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The Complexity of the Transition in Combat Operations and Potential Solutions to Streamline the Process

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Abstract

The contemporary armed conflicts that have recently taken place in Ukraine, the Gaza Strip, and Nagorno-Karabakh serve to illustrate the inherent difficulties associated with combat operations. Despite the high degree of transparency on the battlefield, the nature of the conflict, characterized by friction, uncertainty, violence, and high lethality, underscores the pivotal role of the human factor. The operational process remains primarily driven by human decision-making, with the constant planning, preparation, execution, and evaluation of military operations shaped by the human decision-making process.

In this context, the transition during combat operations is identified as one of the most challenging processes, particularly when unanticipated. The lessons learned from past conflicts indicate that the inherent risks associated with a period of change, the mental pressure, and the increased possibility of experiencing a decisive defeat have a multidimensional impact on both the decision-making process and the execution of the operation. In light of the sensitivity of the transition in combat operations, the analysis seeks to identify the principal vulnerabilities and risks inherent to the process, the triggers and indicators that signal its necessity, as well as a series of solutions to enhance its efficiency. The scientific approach is qualitative and empirically oriented, with a focus on examining the impact of new technologies and weapon systems on the conduct of combat operations.

Keywords:

combat operations; transition; culmination point; tactical opportunity;
position of advantage.

Article info

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The literature and studies on combat operations indicate that one of the most challenging aspects is the transition from one form of combat to another. This has a direct impact on the balance between offensive and defensive capabilities at the force level (Jones, Palmer and Bermudez Jr. 2023). Nearly 500 years ago, Machiavelli, in his work *The Prince*, underlined this difficulty by stating that “there is no subject more delicate, more dangerous or uncertain of success, than the orientation of a leader towards change” (Machiavelli 2012, 55). The statement remains pertinent in the present era concerning the capacity of leaders to acknowledge the necessity for transformation and their capability to direct subordinate entities toward a productive transition from one combat scenario to another. The inherent ambiguity of armed combat, its potential for opportunity or chance, or conversely, its lack thereof, frequently necessitates a transformation in its manifestation. Transition at the level of specific armed combat operations may result from the implementation of the operation plan and be based on a decision for execution. Alternatively, it may be imposed by unforeseen changes in the operational situation, in which case it is based on a decision to adjust the operation. Therefore, this activity can be undertaken either for the purpose of exploiting tactical opportunities or due to the insufficient combat capability of the own forces. The initial theoretical approaches to the concept emerged during the interwar period and were further developed by the German army. In accordance with the dialectical relationship between defense and offense, as elucidated by Clausewitz in his treatise on military strategy, the German army, in one of its combat manuals, underscored the importance of the fact that “unpredictable situations in battle often require a change of operation type. The switch from attack to defense may occur when it is necessary to consolidate gains or when the enemy is exerting great pressure on friendly forces.” (Finkel 2011, 77). In the context of military operations, the term “transition” is used to describe a change in the way armed combat is conducted. This change is often forced upon the military forces involved and is frequently carried out in a violent manner. Such circumstances give rise to feelings of frustration and friction within the context of military operations, necessitating the prompt formulation of decisions and the realignment of combat strategies and techniques. Furthermore, if the commander is unaware of the necessity for transition and it is not executed in a timely manner, the consequences can be catastrophic for subordinate forces.

The description of transition as a concept is not treated comprehensively in the Allied doctrine. Yet, *the Doctrine for land forces operations - AJP 3-2* underlines the fact that „forces need to be capable of executing rapid transition within the entire range of operations and tactical operations and, also, to exploit the information environment in order to gain a superior position” (Allied Joint Publication, AJP-3.2 2022, A-V). In conclusion, it can be stated that the transition implies change not only in the combat operations theme but also in the campaign themes. *The Tactics Manual for Land Forces Operations - ATP 3.2.1* identifies the need for tactical forces to “transition rapidly from one tactical activity to another in order to accomplish their stated objectives” (Allied Tactical Publication, ATP-3.2.1 2022, 1-7). The same publication emphasizes

that the “commander and his subordinates must be mentally and physically prepared to make a rapid transition between offense, defense and enabling operations” ([Allied Tactical Publication, ATP-3.2.1 2022, 1-14](#)). United States Army doctrine emphasizes that “*a transition occurs when a commander assesses that units must change their focus from one element of decisive action to another*” ([Department of the Army, ADP 3-90 2019, 3-18](#)).

In accordance with doctrinal regulations and combat manuals, the necessity for transition arises for a multitude of reasons, and not merely as a direct consequence of the conclusion of the operation or due to a transient setback. Therefore, transition is an inherent aspect of the conduct of mission accomplishment activities, entailing either a change in the form of combat or a shift from combat to stability operations. Transitions can be challenging, particularly if unanticipated. Therefore, during planning, commanders, with the support of the general staff, identify potential transition scenarios and the indicators that signal the necessity for such transitions. This approach helps to mitigate friction and streamline the adaptation process. Specialized studies have identified the following scenarios where the transition occurs in military operations (www.globalsecurity.org 2003):

1. The transition from combat operations (offensive and defensive) to stability operations entails the achievement of set objectives and the desired end state, the cessation of combat operations, and the gradual transfer of responsibility to government authorities.
2. The transition during combat operations from offensive to defensive tactical operations and actions, and vice versa, includes a number of intermediate operations.

The analysis focuses on the second situation, yielding insights into the transition process at the operational level. These insights are particularly beneficial in the context of a large-scale and intense conventional conflict in the vicinity of Romania’s borders. The primary objective of the present study is to identify potential solutions for streamlining the process. Subsequently, research efforts have been focused on identifying the triggering factors of the transition, describing the role of its main components and their impact on the mechanisms of realization of the process, as well as the indicators that warn of a potential situation that requires the realization of the transition. In this regard, the evaluation encompassed an assessment of the transition from a defensive to an offensive stance and vice versa.

In order to direct and guide our research, we have identified a series of key questions that we intend to address:

- What are the situations when a tactical ground force is forced to resort to transition during the conduct of armed combat?
- What are the components of transition, and what is their impact on its onset?
- What are the indicators that signal the imminent culmination of a military force (proximity of its reaching its climax) in an offensive operation?

- What are the warning indicators of the culmination of a military force (proximity of its reaching its climax) in a defensive operation?
- What measures might be taken to facilitate the transition process?

The provision of answers to these research questions contributes to the construction of a comprehensive picture of the fundamentals and mechanisms of transition in combat operations. The intrinsic complexity of armed combat precludes the possibility of conducting an exhaustive analysis of the subject. Nevertheless, the findings may prove beneficial for military commanders and leaders, as well as specialists and theorists in this field.

Situations requiring transition during combat operations

The execution of a transition during a combat operation is a high-risk activity that requires the careful synchronization of all available capabilities and actions. Transition from one form of combat to another is achieved either when the force engaged in a particular type of operation is no longer capable of sustaining it, or when, due to a position of relative advantage, its own forces are in a position to assume the initiative. In this regard, the remarks of the English General Rupert Smith are edifying. In his work *The Utility of Force*, Smith emphasized that the essence of all tactics and maneuvers, and in general the greatest tactical dilemma, is striking a balance between how much effort to expend in striking the enemy in order to achieve offensive objectives and how much effort to concentrate on countering his retaliation (Smith 2019, 14). By this, he emphasizes the importance and necessity of maintaining a balance between offensive and defensive capabilities to ensure success and avoid defeat. Accordingly, in tactical combat operations, the following situations can be identified in which military commanders must resort to transition:

- on the offensive, when own forces can no longer sustain the ongoing operation and continue action on the main lines of advance;
- on the offensive, when own forces are forced to consolidate their gains or to take an operational pause with a view to resuming offensive operations at a later date;
- in defense, when own forces are in a position of advantage and can seize the initiative, taking offensive action on an enemy who can no longer conduct defensive operations in a cohesive manner by withdrawing;
- in defense, when own forces can no longer conduct an effective defense and are forced to withdraw. In each of the aforementioned situations, the transition is based on a sum of factors that relate to the operational situation of combatant parties.

It can be reasonably deduced that the realization of a position of advantage for one of the combatants is directly or indirectly linked to the existence of a vulnerability or even a failure of the opponent. In conclusion, the initiation of the transition is

contingent upon the specific factors inherent to each situation and hinges upon the capacity of one of the parties to accurately discern the indicators that signal a potential shift in circumstances.

Components of transition and their impact on the realization of the process

Transition in combat operations is not only physical but also mental. Furthermore, commanders must initially be aware of the necessity to transition from one form of combat to another, accept the new situation, and assume risks. Once the new situation is understood and the mental acceptance of the need for change has occurred, the commander can then trigger the transition to the physical level by making the decision to do so (Baillergeon 2019, 176). The aforementioned components serve to differentiate the transition process into two discrete phases, which are nevertheless interrelated.

a. The mental component of transition

In the initial phase of the change, the mental aspect is predominant, with the commander acting as the primary catalyst. Subsequent to a comprehensive evaluation of the circumstances and a comparison of his own capabilities with those of the adversary, the commander determines and initiates the transition. Additionally, during this phase, the staff, in accordance with the commander's guidance, initiates the planning of a new operation. The initiation of a new planning process transmits the requisite signals to subordinates, thereby engendering a mental realization of the change. The underlying factors that precipitate the decision to alter the form of combat are the tactical opportunity on the battlefield and the culmination of the operation.

In the absence of a clearly defined opportunity, the decision-making process becomes inherently tactical in nature. United States Army doctrine places significant emphasis on the interconnection between tactical opportunity and the existence of a position of relative advantage. In this context, tactical opportunity can be defined as *"a location or the establishment of a favorable condition within the area of operations that provides the commander with temporary freedom of action to enhance combat power over an enemy or influence the enemy to accept risk and move to a position of disadvantage."* (Department of the Army, ADP 3-0 2019, 4-5). In consequence, the concept of tactical opportunity is transient and predicates the existence of a favorable situation in time and space that can be exploited to strike the enemy's vulnerabilities and subsequently achieve success. In the context of tactical operations, a position of advantage may manifest in a number of ways (Department of the Army, FM 3-0 2017, 1-18):

- In terms of **physical and geographical factors**, this can include the positioning of friendly maneuver forces in relation to those of the enemy, the

maintenance of key terrain, and the control of rear areas;

- In terms of **temporal factors**, this can include staying ahead of the enemy in the decision-making cycle, operational tempo, the speed of the information process, and the effectiveness of the sensor-to-shooter relationship;
- In terms of **freedom of action**, this encompasses the security of lines of communication, the opportunity to exploit friendly forces' striking capabilities beyond the range of the enemy's weapons, the protection of rear areas, and the creation of an A2AD system;
- **Morale and will to fight** – legitimacy of the cause, effective leadership, rational allocation of resources, equipping with high-performance weapons systems, high level of training and interoperability, etc.;
- Achieving **superior combat power** – resulting from an extended range, accuracy, and lethality of weapons systems, concentration of forces, or misleading the enemy.

Tactical opportunities may arise in both offensive and defensive operations. It arises in the context of combat, characterized by uncertainty, ambiguity, and chaos, and may result from the actions of one's own forces or those of the enemy. The capacity to capitalize on opportunities is contingent upon the flexibility and autonomy of thought, initiative, velocity, and audacity exhibited by the commander and subordinate commanders. The initiation and implementation of an action with the objective of exploiting a potential opportunity is an undertaking that entails an inherent degree of risk. It is incumbent upon the commander of the tactical formation to be engaged in combat, as well as his higher, to assume these risks in a deliberated and calculated manner. An adequate allocation of resources and the qualitative superiority of equipment facilitate the commander's willingness to assume risks.

The exploitation of one tactical opportunity usually generates other tactical opportunities that can "create new courses of action or point to new directions to exploit in achieving the higher echelon's objective sooner or with less effort" (Statul Major al Forțelor Terestre, FT 2 2019, 95). In general, the potential for opportunity is linked to the conduct of offensive tactical operations and is contingent upon the capacity of friendly forces to retain the initiative. However, the possibility of capitalizing on an opportunity may also present itself in a defensive context. The successful execution of a counter-attack at the optimal time and location, the extrication of one's forces from an unfavorable situation, and the prevention of the defeat or destruction of one's forces are all contingent upon the exploitation of a tactical opportunity.

The Operation Culmination Point, the second determinant of transition, is the point at which a force can no longer successfully continue the operation in which it is engaged (Allied Joint Publication, AJP-5 2019, 3-12) and must change the form of combat (Department of the Army, ADP 3-0 2019, 2-9). Usually, the climax is

associated with the offensive operation, but it also applies to the defensive operation (Friedman 2017, 105). Therefore, the concept must be approached from the perspective of both the attacker and the defender (Weiss 2021, 263). Thus, in tactical offensive operations, a force reaches its culmination when it can no longer sustain the offensive operation and must switch to defense to avoid defeat. Concurrently, in the efficacy of a defensive tactical operation, a force reaches its climax (culmination point) when it is no longer able to defend itself successfully and create the conditions for a transition to the counter-offensive. In such a situation, in order to avoid defeat, the defending force must be reinforced, relieved, or engaged in withdrawal operations.

By analyzing these two contexts in which a tactical force can experience the climax, we identify, punctually, the main causes that determine this situation.

TABLE NO. 1

Culmination factors in combat operations

DURING OFFENSIVE TACTICAL OPERATIONS	DURING DEFENSIVE TACTICAL OPERATIONS
It no longer achieves greater combat power than the defending force	It no longer has the combat power to stop the enemy's offensive
It no longer has forces to be brought forward to develop the offensive operation, thus losing the initiative.	It cannot mount a cohesive defense
It can no longer logistically support the continuation of the attack	It is in a situation of being overwhelmed by the enemy forces on the offensive

In particular, in the context of combat operations, tactical forces may encounter one or more factors that contribute to the culmination of the operation, either concurrently or sequentially. In any given situation, the role of the commander is of paramount importance in the assessment of the risk and likelihood of culmination by subordinate forces. This will facilitate the transition process considerably. Otherwise, failure to identify this risk in a timely manner will result in an improper transition, with severe consequences for the tactical force engaged in the operation. To illustrate this, if the commander of a tactical formation engaged in offensive operations fails to recognize in a timely manner the significant constraints associated with the introduction of new forces into the fray, this could potentially result in a vulnerability. This vulnerability can be exploited by the enemy once it is recognized that the deployment of forces has reached its culmination. The enemy's counterattack has the potential to catch the formation forces off-guard in a position and location that is disadvantageous to repel it. The commander, based on the information at his disposal and the analyses and estimates provided by the staff, also discerns, in time and space, the possibility that the enemy will reach its culmination. It is therefore possible to conclude that determining this fact can be a valuable opportunity, providing the preconditions for the own forces to take the initiative and subsequently achieve success. A lack of awareness or indecision may result in the failure to capitalize on an opportunity to launch an attack on the enemy when they are at a disadvantage.

By analyzing the fundamentals of combat operations and their main stages, it is possible to determine a number of indicators that are highlighted when a tactical

force reaches or is about to reach the climax of an operation. The following is a list of these indicators and possible actions to be taken in their occurrence, both to avoid the climax and to exploit opportunities. It should be noted that the list is not exhaustive and that an adaptive and intelligent enemy will seek to conceal these indicators.

TABLE NO. 2

Indicators of the culmination point in offensive operations

INDICATOR	ACTIONS
Obtaining information on the initiation of defensive actions: consolidation of seized objectives, retreat on favorable alignments, expansion of combat disposal for the first echelon	Fire and maneuver interdiction of consolidation actions
Drastic reduction in the tempo of offensive actions	Destroying the coherence of the offensive operation by selectively striking command and control elements
Insufficient concentration of forces during attacks on the main offensive directions	Prohibiting the enemy from dislodging forces from other areas of operations
Capture of a large number of prisoners from the offensive force or own assessments of high enemy casualty rate on the battlefield	Intensifying the defense effort to increase the intensity of strikes in affected areas of operations
Indicators of lack of synchronization of combat functions in the enemy's attacks	Executing precise strikes that fragment the coherence of the enemy's combat operations
Identification in the operation area of the first echelon of forces whose destination was known to be part of the reserve	Identifying options for the possibility of changing the type of operation by own forces
Interception of lines of communication by own forces and blocking the logistical flow to enemy first echelon units	Deployment of forces and weapon systems, both to protect your friendly forces' flanks and also to conduct a possible encirclement of the enemy
The discovery by defending forces of a large quantity of abandoned combat equipment and techniques.	Intensification of strikes on the enemy and preparations for the change of the operation type

TABLE NO. 3

Indicators of the culmination point in defensive operations

INDICATOR	ACTIONS
Information and reports on enemy force penetrations into the ZO of neighboring units	Requests for information/clarification from higher echelons and on the need to redeploy own forces, including principal weapon systems
Information and reports of enemy capture and occupation of key points in the enemy's own forces' rear area	Rapid deployment of reserves to counter these actions
Reports of low morale and obvious physical and mental exhaustion of soldiers	Staggered replacements of forces, countering enemy undermining of the will to fight
Neutralization of artillery and air defense missile systems of own forces;	Redeployment of available weapon systems, request for support from higher echelon.
Drastic reduction in the PL of second echelon units intended for counterattack	Requesting support from higher echelon for replenishment of reserves
Commitment of second echelon or reserves, followed by the impossibility of their regeneration or replacement	Awareness of the culmination and request for withdrawal
Striking and destruction of the logistic system	
Significant increase in casualties from enemy attacks	Requests for replacements of forces and weapon systems
Clues and information about concentrations of superior forces of the attacker on the main offensive directions	Repositioning of forces and main weapon systems

These indicators are determined by the staff as part of the operation planning process and fall within the *Commander's Critical Information Requirements/CCI* which is that "information requirement identified by the commander and staff as essential to facilitate timely decision-making" (Statul Major al Forțelor Terestre, FT 2 2019, 22). Specifically, these indicators underpin *Friendly Forces Information Requests/FFIR* and *Essential Enemy Friendly Information/EEFI*. FFIR is the information that the commander needs to know about the situation of his own forces, and EEFI is

the information that needs to be concealed from the enemy. Once established in the planning process, the indicators must be continuously monitored in order to provide the commander with situational awareness, including the proximity of the culmination of friendly forces. Finally, it is imperative that the commander and their staff consider the possibility that the enemy may be engaging in misleading operations and that certain culmination indicators may not accurately reflect the operational status of enemy capabilities. Therefore, an imperative of the operational process carried out by friendly forces is *to develop “effective procedures to counter the deceptive actions carried out by their adversaries, so that the achievement of their own mission is not jeopardized”* (Toroi and Stanciu 2023).

It is indubitable that the identification and exploitation of tactical opportunities on the battlefield can engender success. Furthermore, determining the enemy’s culmination point and identifying the increased risk of reaching one’s own culmination point can also be pivotal in determining the outcome of a battle, with victory or defeat being the potential results. The examples from the past are not few and emphasize that “one of the most difficult things for a commander is to admit defeat or in other words the inability to achieve success.” (Baillergeon 2019, 181). This is particularly the case for a commander who is on the offensive and who will experience significant psychological challenges in accepting the unfeasibility of achieving the initial objectives. In the winter of 1994, the commanders of the Russian forces engaged in the assault on Grozny demonstrated a lack of awareness of the inherent risks and did not accept the impossibility of conquering the city. Frustration and ignoring the indicators of the climax led to the disaster of the Russian mechanized forces: *“in a few hours, the Russian units were blocked in the streets, their armor destroyed by the enemy, who was firing freely from the roofs of the buildings and from the cellars, positions that could not be neutralized by tanks”*. (Oliker 2001, 13). After more than twenty years, the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), in one of its analyses of the unfolding conflict in Ukraine, emphasized that *“the initial phase of the Russian campaign in Ukraine was effectively repelled by Ukrainian forces. The campaign, which sought to seize control of major Ukrainian cities including Kiev, Kharkov, and Odessa through a series of mechanized and airborne operations, ultimately proved unsuccessful in its objective of forcing a change of government. The offensive operation has reached its culmination (at the time of writing). Despite achieving minor successes, it seems unlikely that Russian forces will be able to achieve their original objectives through this method.”* (Kagan, Barros and Stepanenko 2022). In a subsequent study published by the same research institute, the causes of the cessation of the Russian offensive in the Kiev area were investigated. One of the most significant indicators identified was the undertaking of defence-specific actions, including the planting of minefields (Kagan 2022). Concurrently, several months later, Russian troops were able to evade encirclement at Izyum and avert a catastrophic defeat when they were caught by the Ukrainian counteroffensive in Kharkiv (Kofman and Evans 2022). A similar situation occurred in the Herson area of operations, where the Russian forces were withdrawn to the left bank of the Dnieper. At that time, the advantage of the Ukrainian forces was difficult to challenge (Hird et al. 2022).

The culmination of the operation and the tactical opportunity are inextricably linked in terms of both temporal and spatial considerations. They play a significant role in initiating the transition, initially at the mental level and subsequently in action. The manner in which these characteristics of military action are managed has a direct bearing on the outcome of the tactical operation. In this sense, the reaching of the climax by friendly forces represents not only a loss of initiative and a change of the combat form but also an opportunity for the enemy. If the enemy becomes aware of the inevitability of the culmination of the friendly forces, it is likely that he will intensify their efforts to exploit the situation. It is therefore imperative that the commander of the friendly forces prioritize the protection of information regarding this event and the masking of its indicators. Similarly, the enemy's culmination represents an opportunity for its own forces. In conclusion, it is of paramount importance to determine the point at which either our own or enemy forces can reach their climax during the planning process.

b. The physical component of transition

The second key component of the transition is physical and represents the totality of actions taken to prepare and execute the tactical transition from one form of combat to another ([Baillergeon 2019](#), 175). Referring to this component the analysis will consider the transition from offense to defense and the transition from defense to offense, highlighting the main factors that the commander and his staff must consider in order to streamline the process.

➤ *The transition from offense to defense*

The transition from offense to defense is a challenging process, both mentally and physically, as commanders and subordinate forces must adapt their operations and alter the form of combat as initial actions are carried out. The complexity of the transition from offense to defense can be attributed to the interplay of the following factors:

- The necessity to adopt a defensive posture arises when an offensive operation culminated, or alternatively, forestalls the culmination.
- The restructuring of defensive combat disposal is a significant challenge in light of the dispersion of forces.
- Furthermore, it is essential to identify and occupy the terrain in order to facilitate the implementation of a defensive operation.
- Low morale due to a feeling of "defeat" when offensive actions stop.

Military experts and theorists have identified two main methods that allow an offensive force to switch to defense in an algorithmized way ([Department of the Army, FM 3-90 2023](#), 3-12). The initial procedure entails that upon the commander's recognition that the viability of the offensive operation has reached its limit, the forces currently engaged in combat undertake limited offensive actions to secure key terrain on the battlefield that will facilitate the subsequent organization of defensive measures. This method presents a number of advantages and disadvantages. In terms

of advantages, this approach facilitates the establishment of a more robust defensive position, allows for the accumulation of resources to reinforce the main forces, and enables sustained engagement with the adversary. The principal disadvantage is the difficulty of executing limited offensive actions by the forces in contact in order to create a zone of cover. The second method for transitioning from an offensive to a defensive posture entails the organization of the covering area on the alignment where the offensive forces have been halted. This facilitates the backward movement of the main forces, enabling the establishment of a robust defensive alignment on the ground. The principal benefits of this approach are the potential to establish a robust defensive position in the terrain, with the caveat of requiring the deployment of a portion of the forces in an unfamiliar environment. Conversely, the disadvantages of this procedure include a lack of depth and the necessity to coordinate actions when traversing the terrain.

In the situation when friendly forces are on the offensive and the commander realizes that it is nearing its culmination and transition is necessary, he can concentrate the effects of the weapons systems in order to:

- occupy key points in the terrain that will enable him to organize the defenses on a favorable alignment, while giving depth to the combat disposal;
- support the disengagement of forces in contact that no longer have sufficient combat power to break contact;
- strike enemy forces preparing to execute the counter-attack;
- concentrate air defense systems in order to protect friendly forces during relief operations and regrouping;
- concentrate anti-tank systems to stop enemy armored attacks in order to create breaches during the organization of the defense by friendly forces.

In accordance with the circumstances, the commander of the own forces will select one of two procedures, weighing the inherent risks, the capacity of the own forces to execute the transition in an efficacious manner, the support provided by the higher echelon, the nature of the operation to be conducted, and the actions of the enemy.

➤ *The transition from defense to offense*

The shift from a defensive to an offensive operation has been initiated „by anticipating when and where an enemy force will reach its culminating point or require an operational pause before it can continue.” (Department of the Army, FM 3-90 2023, 8-24). In order for a defending force to be able to effectively transition to an offensive operation, a number of conditions must be met. These include the enemy having lost the initiative and no longer having sufficient forces to develop operations, the enemy no longer achieving air superiority on the main offensive axes, and the enemy's combat strength no longer being at a higher level than that of the defending force.

The commander of the defending force must act promptly to seize the initiative and exploit the temporary disadvantage of the attacker. The opportunity to undertake an

offensive posture is contingent upon the availability of enemy air defense and anti-armor capabilities on the main operational axes. The establishment of the second echelon and reserves is also a prerequisite for a change of the operation's theme. Once a decision has been made, the commander of the tactical formation has two options for changing the battle posture. The first is to reconfigure the battle disposal, and the second is to relieve the forces and advance with the second echelon ([Department of the Army, FM 3-90 2023, 8-25](#)).

Both scenarios possess both advantages and disadvantages, entailing the concentration of forces in specific directions to attain a favorable equilibrium of forces. In such cases, it is often necessary to transfer operational control of specific areas to other forces, or alternatively, to maintain control with a minimal number of forces in order to prevent enemy penetration. The former approach involves the use of forces that are already in contact with the enemy, and offers a number of potential advantages:

- The time required to initiate an offensive maneuver is less than that needed to replace forces already engaged in combat. This allows the opportunity created to be exploited without allowing the enemy sufficient time to consolidate its defenses;
- The process is less complicated because it does not involve coordinating the replacement of forces. This is true whether we are talking about a relief in place or a passage of lines;
- The forces in contact have a better understanding and relationship to the existing tactical situation than forces newly introduced into the fight.

From a human perspective, the forces already in contact have already acquired an understanding of the enemy's tactics and are aware of his strengths and vulnerabilities.

Nevertheless, this approach has inherent disadvantages:

- The concurrent planning and preparation of an offensive operation with the execution of current defensive actions places significant demands on both the general staff and subordinates;
- There is a high risk that the forces in contact will not be in optimal physical and mental condition due to the actions executed up to the moment of going on the offensive;
- It is possible that some of the equipment and weapons systems employed by the forces in contact may be inoperative, and that the forces already in contact may experience logistical difficulties. In such a scenario, it would be prudent to replace essential equipment and weapons, or even to supplement them, and to build up logistical stocks.

The second procedure entails initiating an offensive with forces that are not in direct contact with the enemy. These forces are typically generated by the second echelons of brigade or division-level formations or by units in reserve. This

approach offers several advantages:

- forces not in direct contact with the enemy will be in much better physical and mental condition than those already engaged in the operation;
- forces not engaged in the operation should have no logistical problems;
- the planning of the operation is done out of contact and does not involve the execution and conduct of other operations.

The following disadvantages have been identified:

- The replacement of forces in contact necessitates a longer time to initiate an offensive action;
- Additionally, the concentration of forces along the routes of ingress and egress to and from the contact zone, as well as within the contact zone itself, presents a significant challenge in terms of force coordination. This is further compounded by the heightened risk of enemy identification, particularly of replacements and concentrations of forces;
- Furthermore, in situations where forces are replaced through the process of going into combat, the offensive forces have limited time to connect directly to the existing tactical situation.

In terms of defense, it is typical for the forces in question to lack the initiative and, as a result, must effectively utilize their own weapons systems in order to compel the enemy to fail in their attack. It is therefore incumbent upon commanders to consider the following:

- It is essential to prioritize the neutralization of enemy armored vehicles in the primary axes of advance.
- Furthermore, it is vital to target the second echelon in the rear area and form up places, both during the approach to the contact formation and upon entering combat;
- The strike of the enemy logistic system;
- Anti-aircraft protection was provided for the own forces deployed in the rear area (second echelon). This was done in order to maintain the option of executing a counter-attack and switching to a counter-offensive;
- The implementation of a select number of tactical maneuvers, designed to seize pivotal locations on the battlefield, serves to pave the way for a more expansive and decisive offensive.

In conclusion, regardless of the process chosen by the commander to make the transition from defense to offense, the purpose of the operation, the key tasks, and the end state must be clearly provided to subordinate forces. The commander, supported by his staff, must also consider the following aspects for the execution of the offensive operation: development of the scheme of maneuver, operations in depth to gain control of key points in the terrain, and to weaken the enemy's combat power, security of the flanks and rear area, decisive operation striking the enemy's center of gravity as well as maintaining the capability to develop the offensive, mobility and

counter mobility operations, permanent generation of reserves, judicious allocation of weapons systems to achieve the desired effects on the battlefield.

In conclusion, regardless of the process selected by the commander to facilitate the transition from a defensive to an offensive stance, it is imperative that the purpose of the operation, the key tasks, and the desired end state are clearly communicated to subordinate forces. In addition, the commander, with the assistance of their staff, must consider the following aspects in order to successfully execute an offensive operation: the development of a scheme of maneuver, operations in depth to gain control of key points on the terrain, and to weaken the enemy's combat power, the security of the flanks and rear area, a decisive operation striking the enemy's center of gravity, as well as maintaining the capability to develop the offensive, mobility and counter mobility operations, the permanent generation of reserves, and the judicious allocation of weapons systems to achieve the desired effects on the battlefield.

Conclusions

Armed combat, by its very nature, represents a phenomenon that is unique to the human experience. It is simultaneously shaped by the ever-changing nature of war. The necessity for change and the capacity for transition remain constant features of armed combat. They depend on two factors: the immutable nature of armed combat and the variable character of the phenomenon.

The transition process, comprising both mental and physical components, is widely acknowledged as an inherently delicate phase in the context of armed combat. It is often observed that this phase gives rise to a range of challenging emotions and behaviors, including frustration, friction, and an increased risk of adverse outcomes. In their role as promoters of the operational process, commanders must possess an understanding of the operational context and the effects to be achieved. They must also be able to direct and coordinate the efforts of subordinate forces in order to facilitate an efficient transition process. As the principal decision-maker, he is responsible for initiating the transition, whether driven by the necessity to capitalize on an opportunity or to circumvent a critical juncture. It is therefore evident that the explicit articulation of the commander's intent is a crucial determinant of the success of the transition, whether it entails a shift from a defensive to an offensive posture or vice-versa. Concurrently, in light of the inherent uncertainties and risks associated with a transition in operational posture, it is incumbent upon the commander to cultivate a conducive environment for its realization. Mission command represents an efficacious instrument for conferring upon subordinate commanders the requisite authority and operational autonomy. A command philosophy that is based on mutual trust, professionalism, and the responsibility of subordinate commanders to act in accordance with the intent of the higher echelon is the only one that can create the preconditions for success or avoid defeat.

The analysis, which commenced with a comprehensive literature review and delved into the nuances of armed conflict in the context of evolving trends and technologies in contemporary warfare, has yielded insights that address the research questions. These findings yield a series of insights that can inform the tactical commanders during the operation process, encompassing the planning, preparation, execution, and evaluation phases.

First, by exploring the research directions related to the proposed objectives, we identified potential situations in which the transition may manifest itself at the level of armed combat. The analysis of the main components of transition helped to determine the mechanisms by which the process is realized, while also creating the opportunity to identify options for process improvement. The results of the research indicate that success in the physical (action) component of the transition is directly dependent on how the mental dimension of the process is managed. The research results also emphasize that whether exploiting an opportunity or approaching the climax, the commander's decision is crucial. On it, there depends the ability of subordinate forces to execute the actions necessary for the transition. Consequently, the success or disastrous defeat of one's own forces is influenced by the commander's ability to exploit a position of advantage or to create one when it does not exist. Opportunity comes as a result of the existence, in space and time, of a position of advantage, but at the same time, the avoidance of the climax is influenced by its temporary attainment. From this perspective, it must be realized that in combat those "windows of opportunity", that offer a relative advantage, are limited in time and must be exploited quickly so that the set objectives are achieved.

The identification of culminating indicators provides the commander with the information he needs to make informed decisions during execution, thereby limiting the effects of critical situations and exploiting opportunities. Moreover, these indicators can assist the commander and his staff in the planning process, enabling them to anticipate critical situations or potential opportunities and facilitate an effective transition. The effective employment of weapon systems in the tactical land force formations' equipment can facilitate the transition process. Technological superiority provides the foundation for attaining a relative advantage. Consequently, if the upper echelon possesses qualitatively superior capabilities, including new weapon systems, the formations equipped with them must be allocated to support the forces initiating the transition, irrespective of the circumstances.

It bears reiterating that the transition in combat operations represents a significant challenge and a crucial test for the commander of the tactical structure of land forces. In addition to the tactical and operational implications inherent in this process, there are also civilian issues that must be considered. The influx of refugees, the occurrence of collateral casualties, and the provision of humanitarian assistance impede military operations and, consequently, the transition process. It is thus incumbent upon the commander to give particular attention to both the military and civilian aspects.

Consequently, the potential consequences of military operations, particularly in relation to the deployment of weapons systems, must be continually evaluated in terms of the risk of casualties and collateral damage.

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