
Interview: Lt. Gen. Gerard C. Berkhof

Soviet irregular warfare threatens NATO with 'spetsnaz' operations

Lt. Gen. G.C. Berkhof of the Royal Netherlands Army was Chief of Staff of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's Allied Forces Central Europe (AFCENT) Command until October 1986. He was interviewed by Michael Liebig, EIR executive director for Western Europe and by EIR correspondent Dean Andromidas.

The discussion dealt with the Soviet Union's irregular war against Western Europe, with particular reference to the role of Soviet and East European spetsnaz operations, a topic on which Lt. General Berkhof is highly qualified. He conducted an investigation into these capabilities while Chief of Staff of AFCENT, NATO's wartime command for all forces on NATO's Central Front, which include American, British, West German, Belgian, and Dutch forces. According to reports in the Netherlands press, it was Lt. General Berkhof's concern for the vulnerabilities of NATO's Central Front to Soviet irregular warfare which led to his dismissal as Chief of Staff, although the NATO spokesman attributed it to a "personality conflict" with his West German commander, Gen. Leopold Chalupa. In the course of EIR's independent investigations, security experts in the United States and Western Europe concluded that Soviet-sponsored irregular warfare is a major unresolved policy issue within NATO.

Prior to his position at AFCENT, Lt. General Berkhof was a research fellow for one year at the Clingendael Institute, the Netherlands, Institute for International and Strategic Studies, where he authored the book, Battle For Space, which strongly demonstrates the necessity for the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) and a Tactical Defense Initiative (TDI) for Western Europe, if NATO is to maintain even a credible deterrent against the Soviet military threat. The

general has also written many articles and reports on a variety of strategic subjects including SDI/TDI, Soviet irregular warfare, and questions dealing with European defense.

EIR: Do you think that irregular warfare is adequately appreciated in current NATO strategic thinking?

Berkhof: The answer is clearly no. It is an uncomfortable question. Most people do not know about it and seem not to want to know about it. It is not on the curricula of the military academies. Whenever the issue of irregular warfare is taken up at all, it is dealt with superficially.

EIR: What is the concrete danger specifically of the *spetsnaz* side of Soviet irregular warfare?

Berkhof: The *spetsnaz* side comes into operation only in times of acute tension and in wartime. It is therefore not the most pressing danger. We obviously should, however, be concerned about the *spetsnaz* infrastructure in the West.

It is irregular warfare by proxy involving terrorist organizations that should worry us the most. The greatest danger is destabilization through "active measures," disinformation, and terrorism. The real danger lies in indirect, covert operations of the Soviet Union, mostly directed by the KGB. On the other hand, *spetsnaz* is a war instrument; the methods are probably the same, but the instrument is different.

At the top, there is a close coordination between the KGB, the International Department of the CPSU and the GRU's (military intelligence) *spetsnaz* in Moscow. But on the ground the operations are more differentiated. Therefore, one must look at various indicators in order to assess irregular warfare capabilities under so-called "peacetime" conditions.

EIR: How do you view the indirect, covert control of terrorist irregular warfare?

Berkhof: Let me go back a bit in order to answer your question. The costs and risks of modern "regular" warfare are quite extraordinary. This sets well-defined limits to conducting "open" warfare. If you can achieve your strategic aims with little cost and low risk, all the better. The sheer size of both NATO and Warsaw Pact arsenals leads almost automatically to the adoption of an indirect strategic approach. Such an indirect strategic approach involves a variety of aspects, ranging from propaganda with sweet-sounding "peace initiatives" to the spreading of drugs as a means of destabilizing NATO, and the deployment of terrorist organizations.

EIR: Do you think there exists concrete evidence of Soviet control of international terrorism?

Berkhof: If such evidence exists, it is somewhat scanty precisely because the Soviets work indirectly and covertly. They are working through the Bulgarians and there does exist evidence that the Bulgarians are involved. They work through East Germans and there is evidence that the East Germans are involved. The Soviets don't get involved directly. They employ their satellites.

EIR: Do you sense any political interference in the West in order to block an effective investigation into these Soviet and East bloc tracks?

Berkhof: You have to look at the problem of Soviet-directed irregular warfare in the context of the dominant conception of détente. Most Western governments like to do business with the Soviet Union. They don't want to upset the détente climate for themselves and for their populations with the knowledge that the Soviet Union is a real adversary. In the present political environment this matter is not a popular one. Politicians do not appreciate the fact that we are facing a real enemy.

EIR: Do you think there is fear in the West of Russian retaliation if the Soviet Union's role in irregular warfare were exposed?

Berkhof: The problem is that the Soviets would simply deny it. They would deny it categorically. And then you would have to present your evidence, and the evidence, being mostly circumstantial, is somewhat inconclusive. Our intelligence services want to keep their work secret and even they would have problems presenting evidence of courtroom quality.

EIR: How do you see the role of drug trafficking as a part of Soviet irregular warfare?

Berkhof: It's one of the elements. First of all, it destabilizes the West and second, it provides hard currency earnings. So it is quite an effective operation.

EIR: Do you see indications of Russian-controlled drug operations specifically targeting NATO military personnel?

Berkhof: Again, circumstantial evidence. You know the affair of the Russian freighter *Kapitan Tomson* at Rotterdam harbor. You know that the drugs aboard came from Afghanistan, they were loaded onto the ship in Riga. The drugs were moved 5,000 km through Soviet territory, KGB-controlled territory. Do you think that such smuggling operations are possible without the relevant Soviet authorities being involved? That's utter nonsense. You also have to look at drug-growing areas like Lebanon and Syria. The drugs are loaded onto East European ships in Syrian harbors, and are then transported to Europe. So there is if you know how the organizations work. There must be a controlling agency, and most likely it's the KGB.

EIR: How serious is the drug problem within the NATO military?

Berkhof: Well, it's definitely a factor, but not in the sense that NATO's overall military performance is seriously affected by it. The problem varies in the different armies. For instance, drugs are more of a problem in all-volunteer armies than in conscript armies. I would say that the Americans have more of a problem than the Dutch. The Canadians have a problem, too. They have even had some nasty airplane accidents as a result. Now the Canadians are enforcing urinalysis for their military personnel. The U.S. Navy is implementing new measures. They swoop down on an installation or a ship with a urinalysis team and if you are caught you will be fired. The Navy brought drug use down from 27% in 1980 to less than 10% at the present moment.

EIR: You mentioned the role of the East European satellites in drug trafficking. Could you specify a bit more on that?

Berkhof: There is a lot of evidence concerning Bulgarian and East German involvement in the drug trafficking, less evidence concerning the Czechs, although we have more indication of Czech involvement than we do of any direct Russian involvement. The most effective way of gathering evidence is to investigate the financial transfers of Russian and East European shipping and other trade-related agencies. These financial flows, or, to be more precise, money laundering, were so revealing that some Russians were expelled from Belgium and even Holland.

EIR: Could you describe the role of trucks from Warsaw Pact states in the context of *spetsnaz*, terrorist, and drug operations?

Berkhof: Well, you have to look at the whole TIR [*Transport International Routier*] system. It was designed back in 1949 in order to simplify customs procedures. In the country of departure the customs officer seals the freight and signs the customs documents and then the truck can be driven

across all European frontiers. Customs inspections are allowed only if there are concrete indications that the seals and/or the freight documents have been tampered with. Holland is the gateway to Europe with the world's largest port, so naturally we have a lot of East-West trade passing through my country and a large percentage of it is transported in East European and Soviet TIR trucks.

Since 1949 the TIR system has expanded dramatically, there are millions of TIR documents issued each year. Even more dramatic is the growth in the East European and Soviet share in TIR truck transportation. By the 1970s it comprised 30% of all TIR traffic, now it is over 50%. There is also a commercial side to Soviet and East European TIR truck transportation. It earns them hard currency. In fact, they practice some rather ruthless price cutting on freight rates, so much so that in France alone, employment in the transport sector dropped by 40% because of price cutting by the Bulgarians. It has gotten to a point where French weapons are transported to Iraq on Bulgarian trucks!

The other side of Soviet and East European TIR trucking is much more sinister. In the Warsaw Pact states, customs authorities are part of the state security apparatus. This allows the KGB and the other East bloc services to exploit at will the TIR system. With "officially" doctored freight documents, Soviet and East European TIR trucks can transport all sorts of illegal merchandise. . . . We here in Holland found some quite peculiar things in TIR trucks from the East bloc, but I'm not at liberty to tell you the details. Similar findings were made in Italy and most other West European countries. We are not sure of the precise percentage of illegal merchandise in total East bloc TIR trucking, but according to Dutch experts it is above 5%.

EIR: One problem is the freight, the second problem is the TIR truck drivers. What role may they play as a factor in Soviet-directed irregular warfare?

Berkhof: We have reports from defectors like Victor Suvorov. I see two aspects, one category of drivers must be contraband specialists. They deliver arms, explosives, drugs, *spetsnaz*, and/or spy equipment. Others are systematically reconnoitering roads for armored formations, spying on military installations, following military exercises, and so forth.

Were we to systematically follow all suspicious indications concerning East bloc TIR trucks, there would be total chaos at most European border crossings. The Soviets would retaliate politically and that's not a pleasant prospect for Western politicians. Norway and Switzerland have taken some measures to restrict the movement of East bloc TIR trucks. If, for instance, an East German "commercial" TIR truck has to transport its freight from East Berlin to Rotterdam, then there is no logical reason for this truck to end up at Brunssum NATO HQ. We cannot and should not ban East bloc TIR trucks from entering NATO countries, but we can and should monitor them carefully and restrict their move-

ments to what is commercially sensible, so that they can stick to their business.

EIR: What is your assessment of the implications of the above-mentioned irregular warfare problems for a NATO HQ like AFCENT Brunssum?

Berkhof: When AFCENT was moved to Brunssum in 1967, we monitored a lot of East bloc intelligence activities. Arrests were even made. Later in the 1970s and '80s a suspicious lull set in. That's always an ominous sign. There were two explanations: Either the counterintelligence work did not go well or AFCENT was infiltrated by the enemy. Both explanations were quite disturbing, to say the least. I thought the first explanation was the most probable. So I decided to start with it and to try to upgrade the counterintelligence work at AFCENT.

EIR: AFCENT Brunssum is located in the Dutch province of Limburg, which is a traditional mining district with a sizable Polish community. Did you find any indications of Warsaw Pact operations attempting to exploit this environment for irregular warfare purposes?

Berkhof: Actually the NATO HQ AFCENT in Brunssum is situated on a mine which has been shut down. Several other military facilities in the Limburg region are also built on shut-down mines. That means that below AFCENT and the other military facilities, there are extensive underground mine complexes. There are deep-production mines and there are mines between 5-18 meters deep that were used to train apprentice miners. When the mines were closed down, the mine shafts were shut in with stones, concrete, and iron bars.

Yet, as I was to realize, these training mines below AFCENT and in its vicinity were reopened! Most probably around the mid-1970s. Through these reopened mines, it had become possible to enter most sensitive military installations from outside the perimeter!

If one is serious about the *spetsnaz* threat, one has to take into account the ethnic communities of East European origin, that potentially may be infiltrated in order to provide support operations for *spetsnaz*. This is more so the case if there are concentrations of such ethnic communities in the vicinity of sensitive NATO command centers or other military facilities. In the Limburg region we have a more than a million-strong Polish community, which came primarily from the Upper Silesian mining districts at the turn of the century. This also includes many soldiers of the Polish First Armored Division, which helped liberate Holland in World War II, who stayed after the war and settled down here. Until the mid-1970s it was difficult or even impossible for the Polish community in Holland to get visas from the Communist regime to visit Poland. Since the mid-1970s that changed dramatically and a lot of traveling took place. Not only to Poland, but also from Poland. Suddenly there were cultural and sports exchange programs. Don't misunderstand me. I have no prej-

udices of any kind against Poles or people of Polish origin. Quite the opposite. You should be aware that the Polish First Division, which fought alongside the British Army, suffered many losses when they liberated the Netherlands at the end of World War II. But we have to take into account that a minuscule minority of the Polish community may have been blackmailed or otherwise recruited by the Polish secret services. Indeed there were and are indications in this respect, that do deserve close attention from our counterintelligence.

EIR: Were there any other peculiarities surrounding AFCENT which indicated potential East bloc intelligence and/or irregular warfare implications?

Berkhof: As I already said, we had a lot of these TIR trucks, more than the location of Brunssum warranted. One also has good reason to wonder about the owners of quite a few small shops in the vicinity of AFCENT. And, last but not least, there is the "entertainment industry," with not so few of the establishments being run by people coming from Warsaw Pact countries. There are also surprisingly many East Germans involved in prostitution operations.

EIR: What is the military and strategic significance of the Limburg region for Warsaw Pact *spetsnaz* and commando operations?

Berkhof: This region is situated in the north of the Ardennes and to the south of an area of extensive moors. Limburg is a gateway and has been historically—like the Belfort Gap—a key gateway to the western part of Western Europe. It was strategically vital for the Romans who defended it until 483. Limburg was key in both world wars. Because Limburg was defended, the Schlieffen Plan had to focus on Belgium. In World War II Limburg was not adequately defended, so the Germans moved in with paratroop commandos and "Brandenburg" special forces to seize the Maas bridges.

So it's quite logical for the Soviet command to look attentively at the region between the Rhine and the Maas when they plan a surprise attack with their principal assault forces: a) *spetsnaz* and airborne forces, b) tactical ballistic missiles, c) combat aircraft. We have several NATO airfields here with nuclear-strike aircraft; there are a lot of vital NATO communications and air defense facilities; and we have the very important NATO headquarters AFCENT and NOR-THAG. This strategic core area is, in time of war, defended only by territorial forces. If an aggressor were to manage to occupy this area with airborne forces and destroy the most important military targets, he would be in a very good position. In this area, airborne forces would have an excellent environment in which to create a foothold, because you are between two rivers. Also in the north you have the Reichswald and extensive moors. You have the Rhine-Ruhr conglomerate to the east and the bottled-up Cologne-Aachen region to the south. Paratroopers find a near-perfect terrain

to hold out in. So it's a very lucrative target. And Soviet exercises do consider precisely that fact.

EIR: Why is there so much resistance among senior NATO officers to the concept of irregular warfare?

Berkhof: First of all, it's a fairly new concept. Irregular warfare as such is, of course, as old as warfare itself, but in the East-West context it is a fairly new concept. In the context of nuclear warfare, irregular warfare seems irrelevant. Since the mid-1970s, the Soviet command has focused strongly on *spetsnaz* operations. They did so when they dropped the strategy of a nuclear first strike against Western Europe as their principal approach. They wanted to keep a war conventional for as long as possible because, in a conventional war, damage to the Soviet Union can be minimized. The Russian strategic concept aims at a decisive military breakthrough against NATO in Europe before the United States would release nuclear weapons. In this Soviet approach, the concept of irregular warfare obviously does have a high priority. The other major problem for the NATO military vis-à-vis irregular warfare lies in the unfortunate fact that under peacetime conditions irregular warfare operations are viewed as matter of concern for the police forces, not the armed forces. This problem remains even in respect to outright *spetsnaz* operations in periods of extreme tension immediately preceding full-scale war.

The fundamental problem in dealing with Soviet-directed irregular warfare lies in the strict separation between civilian law enforcement agencies on the one side and the military on the other side. The twilight zone created by this separation is exploited by the Russians. That is the sore spot.

EIR: What would you recommend in order to deny the Soviets this grey zone in which irregular warfare capabilities can prosper?

Berkhof: Well, first of all, we have to educate the officer corps and the law enforcement agencies about irregular warfare. They must be made aware that the problem of Soviet-directed irregular warfare really exists. If the concept of irregular warfare is understood, the police and military will literally stumble over the evidence of its existence. It obviously would be absurd to try to imitate Soviet totalitarian methods in combating irregular warfare. We don't want to build up a bloody police-state apparatus. In order to effectively combat Soviet-directed irregular warfare we have to disrupt the infrastructure, we have to create uncertainty. The Soviet command must never be sure that their irregular warfare infrastructure is "under control." Every planned irregular warfare operation must become incalculable for the Soviets. They must fear exposure of their operations.

For instance, we know from Victor Suvorov that a lot of Warsaw Pact sports clubs are in reality *spetsnaz* outfits. When there are exchanges of sports clubs with the East bloc we should not stop such exchanges, but let's photograph these

“athletes” and look at their backgrounds. And then let’s send these photographs to the relevant East bloc embassies together with a little note saying that it was a pleasure meeting you in the sports arena; we wouldn’t like to meet you next time in a war. You see, then they can’t be sure that they can use the same group again. With two guilders you can do a lot of damage to *spetsnaz* operations. Once more, we must put as many question marks as possible into the Soviet command computer.

EIR: What conclusions must be drawn as to the operational approach and the training of NATO’s armed forces?

Berkhof: We should first look at the list of possible NATO targets for *spetsnaz* operations. The highest priority, of course, is NATO’s nuclear forces, especially units with long-range missiles. Probably, the Soviet Union can wipe out this target category through arms-control negotiations—for instance, through the INF talks. That would free a lot of *spetsnaz* forces for other targets, like NATO’s command and control centers. But the Soviets attribute similar importance to political and administrative command centers, civilian communication facilities, and so on. Another priority of the Soviet target list are NATO’s air defense facilities. So we have to go through these target categories and prepare ourselves to defend them most effectively according to priorities. We must not stupidly disperse and stretch out our limited forces.

EIR: Three to four times a week, some NATO, primarily German, military facility is attacked and equipment stolen or damaged. The soldiers on guard seem to be utterly unprepared.

Berkhof: I see what you mean. I can only speak about the Dutch armed forces. I believe that most of the attacks against Dutch bases were done by “regular” criminals. That doesn’t mean that the cases we didn’t solve were also cases of regular criminal networks. Terrorists and especially *spetsnaz* are true professionals who don’t leave the type of traces that professional criminals do. The Dutch armed forces have right now an extensive training program to safeguard military bases. This goes especially for our national reserve forces, which are effectively a Home Army. Their task is to guard military facilities in the area in which they live. They know their assignments and can be mobilized very quickly and are very flexible with their personal means of transportation like cars or bicycles. They train regularly and in the Limburg area we have a quite sufficient force we can draw on already in peacetime when necessary, and, of course, in wartime.

EIR: What is your assessment of the preparedness of other NATO armies for the defense of rear areas against Soviet irregular warfare capabilities?

Berkhof: Rear defense is a national responsibility, it’s not part of NATO’s conceptual military framework. On a national level a lot more emphasis has to be given to combating

Soviet-directed irregular warfare. NATO must act as a catalyst.

EIR: How would you assess the awareness in NATO countries of the irregular warfare threat using a scale of 1 to 10?

Berkhof: I would say that three years ago it was 0.5 on the average and we are now approaching a level of 3 for NATO as a whole. The British I would rate at about 6; they held in 1985 a very large exercise, “Brave Defender,” that dealt with irregular warfare. If you look at the Western military literature you would see that more attention is gradually being given to irregular warfare.

But let me say a few more words on the Dutch situation. I would not rate the Dutch Army low in this respect. I worked on this problem when I was deputy Chief of Staff for Operations on the Army staff. The Dutch emergency laws are quite effective and they have been made more comprehensive. But the problems of rear defense against the irregular warfare threat are tremendously complex. For instance, one of the priority targets for *spetsnaz* and/or airborne assault operations are the major harbors. Just look at such a harbor and you will realize how difficult it is to defend against commando-type attacks. It involves closely monitoring all East European trade flows, watching trucks, ships, and personnel. We have the biggest harbor in the world and thus the biggest problem in the world defending it and keeping it in operation in times of tension or war. You have to identify the most sensitive spots in the gigantic harbor complex and take appropriate measures for their defense. The same goes for airports like Schipol in Amsterdam. It’s not the runway that I am worried about, but rather the vast technical infrastructure needed for flight operations with many of the radar installations and radio transmitters located far away from the airport.

I put civilian and military working groups together covering most of the indicated fields, the port and airport facilities, and the like. It is a rather long, drawn-out process, but we’re making progress. We live in a technological society and a technological society is vulnerable to irregular warfare. I’m far from being satisfied with our work in this field, but I’m an impatient man.

EIR: What authors have, in your view, the best conceptual understanding of irregular warfare?

Berkhof: One is certainly von der Heydte. I did read his book carefully, but I must say it is a typically German book, difficult to read. Actually there does exist a vast amount of literature on guerrilla warfare for the military professional. The literature on *spetsnaz* operations is growing—Hickey’s report in Britain and the Norwegian report on *spetsnaz* are very useful. Barron’s book on the KGB is helpful in respect to irregular warfare. “Victor Suvorov” I mentioned already. And then there are many good magazine articles.

But what’s really lacking in the literature is a conceptual framework for irregular warfare. Von der Heydte took such

an approach and what he did is good as far as he went, but he only got to a certain point.

EIR: Would you characterize irregular warfare as "irregular" warfare or "surrogate" warfare?

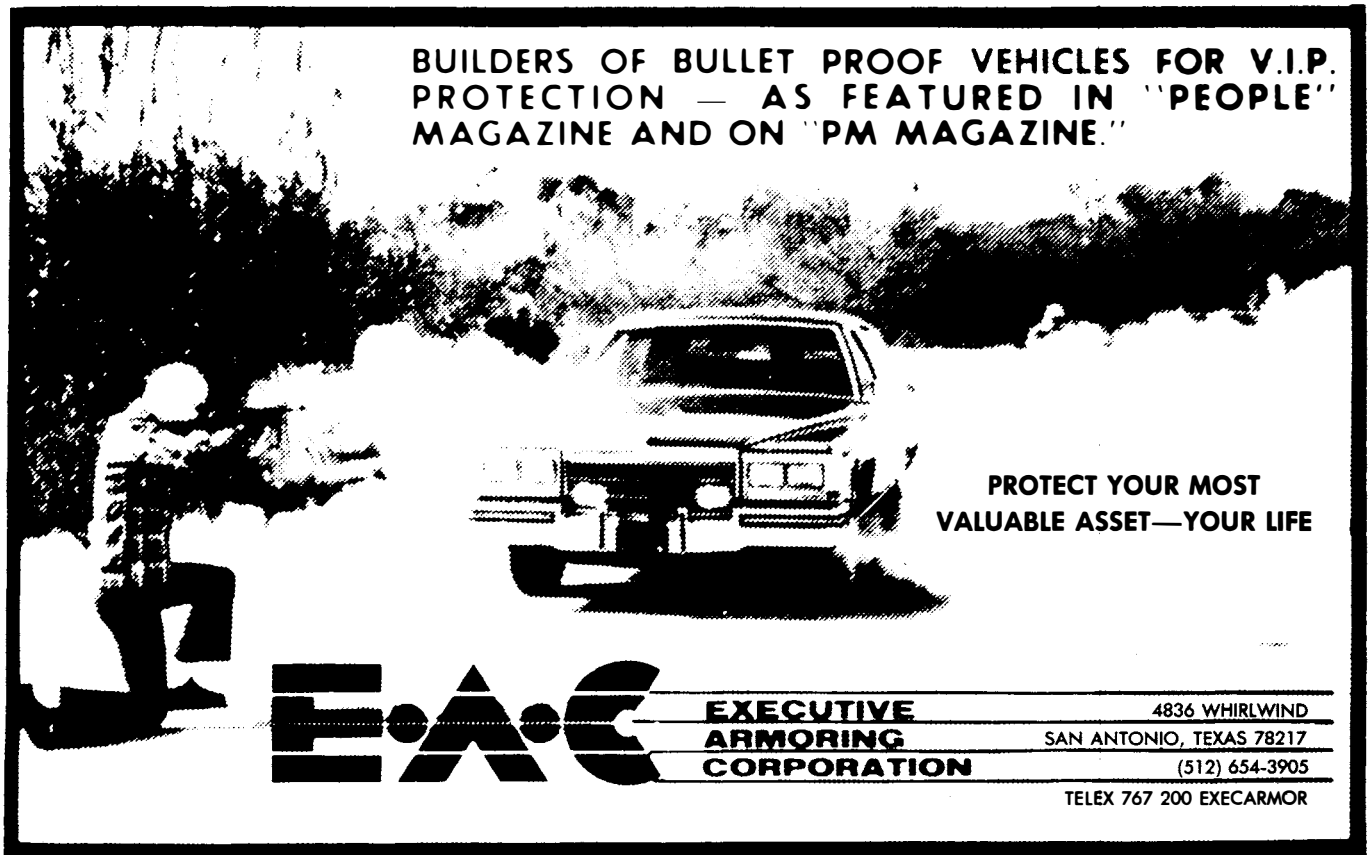
Berkhof: Irregular warfare is an indirect strategy. Indirect strategic approaches are operations outside the NATO arena. For instance, in the Middle East there is Soviet warfare by proxy, that means indirect operations against vital NATO interests. Soviet control over the Middle East and the oil routes endangers NATO's security much more than some specific terrorist or *spetsnaz* operations. But both are part of an indirect strategy of warfare. You don't fight directly, you fight indirectly to keep risks and costs low. It's an ancient strategy, as old as Sun Tzu. Soviet-directed irregular warfare is an indirect strategic approach which serves to destabilize the security of the Alliance by out-of-area political and/or military operations and operations of low-intensity violence within NATO territory.

EIR: Why is the Soviet political and military command so focused on irregular warfare? Is Ogarkov's role of special significance in this respect?

Berkhof: It is part and parcel of the collective Soviet memory. With 1,500 so-called "techno commandos" Trotsky took

Petrograd. During the October Revolution Trotsky had a unit of about 1,500 workers who were operators of power stations, the telephone and telegraph system, the railways, and so on. The idea was not to attack the government frontally in the Winter Palace, but to make it impossible for the government to govern. It was a revolutionary idea and it worked. Second, think of World War II and the role of the Russian partisans against the Germans. Take the battle of Kursk, the biggest tank battle in history. The Soviet command synchronized the sabotage actions of the partisan forces with their regular operations. The partisans systematically cut off the roads and logistical support lines of the German army. Reserves and supplies couldn't move as fast as they needed to and the Germans were defeated. So the Russians have much more of a tradition in the field of irregular warfare than we have. There is an Italian author, Malaparte, who wrote the book *La Technique de Coup d'Etat* in 1933. He understood a lot about irregular warfare when he compared the movements of Mussolini, Hitler, and the Russian Revolution. He makes the point about Trotsky's "techno commandos."

As for Ogarkov: He, like myself, is an engineer. As engineers we not only know how to build things, but we also know how to destroy them. We have a natural feeling for such things. We know about the vulnerability of technology. We are very well acquainted with General Murphy.



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