MASKIROVKA
– THE ART OF DECEPTION À LA RUSSE –

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Synonymous with disguise, camouflage, diversion and deception, maskirovka is a complex Russian cultural phenomenon, which has already reached the rank of doctrine. The Armed Forces of the Russian Federation have carried forward military theory, doctrine and thinking between the years after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Russian political-military revival. It is also reflected in the increased importance of diversion in achieving military objectives. Maskirovka is culturally rooted in the Russian mentality and represents a significant component of Russian military operations. This paper aims to analyse the evolution of this phenomenon in Russia, from a military to a political concept, from the Second World War to the invasion of Ukraine in 2014, as well as its psychological implications. Once a means used to gain advantage on the battlefield, maskirovka is utilized in order to create ambiguity and uncertainty in the environment it operates on for freedom of action in achieving the military and political objectives of today's Russia.

Keywords: disinformation; influence; maskirovka; psychological operations; Russia;

INTRODUCTION

Russian military deception is based on a tradition developed during the Cold War by the army and intelligence agencies of the Soviet Union. It is part of USSR's military history, since there already was a Tsarist school of *"deception"* before the revolution, where techniques of interference and action on the enemy were taught. While that school was dissolved during the Revolution, its principles were transposed by the Red Army in its official Field Regulations of 1933. The strategic value of Russian military deception has consistently shown an ability to cause damage and to alter, temporarily or permanently, the thinking of individuals, their perceptions, their emotions and their elements of the communication process in groups where such harmful effects are manifested. The mechanism is simple, using all possible levels and sources of knowledge of behaviour as studied by the great Russian psychologists, for military and political-military actions and, thus, acting on individuals and on the groups and social ensembles they make up and contribute to the success of the action. Influence is an integral part of the action; it is a strategic function.

The Russian doctrine of military deception has evolved significantly starting with the beginning of the last century. It has accompanied ideological revolutions, from the first communists to the end of the USSR, up until the return to the context of the Cold War anew, with Russia returning to the old constants of enclavism and supremacy. Recently, it has been confronted with the emergence and then the evolution of digital technology in particular, which has given it a new face, more generalized, more diffuse and probably more formidable for its targets and victims.

Westerners are generally unaware of its importance. They minimize it, neglect it, and it escapes them beyond a mere superficial knowledge (Smith, 1966, p. 30). Another impediment is the fact that Russian terms are not easily translated into English, French, or Romanian. However, beyond the linguistic difficulty, this is, above all, a matter of difference in culture, in the conception of the world and its equilibrium. The context in which it is implemented is also difficult to understand. It is overwhelmed by Russia's constant, almost paranoid assessment of the potential danger posed by social groups and individuals that compose them, enemies both from outside and from within.

In this context, even though this term first of all refers to the activities and methods of masking and concealment, it has long embraced dimensions other than that of simple military camouflage (Hutchinson, 2004, p. 170). The word, in Russian, literally means *"masking"*, as in covering something with a mask, disguising or camouflaging. In essence, it is the art of deception *à la russe*. *"It is simply designed to keep adversaries permanently off-balance"*, explains Lindley-French (2018) on her blog. It is a generic term today that designates a concept that is "*complex, diffuse, although very well structured, institutionally recognized as officially funded, and carefully planned*" (Smith, 1966, p. 32), in order to establish one of the doctrinal principles of the state. Thus, in general terms, all Russian actions should be hidden as much as possible from the enemy, whether it be real or potential. The intention of a commander, decision-maker, or other leader must always be disguised in order to improve the chances of surprise. And this principle applies simultaneously to all three levels: strategic, tactical, and operational.

Debates in Russia on this phenomenon have focused on the prevalence of the terms *obman* (deceit), *voyennaya khitrost* (military cunning), and *vvedeniye v zabluzhdeniye* (misleading) as synonyms for *maskirovka* (currently in the process of reverting to its original meaning of concealment or camouflage). Russian experts have debated the relevance of the term *maskirovka*. The theorists emphasize that *maskirovka* (with the meaning of concealment/cover-up) is a component of deception (*obman*) and not the other way around. Debates in Russia argue that the term *maskirovka* is vague and illogically groups any form of deception under the Russian term for concealment/cover-up. It has translated *maskirovka* back to its original meaning of hiding/cover-up and led to the use of a more appropriate term to encompass all attempts to deceive under this word. Essentially, the general principles and elements of *maskirovka* are retained, but under a terminology more suited to the exhaustive meaning. Much like *maskirovka*, *obman* is an umbrella term for deception. With the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014, *obman* replaces *maskirovka* in an effort to remain within the currently accepted Russian concept of deception (Thomas, 2011, pp. 113-116).

Russia's understanding of the nature of war, like its conceptualization of deception, has evolved over time. Commonly referred to as the Gerasimov Doctrine or *"New Generation Warfare"*, the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, General Valery Gerasimov, outlined his observations on modern warfare in *Voenno-Promyshlennyi Kurier* (*Military-Industrial Courier*). General Gerasimov, along with other Russian military theorists, made several important observations relevant to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Gerasimov observed that there was no longer a clear distinction between war and peace.

Moreover, in modern warfare, increased emphasis is being placed on information and psychological warfare. Appropriately, it requires the use of non-military means of power, along with the armed forces, but has the potential to reduce the military power required (Gerasimov, 2016, p. 24; Bartles, 2016, pp. 30-31; Chekinov, Bogdanov, 2013, pp. 12, 16-17; Bērziņš, 2014, p. 5).

In the new generation of warfare, public institutions, media, religious organizations, cultural institutions, NGOs, public movements, criminals, and diplomats are all weapons of the aggressor state. All of these institutions aid in the information and psychological warfare that weakens the target state. *Obman* aids in this effort because these organizations use disinformation to help conceal military operations and the effort as a whole (Chekinov, Bogdanov, 2013, pp. 17, 18, 20; Bērziņš, 2014, p. 5).

RUSSIAN PSYCHOLOGICAL INFLUENCE AND *MASKIROVKA* AS A STATE OF MIND

From Clausewitz's (1832) fog-enhancing smokescreen of war, reinterpreted in particular by Dragomiroff (1889), to the informational smoke of social networks by *"troll factories"*, *maskirovka* corresponds to a codified set of processes designed to mislead, sow confusion, lead to fatigue, and, if possible, generate despair in enemies. It is thus an instrument that makes it possible to intervene in conflicts or in the balance of power that precedes them, while ensuring the stability of the state, which can therefore mobilize its forces without hesitation. This broad sense constitutes a form of *"doctrine of falsehood"* or relative truth in military, political or diplomatic terms. Of course, it includes all the metaphors of cunning and concealment, denial and lies, regardless of the evidence (Glantz, 1989; 1992). We thus resort to contents whose verification is complex and which go beyond mere omission or lying in order to rely on psychology: dispersion, illusion, logical paradoxes, cognitive biases... Moreover, it includes an ambition of targeted action to instil in people not only doubt, but also fear, dread and despair, regardless of the consequences for individuals and the social groups they compose.

Maskirovka is exercised simultaneously at all levels (Smith, 1966), from strategic to tactical or operational, and by all actors involved in the Russian state organization. Thus, it permeates all organs of the nation and has been applied in Soviet – now Russian – civil society. It is no longer just a military phenomenon, but also covers the fields of civil defence, internal security, and certain branches of industry, trade, agriculture or even artistic, cultural and digital production. The aim is to constantly deceive the real or potential adversary, relying on all the procedures of modifying

information processing, but also to determine the enemy to make mistakes (Karankevich, 2006); it is not only to disinform, but to misinform, overinform, sow doubts, saturate cognitive abilities, thus altering certainties.

Today's approaches mix both active and passive, physical, information and cyber actions. Furthermore, we can observe a form of similarity between Russian conceptions of *"psychological warfare"* (Ionov, 1994) and *"ideological struggle in peacetime"* with the *"information warfare"* waged by the West *"against its enemies in general and against Russia in particular"* (Prokhozhev, Turco, 1996). The action takes place, on the one hand, thanks to networks and the media, in science, education, public affairs management, culture, especially with the falsification of history (Minic, 2021) and, on the other hand , through targeted, precise and personalized attacks. The tools take on a new dimension with the emergence of social networks, news servers and public databanks, with *"trolls"* and cognitive cyber tools (digital *maskirovka*).

Maskirovka first targets Western culture and society as a whole by attempting to descend on individuals and influence or recode mass consciousness, for example to turn patriotism into collaborationism. The intent then descends to elites, community leaders, then employed as opinion leaders or agents of amplification. This procedure is similar to the *"key leader commitments"* or *"local leader actions"* of Western doctrine, without being constrained by moral boundaries. Ultimately, small groups can be reached, and individuals themselves can be subject to targeted actions through *"reflexive control"* (Thomas, 2016). Attacks that target individuals exploit their acquired or innate characteristics, weaknesses, and preferences to act on their behaviour as an agent, or their ability to command in context. In this way, the systems or institutions to which they contribute can be changed from the bottom up. It works at all levels and in both directions. It changes the coherence between leaders and the agents they command or the citizens they represent, between social entities and those who make them up.

Disinformation

Disinformation (with the literal meaning of *"erroneous information"*) is an example of a technique of influence widely used by the Soviet Union during the Cold War and taken up by current services, contributing to *maskirovka*. It consists in the systematic dissemination of false information in order to drown relevant information that could not be concealed (Schultz, Godson, 1984).

The first strategy is to hide information. Concealment is one of the main forms of disinformation. It involves procedures to reduce the ability to detect possible tell-tale signs of action or preparations for action: troops, equipment, strategic clues etc. Direct use of camouflage, hangars, canopies, camouflage cloths, paravanes in order to conceal stationing and lack of stationing, arming or placement of vehicles, ships, aircraft etc. The construction or storage of sensitive equipment can be carried out in this way, for example, in automobile factories, agricultural sheds or power stations.

The second strategy is imitation. It is based on the visible deployment of fake objects. The use of detachable or pneumatic models, intact parts of damaged equipment on wooden frames, drawings imitating reality or disruptive paintings (*"kamuflyazh"*), decoys and dummies, was frequently applied during the Second World War, and examples can also be found in recent conflicts, in Syria, in Crimea, and, more widely, in strategic seaports, through decoy bridges or the construction of factories or even unused airfields. Alongside passive imitation, simulation also has an active side. It consists of creating identifiable signs of activity to distract attention and increase the effectiveness of concealment. Examples are fictitious anti-aircraft or artillery emplacements, fake troop movements and convoys etc. (Smith, 1966).

The third strategy is to camouflage relevant information smothered in what it is not. The aim is to multiply global information by saturating the cybernetic communication channels of machines or the biological attention channels of individuals, thus sowing cognitive confusion.

The Global Approach has thus demonstrated remarkable abilities to combine military action, at all levels and in all areas, with non-military action. It can be seen in particular in the use of modern cyber tools and in the creation of real corps of specialists. But beyond this globality of actors, *maskirovka* is also a globalized phenomenon. It manipulates beliefs and perceptions by misinforming everyone. It takes on a global, chronic and generalized aspect for the entire social body. And it does not stop there, since it is accompanied by specific action on individuals: surveillance and possible discrediting of the bearers of information, discrediting those who analyse it, promotion of the bearers of fake news, the culture of *"useful idiots"* etc. The practice often resorts to associating public criticism or pejorative humour with threats.

This targeting is in itself a veritable method of applying the *"dossier culture"*, illustrated by the personalized discreditation of adversaries or globalized discreditation of groups represented by their leaders.

Demoralization

Demoralization (literally, the technique of *"demoralizing"*) is a procedure that has been used by Russian services to provoke a depressive syndrome or psychological distress and to propose an alternative strategy from which a person, group or state cannot evade or respond favourably, except at the risk of maintaining a pernicious state. For the victim, it does not matter what the solution is as long as the threat or psychological conflict ceases.

While this procedure is aimed at individuals, it is also aimed at the groups they make up, and therefore at the leaders of these groups, who are in a position to stop the suffering. The technique extended to adversary states is part of the arsenal of military art (*teoriya voyennogo iskusstva),* as *"the theory and practice of the preparation and conduct of the army and operations [...], as well as the use of «non-military» measures and indirect actions and other forms useful to the battle"* (Chekinov, Bogdanov, 2015, p. 24). In this context, psychological impact is considered a major strategic tool of influence, and demoralization is included in the art of warfare extended to any indirect means that contribute to success (Ib., p. 9). Demoralization can be considered as preparation of adversaries, groups and individuals, for submission and acceptance of alternatives favourable to Russia.

Like *disinformation*, *demoralization* concerns all state bodies and its institutions of public communication. In addition to the use of un-truths and all means of psychosocial influence, there are *"psychotronic"* and *"psychotropic"* means in psychological matters (Vorobyov, Kiselev, 2006). The former corresponds to actions and techniques involving direct human actions. This is the case of influencers, actors of relational actions, designers of targeted and adapted technical devices, such as computer programs or video productions etc. The other category of means concentrates indirect actions of neuropsychological or neurological induction, having a direct action on the brain and, consequently, on the morale. This is the case with drug use, certain psychotropic or narcotic drugs, electromagnetic emissions, control of delimited chemical, sound or light spaces, which cause transient or chronic mental health disorders [one example is the Havana syndrome (Verma et al., 2019)].

The proposed solution, although partial, is a favourable alternative for Russia. It can take the form of a defeat, a submission or a compromise which then opens up to blackmail. It is only with difficulty that the Western world understands that the authors can go beyond the ethical limits and observes, disarmed, that all the consequences for people's mental health do not enter into the equation of disastrous consequences: resignation, flight, drug use, alcoholism, melancholy, suicide, violence, induced personality disorders.

Digital Maskirovka

"Digital Maskirovka" is the application of the doctrine in the cyber world. The process consists of using troll factories to invade networks and Internet broadcasting systems and to identify flaws in systems in order to exploit weaknesses in technical or psychological usability. The digital space is considered as any flow of information and therefore a means of gaining an actual or potential strategic advantage. *Maskirovka* principles are widely applied in cyberspace (Bagge, 2019) with such ease, as manipulations are easy to implement, difficult to localize and, in the case of localization, always too late.

On the one hand, a saturation of information is practiced for disinformation and, on the other hand, the targeting of individuals or institutions allows the creation of individual *"dossiers"* based on historical website browsing and shopping habits, the intrusion of personal equipment, the corruption and mounting of files, real or invented, with posting on networks or under threat of judicial compromise. A plethora of non-geolocable or poorly localized front-ends are spread on the Internet by trolls, with fake or spoofed accounts, to influence either globally or in a targeted manner or to implement psychological influence operations.

False information sites or hijacked real sites, false testimonies, false theories or fragmented theories are thus put online, especially via social networks, after analysing internet usage habits. This is the case with lists of think tanks, trade unions or political parties, non-governmental associations, charities or advocacy organizations etc. The construction of fake, perfectly imitated websites, attempts to deceive users while manipulating them. One aspect to be mentioned is the intervention of trolls or specialized agents to anonymously or under false identity modify information in large databases on which content generation systems are based.

Finally, content crafted in an emotionally meaningful way is used to spread, encapsulated information in a viral fashion. The principle is to use a rationale for spontaneous (viral) dissemination of emotionally labelled messages (Berger, Milkman, 2012, pp. 192-205) to associate them with pieces of information as part of a reflexive control strategy. The source of information can be military, for example, Russian soldiers or mercenaries posting photos, videos or texts on social media, or bots that can transmit AI-generated synthetic images, movies or texts. The dynamics may be orchestrated by relays, but the spontaneity of *"useful idiots"* is sufficient for this widespread dissemination.

In all cases, there is a convergence of actions that modify structured thinking and those that manipulate emotions (Charquero-Ballester et al., 2023), such as

by using un-truths, half-truths or misleading information with a marked emotional dimension (Wunder, 2022, p. 7/1-7/5).

Maskirovka is primarily a state of mind. It is part of the spontaneous reasoning of the Russians and applies to all levels of the organization of the state, its diplomacy and its army, on the strategic, tactical or operational level (Smith, 1966).

This mindset is manifested in all branches or services of the Russian Armed Forces and, more broadly, in those of the state. As far as tactical units on the field of conflict are concerned, it also applies to all levels of the air force, air defence, border guards, intelligence and law and order services.

Thus, any *maskirovka* must be persistent, regardless of difficulty or questionable appearance, and even in the case of discovery or awareness by the enemy. The evolution must be slow, almost imperceptible, and lead the opponent or victim to incorrect estimations, false ideas, or to despair, submission, or abandonment. It must be plausible, i.e. the opponent or victim must be able to believe what is presented to him or maintain a rational doubt. *Maskirovka* must blend with the real or virtual environment, the physical or digital background and present plausible or ambiguous information. It should be varied, non-repetitive or as non-repetitive as possible and, if necessary, show visible differences. It is not intended to be spotted by statistical analysis or by the detection of common features that facilitate identification or anticipation by regularity or predictability. Lastly, there is a principle of continuity, at a geographical level, in the slow unfolding and temporality of actions, by installing a form of desperate chronicity situating any punctual action in a multidimensional background movement.

Therefore, the doctrine places every operation within a carefully defined and structured hierarchy of the *Maskirovka* state of mind in the Russian military thinking, or at least in the Russian military. Those who disregard its spirit are accomplices of the actual or potential enemy or, at the very least, bad citizens, and must be discredited, even punished.

HISTORICAL EVENTS MARKED BY *MASKIROVKA*

Historians have tracked the strategy since 1380, when the tsar Dmitry Donskoy and 50,000 Russian soldiers defeated 150,000 Mongol warriors of the Golden Horde at the Battle of Kulikovo. Donskoy's men achieved victory thanks to a surprise attack by a regiment of soldiers hidden in a nearby forest.

Maskirovka helped the Soviets achieve great victories several times during the Second World War, and since then it has been established as a general principle that has proven itself and is to be developed as a true specialty in defence

and security actions. Thus, while *maskirovka* is primarily an active support for military operations, it is no longer limited to the field of the military, but manifests itself both as a state of mind and as a permanent activity in a clearly applied orientation of hybrid warfare and a defensive state.

Battle of Kursk

The battle, which took place between 5 July and 23 August 1943, was the last offensive *blitzkrieg* action on the Eastern Front of the Second World War. *Maskirovka's* importance in Soviet military operations increased as the Soviet Army began offensive operations to retake Russian territory (Armstrong, 1988, p. 5). *Maskirovka* concealed the movement and grouping of Soviet formations for the counteroffensive. Specifically, the Battle of Kursk illustrated the effectiveness of Soviet *maskirovka*. The carefully planned and executed Soviet concealment effectively annihilated any chance the German army might have had to regain the offensive in Russia. In preparing for the battle, the Soviets used a series of *maskirovka* principles to ensure the secrecy of their preparations and intentions. The Kursk offensive primarily used *maskirovka* to conceal the movement, organization, and grouping of Soviet forces from German scout formations (Armstrong, 1988, pp. 5-6; Simms, 2003, p. 8).

The Soviet *maskirovka* during the Battle of Kursk was successful because the Soviets carefully considered the effect they were trying to achieve, planned the deception in detail, and used the available resources appropriately. Analysing the capabilities of the German Army informed the Soviets about what was necessary for a successful deception. The Soviet Army understood German intelligence collection, methods, systems, and capabilities. In planning the deception, the Soviets were able to ensure that the methods used were capable of avoiding German detection. The German Army was able to detect the units involved in the defence of Kursk, but was unable to identify the hidden defensive positions of the Steppe Front as to the true extent of the concentration of Soviet forces arranged in depth (Armstrong, 1988, pp. 26-27; Glantz and House, 1999, p. 74; Showalter, 2013, p. 66).

Later, throughout the war, Soviet military deception became increasingly sophisticated and effective through repeated practice. The Soviet Army learned, through repetition, the importance of centralized control and careful planning how to successfully use *maskirovka*. Practice proved that its execution required that false positions should be animated with at least ten percent of real troops and equipment (Armstrong, 1988, p. 16). The Soviets continued these lessons throughout the rest of the war to achieve surprise effects during other major operations.

The Cuban Missile Crisis

The Cuban Missile Crisis was a confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States over Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba. The crisis began on 14 October 1962 and lasted 38 days, until 20 November 1962. The crisis was seen as the moment when the Cold War came very close to becoming nuclear war and turning into the Third World War.

The attempts to deceive during the Cuban Missile Crisis are notable for both similarities and significant differences to the acts of deception during the Second World War. The Cuban Missile Crisis indicates a continued emphasis on the use of dissimulation and an increased emphasis on disinformation. In this way, the Soviets used *maskirovka* to conceal intentions similar to those during the Second World War. *Maskirovka* during the Cuban Missile Crisis differed from its application in the Second World War, with an increased emphasis on tactical, operational, and strategic disinformation.

In attempting to conceal the concentration of nuclear forces, the Soviet military used tactical concealment. It was demonstrated by the concealment of troops and equipment on ships docked in Cuba, by actions taken at the landing ports, and by concealing short- and medium-range ballistic missiles in Cuba. The success of Soviet concealment attempts was also quantified in the large number of Soviet military personnel moved to Cuba, largely undetected by the US military and the CIA[1] (Hansen, 2022, p. 54; McCone, 1992, pp. 19-20; Gribkov and Smith, 1994, pp. 27 28). However, the concealment attempts failed to hide the location of the surface-to-air missiles used to protect the ballistic missiles and their associated launch pads. In addition, the nuclear missiles, once in Cuba, had inadequate cover. This lack of cover led to the detection by the US military air reconnaissance service of the surface-to-air missiles and the launch pads they were defending. The large concentration of surface-to-air missiles contributed to the failure of the deception (Absher, 2009, pp. 29-31).

At the same time, the Cuban Missile Crisis displayed tactical, operational, and strategic *maskirovka* in its form of disinformation. Strategically, Soviet diplomats and political leaders made false statements that attempted to mislead US political leaders about the nature of Soviet intentions in Cuba. The clever naming of the military operation and the Soviet intelligence service's use of Cuban dissidents represented the operational use of disinformation in order to mislead. Ultimately,

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[1] The Soviets managed to infiltrate over 40,000 soldiers and personnel involved in the concentration of ballistic missiles. In the months leading up to the crisis, the Central Intelligence Agency estimated that only 4,000–6,000 Soviet personnel were in Cuba.

the Soviet military's tactical disinformation of its own troops ensured the success of the non-disclosure of information about military plans by Russian forces.

Soviet *maskirovka* ultimately failed during the Missile Crisis for a number of reasons. First, the Soviets and Cubans failed to conceal the missile launch sites. Second, the Soviets and Cubans failed to adequately conceal the ballistic missiles. The final factor contributing to the failure of this *maskirovka* was suspicion. US government officials did not trust the Soviets and did not believe their narrative or messages. The lack of trust the US government displayed towards the Soviets made any statement suspect and open to scrutiny and verification (Alsop, Bartlett, 1988, p. 69).

Invasion of Czechoslovakia

The Invasion of Czechoslovakia, officially titled *Operation Danube*, was the occupation of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic by armed forces from five Warsaw Pact member states – the Soviet Union, the Republic of Bulgaria, the Republic of Hungary, the GDR and the Republic of Poland – on the night of 20–21 August 1968. Approximately 250,000 soldiers occupied Czechoslovakia at the time. The invasion of Czechoslovakia ended the reforms initiated by Alexander Dubček in the Prague Spring.

The Soviet Union used a number of principles of *maskirovka* to achieve its objectives in Czechoslovakia. Disinformation fuelled existing popular fear, misdirected Czechoslovak military assets, and created a false presumption for the introduction of Soviet troops into the country. A simulated secret weapons depot provided evidence that made the entire Soviet disinformation campaign credible. Ultimately, the Soviets' use of the demonstration, in the form of military exercises, desensitized the Czechoslovak government and population to the true intentions of the Soviet forces. The combination of these factors allowed the Soviets to surprise both Czechoslovakia and Western governments with the invasion. Soviet intentions became clear once Czechoslovakia came under the full control of the Soviet Union.

Similar to Soviet attempts during the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia demonstrated a continuing trend that coupled both military and diplomatic deception. At the tactical and operational levels, the Soviets used disinformation combined with simulations in an attempt to influence public opinion in Czechoslovakia. Military simulations in the form of manoeuvres and exercises postulated Soviet military forces for intervention. These manoeuvres and exercises further desensitized the Czechoslovak population and eliminated the Czechoslovak army as an obstacle to intervention. In addition, the manoeuvres strategically deceived Western governments about what was happening in Czechoslovakia.

Strategically, the Soviet political apparatus continued to use disinformation during their invasion in an attempt to conceal what was really happening in Czechoslovakia. Claims that the Soviets were invited into Czechoslovakia by disenfranchised political leaders misled Western nations about what was truly going on in Czechoslovakia and provided a credible basis for the Czechoslovak people.

Invasion of Ukraine

The invasion on 24 February 2022 constitutes an escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian War that began in 2014, following the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in February-March 2014. The largest conflict in Europe since the Second World War has already caused hundreds of thousands of military victims and tens of thousands of Ukrainian civilian casualties.

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine highlights the increasing importance of the *obman* phenomenon in Russian military operations. The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea demonstrated the continuity between *maskirovka* and *obman* in the form of concealment, simulation, demonstrations, and disinformation. The conflict continues to expose how the Russian application of the *obman* principle has changed from its earlier versions in the Second World War, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the intervention in Czechoslovakia. The invasion of Ukraine witnesses a shift in Russian deception. Plausible denial of the events that took place replaced the physical concealment of forces.

A significant difference between previous deception attempts and those in Ukraine is Russia's increased use of disinformation over other forms of deception. Disinformation is the cornerstone of the *obman* phenomenon in Ukraine. It is notable that most of the disinformation taking place in Ukraine is being executed throughout the Russian government. Russian political leaders, state media, trolls on government-controlled social media, and government agents are being used to spread false information and create false narratives around unfolding events. The scale of these actions dwarfs the diplomatic and intelligence efforts used during the Battle of Kursk, the missile crisis, and the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Beyond the government's extensive use of disinformation, the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation have focused their efforts to deceive on simulations and demonstrations. The employment of the *"little green men"*, masked Russian soldiers in unmarked green uniforms, was a tactical and operational simulation of local partisan forces. Operationally, the demonstrations along the Ukrainian border of Russian military forces helped to focus Ukraine's attention away from Crimea.

The cover-up took place at a tactical level in order to infiltrate Russian soldiers into Ukraine. Beyond that, concealment helped with force protection and battlefield survival, but it did not play as large a role as it did during the Second World War or the Cuban Missile Crisis.

CONCLUSIONS

Maskirovka is no longer an old pre-Soviet practice that the communists developed as a theory of Russian military camouflage. It is a state of mind that today crosses military, political and diplomatic activities, in a culture of action of a Russia torn between distrust of external enemies and domination of those within. It has been enriched by disinformation, demoralization and techniques of manipulation and control, and has recently been amplified by the power of digital tools.

Maskirovka is conceived in the field of psychological warfare, in accordance with the knowledge and guidelines of the great Russian psychological tradition. Few works are translated, the first ones, especially on behaviourism, were rewritten by Westerners, at the same time as Russian universities and psychology centres were self-enclaving. Apart from the conquest of space, which is a particular area of collaboration with the West, little is known about recent Russian psychology, neither fundamental nor applied to individuals or small groups and collectives, nor about systemic social experiments.

The analysts' writings reveal several features, however. Thus, unlike Western military work, which is focused on social and political sciences, Russian practice combines all dimensions of human action and action on the people. It attaches great importance to biology, neuroscience, psychology, but also physics and radiation. The method is global, associating actions from the top down, at the social level for the effects on the individual, and from the bottom up, focusing on the individual for the effects on human groups, all of which are in a continuous loop and regarded as complementary.

Another feature is the insensitivity of the actors to the fate of the targets, although it is often fatal. Morality has nothing to do with the case here, except for Russia's interests. The action is also often triggered, conducted, then abandoned, when it becomes effective and has achieved its goal. Moral disarmament, repeated surprise and continuous astonishment of democratic countries represent some of the weaknesses constantly exploited. Each time, the unimaginable astounds the victims who are always surprised. The culture of slowness, of potential power, is another striking characteristic of *maskirovka*. It is made to last by being inscribed in the consciousness of an eternity of Russia.

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