach.







As previously stated, deception operations have been an integral part of military strategy for centuries. Throughout the annals of military history, the use of deception tactics has been seen as a huge enabler for successful outcomes in conflicts. Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, one of the most appreciated pieces of military art is full of examples of how deceiving one's enemy can be a potent tool. From ancient Greek battles to the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict, deceiving one's enemy has been a powerful resource.

*What makes it so attractive?* Deception operations represent such a valuable asset to military forces because they offer the ability to surprise and confuse an opponent, thereby creating effects that can cause the adversary to react inappropriately. Deception operations make it easy for a smaller and less powerful force to take on a larger, more powerful enemy by providing the capability to create situations or circumstances that give an advantage to the smaller force. Moreover, great powers make use of deception in order to optimize their operational approach and save resources and lives. One great example in this regard is that of the Gulf War (1990/1991), when the coalition led by the USA, a far greater power than its opponent, made extensive use of deception to facilitate their operational success. The coalition's plan to free Kuwait from Saddam Hussein's Iraqi troops depended on a massive deception campaign, which was successful. So, regardless of the situation, by succeeding in exploiting the enemy's weaknesses, deception provides armed forces with an invaluable resource for achieving victory. That is why it can be considered a *"force multipliers, which support the commander achieving their objectives by providing greater freedom of action"* (AJP3.10.2., 2020, p. 1).

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**Having the tactical edge** in the field is critical for success in any mission. In this context, deception can be used as part of a broader military strategy to gain this advantage. Regardless of the tactics used, the reason deception is used is to put the adversary in a position of operational disadvantage, a situation that can be exploited by the forces initiating deception. So, by using effective deception tactics, military structures can gain decisive advantages for operational success. Using false information or disguises, a commander can make his forces appear stronger or weaker than they really are, depending on the situation, allowing him to surprise the enemy and achieve victory.

Making decisions and implementing them are fundamental components of war. The probability of achieving the desired result increases with the improvement of the decision-making process. To create the optimal conditions for the achievement of objectives, military forces must act faster, more rationally and decisively than the opponent. **Decision-making superiority** in relation to it is, therefore, another critical element for operational success. Degrading the enemy's decision cycle and protecting and enhancing your own is the solution to creating decision superiority. From this point of view, deception is a viable tool by which the quality of the adversary's decision-making process can be affected.

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John Boyd, the OODA (Observe, Orient, Decide, Act) loop decision action cycle inventor, acknowledges deception as one of the elements that can be employed to disrupt the enemy OODA cycle thus obtaining the C2 advantage on the battlefield. *"Boyd himself also emphasized the importance of maintaining orientation under conditions of menace and uncertainty, as well as the importance of using deception and ambiguity to affect the adversary's orientation. For Boyd, operating inside the adversary's decision cycle implies not merely going through the cycle faster but maintaining superior orientation about the developing situation"* (Piehler, 2013, p. 1016). As such, several factors come to one's mind when we speak about slowing down an OODA loop or making it significantly less effective. They include raising doubt, producing ambivalence, presenting novel actions, arousing scepticism, conveying risk, as well as misleading and deceiving the adversary.

In order to structure the operation in such a way that its concept can be easily understood, the military forces use a series of conceptual frameworks, which refer to the geographical space, to the functions to be performed during the operation or to the purpose and effects of tactical actions. Deception is a key factor in military success, and using these conceptual frameworks brings consistency to the timing of various deceptive actions. If we think of the operational framework, then deception can be used as a shaping operation in order to create the optimal conditions for decisive action, and when we consider the functional framework, then it can be used as a fixing action to facilitate other actions at different times or areas. The geographic framework







can support understanding how specific deception actions are spatially correlated, often requiring concurrent activities in both depth, contact, and the back area to increase the chances of deception success. As such, one can appreciate that **deception is consistent with any of the conceptual framework** specific to the military concept of operations.

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Deception can be seen as an enabler for the *Protection joint function*. *"Protection results from many factors, including operations security, dispersion, deception, survivability measures, and the way forces conduct operations"* (FM3-0, 2022, pp. 2-3). By employing military deception, forces can create a complex and dynamic operating environment that can confuse and disorient adversaries, reducing their ability to detect and engage friendly forces, thereby enhancing the operations' protection. Also, by delaying adversary actions or making them occur at the incorrect location, deception techniques play a crucial role in the force protection, boosting the security of friendly troops. So, by using its specific tactics, a military force can try to protect its own forces and minimize its exposure to danger. By disseminating false information or creating illusions, one can encourage the enemy to make wrong decisions or divert their attention, thus allowing one's own forces to operate under safer conditions.

There are other numerous benefits that deception can provide the force with. The following are only a few notable implications that deceit can have on the concept of operations:

- surprising the enemy thus enhancing the probability of mission success;
- inflicting misallocation of personnel, financial, and material resources on the opponent;
- forcing the enemy to disclose their weaknesses strengths, intentions, and also disposition;
- forcing the opponent to degrade its combat effectiveness by wasting resources in unimportant operational areas.

Although the benefits of using deception can be multiple, as we have previously shown, the doctrine of the United Kingdom has made a delimitation and framing of them in four broad categories: surprise, security, freedom of action and economy of effort (AFM, 2018, pp. 3A-2).

The advantage of such an approach lies in the clarity and structure it brings, allowing an easier understanding of these advantages as well as of the way in which they can support the objectives of military operations. Thus, this delineation facilitates streamlining analysis and decision-making regarding the use of deception in various operational contexts.

It is important to note, however, that deception is a delicate tactic and its excessive or uncalibrated use can have negative consequences. Also, manipulation of information and disinformation can damage long-term trust and credibility, both among the civilian population and among allies. As one can notice, deception can be a huge enabler for military success. By recognizing the benefits of military deception and investing in its development and execution, military organizations can enhance their ability to achieve operational success and protect the safety and security of military personnel and assets. Moreover, *"deception is used because it succeeds"* (Moore, 2015, p. 4). But how does it work?

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## DECEPTION FUNDAMENTALS

Military deception has been and continues to be an essential aspect of warfare, which involves the use of disinformation, false information, or other techniques to mislead an adversary about the course of events. Its purpose is to cause him to make decisions, unknowingly, that will create negative effects for him and advantageous situations for the deceiver. Considering its proven efficiency, *"deception must be an integral part of all operations"*. (AFM, 2018, pp. 3A-5).

Any analysis of the theoretical underpinnings of deception must also include the examination of attempts to define the concept. A comparative analysis from the perspective of this criterion highlights the fact that there is agreement between the views of the majority of Western actors from the perspective of defining the concept. Thus, deception represents *"deliberate measures to mislead targeted decision-makers into behaving in a manner advantageous to the commander's objectives"* (AAP-06, 2021, p. 39). It can be identified, therefore, that it must have a precise target and purpose. In this sense, to influence adversary leaders to act in a way that is harmful





to their interests but advantageous to the deceiver, deception aims to portray a false but believable reality to the adversary that causes him to adopt disadvantageous measures, in ignorance of the cause. For this reason, the analysis of the deception target, of the entire apparatus of collecting, analysing and disseminating information, of the level of understanding regarding the operational situation, as well as of the way in which the adversary makes decisions become crucial elements for planning a successful misleading action.

Deception operations entail conveying both false and true information, employing specific methods and techniques to inoculate the target with a desired perception. The majority of scientists who have dedicated their lives to the research in this field, as well as the visions of most Western actors transposed in their doctrines specific to the field under analysis, give due importance to the previously listed concepts.

Next, we considered it essential to conduct a content analysis of the specialized literature to determine those elements essential to a successful deception. We chose this approach because it supports, through its results, the broad approach of this paper, namely that of streamlining the planning of misleading operations at the operational level. The main conclusions resulting from the analysis were the following:

- there are two deception methods, simulation and dissimulation, the former involving showing and the latter hiding specific elements to/from the enemy. Also, more often than not, an act of deception must involve elements specific to both methods;
- there are various types (Monroe, 2012, p. 44) of deception, including displays, feints, demonstrations, disinformation, camouflage or denial, each of them requiring specific means to be put into practice. We would also like to highlight the fact that the former four represent active measures specific to simulation, while the latter two represent passive measures specific to dissimulation;
- there are three types of means employed by deception operations: physical, technical and administrative (FM3-13.4, 2019, pp. 1-11). They are extremely important because

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they represent the tools through which observables can be portrayed to the adversary and thereby contribute significantly to the effectiveness and success of these types of operations;

- a key element of deceit and a major facilitator of these kinds of tactics is uncertainty. From this point of view there are two methods of portraying deception (A-type/ambiguity producing deceptions and M-type/misleading deceptions) (Daniel, 1980, p. 8). The choice of one of these methods is dependent on the operational situation, the character and leading style of the target, or the specific objectives of the deception;
- deception employs specific techniques in order to be successful: obvious solution, false routine, substitution, lure, deliberate leak, mistake, piece of bad luck. *Table no. 2* is the result of our comparative analysis of the techniques of deception from some of the most important western actors' doctrine.

*A key element of deceit and a major facilitator of these kinds of tactics is uncertainty. From this point of view there are two methods of portraying deception (A-type/ambiguity producing deceptions and M-type/misleading deceptions). The choice of one of these methods is dependent on the operational situation, the character and leading style of the target, or the specific objectives of the deception.*

*Table no. 2: Techniques of deception – comparative analysis (authors' conception)*

| **US** (FM3-13.4, 2019, pg. 1-8) | **NATO** (AJP3.10.2, 2020, p. 47) | **UK** (AFM, 2018, pg. 3A-7) | **CAN** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Reinforcing the impression | Obvious solution | Obvious solution | Obvious solution |
| Conditioning the target by repetition | False routine | False routine | False routine |
| Leading the enemy by substitution | Substitution | Substitution | Substitution |
| | Lure | Lure | Lure |
| | Deliberate leak | Deliberate leak | Deliberate leak |
| Leading the enemy by mistake | Mistake | Mistake | Mistake |
| | Piece of bad luck | Piece of bad luck | Piece of bad luck |
| Overloading enemy sensors | | Exploiting enemy's C2-intel sources | Exploiting enemy's C2-intel sources |
| Amplifying signatures | | | |
| Suppressing signatures | | | |





| **US** (FM3-13.4, 2019, pg. 1-8) | **NATO** (AJP3.10.2, 2020, p. 47) | **UK** (AFM, 2018, pg. 3A-7) | **CAN** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Repackaging known organizational or capability signatures | | | |
| Conditioning the enemy | | | |



Moreover, we consider it appropriate to highlight the fact that, although technology influences the way deception operations are carried out, it must be remembered that *"the human mind is the target of deception and remains susceptible to being deceived"* (AFM, 2018, pp. 3A-1). From this point of view, studying and exploiting the cognitive limitations and vulnerabilities of the target can support the efficiency of the deception process. Furthermore, knowing how the adversary thinks is a *"sine qua non"* condition of these types of operations, deception being *"dependent on understanding how someone else (or something else) is thinking. In other words, if you're going to fool someone, you have to be able to imagine how they're going to interpret and react to your actions"*. (Moore, p. 4)

Deception operations represent, in fact, a process that follows specific steps towards achieving its goals. *Figure no. 1* highlights this process of conveying deceptive messages to the target. This process is an adaptation from the one Michael Bennett and Edward Waltz proposed in their famous book dedicated to counter-deception, *Counter-deception Principles and Applications for National Security*. (Bennett, 2007, p. 49)

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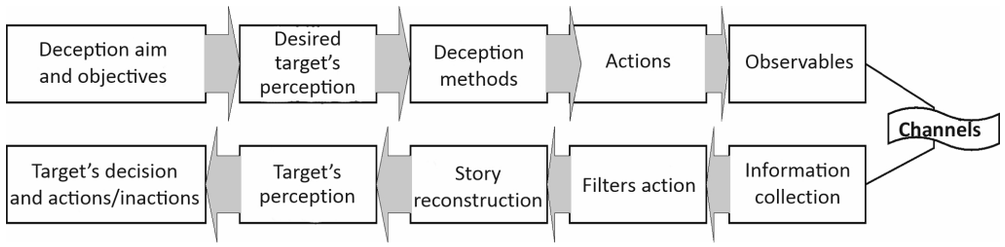


*Figure no. 1: Deception process*

However, deception operations often involve meticulous planning, requiring attention to details, and synchronized execution to provide the operational flexibility necessary to adapt these actions

to the monitored adversary reaction. We consider planning to be crucial for deception operations as it provides a structured approach to achieving objectives, aligns the operation with broader strategic goals, optimizes resource allocation, mitigates risks, ensures coordination and synchronization, and facilitates evaluation and feedback for continuous improvement. For these reasons, in our next chapter we provide a framework for integrating deception within the OLPP.

## INTEGRATING DECEPTION PROCESS INTO THE OLPP

*"Deception planning and execution is a critical function within the operational art of warfare and has been used effectively by commanders for centuries. Deception has proven time and again to be an effective force multiplier. There is no shortage of examples of brilliant deception operations of past ages. Making an argument for deception and deception planning is rather straightforward"*. (McPherson, 2010, p. 1).

*The foundations of a successful deception operation are laid from the planning phase. The level of understanding how these operations can support the overall concept is critical in the deceptive endeavour. Therefore, special attention must be paid to how the elements necessary for misleading can be integrated into the operational planning process.*

The foundations of a successful deception operation are laid from the planning phase. The level of understanding how these operations can support the overall concept is critical in the deceptive endeavour. Therefore, special attention must be paid to how the elements necessary for misleading can be integrated into the operational planning process.

In order to be able to plan successful deceptions one should be proficient in the theory of deception and have a solid grasp of the target personality and its intelligence and decision-making processes. Planning for deception operations must also consider information security, OPSEC measures, protection of information sources, and assessment of potential risks associated with premature detection of operations by the adversary.

Moreover, in order to enhance the deception planning efficiency, one should also have a solid grasp of the specific concepts that deception operations use, such as deception target, cognitive limitations, deceptive indicators, observables, perception, deception channel, deception filters, deception events, deception plan, or deception story.







The complexity of deception operations places additional stress on the fidelity of the planning process, and for this reason a systematic and well-coordinated approach is essential. In this regard, planning must be rigorous, with detailed analyses of possible situations and second- or third-order effects, risk assessment and the development of alternative strategies. Effective communication and collaboration between all parties involved in deception operations is also of crucial importance, during both the planning and execution of such operations.

Therefore, proper planning of deception operations is essential to their success. The level of understanding, the integration of the necessary elements and the attention to detail are fundamental in the deceptive approach and in supporting the overall concept of the operation. However, the complexity of misleading actions can present a challenge to the planning process, but a careful and well-structured approach can help maximize the efficiency and success of these types of operations.

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We consider that the proposed process can bring more synchronization and accuracy to the planning of deception operations. We would like to specify that it is fully integrated with NATO's OLPP, being developed in accordance with NATO's deception doctrine. As such, our process complements the one used by NATO (AJP3.10.2, 2020, p. 30), but provides more detail on the elements that should be analysed during planning, as well as on how they can be synchronized with the specific stages of the OLPP. *Table no. 3* is a schematic representation of the process proposed by us.

*Table no. 3: Operational deception planning process (authors' conception)*

| OLPP steps | Operational level deception process integrated within the OLPP |
|---|---|
| **1. Initiation** | 1.1. Initiate/update deception estimate:<br>*- Enemy doctrine, disposition, capabilities*<br>*- Enemy intelligence system*<br>*- Features of the information environment* |
| | 1.2. COM's initial guidance on deception |
| | |

| OLPP steps | Operational level deception process integrated within the OLPP |
|---|---|
| **2. Mission analysis** | 2.1. Deception analysis<br>*- Deeper analysis of the information environment*<br>*- Analysis of own resources that can be employed for deception operations*<br>*- Deception target identification and analysis*<br>*- Timeline for deception*<br>*- Suitable conditions to employ deception*<br>*- Identification of opportunities for deception*<br>*- Deception risk analysis*<br>*- Current enemy knowledge*<br>*- Possible deception channel analysis*<br>*- Analysis of relevant factors that can influence deception (ROE, legal aspects etc.)*<br>*- Recognition if the force has any part in the higher deception plan* |
| | 2.2. Establish the aim and goal of deception |
| | 2.3. COM's direction and guidance on deception |
| | |
| **3. COA development** | 3.1. Update deception analysis information/Update deception estimate<br>*- Developing intelligence relevant for deception with respect to the enemy* |
| | 3.2. Establish the target's desired perception |
| | 3.3. Establish means of deception and observables |
| | 3.4. Develop the deception story |
| | 3.5. Develop deception event matrix |
| | 3.6. Develop OPSEC measures to support deception |
| | 3.7. Establish feedback criteria |
| | 3.8. Develop termination plan |
| | 3.9. Develop deception plan to support all friendly COAs |
| | |
| **4. COA analysis** | 4.1. COA deception analysis<br>*- Wargame deception plans for each COA* |
| | |
| **5. COA validation and comparison** | 5.1. Comparing COAs including deception based on COM's comparison criteria |
| | |





| OLPP steps | Operational level deception process integrated within the OLPP |
|---|---|
| **6. Commander's COA decision** | 6.1. COM's decision on what COA and deception plan should be developed |
| | |
| **7. Plan development** | 7.1. Plan development<br>7.2. Distribution of the plan<br>*- On a need-to-know basis* |

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It can therefore be seen that planning a deception operation is an extremely complex task that requires a high level of expertise. We believe, however, that the proposed process provides a comprehensive framework to approach the effective planning of such operations. The importance of planning is extremely high for the success of deception operations, and for this reason, streamlining this process can represent an additional guarantee of the success of the deceptive endeavour. To this end, misleading should be included from the early stages in the planning process. Deception operations that do not benefit from considerable time to collect and analyse the information specified in the process proposed by us will carry a high risk of generating some effects inconsistent with those anticipated. Hereby, an operation that is intended to cause operational advantages may, in fact, produce the opposite effect.

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To benefit from the maximum effect, all steps of the deception planning process at the operational level must be completed, each of them being extremely important in this endeavour. However, the understanding that is generated after the first two phases is critical to the success of the operation, as it provides the proper foundations to develop flexible and successful deception plans. In addition, it must never be forgotten that deception is an action that is used only in support of one's own operational plan, as an integral part of it. Therefore, an important aspect of planning is the timing of the deception in one's course of action.

## CONCLUSIONS

In a world characterized by unrestricted access to information, ambiguity and uncertainty, deception operations have become a constant in today's military operations. They are very complex

undertakings that require an extreme amount of planning, preparation and execution in order to be successful. It is essential for deception plans to be able to *"fool"* both the enemy and friendly forces in order to achieve the desired effect. The need for such an approach is based on the need to maintain secrecy regarding the deception action to be carried out. It requires careful and elaborate planning in order to ensure that the plan is successful and not easily exposed.

Moreover, deception planning at the operational level of conflict is a crucial element in gaining strategic advantage over the enemy. Through proper planning, the use of varied tactics, coordination with actual operations, and constant evaluation, the effect of deception can be maximized and the overall success of military operations can be enhanced.

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Considering all these variables of deception planning, the process we provide can be an effective solution to increase the probability of success of these actions. By applying a systematic and well-structured approach, and by using available information and resources, deception planning can contribute significantly to disorganizing and disorienting the enemy, protecting own forces, and creating tactical opportunities. Therefore, a well-designed and implemented deception planning process can significantly strengthen the position and advantages of military forces, thereby supporting the achievement of strategic objectives.

In conclusion, the effective use of operational deception planning process can make the difference between success and failure in achieving strategic objectives. That is why it a critical process for any force or military operation.

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