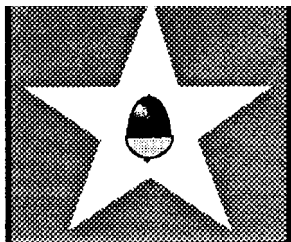


Conflict Studies Research Centre

Maj-Gen Ye A Derbin

**"Invasion"
How Could It Be?**

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"Invasion: How Could It Be?"

Maj-Gen Ye A Derbin
Translation & Commentary by Dr S J Main

In a recent article (Voyennaya Mysl', July 2001, No 4, pp 64-69), Major-General Ye A Derbin seeks to expand the definition of "invasion" to include attacks on a country's information space and "humanitarian intervention" on its territory without its consent.

In assessing the importance of this article, the reader is hampered by the lack of biographical information on the author: there is a photograph but nothing in the article throws any light on the author's current post. However, I have established that the author graduated from the Military Academy of the General Staff in 1999 with a Gold Medal; that he is part of a military "dynasty", ie his father was a colonel in the Red Army during the Second World War and he has two sons serving in various capacities in the Russian Armed Forces; and that he has served with distinction, including a period in the 1990s as a garrison commander in the Transbaykal Military District, when it was commanded by Colonel-General V Tret'yakov and the first deputy commander was the current Ground Forces Commander-in-Chief, General N Kormil'tsev.¹ Although this is his first published piece, it is in the Journal of the General Staff, and it would be a reasonable deduction to make that the views of the author are worthy of our attention. The topic itself is an important one, and one which has assumed ever greater relevance as the whole notion of war-fighting and war-prevention undergoes radical change.

The article is a bit of a curate's egg, though, containing some new thinking about the topic, as well as a re-statement of previous ideas, albeit more concisely explained than has been the case to date. Whilst it is impossible to assess the impact of the article on future Russian military thinking, it would not be an exaggeration to state that Derbin's analysis represents a trend in Russian military thought which may yet be reflected in the course of reform of the Armed Forces, either in terms of doctrine or force structure. If his view of the need to broaden the concept of "invasion" is widely accepted, then the future course of military reform may well be altered to accommodate the views presented in this piece.

On the surface of things, what constitutes an "invasion" is fairly obvious and, in beginning his analysis, Derbin opens with a very standard Russian definition of the term, taken from the 1983 Voyennyi Entsiklopedicheskiy Slovar (Military Encyclopaedic Dictionary), which, more or less, has been

repeated ever since, including in the most recent edition of the authoritative Voyennaya Entsiklopediya (Military Encyclopaedia):

Entry by the armed forces of one or several states by land, air or sea of the territory of another state without its consent; violation of the state border (air space, territorial waters) by military units (patrols), individual planes or ships from another state for intelligence, diversionary purposes, etc.²

However, given the changes in the way that wars are now being fought, as well as the way that armed forces are being used in the affairs of other states, the author argues that it is time to look at the whole concept of "invasion" and re-define it for the modern era. In examining the term, he returns to one of the earliest definitions of the word in Russian, not to a military source, but to one of the standard great works in the history of the Russian language, namely V Dal's authoritative dictionary of Russian, Tolkovyy Slovar' Zhivogo Velkiorusskogo Yazyka (Explanatory Dictionary of the Living Great Russian Language). The dictionary defines "to invade" simply as "to enter by force".³ Derbin then goes on to state that the act of invasion in itself implies that there is "resistance" in some form or other, ranging from a declaration forbidding the invading power to literally "cross the line", ie violate the border, to "adopting measures to repulse the invader".⁴

This then leads us to another area of difficulty: definition of the "subject of invasion", ie not the target of the invasion, but a definition involving the means of invasion, be it spy-plane, reconnaissance-trawler, or group of armed troops. To his way of thinking, if this is not done properly, then the corresponding response may either be too little or too much:

Unfounded responses, or the lack of [one] could lead to the death of innocent people or the non-fulfilment of military tasks designed to defend one's borders.

There is nothing faulty in the logic of the above and he elaborates on it later: it is a question of measuring the response to the threat posed. If you get it right, then the implication is that you could stall an invasion by the enemy in its tracks; however, if you get it wrong, then not only is there a very real possibility that innocents will be killed but, more importantly from the point of view of the state, a condition of military unpreparedness on the eve of war not only renders you weaker in the fight but could easily itself encourage an invasion. Note that Derbin studiously avoids using the example of June 1941, the last great invasion of the USSR/Russia, to prove his point.

Instead, in discussing the pre-World War Two period (interesting that he only refers to World War Two as such, not the standard Russian phrase for WW2, the "Great Patriotic War"), he quotes an earlier military-sourced definition of "invasion", from an article published in 1936 (the year of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and the beginning of Stalin's purge of the Red Army's senior military command):

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An energetic offensive on a broad front, violating the state frontier by a militarily ready ... component of the armed forces (the invading army).

It was then a question of "by battle, ascertaining the position on land and in the air, forcing the enemy to operate in an unclear position for him, ensuring the possibility of deploying the main force at the necessary moment and on the decisive axis in order to develop the future success of the operation".⁵

Derbin's use of a definition which was initially published at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War is interesting and, on the surface, somewhat difficult to reconcile with analysing and interpreting the word in the context of much more recent events. However, the definition does talk about the invasion taking place over a "broad front", as well as the need to force "the enemy to operate in an unclear position". As will be shown below, he is also extending the definition beyond the narrow confines of the classical use of the word: in its own way, the attack on a country's "information space" could be interpreted as a modern-day equivalent of forcing the enemy to operate "in an unclear position". Even so, as he himself points out: "Long gone are the days when 'to enter by force' was carried out either at the pace of infantrymen or cavalry".

He continues:

Today, in the armoury of actions of the aggressor a firm place is taken up by a lengthy phase of air-power.

Derbin analyses the use of air-power to a significant extent as being one of the determining factors in any future "invasion" and although not original, it is an issue that he returns to throughout his article. There can be little doubt that in examining the campaigns waged against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999 and Iraq in 1990, Derbin has been impressed by the significance of air power and is attempting to stimulate his readership to more thoroughly examine its use and impact in any future military campaign. Again, it is striking, especially to a Russian audience, how he refuses to draw on the experience of June 1941 in order to assess the historical and military accuracy of a view that air power alone can win wars.

But Derbin is also keen to emphasise the importance of an attack on the country's "information space" and he rates this as of equal importance as any ground or air campaign:

Invasion, in our view, can be real not only as a result of the activities of air or land groups of forces, but also by an incursion [*vnedreniye*] in the information space of the enemy by the unleashing of an info-technical and info-psychological debilitating strike [*porazhdayushchee vozdeystviye*].

This is a very interesting part of the article, not least because it mentions an attack on a nation's "information space" as being equivalent in its

importance and purpose in attempting to destroy the enemy to a classical invasion force. The importance of this newer interpretation of what constitutes an "invasion" can be underlined by comparing this definition of "invasion" with definitions of the same word recently published in two other works in Russia. One, published by the Russian General Staff, sticks to the standard, classical definition of the term:

1) Entry by the AF [Armed Forces] of one, or several countries, by land, air and sea of the territory of another state, without its consent. Under invasion can also be understood the violation of the state frontier (air space, territorial waters) of a country by military units (patrols), individual planes or ships from another country for intelligence, diversionary or other purposes.⁶

There is not much difference between this definition and one which appeared in a specialist dictionary, under the general editorship of General V L Manilov:

1) Entry by the *armed forces* [emphasis as in the original] of one, or several, states by land, air or sea on the *territory* of another *state* without its consent; 2) violation of the *state frontier* (air space, territorial waters) by military units (patrols), individual planes or ships from another country for *intelligence, diversionary, etc.* purposes. Invasion is an *act of aggression*.⁷

Derbin's definition, in seeking to equate an attack on a nation's "information space" in potential consequence and seriousness with an attack by conventional military forces on the ground, in the air or at sea, increases the breadth of the definition considerably and, arguably, brings it more into line with the realities of any "invasion" that Russia (or any other modern state) is likely to face in the future. This extension of the definition is very important in a Russian context, especially in the light of the recently-published definitions, which hark back to a more classical definition of the term. Derbin's attempts to extend the meaning imply that there is a body of professional opinion in the Russian Armed Forces which is not happy with the standard definition. They would argue that the standard definition is outmoded. It could be that non-acknowledgement of the background to the events of 22nd June 1941 is very deliberate, in that he is attempting to persuade his fellow military professionals to move their thinking away from repetitive analysis of the main reasons behind the initial debacle of June 1941 to tackling more contemporary issues in today's geopolitical and geostrategic context and not in the context of events now 60 years old. In short, 2001 is not 1941. This is purely speculative, but it is unheard of that an article in the General Staff's main theoretical journal on the theme of "invasion", by a Major-General who has completed the General Staff Academy with great distinction, did not see fit to include any discussion of the last invasion of the USSR/Russia, either on a theoretical or practical level.⁸

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After all, one of the most fundamental questions that can be posed either to the state, or to its armed forces is: what constitutes an "invasion"? The answer to that question determines so much in the way of military policy, doctrine and procurement that it is of vital importance that it is addressed properly. Is Derbin simply a lone wolf, or does he represent an important body of opinion within the General Staff seeking to re-think what are now the basic features which constitute an "invasion"? It is true that the means used to "invade" a country now go far beyond what was thought possible 50 years ago, never mind 100. For an invasion nowadays to be successful, an attack on a country must also target the country's "information space". Derbin makes this very clear by continuing that an "internal armed conflict will also take the shape of a complex info-armed invasion [*informatsionno-vooruzhennoye vtorzheniye*]": Russia's recent war in Chechnya provides enough evidence that it was as much an information war, as a conventional war fought on the ground or in the air.

In another key couple of paragraphs, he describes what he means by the phrase "enemy invasion":

First of all, the introduction of troops (forces), means and objects in the air space, on the territory or in territorial waters, without the consent of the legitimate organs of state power of the country-object of invasion, or its allies, for the conduct of military (intelligence-diversionary, underground, provocative) and other pre-determined operations. Secondly, info-technical strike on the means acquiring, analysing, securing and transmitting the information of the country-object of invasion, ending (limiting) their activity in the information sphere, reducing the capability of state and military control and creating a threat to the information security of the state.

In short, any unsanctioned violation of the state border can be considered as an "act of invasion": the logical conclusion of this and one that appears in bold - to make sure that the reader does not miss the point - is the following:

Any 'peacekeeping actions' on the territory of a state without the agreement of its government can be considered an invasion which, obviously, must be repulsed.

The potential consequences of such a statement should not be underestimated. If anyone is still in any doubt, in the next paragraph, Derbin discusses how both the USA and NATO have "principally new views on the use of troops [forces] in the absence of a state of military conflict". "Humanitarian intervention" he dubs "a comfortable idea", which "reduces to zero the significance of a country's sovereignty". He cites NATO's recent air campaign against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as a case in point.

There is a clear inference that if NATO was even to attempt a case of "humanitarian intervention" in Russia without the sanction of the Kremlin, then there would be no question that Russia would resist such direct

interference in its internal affairs. However, can the inference not also be made that a NATO-led "humanitarian intervention" mission conducted, for instance in Georgia, Azerbaijan or Moldova, without the prior consent of their or the Russian government, may compel Russia to respond?

Whilst it is understandable that he has concentrated on military campaigns and wars which support his argument, there are a couple of points which he singularly fails to address. One is whether a peacekeeping force which is no longer welcome in its host country can be considered as an invader. Russia itself has played a "peacekeeping" role in a number of fSU republics over the years, with the - sometimes grudging - consent of the governments involved. This unwillingness to withdraw, it could be argued, is currently the case with the Russian forces in Moldova. And what if, as may well happen in the not too distant future, Georgia requests that Russia withdraw its peacekeeping force from Abkhazia, a strategically vital area for Russia? The picture could become even more complicated if, for example, the Abkhaz "government" requested that the Russians keep their men there. This is an important issue, about which nothing in the article throws any light.

More than two years after Kosovo, this article proves that there is a section of the senior Russian military leadership still very unhappy with the whole idea of NATO peacekeeping, and publicly re-asserting the right of nation states to solve their own internal problems without recourse to the UN, never mind NATO. If Russian policy does follow the trends and implications of this section of Derbin's analysis (though Putin's response to the events of 11 September make this less of a forgone conclusion), then Russia could be on a direct course of confrontation with NATO over future interventions. Given his attempt to broaden and deepen the definition of what constitutes an "invasion", and his citing the examples of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Iraq, Derbin is making a strong argument for the re-assertion of the sovereignty of the nation state. Regardless of the merits and demerits of his argument - and I suspect that this article is part of a wider and more detailed work he carried out as part of his Academy Diploma work - his views have found public expression in the main theoretical journal of the Russian General Staff, either as an aid to stimulate debate on the issue (the article is published in the "discussion" section), or as a reflection of the views of a body of professional military opinion. Even in the face of what they acknowledge is a very tangible threat to world security - "international terrorism" - there is still a real reluctance on the part of many of the senior Russian military leadership to get too involved in the current Anglo-US military campaign in Afghanistan, that, on a broader scale, a section of the senior command is still less than happy with US/NATO interference in what it would see as internal security issues, best left to the nation state to resolve. "Humanitarian intervention", in their eyes, is simply being used as an excuse to meddle in the internal affairs of other states and re-shape the world more to the liking of the interventionists. It will be interesting to see how the Russian military reacts to the US military presence in Central Asia once/if/ the present campaign in Afghanistan is brought to a successful conclusion and the US decides to stay in the region, on the pretext of the area being the new "front line" against international terrorism.

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The rest of the article is used by the author more or less simply to reiterate classic invasion theory, ie the types of invasion possible, objectives and methods used, the effect of resistance to the invasion and how it could be tackled, etc. However, he makes no effort to analyse, for instance, the role of the political arm of the state in the decision-making process. Again, this is striking. After all, how a country responds to an invasion is as much a political question as a military one. Derbin has written a largely military-technical piece, without mentioning the fundamental role of the state's senior political apparatus in deciding whether an invasion has taken place and what to do about it. Thus, he is content to analyse three types of "invasion", but says nothing about how the role of the political apparatus may impact on what steps are taken to counter each of the types of invasion scenario he describes. In his evaluation, they are purely military-technical problems, to be solved by military-technical means.

Of course, the scenarios vary according to the aims of the invader: "Tactical - invasion of specific military objects ... in armed conflicts; operational (operational-tactical) - invasion by military groups in local (regional) wars, enemy's use of mass missile-air strikes and the conduct of systematic military operations by air force groups; strategic (operational-strategic) - invasion by strategic-level groups of forces on a large-scale (regional) war, air force offensive operations (air campaign)." As an "act of armed aggression", "invasion" goes through a number of stages - "offensive - launch by the enemy, during a prolonged period of time, of a number of information strikes, firing at his objects and [conducting] diversionary-intelligence activities (armed acts) on the border and in the rear; attack of the main force deep in the territory with the subsequent defeat of the opposing enemy and seizure of profitable regions; presence of forward units on captured territory, with the aim of creating conditions for broadening the scale of the invasion."

The enemy's invasion can be deemed successful ... in the following circumstances: launch, by the attacker, of a second and subsequent round of mass missile-airforce strikes, as well as the continuation of other operations without changing their earlier intensity, length or character; the seizure and firm hold by the attacker of important areas in the border zone, and in the interior of the country, allied with unsatisfactory results of retaliatory strikes on the part of the defender; isolation, on account of the operations of the airforce, airborne troops and diversionary-intelligence units, of the first echelons of the defending force; successful landings of marines, seizure and hold of parts of the coast."

In concluding this section, Derbin also points out that "if there is no resistance to the invasion", then the invading force could move on to the second phase without the need to launch mass air strikes, simply by "occupying territory through the deployment of forces."

Assuming that there is resistance to the invasion and the invading power has to work through the three stages, Derbin lists the main methods that

could be used by the invading power to achieve its objectives: in accordance with standard Russian theory prominence is given to the use of the invader's air and artillery assets, not only in attacking the "normal" military targets in the border zone, for instance, but also the country's communication, transport and energy systems, including "the creation of catastrophic consequences through the destruction of energy plants, particularly nuclear ... the deployment over the state border of diversionary-intelligence groups ... to conduct terrorist and underground information-psychological activity, etc."

This emphasis on the importance of an air campaign is a feature which Derbin refers to again in his final conclusion, examining the success of the military campaigns against both the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Iraq:

The defending side did not have the possibility of launching serious retaliatory strikes at the opponent's air bases, its aircraft carriers and naval ships, from whence the planes flew and the missiles were fired.

Arguably, though, his main conclusion was arrived at earlier in the text:

The analysis of the nature of contemporary military conflict permits [us] to confirm that the primary threat of an enemy invasion comes from the air and not from the land, as in all other previous wars ... If the defending power successfully repulses the air offensive, then the enemy may refrain from further developing his offensive.

Whilst there may be little originality in his presentation of the various phases and targets of an invasion campaign, has he not fallen into the trap of focussing too much and too selectively on the experience to be gained from the military campaigns against Iraq and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia? Has he not placed too much weight for the success, or otherwise, of any future military campaign on air power? After all, he does seem to be of the opinion that knocking out the enemy's airforce/missile strike system would go a long way in, if not stopping, then certainly forestalling an invasion. Even today, there are instances where ground troops have to be committed in order to win the conflict. But Derbin makes no attempt to broaden the range of measures used in repulsing an invader to include any analysis of the effects of his new, broader definition of the invasion itself.

In short, the article sought to do two things:

1. Emphasise the need to expand on the existing concept of "invasion", by examining military campaigns over the past decade, especially those involving the USA and its NATO allies to include invasion of a country's information space and to the point of stating that peacekeeping actions on a state's territory without its prior consent can be considered an "invasion";

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2. Reiterate the various stages of an "invasion" and the methods used to ensure the success.

This is an interesting article, by a man who will be very much a name to look out for in the future, even if his published views would appear to place him among the more reactionary of Russia's military thinkers. Of course, the caveat should be added that the article was written long before the events of 11 September and events may just possibly have superseded the main thrust of his anti-NATO arguments. Whilst this has been an interesting piece - especially given the deliberate lack of any mention of June 1941 - it will be much more interesting to see whether Derbin's analysis produces a debate within the ranks of the Russian military on this theme and how, if at all, it changes Russia's military posture in the future.

ENDNOTES

¹ V Berezko, "Diplomy Akademii Genshtaba", *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 22 June 1999; S Pavlenko, "Ofiterskiye Dinastii", *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 17 February 1998; A Biletskiy, "V Voyennom Sovete Okruga. Glavnoye - Boyevaya Ucheba", *Na Boyevom Postu*, 31 August 1996; V Chuprin, "V Voyennom Sovete ZabVO. General-polkovnik N Kormil'tsev: Voyennaya sluzhba - sluzhba gosudarstvennaya", *Na Boyevom Postu*, 20 November 1996; N Kirmel', "Kolonka redaktora. Ne Lishayte Shpionov Raboty", *Na Boyevom Postu*, 10 September 1997; A Overchuk, "Vydayushchiysya Komandir Veka", *Voyennyy Vestnik*, No 1, 1985, 6, 32.

² Voenniy Entsiklopedicheskiy Slovar', M 1983, s 171; Voennaya Entsiklopediya, t 2, M 1994, s 315.

³ Although Derbin uses the 1978 edition, the edition is an exact replica of the second edition of Dal's work published in 1882-1884 (the dictionary was originally published in 1863-1866). Derbin's choice in using a definition of over a hundred years' old is an interesting one (Vladimir Dal', Tolkovyy Slovar' Zhivogo Velikorusskogo Yazyka, tom 1-4, M 1978).

⁴ Unless otherwise stated, all quotes are from Major-General Derbin's article.

⁵ Derbin is quoting an article which originally appeared in *Krasnaya Zvezda* on 1 June 1936, (Ye Sergeev, "Posle Vtorzhenia").

⁶ Slovar' Voyennykh Terminov, M 2000, 36.

⁷ Voyennaya Bezopasnost' Rossii. Slovar'-spravochnik, M 2000, 67-68.

⁸ According to a newspaper report which appeared in June 1999, Major-General Derbin graduated from the Military Academy of the General Staff that year with a gold medal, its highest academic honour, ("Vypuskniki. Diplomy General'nogo shtaba", *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 22 June 1999).

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