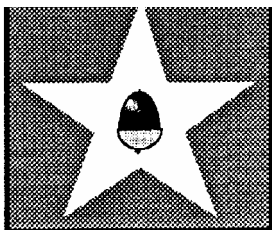


**Conflict Studies Research Centre**

Col Sergey Batyushkin

# Relying on Surprise

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## **Relying on Surprise**

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*(Taken from Armeyskiy Sbornik, 10/02, pp29-34)*

### ***[CSRC Introduction by MJ Orr***

*The Russian Ground Forces have been heavily committed to counter-insurgency and peace support operations during the last ten years but their professional journals have been more concerned with general war issues. However recent issues have begun to address the problems of "Operations Other Than War", which may be an indication that Russian armed forces are beginning to lose their Cold War mentality.*

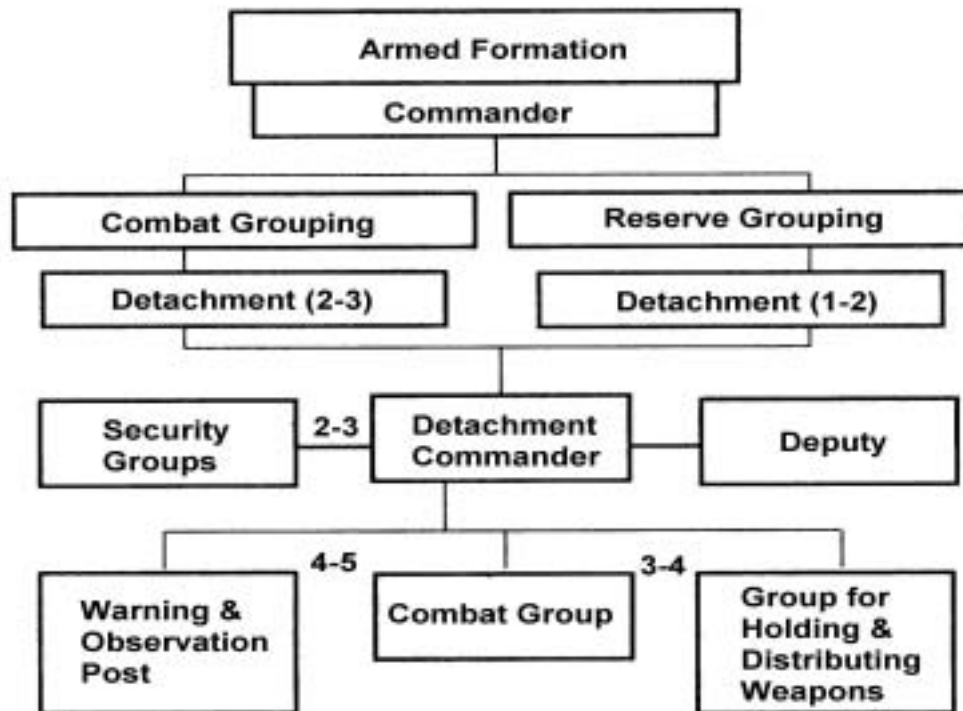
*The present article is an example of this process, significant in itself but also revealing how far Russia has to go in developing a counter-insurgency doctrine. The organizations and tactics described here are so generalized that their value in training for any specific conflict must be limited. Conventional Russian military terminology is used which may give a misleading impression of the scale and level of organization of guerrilla groups. The illustrations are not fully explained in the text and some of them seem to have been copied from other sources. Figure 7, for example, which shows a sabotage-reconnaissance group in action, appears to be more relevant to conventional special forces' operations as a parachute insertion is shown.]*

The events of the past few decades, arising from military confrontation in Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, the Chechen Republic and Dagestan, have shown that the composition, armament and organisational structure of enemy armed formations in local conflicts vary. Both regular and irregular armed formations may be fielded in combat operations. Figure 1 shows a possible organisational structure for such formations, while the table below gives their fighting strength and equipment.

Armed formations are generally manned according to the same general pattern, with a number of common features. We shall enumerate the most important of these. The basic manning principle is territorial, with a village providing a group or small detachment and a community a detachment or armed formation. Personnel are aged from 16 to 65. The commander of the

armed formation is appointed either by the command of the irregular forces or by a newly established local governing body in agreement with them. In the latter case formations are funded from the budget of the newly established governing bodies. Outside the area of active operations the manning strength of the armed formation is 5-10% of the strength shown in the table.

**Figure 1: Possible Organisational Structure of an Armed Formation**



**Operational composition of armed formations (specimen)**

Item	Number in	
	Group	Detachment
Personnel	30-35 (50)	150-200
Machine guns	1	4 (3)
Grenade launchers	1	1 (3)
Assault rifles	10-15	40-60
Carbines	6-8	24-32
Hunting rifles	11-12	44-48
Tanks	-	5-10
Infantry combat vehicles	1-2	6-15
APCs	1-2	15-35
Guns and mortars	1-2	12-20

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It should be noted that it is impossible for them to have a common shape and size, and their operational composition and strength will be decided in each specific case. However, as the military phase of a conflict drags on, armed formations may move towards a fairly stable “manning table”. For example, a group may number 10 to 50 men, a small detachment 50 to 100, a detachment 100 to 500 and an armed formation 500 to 3500.

The members of armed formations are equipped with a variety of small arms, which are generally their personal property. In addition, there may be from one to three light machineguns in groups, two or three medium machineguns and two to four light mortars in small detachments, and up to six mortars of various calibres, up to four anti-air weapons and up to ten artillery pieces of various calibres in detachments. Modern portable and fixed-site radios are normally used for communications.

As is shown by an analysis of the events of recent years, the tactics of armed formations are devised to suit their composition, equipment and organisation structure. It is useful to sub-divide their combat operations into offensive, defensive and partisan operations.

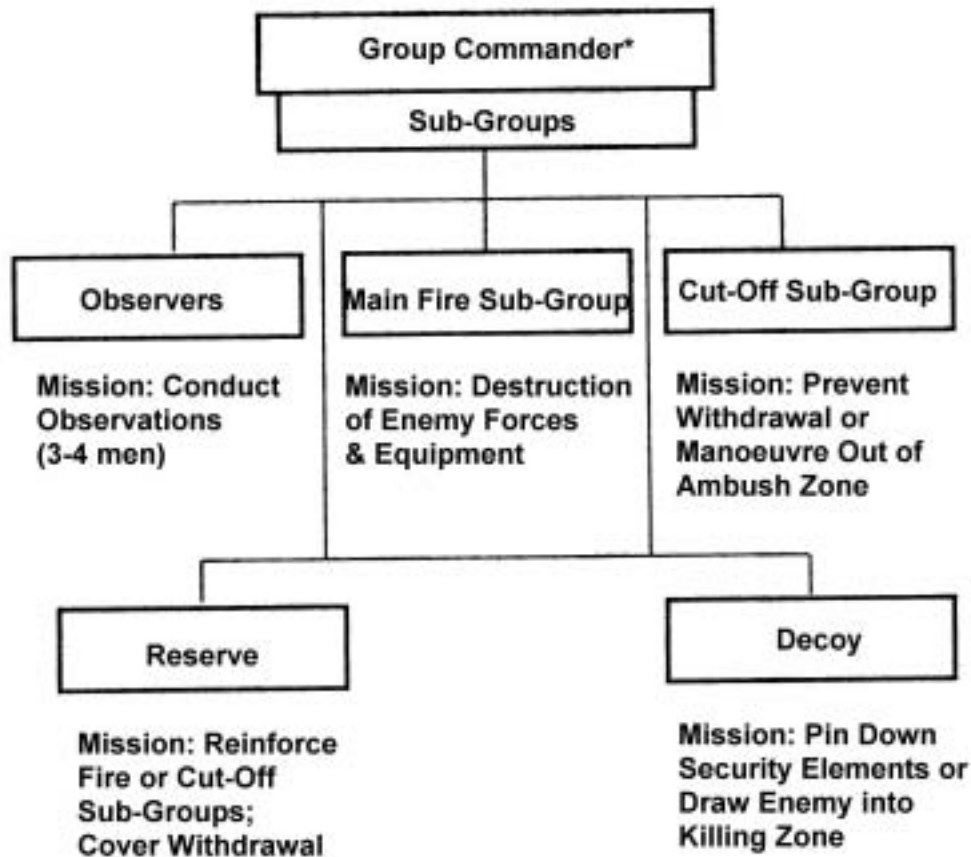
It makes sense to dwell in more detail on partisan operations, since it is these that occur on the widest scale (over the entire territory caught up in the armed conflict, and involving not just armed formations, but a substantial proportion of the population), seeking to inflict damage on local governing bodies and forces, wear them down and thereby weaken the opposing side’s influence on the military-political situation in the region.

Partisan operations include ambushes, raids, the mining of roads, bombardment of military and economic targets, sabotage and terrorist operations and the like.

Ambushes are planned with regard to when columns of combat or transport vehicles, lone vehicles, sub-units or individual servicemen will be passing or disposed at a given location.

Fire ambushes are laid in areas where it is possible to take up position and withdraw afterwards without being spotted. As a rule, positions are selected in tracts of woodland with roads or tracks running through them that are used for the movement of troops and their logistical support elements. Preference is given to stretches of roads with sharp bends, to hollows, river crossings and fords, where vehicles slow down so that they bunch up and find it difficult to manoeuvre.

Stealth, surprise and deception are typical features of ambushes. Members of armed formations most often attack columns from ambush in the early morning or in the evening when the opposing side is less alert. Militants prefer to attack in the second half of the day so that they can break off battle at the onset of darkness, thereby limiting retaliatory action by the other side, particularly with aircraft.

**Figure 2: Possible Composition of an Ambush Group**

\* Group strength 10-15 men

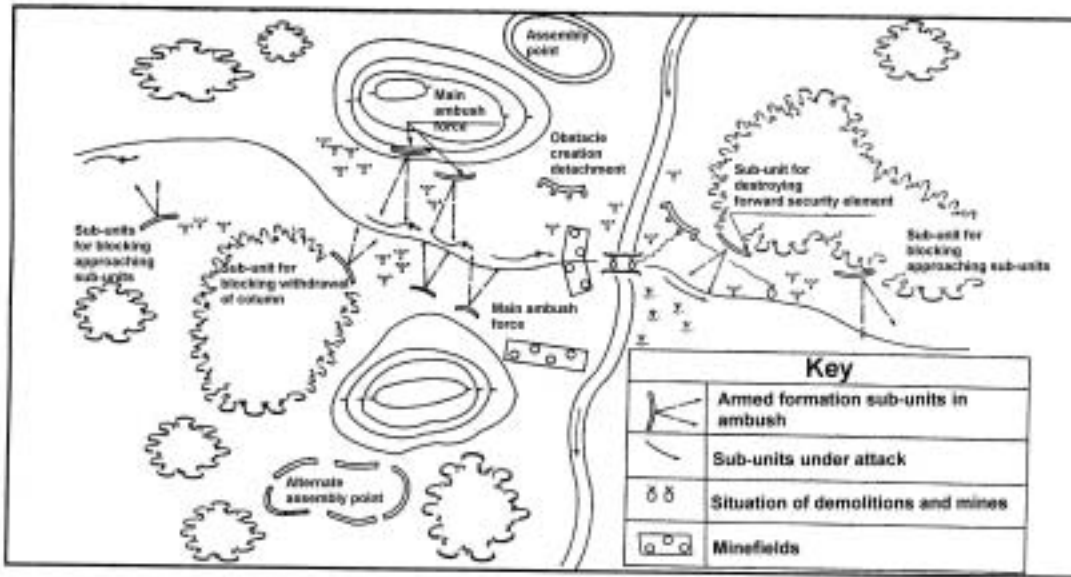
When attacking a column militants usually engage the front and rear vehicles first, so bringing the whole column to a halt and facilitating its efficient destruction with grenade launcher and small arms fire. A second ambush may be arranged with part of the group's manpower and assets in order to prevent help from reaching the column and assist the withdrawal of the main body of the attacking force.

Armed formations sometimes employ a tactical ruse in the form of a decoy sub-group. This is usually positioned with the intent of getting the enemy security elements bogged down in fighting. To this end the decoy sub-group opens fire on the column at long range and then withdraws towards the main body of the ambush forces, luring the pursuing sub-units into its fire.

Well-organised reconnaissance and guarding of the column by escorting forces and proper ground and air cover is usually sufficient to induce armed formations to give up thoughts of ambush.

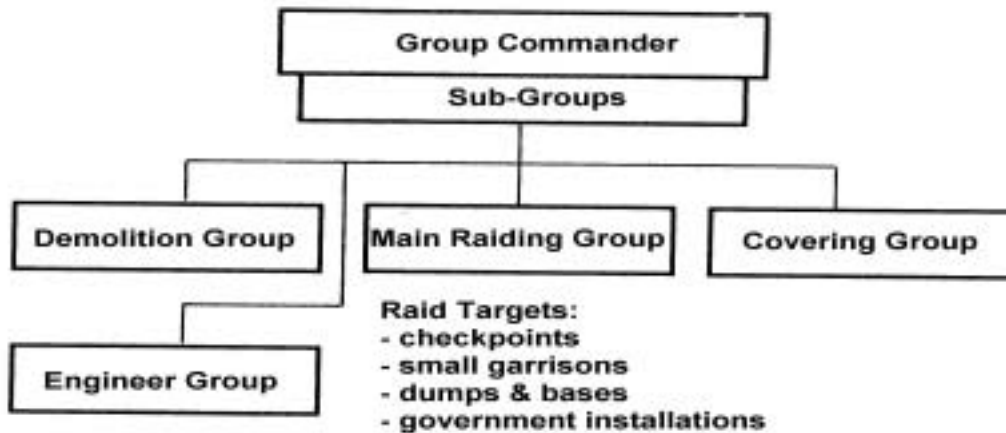
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**Figure 3: Example of Ambush by Armed Formations**



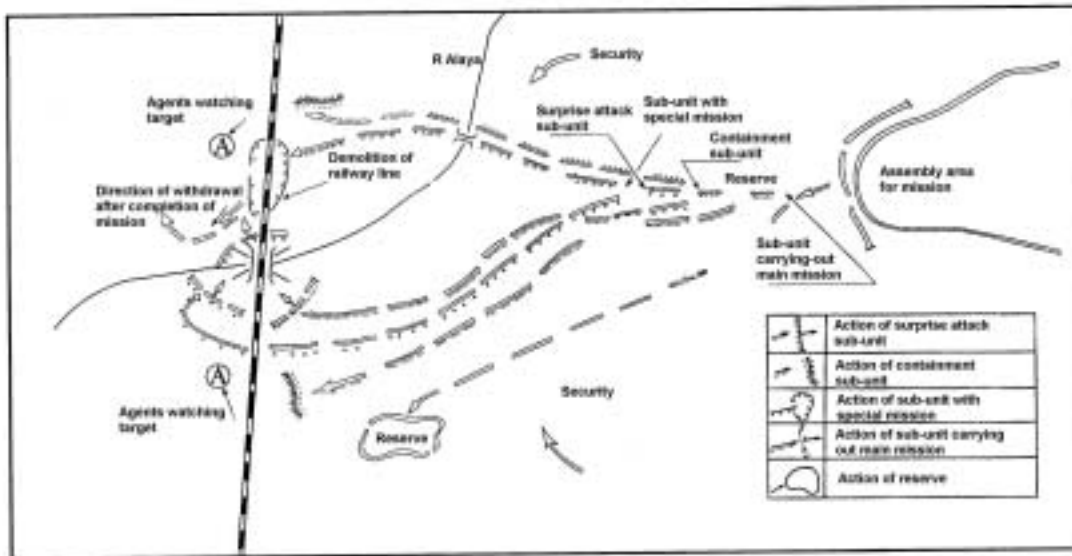
In addition to the ambush, the raid has become a widespread part of the tactical repertoire of armed formations. There are plenty of examples of successful raids being carried out, even while counterterrorist operations are in progress. In organising the raid particular attention is again given to the surprise factor. As with every other mode of operation by armed formations, it is preceded by thorough reconnaissance.

**Figure 4: Possible Composition of Raiding Group**



Stealth and surprise in the raid are achieved by moving armed formations up to the target at night, just before dark, or in poor weather in order to prevent the opposing side from using aircraft. Withdrawal is effected in small groups, heading in different directions. Command and control on the move are by voice, pre-arranged signals or by radio. Figure 5 shows one way in which a raid could be carried out.

**Figure 5: Example of Armed Formation Conduct of a Raid**



In partisan fighting armed formations give particular attention to mine warfare, especially on roads. The object of such action is to stop or seriously impede the movement of both government freight traffic and military columns, thereby undermining the economy and disrupting supply to forces in the conflict zone. Militants use both factory-made mines from various countries and improvised mines, as well as demolitions and other types of explosive devices.

Militants usually lay mines and charges on traffic routes either ahead of time or just before troops and vehicles come up. The best places for laying them are considered to be roads just outside built-up areas or damaged stretches of road, where it is difficult or impossible to effect repair or make a detour; approaches to water sources, fords and crossings; and suitable locations for rest stops or halts. Mines are laid in potholes in the roadway, on the roadside or at places where columns may halt and go round large holes. Mined locations are generally close to prominent landmarks or are marked with various types of sign or improvised materials: stones, grain scattered on the road, twigs etc.

Explosive devices may be laid in a great diversity of ways, at depths from 5 to 100 cm. Electrically ignited charges, command-detonated mines and



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booby traps are also employed. Explosive devices are camouflaged carefully to blend with the surroundings.

Specially trained teams of about four or five men undertake mining.

In order to destroy aircraft on the ground and parked vehicles, wear down troops and make a show of force to the local population, armed formations often resort to bombarding airfields, military garrisons, guard posts and government establishments with mortars and rocket launchers. Sometimes mobile assets, such as heavy weapons and anti-tank guided missiles mounted on UAZ-type light vehicles, are used for this purpose.

Militants will normally reconnoitre the target in advance and prepare carefully for bombardment. While it is in progress fire will very often be adjusted by an observer with a radio.

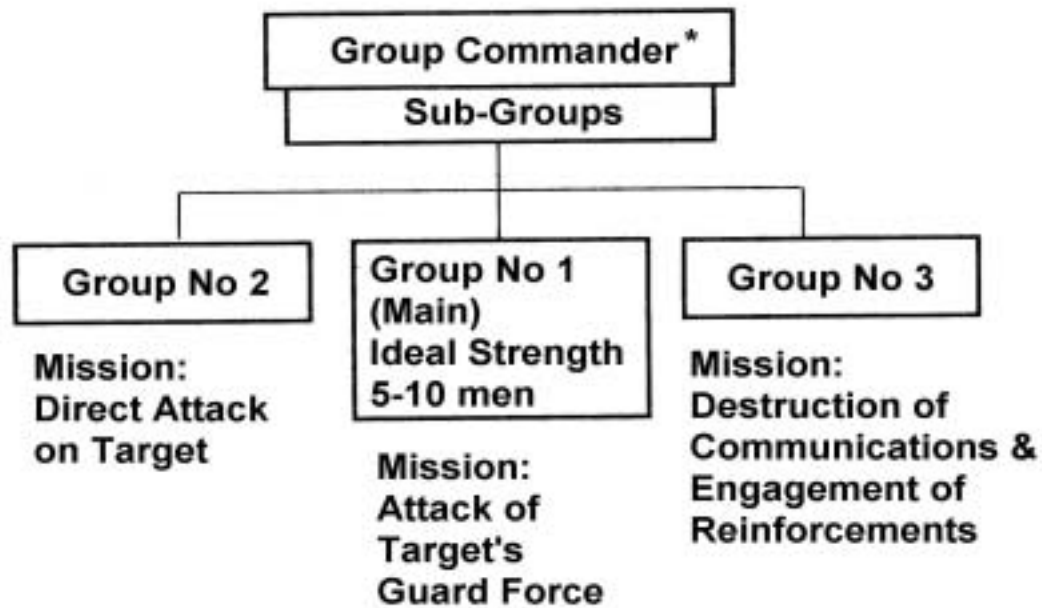
Attacks on military garrisons, various bases and storage facilities are also preceded by careful preparation. Attention is given to the number of fire positions, the times at which sentries are relieved, the strength of the relevant sub-units and the state of mind of their personnel. Engineer preparation of the area of operations is then carried out by secretly setting up positions for mortars, machineguns and recoilless rifles in the yards and gardens of local residents. Withdrawal routes are likewise prepared in advance. The aim of these attacks is to keep the local population in a state of tension, undermine their faith in the state's ability to fight the armed formations and induce them to join the militants.

Sabotage and terrorist action occupy a special place in the operations of armed formations. Their chief targets are communication and power lines, government establishments, economic enterprises, members of the local authorities, members of the local intelligentsia and commanders of the opposing side's military formations.

Sabotage action is usually conducted by specially trained groups or detachments of various sizes. Groups are usually divided into several sub-groups, each with its own task (Figure 6). For example, the first sub-group may attack those guarding the target, while the second carries out the sabotage against the target itself and the third disables communications lines and engages reinforcements. This latter part of the group will normally be disposed in well-camouflaged shelters and only be armed with light machineguns, grenade launchers and assault rifles.

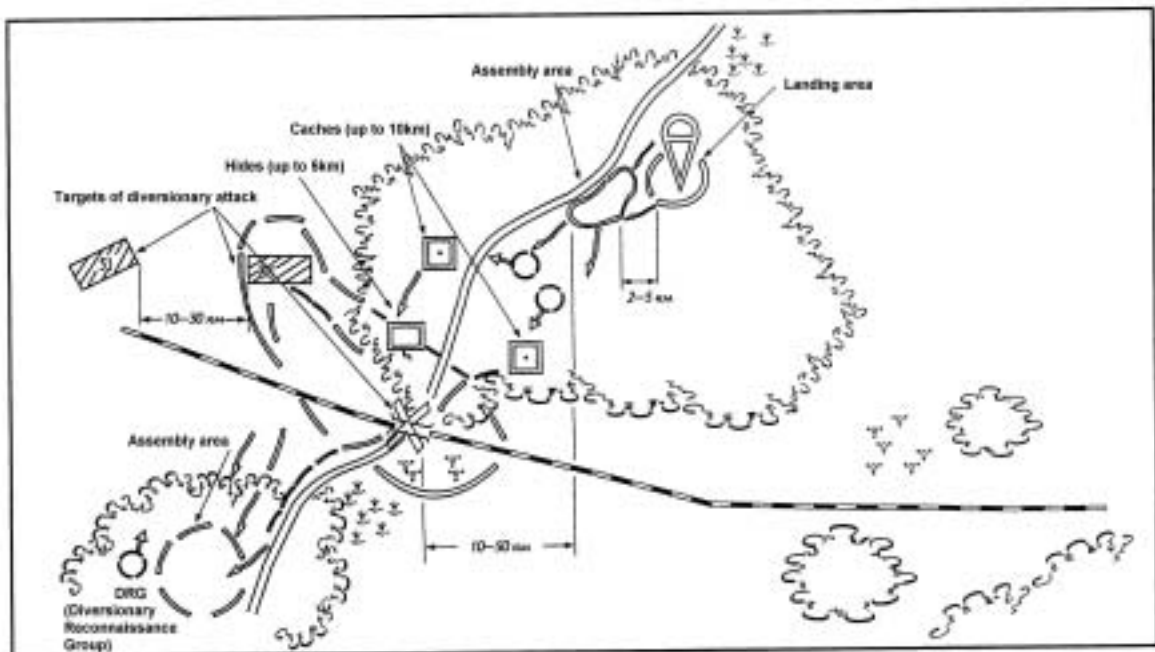
Groups tasked to carry out acts of terrorism first study their target and then decide on how to accomplish their mission. This may involve firing from vehicles, laying mines in official premises or residential buildings, using toxic gas, planting explosive devices on public transport, capturing buildings or hostages, and so on. Figure 7 shows a specimen sabotage operation.

**Figure 6: Possible Composition of a Group Conducting a Diversionary or Terror Attack**



\* Group strength 15-30 men

**Figure 7: Possible Diversionary Action by Armed Formation**



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We have already mentioned that the most frequent mode of action by armed formations against enemy air assets is the bombardment of fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters at airfields. However, recent years have seen a new trend: losses have occurred while aircraft have been taking off, landing or carrying out strikes. For this purpose armed formations establish an air defence system which includes observation posts, pre-prepared weapon positions and command posts. They may engage air targets with group-launched missiles, anti-air fire in combination with a barrage of small arms volley fire, or fire from standard-calibre automatic weapons. All these assets will normally be dispersed and disposed in depth on different lines. This dispersion of assets permits simultaneous fire from different directions, making it harder to neutralize them. In addition to partisan operations, armed formations also undertake offensive and defensive operations, and we shall look at these briefly.

The majority of offensive combat operations are undertaken with the aim of capturing large administrative centres, particular pieces of territory or particular installations, as well as to break out of areas that have been sealed off, as in the fighting in the Ulus-Kert area. Much attention is given to surprise, the seizing of the initiative, manoeuvre with men and assets, and also to independence in implementing plans within the context of well-organized intelligence and warning.

The members of armed formations attach particular importance to the choice of time, place and direction of attack. The enemy manoeuvres his manpower and assets so as to achieve superiority over the opposing forces in a particular area at a specific time. Offensive operations are fast-moving, especially if they are unsuccessful. In that case the enemy breaks off rapidly and withdraws via routes selected in advance under cover of fire and minefields. Experience shows that armed formations prefer to avoid using large numbers of heavy weapons in the offensive, since they reduce mobility.

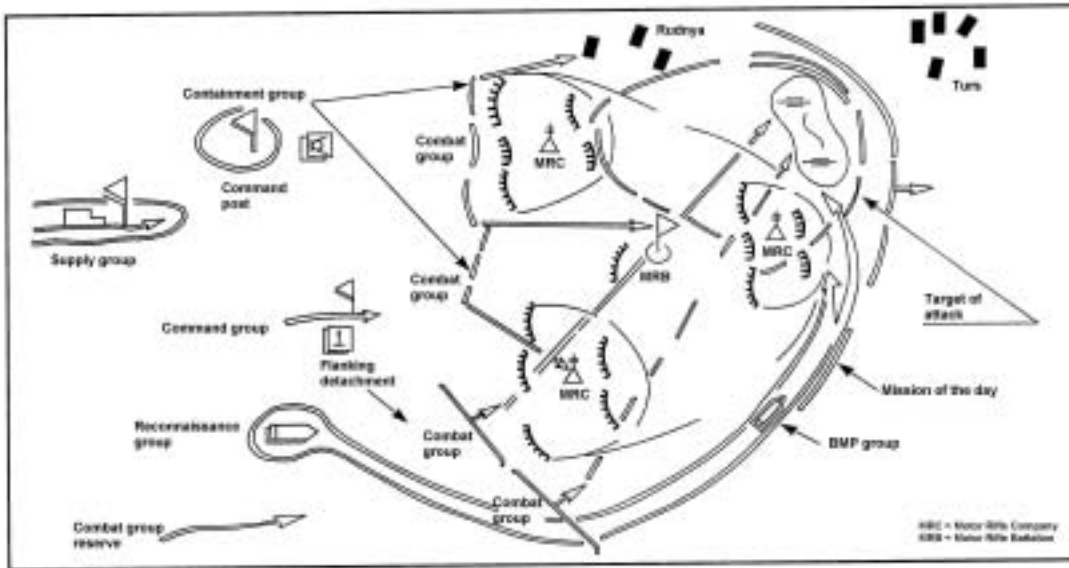
When conducting combat operations the attackers try to make the most of their capabilities. The combat formation is usually structured as a single echelon, with a strong reserve. In the attack frontages will be up to 100 m for a group, from 200 m to 1000 m for a small detachment, from 500 m to 3000 m for a detachment and from 1000 m to 5000 m for an armed formation. A good deal of attention is given to covering flanks and to operations by reconnaissance/sabotage groups.

As a rule, missions are assigned on the day of the attack. There is no division of objectives into immediate and subsequent objectives. The main objective is considered to be the capture of an installation, area of ground or specified line in the armed formation's zone of attack (Figure 8).

Defensive combat operations are organised in order to hold base areas and other important zones, to support the withdrawal of friendly elements from enemy attacks, and also when it is impossible to avoid open battle. Thus, during the counterterrorist operation in the North Caucasus illegal armed formations used virtually all built-up areas (some 400) for defence, and

established a determined positional defence in seven (Groznyy, Bamut, Goyskoye, Komsomol'skoye, Pionerskoye, Shatoy and Khatuni).

**Figure 8: Possible Offensive Battle by Armed Group**



When organising defence particular care is taken in setting up observation, fire and obstacle systems. The combat formation in defence is usually structured as a single echelon, with a reserve. The group occupies a strong point 150-500 m wide and up to 300 m deep, the small detachment a strong point 400-1500 m wide and up to 1000 m deep, the detachment a defended area 700-3000 m wide and up to 2500 m deep, and the armed formation a defence zone 1000-7000 m wide and 3000-5000 m deep (Figure 9).

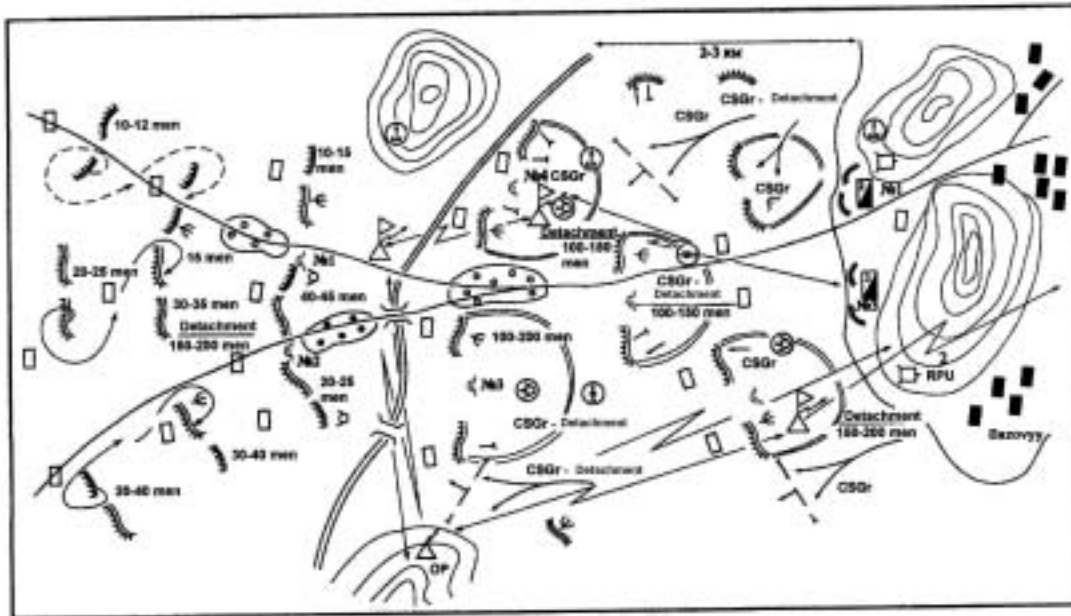
Built-up areas are prepared for all-round defence. Internal defensive positions are established, as well as separate centres of resistance and strong points. Thus, in the defence of Groznyy armed formations established three lines. The inner line, with a radius of up to 1500 m, ran around the presidential palace and was based on continuous centres of resistance. The middle line was established at up to 1000 m from the inner line in the north-west of the city and at up to 5000 m from it in the south-west and south-east and was made up of individual centres of resistance and strong points. The outer line consisted of strong points on the outskirts of the city.

Thus, a number of features are clearly identifiable in the tactics of enemy armed formations: the endeavour to achieve surprise; careful weighing-up of the relative strengths and the situation, and thorough preparation for battle; extensive use of specific modes of operation (partisan operations being the basic mode); well-organised intelligence, making use of the local population and agents in government institutions.

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The main principles underlying their action remain: operating in small groups and detachments; avoiding direct confrontations with superior regular forces; seeking to avoid being drawn into positional battle; avoiding holding on to captured areas for protracted periods.

**Figure 9: Example of Conduct of a Defensive Battle by an Armed Formation**



## Key

▷ Mortars	⊥ Light Anti-Tank Weapon
⊥ Surface-To-Air-Missile	↘ Light Machine Gun
← Medium Machine Gun	⊞ Concentrations of Fire
⊥ Medium Anti-Tank Weapon	CSGr Combat Sub-Group
⊞ Multi-Barrelled Rocket Launcher	
⊞ Minefield	

Analysing the experience that has been built up in fighting armed formations, it is important to learn lessons and prepare units and sub-units in advance for deployment in local conflicts.

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