

James Stejskal*

Bear Trap: Building a Pre-Conflict Underground Force to Resist the Future Enemy

Received: 15 April 2022

Accepted: 25 April 2022

Abstract: This paper will discuss the Resistance Operating Concept and how nations should prepare to resist a potential enemy before an invasion takes place. Oriented towards the self-defense of small countries by a resistance or partisan force, it describes past examples of resistance groups in Europe. Specifically, by discussing the long-term survival of resilient organizations, its focus will be on the basic factors crucial for an underground resistance, including security, organization, and training. It also considers the need for a practitioner-oriented manual that can be disseminated at the widest levels to guide and enable future resistance operations.

* **Corresponding author:** James Stejskal, e-mail: jestejskal@aol.com. Mr. Stejskal served in the US Army Special Forces and as a senior CIA intelligence officer. He currently lives and writes in Northern Virginia.

All statements of fact, opinion, or analysis expressed are those of the author and do not reflect the official positions or views of the U.S. Government. Nothing in the contents should be construed as asserting or implying U.S. Government authentication of information or endorsement of the author's views.

Open Access. © 2022 James Stejskal published by Journal on Baltic Security, powered by PubliMil. CC-BY This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Keywords: resistance, resistance operating concept, guerilla warfare, unconventional warfare.

Introduction

As I began to write this essay in December 2021, I wondered if Russia would push across the border in an attempt to vassalage Ukraine. Now, in the Spring of 2022, my belief has been reaffirmed that this forum on resistance will be critical to the defense of many countries.

When Putin invaded, he expected Ukraine to fall quickly. Ukraine has not complied, and it has instead shown what few expected to see: resistance. Ukraine has yet to be fully occupied, but the conflict there has already shown signs of the viability of the Resistance Operating Concept. While its troops have met the invaders and blunted their attacks, Ukraine's leaders have demonstrated a mastery of messaging to unify its populace, Europe, and other Western countries. It has demonstrated the credible defense of its homeland, which has been devastating to the Russian army. Ukraine has provided a contemporary example of how to react to an invasion by a larger force, but there is more to be done.

Beyond Ukraine, the Baltic states of Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, and other countries like Moldova should consider themselves targets of Russian irredentist threats. These countries must prepare for the possibility that their borders will be violated and their territories occupied by a hostile power. With comparatively tiny militaries and an uncertain NATO behind them, one of the few options remaining to them will be the last resort of small nations — unconventional warfare by a popular resistance force.

Background

The object of forming secret armies was to produce at the moment required open, armed opposition to the enemy behind his lines, aimed at his most vulnerable points, i.e., his lines of communication, particularly roads and railways; his

communicational systems whether telephone, tele-graph, W/T or dispatch rider, his depots, and repair organizations – in fact, all the services whose efficient functioning is essential if the [enemy] troops in the line are to fight with the best ability.

— Major General Sir Collin Gubbins, Director, UK Special Operations Executive

The history of underground resistance in Europe is inconsistent. Recent examples from World War II highlight both the positive and negative effects of resisting an occupying enemy force. Resistance organizations in France, Greece, Italy, Poland, and Yugoslavia, among others, fought German occupation and assisted in the final victory of the Allies, but at a high cost. While many underground operatives and guerrilla fighters were killed as a result of combat action, many were lost due to negligence on the part of the resistance movements themselves, as well as that of the controlling headquarters in England. Tragedy errors and poor internal security measures ranging from failing to properly compartment or sequester off operations to abysmal communications security — both technical and non-technical — led to the failure of many underground ‘cells’ and the capture and death of personnel.

In the case of the Netherlands, a failure by MI-6 and the Special Operations Executive to follow their radio communications security protocols — specifically, ignoring duress codes from their agents that indicated capture or compromise — led to the wholesale co-opting of SOE’s entire resistance organization in that country, an operation the Germans called *‘das Englandspiel’*.

In the Philippines, multiple resistance groups successfully resisted the Japanese during World War II. Although most were raised after the Japanese occupation of the archipelago, some of the major groups had existed to fight the central government long before the beginning of the war. That said, as with most resistance groups who fought the Axis powers, no pre-war planning

was conducted to meet the challenges posed, planning that might have increased the country's resistance capabilities much sooner.

During WWII in Indo-China and the later Vietnam conflict, ethnic Hmong (among many tribal groups) were raised and trained as guerrilla forces by the OSS to fight the Japanese in Laos and later by the Central Intelligence Agency and US Army Special Forces against the North Vietnamese Army along the Ho Chi Minh trail. Once the general war effort in Vietnam failed and American forces were withdrawn, the US-supported tribal irregulars were abandoned to their fates.

After WWII, the United States and the United Kingdom had a new enemy: the communist Soviet Union. Together, they attempted to subvert the Soviet Union's occupation of Eastern European countries through various means, all of which failed. Probably the most notable Cold War example is Albania. Attempts to thwart communism there through externally-supported covert action began in 1947. The CIA lent the MI-6 its full support despite an initial internal assessment that 'a purely internal Albanian uprising at this time is not indicated, and, if undertaken, would have little chance of success' (CIA Records of the Historical Staff). As predicted, Operation VALUABLE, as the British code-named it, was quickly destroyed — not because of poor tradecraft on the ground but because it was compromised by a Soviet agent within MI-6. Kim Philby, a traitorous senior MI-6 officer, gave the Soviets detailed information on the program, which they passed on to the Albanian security services. Despite repeated indications of compromise and the loss of agents who had infiltrated into the country, the project continued until 1952 before it was abandoned. Similar efforts in Ukraine also met with abject failure.

In the 1950s, the United States planned to sponsor resistance in East Germany if another war broke out by using existing internal opposition organizations within that country. These groups would be reinforced by trained expatriates and US Army Special Forces who were to be infiltrated into the enemy rear areas once conflict broke out. The CIA's plans were, however, slowly strangled in the crib as the all-pervasive *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit* (*Stasi*) supported by

the Soviet KGB systematically penetrated and dismantled all dissident groups by the 1960s.

By the late-1960s, the CIA's efforts to support and prepare resistance to communism in East Germany and the other Warsaw Pact countries had all but vanished and were abandoned. United States Army Special Forces soldiers stationed in the Federal Republic of Germany at Bad Tölz and in West Berlin during the Cold War went from the CIA's promise of an established underground to assist their planned stay-behind mission in Eastern Europe to the reality of attempting to raise a resistance force from nothing in the event of war. The chances of that happening successfully were probably nil (Stejskal, 2017, p. 35). That said, the potential threat of any stay-behind force operating in their backyard frightened the Russians sufficiently for them to designate large numbers of forces for rear-area security operations to deal with guerrillas and Allied special operations forces.

Cold War efforts by some Western European governments to prepare for a possible Soviet Bloc invasion led the intelligence services of several countries to set up, train, and provide for the logistical requirements of small forces to provide a stay-behind capability to resist an occupying enemy. The Gladio program in Italy was once such group. Established in the mid-1950s, it existed as a clandestine element, mostly in northern Italy, to resist Soviet occupation, however, its aims gradually evolved to include an internal anti-subversion /anti-communist role. When Gladio's activities were disclosed, the network was shut down because of the negative public perception of its extra-legal involvement with right-wing groups, the mafia, and US influence on its operations. Similar efforts elsewhere were launched and later abandoned after the 1990 dissolution of the Soviet Union because the threat of invasion had diminished.

Present-Day: Prepping for the Future

Someone who acts like Putin does not care whether these dead bodies are on the streets of Bucha, Tbilisi, Vilnius, or Berlin.

- Christine Lambrecht, German Defence Minister, 6 April 2022

The aforementioned history is not lost on the populations of the Baltic and other Eastern European states who, having resisted Germany in WWII and then the Soviet Union during the early stages of the Cold War, are familiar with totalitarian aggression, occupation, and the oppressive security measures that follow. The lessons outlined above are many. One should be obvious: a romantic view of resistance organizations is both unrealistic and deadly.

Another painful lesson from history is that the expectation of outside intervention to end an occupation should not be taken for granted. While outside assistance and support may be forthcoming, it is not at all clear that any nation will come to the aid of a small country occupied by a major one. Therefore, the small nation — the country that will be occupied — must be prepared for the eventuality of having to go it alone.

With these seemingly ominous declarations, the question remains, how does a small country pre-prepare for resistance? For this article, simple requirements will be discussed. Simple, primarily because complex plans rarely survive the first exchange of gunfire. Simple also because no single recipe exists for all possible contingencies.

Both the ROC and NATO Comprehensive Defense Handbook are comprehensive, but they are geared towards a higher level of readership rather than the actual practitioners — the populace who will form the resistance organization and be the ones who are relied upon to put these strategies into effect.¹ What is needed is a manual of instruction much like those produced by the British SOE before World War II like *The Art of Guerrilla Warfare*, *Partisan Leader's Handbook*, or Carlos Marighella's *Mini-manual of the Urban*

¹ Both the ROC and the CDH use the bureaucratic term 'Asymmetric Defense Component' as a name the resistance organization.

Guerrilla. The principles that follow are simple but useless if not available to those who wish to contribute to the resistance.² What is outlined below is the basic information required for such a manual that should be produced and distributed to the citizens of every ‘at-risk’ country.

Organization

As a rule, a nation’s clandestine resistance organization should be guided by a clandestine, i.e., secret, national command element that is separate from its military defense organization. This is done to increase the security and survivability of the resistance.

Most theories of resistance organization describe a three-level structure consisting of the armed resistance or guerrillas, the auxiliary, and the underground.³ A clandestine cellular structure must be set up and maintained throughout the organization to limit possible damage if one person or one cell is compromised by the enemy. The size of a ‘cell’ should be no larger than three or four persons, even in the armed resistance or guerrilla force. This is especially true for the underground but should be the rule across the organization in the initial phases of the resistance campaign. Only during the later phases of open, armed resistance should cells be brought together if they are part of an active combat unit.

Crucially, the initial phases of the resistance in an occupied country should concentrate on preparing the battlefield through non-violent psychological and propaganda means — to steel the population for the fight to come, dishearten the occupier, and, importantly, give time to prepare for concerted

² An analogous handbook: The Mini-Manual for the Urban Defender by Major John Spencer, US Army, has already been produced and distributed to Ukrainian defenders. It is available at https://static1.squarespace.com/static/622cbafd4ab19b7c0966d469/t/624b0fcc746c1e4ec5984cd6/1649086413544/Mini_Manual_Spencerv4_English_03APR22v2.pdf

³ I have chosen to use the ‘old school’ definitions as they are the simplest and best descriptors of the components of a resistance organization and are as outlined in: HQs, Department of the Army. (2008) FM 3-05.130: Army Special Operations Forces Unconventional Warfare, Washington, DC, 30 Sept 2008, p. 4-6.

military action rather than carrying out violent actions against an occupier not known for benevolent passivity, which could precipitate retaliation and hurt the formation of a strong and secure resistance force.

The Underground

‘The element of the irregular organization that conducts operations in areas normally denied to the auxiliary and the guerrilla force’ (HQs, Department of the Army, 2008).

The Underground is the central element of the organization that guides the resistance movement and acts as the political arm or a shadow government in an occupied area. If not already established, it will organize and support the military armed resistance, which should evolve into a separate structure. Parallel, i.e., duplicate, compartmented leadership structures should be considered to provide redundancy in the event of compromise or destruction of one or the other.

Arguably, the underground component is the most important of the organization because it typically includes the leadership and control elements of the movement (Molnar, 1965; Stringer, 2021). It also clandestinely collects the intelligence necessary for both political and military operations.

An out-of-country liaison should be established, possibly through the nation’s diplomatic presence in a friendly country to establish relations and arrange support but also to hold sensitive records of the resistance organization, such as membership lists.

During the Cold War, the Warsaw Pact spent considerable resources attempting to collect information on NATO’s special operations forces, its members, locations, and methods of operations, all with the intent of eliminating the threat early in any conflict. The same threat remains for any nation’s army and resistance organizations today.

The Auxiliary

‘The support element of the irregular organization whose organization and operations are clan-destine in nature and whose members do not openly indicate their sympathy or involvement with the irregular movement’ (HQs, Department of the Army, 2008).

The auxiliary is an important component, but normally the least active — at least in confronting the enemy directly. The membership of the auxiliary is made up of specialist ‘providers’ to the resistance organization, the tradesmen and women who maintain their normal lifestyles while also assisting the resistance effort on the side. They may provide impromptu intelligence, food for the guerrillas in hiding, transport of supplies or contraband (including people), or specific skills needed for operations. They may be unwilling to commit entirely to the resistance but are still willing to help on occasion. Keeping their normal life-style patterns will ensure they can maintain freedom of movement under occupation. At the same time, their skills may be so valuable that the resistance organization will not wish to expose them to unnecessary enemy scrutiny. Often the members of the auxiliary are not recruited into the organization until their services are required. That said, they should be spotted and assessed by full-fledged members as early as practicable, in the pre-conflict period if possible. Members of front organizations may also be considered part of the auxiliary, but they should be kept at arm’s length from the clandestine operations of the resistance as they will generally come under the scrutiny of the occupier’s security elements very early in an occupation.

During the Cold War, US Special Forces preparations for stay-behind missions included identifying local-national (indigenous) persons who would be in a position to assist them during wartime. Relationships with locals often went beyond the personal and professional to the point of assessing a person’s political motivations and willingness to assist but not to the point of recruitment into a prospective resistance organization.⁴ Among others, government workers in crucial fields, medical professionals, and property owners were ‘spotted’ as potentially useful.

The Armed Resistance

⁴ This was because U.S. Military personnel were prohibited from ‘recruiting’ an intelligence asset during peace-time unless the recruiter was a certified case officer. One benefit of not recruiting an individual, even if suitable, is that it does not flag intent or expose operational information to the candidate until necessary.

‘A group of irregular, predominantly indigenous personnel organized along military lines to conduct military and paramilitary operations in enemy-held, hostile, or denied territory’(HQs, Department of the Army, 2008).⁵

The armed resistance or guerrillas make up the action arm of the organization. They will be critical to the success of the movement but only when properly trained and employed. They must be organized as soon as an outside threat is recognized. Pre-conflict training should encompass all aspects of military operations, including weapons and sabotage, but must emphasize security above all.

Many resistance elements have been eliminated because of blatant disregard for security measures. Shortly after D-Day in WWII, many French *Maquis* units were destroyed because they prematurely and cavalierly announced their presence in areas still controlled by the German army, in some cases not even attempting to hide their camps. While *spirit* and *élan* have their place, security and discretion should guide operations.

Recruitment and Personnel Security

Recruitment for a resistance organization should be selective. Many prospective candidates may be enthusiastic, but they will end up being a burden on the organization. Therefore, suitability criteria must be set out and adhered to from the beginning. The members of the clandestine underground should be vigorously vetted to ensure infiltrators sympathetic to the enemy do not gain entry. Once vetted, personnel should be selected for their skills *and* their ability to conform to the ‘clandestine behavior’ required for secret operations. Among these are the ability to inter-act securely with members of the resistance; to be able to establish rapport and work with others, including strangers; to have the necessary observation and memory skills to record and report intelligence information; good time management; and a natural

⁵ Specifically, we are speaking of Armed Resistance or Guerrillas fighting an outside occupation of a nation as opposed to insurgents fighting an existing government.

demeanor for conspiratorial activity. Integrity and a low-key personality are also extremely important. All information on candidates and members should be protected. It should be encoded and kept in safe areas, preferably outside of the country.

It should also be noted that while soldiers and police officers have the background and training for service in the armed resistance, many will be subject to scrutiny, detention, and even elimination by an occupying force as soon as the occupation begins. Additionally, well-vetted veterans can serve usefully as trainers for the resistance organization, but their recruitment into the resistance must be done with extensive background and continual security checks. Careful consideration for recruiting from the criminal element should also be given as they generally are well-practiced in the skills of clandestine behavior.

During the Cold War, the East German *Stasi* attempted to recruit West Berlin police officers and place recruited assets within the security organs. Their goals were to gain intelligence on their enemy's internal security apparatus as well as to establish a Fifth Column to sabotage the Allied presence in the city in the event of war. The 2019 death of Ukrainian Colonel Maksym Shapoval serves as an example of what a determined enemy is willing to do to subvert a smaller country's capability to resist. Shapoval was the head of Special Forces and as such was responsible for irregular warfare. He was most likely targeted because a) he was known to the opposition, and b) a real threat to the enemy's plans. Any small country threatened by another nation can expect the same sort of action and must take measures to protect its most important assets.

Communications

‘ALL MESSAGES IN WIRELESS MUST BE IN CODE
OR CIPHER.’

— Gubbins, Colin. (1939)*The Art of Guerilla Warfare*. para 47

The above admonition given by Colin Gubbins to prospective guerrillas before WWII remains in force. Communications is the single most vulnerable

aspect of clandestine operations. Compromise of communications will inevitably lead to the failure of operations and the destruction of a resistance organization. For example, the recently demonstrated ability of the Syrian intelligence services to penetrate dissident organizations through cellular telephone tracking shows that modern technology remains very susceptible to enemy exploitation. The use of encoded messaging in any form, if seen by the enemy, indicates clandestine or illegal communications because even if they cannot read the message, the enemy will suspect the sender and the receiver are concealing illicit activities. More importantly, cellular telephone signals can be captured, geolocated, and then targeted by enemy fire. The only way to prevent this is to ensure no one 'sees' the message or its transmission. Resistance organizations must adapt to this and find technical means of communication that cannot be traced, or they must use non-technical forms such as dead letter drops, and personal meetings that prevent tracking altogether.

Modern security measures such as drones and surveillance cameras must also be considered. Methods to defeat or disable such systems should be incorporated into operational planning from the outset. The surest way of attaining success in operations is by remaining undetected (Gubbins, 1939, para 54). With constant improvements in technology, it is possible that the best survivability is found in an urban environment rather than open terrain, forests or swamps.

Operations

Operations should be driven by tactical and strategic objectives, not by chance or opportunity. The ability to strike must be weighed against the ability to withdraw and protect the force for future battles. The resistance does not seek to win battles — at least initially — it seeks to make the occupation of their country untenable for the occupier. Its operations should be centered on that fact, and it should never consider taking on the stronger, more numerous occupier in open combat; doing so would be an invitation to suicide. While

the temptation to go for broke and strike valuable targets is great, *Risk versus Gain* should always be considered to preserve the force for the long haul.

Many resistance groups have failed because they began active operations prematurely and were crushed by the internal security forces. Generally, the enemy's consolidation phase of the occupation should be the critical time to *prepare* for a campaign of resistance by watching and observing rather than acting without organized planning.

As a related example, Che Guevara's attempts at fomenting revolution in Bolivia violated most precepts of underground operations by opting for armed revolt even before an auxiliary cadre of supporters was raised. Suspicious and fearful locals informed the government of their presence and Che's 'revolutionaries' were captured or killed.

Once active resistance is begun, the modern resistance organization should use all means to resist occupation. 'Sabotage' in all its forms *from nonviolent to violent* should be used. Psychological operations, cyber warfare, even text messages to an individual soldier's cellular telephone can be considered as a means to degrade morale and inconvenience the occupier's stay. Aggressive, violent (sometimes referred to as kinetic or ballistic) operations should only be adopted when the enemy's ability to respond is confused, eliminated, or reduced. The enemy's propensity and ability to carry out repression against the populace should be carefully gauged. One needs only to look at the aftermath of Operation ANTHROPOID, the assassination of *SS Obergruppenführer* (Lieutenant General) Reinhard Heydrich in Czechoslovakia, to understand the terrible reprisals that can be exacted on the public as a result (Stejskal, 2013).

The subjects discussed above are the most important factors to be considered for a resistance organization. There are many other items that should be included in a manual, including training (especially weapons and sabotage), the collection and dissemination of intelligence, operational security, psychological operations, and most importantly, leadership. If these tactics are employed effectively, the occupiers' will realize the impossibility of subduing the populace and force them to concede defeat.

And Finally...

This article has discussed some of the basic concepts of resistance organization and their historical antecedents. As stated, they are simple tenets easily adapted to individual situations and should not be assumed to be hard and fast rules (except when discussing security). What has not been discussed is the assumption that a small country *must* adopt a posture of resistance, either active or passive, against an occupying power. That is not at all clear and is a judgment that must be put to the populace of the nation concerned. In some cases, a government-in-exile might make decisions they determine are for the good of the people, but which result in terrible repression, measures that the 'government' will not experience. That could easily result in the populace's loss of confidence in their government.

The choice to resist can take many forms, including the formation of a clandestine resistance organization, and should be approached carefully. On the one hand, establishing such an element may serve as a 'hands-off' warning to potential oppressors. On the other, it may have unintended and terrible consequences for a nation's populace. After all, it is the people themselves who must choose between being a vassal or an enemy of Russia, and '[...] if they do not wish to be one, they must reconcile themselves to being the other' (Kennan, 2014, p. 214).

No matter what choice is made, the people must be prepared for a long and grueling fight.

Bibliography

CIA. (n.d.) 'CIA Records of the Historical Staff, Record Group 263.2.2,' National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.

Gubbins, Colin. (1939) *The Art of Guerilla Warfare*. London: Military Intelligence (Research).

HQs, Department of the Army. (2008) *FM 3-05.130: Army Special Operations Forces Unconventional Warfare*. Washington, DC.

Stejskal, James. (2017) *Special Forces Berlin: Cold War Operations of the U.S. Army's Elite, 1956-1990*. Philadelphia: Casemate.

Spencer, John. (2022) The Mini-Manual for the Urban Defender, US Army. [Online]. Available at: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/622cbafd4ab19b7c0966d469/t/624b0fcc746c1e4ec5984cd6/1649086413544/Mini_Manual_Spencerv4_English_03APR22v2.pdf (Accessed: 09 May 2022).

Molnar, Anthony, et al. (1965) *Human Factors Considerations of Undergrounds in Insurgencies*. Washington D.C.: SORO, The American University.

Stringer, Kevin D. (2021) 'Survival in the Russian Occupied Zone: Command and Organization in Resistance Underground Operations,' *Military Review*, Vol. 101, No. 4, July-August 2021, pp. 125-132.

Stejskal, James. (2013) 'Killing the Beast: the Assassination of a Reichsprotektor,' *Military History Monthly* (MHM29), Feb 2013.

Kennan, George. (2014) *The Kennan Diaries*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.