

Document No. 21: Organizational Principles of the Czechoslovak Army, November 22, 1962

This set of organizational principles for the Czechoslovak army is included because it shows clearly how the emphasis of Warsaw Pact strategy had shifted to offense. (See Document No. 7 by comparison.) Offensive combat is seen as the main form of combat, and the Czechoslovaks continue to be expected to fight independently for at least 10-12 days before Soviet reinforcements would appear. The new stress on offense was one of the important consequences of the Berlin crisis.

Organizational Principles of the Czechoslovak Army

[...]

- a) [...] Offensive warfare is the essential and principal form of combat and the only means to achieve victory over the enemy. This is reflected in the first principle of the development of the Czechoslovak People's Army: to build an army which, in addition to being able to handle other types of warfare, possesses primarily offensive capabilities.
- b) The role and position of the Czechoslovak People's Army in the defense system of the Warsaw Treaty, as well as the specific mission the Czechoslovak People's Army has been entrusted with by the Supreme Command of the Unified Armed Forces, are reflected in the second principle: our army must be structured and built to be able to mount an independent front-sized operation.¹⁶ Taking into account the first principle, it follows that the Czechoslovak People's Army must, first and foremost, be capable of mounting and conducting an offensive front-sized operation. In the event of a surprise attack, our army would be required to conduct initial operations on its own for 10 to 12 days, until the next operational echelon arrives and is deployed. [...]

From a strategic viewpoint, it is necessary to possess such peacetime armed forces as would be able to acquire the strategic initiative early in the war, and thus ensure achievement of the immediate strategic objective.

Of the total number of armed forces needed and able to achieve strategic objectives, the following elements are maintained in continuous combat readiness:

- strategic forces and assets in a structure needed to achieve war objectives;
- an air defense system; and
- certain other parts of the Czechoslovak armed forces.

Some armies and divisions from the ground and air forces, which are earmarked for conducting opening operations and stationed close to the border, must be main-

¹⁶ "Front" is a term of Soviet origin describing the organization of forces within a theater of operations.

tained in a structure that will ensure the fulfillment of vital tasks in the initial phase of the war. The other part of these forces must provide for rapid mobilization, so that it can be deployed in opening operations during the initial phase.

[...]

The term “first strategic echelon” as used herein denotes the main group of armed forces of a country (or a coalition of countries) comprising missile units, aviation, air defense forces and assets, peacetime ground troops and also troops mobilized throughout the territory of the country/coalition. [This main group] is earmarked for conducting operations in the early stage of the war, in the course of which immediate military-political objectives, i.e. destruction of a substantial part of the opponent’s armed forces, elimination of a number of members of the enemy coalition from the war, and a serious disruption of the military-economic potential of the enemy coalition, should be achieved.

The order of battle of the first strategic echelon is based on the current concept of the initial stage of the war, the substance of which is active combat, aimed at achieving the immediate strategic objective, namely, crushing the core of the main strategic echelons of the opponent’s armed forces and getting hold of major economic centers and areas, as well as areas where enemy forces assemble and deploy.

The first strategic echelon can be segmented into two or more operational echelons.

The first operational echelon is the main core of the first strategic echelon, its mission being to repel a surprise attack by the enemy and conduct initial operations. As a rule, it maintains full combat readiness even in peace time.

The other operational echelons consist of troops that are allocated more time to mobilize, assemble and deploy in relevant war theaters.

The general principles outlined above determine the position of the Czechoslovak Army in the framework of the first strategic echelon of the Unified Armed Forces in the European theater. Because of the possibility of an unexpected attack by NATO armed forces along the line of contact, all units of the Czechoslovak People’s Army must be viewed strictly as part of the first operational echelon.

[...]

As part of the first operational echelon of the Unified Armed Forces, troops and units of the Czechoslovak People’s Army also act as a covering force, their mission being to provide cover not just for the territory of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, but also for the territory of the entire Warsaw Treaty, together with other allied armies.

In the present situation, the notion of a covering force is different from what it used to be in the past. Earlier requirements demanded that the border be covered in a more or less passive manner, but today’s requirements are much more comprehensive. The covering force must operate within a strategic framework in which the most important role (apart from missile and air force units) belongs to the first operational echelon. It is a part of the first operational echelon that is assigned the role of the covering force. As in the past, the main task of the covering force is to ensure the deployment of main forces in accordance with the plan of initial operations.

However, the covering force is no longer passive, as before. Its main task, i.e. ensuring the deployment of main forces, is best accomplished by securing a line of deployment in the depth of enemy territory. This is why the covering force is expected to fulfill its task through active operations along principal strategic and operational directions.

In order to eliminate the adverse consequences of a lower level of combat readiness in peace time, a plan of step-by-step covert reinforcements is in place, which could be put into effect to increase the numbers of troops at the front to a level consistent with a high level of combat readiness, if there is an increased risk of a war breaking out or of a surprise attack. However, the measures outlined above can be effective only if taken in a timely fashion, i.e. if we do not allow ourselves to be surprised by the enemy.

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