

# PARATROOPERS IN FUTURE OPERATIONS

**COL Gábor BOLDIZSAR, PhD**

National University of Public Service,  
Dean of Military Science and Officer Training Faculty

## **Abstract**

*Between the two World Wars paratroopers or airborne units were set up in preparation for the coming conflicts as the means of the vertical envelopement. During World War II several airborne operations were conducted. The strength of paratroopers deployed ranged from the individual troopers to tens of thousands. During the Cold War era militaries in different conflicts also used parachutes as a delivery system, airborne and special forces units for combat behind enemy lines many times. The development of helicopter technology modernized airborne operations and gave a possibility to combine it with air assault capabilities.*

*Today's operations require rapid deployment of forces to stop the escalation of any conflict and handle the situation, finally to restore peace, normalize the situation and life conditions.*

*To fulfil such requirements paratrooper units are one of the most appropriate ones. Thank to their high readiness, medical and mental conditions, moral and fighting spirit, airborne or air-transportable weaponry and equipment they can operate successfully in an extreme, unknown environment till the arrival of the main stabilisation forces.*

**Key words:** 21 century's operational environment, Paratroopers, Airborne, Deployable forces, Quick reaction.

With the end of the Cold War the global confrontation dominated by the Soviet Union and the U.S. ceased to exist. However, the long-awaited world peace did not arrive. Previously unknown, repressed tensions came to surface and escalated into a conflict or war. The states, and international communities have to be able to manage such conflicts. In World War II and the Cold War military powers with large numbers of troops dominated. In the management of today's conflicts well-trained, well-equipped and well-led, smaller but more efficient units have the leading role. Of course, there are examples of deployments of large numbers, tens, even hundreds of thousands of troops but this is not typical.

With the evolution of technology in World War II and the subsequent Cold War airborne forces had also significant tasks in waging war. The vertical envelopment, occupation or destruction of the key enemy objects were paramount to achieve strategic goals.

The use of airborne forces should also be reconsidered within the system of military procedures developed for the treatment of post-Cold War conflicts.

The complex nature of today's conflicts has essentially political, military and economic components. Managing these conflicts requires a complex response, which requires the cooperation of many organizations and actors.

In the post-Cold War period the defence of the country, that of NATO interests and values have not been conducted only along state borders. Conflicts can be effectively managed and resolved where they are generated. These conflict zones are usually in remote areas far from Europe. In these areas the task of transporting troops there and back and their supply comprises a difficult task for the sending nations and alliances.

After the Cold War Europe's two large alliance systems, NATO and the European Union (earlier: Western European Union), were looking for their new responsibilities in the new security situation. The NATO intervention in Bosnia and Herzegovina proved a good solution. Since 1992 NATO had basically used its air and naval forces for monitoring and intervening in the civil war on the Balkans. In 1995, however, first time outside NATO area, the ground forces started IFOR operations for the establishment of security, for restoring and protecting peace.

The European Union as a political and economic union and the Western European Union as a defense-military alliance were identifying their new roles. The announcement of the Petersburg Tasks and the the merger of the two organizations allowed the development of a European defense system. The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) provides an appropriate basis for the development of EU-led military operations all over the world.

The forecast and early warning of the emergence and escalation of tensions are essential for today's security. It is similarly important to have the capability of rapid deployment of large numbers of troops in the conflict area in order to provide security and normalize the situation. The rapid deployment, usually by air, requires personnel and equipment with the appropriate training and composition that can begin the intervention almost immediately after receiving the call. The airborne combat forces have a high value, high combat preparedness and morale, and air-droppable or air-transportable assets. The airborne units are able act as stand-alone forces, conduct the complex and dangerous tasks until the arrival of main foirces. These are the skills that are essential today for rapid and efficient crisis management.

## **Changes and characteristics of the operational environment**

Throughout history the operational environment of the engagement of military forces has been constantly changing. Such changes are permanent as the characteristics of the conflict also continuously change, similarly to the differring security environment, differring terrain (physical and human), expectations, the availability of resources and the identified political and military objectives.<sup>1</sup>

**1** Dr. BOLDIZSÁR Gábor: A magyar PRT, mint a legkomplexebb külföldi válságkezelés műveleti környezete In Társadalom és Honvédelem 2013/1-2. (NKE, Budapest, 2013)

## The changing of conflicts<sup>2</sup>

The tasks of the armed forces are substantially influenced or even defined by the conflicts. In the recent period conflicts have undergone significant changes. But in addition to the new models and features the traditional (Cold War-type) conflicts also remain.

The differences between Cold War and the present conflicts can be summarized as follows:

- Intra-state conflicts replaced inter-state type conflicts.
- Regular security forces involved in the armed conflict have been replaced by armed groups and militias.
- Previously, most of the casualties were military in nature while the proportion of civilian casualties has increased in the present conflicts.
- In the past the main objectives in a conflict were to gain and control territories while today it is the violent spread of identities and the conservation of the values of small and large groups.
- In conventional conflict management regular forces carried out their tasks in combined arms, and at levels of joint operations, using sophisticated weapons systems. Civil wars are waged basically with the use of simple weapons and in many cases only with small arms.

## The characteristics of a changed operational environment<sup>3</sup>

- A growing number of international organizations get involved in the management of conflicts and in the strengthening of peace and security. Each

<sup>2</sup> Dr. BOLDIZSÁR, Gábor: Kultúrantropológia és a jövő tisztképzés In: Hadtudományi Szemle, Volume 2013/1, Budapest, ([http://uni-nke.hu/downloads/kutatas/folyoiratok/hadtudomanyi\\_szemle/szamok/2013/2013\\_1/2013\\_1\\_alt\\_boldizar\\_gabor\\_101\\_107.pdf](http://uni-nke.hu/downloads/kutatas/folyoiratok/hadtudomanyi_szemle/szamok/2013/2013_1/2013_1_alt_boldizar_gabor_101_107.pdf))

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<sup>3</sup> Dr. BOLDIZSÁR Gábor: A magyar PRT, mint a legkomplexebb külföldi válságkezelés műveleti környezete In Társadalom és Honvédelem, 2013/1-2. (NKE, Budapest, 2013)

organization strives to conduct a legitimate activity; it should be based on a UN Security Council resolution.

- The identified political and military objectives are achieved by the military forces in complex legal (domestic, international, and host-nation) environment and with limited resources.
- Military operations are executed with a high degree of political and media attention. Because of the political impacts and the public attention the missions and behaviour of little units and individuals are highly appreciated.
- The complexity of conflicts necessitates a complex and coordinated response in the execution of international security operations in all security dimensions (political / administrative, military / internal security, economic, humanitarian, environmental, etc.) and with all actors.
- Military forces resolve complex missions basically in military / internal security, political / administrative and economic security dimensions. These three elements of the Copenhagen Approach to security significantly help the international community with providing support to the state-building efforts.
- Every security dimension has its peculiarities, so the involved active organizations, participants and players also show diversity. The management of complex conflicts has many players with whom continuous cooperation and coordination of efforts is to be designed and maintained.
- The theater of operations is essentially a large geographical area, however, the strength of available military forces is limited. Thus, in a large territory small sized units are to execute their tasks.
- An international military intervention has always been planned, organized and carried out by several nations therefore its multinational nature is also determining.
- This makes it necessary to bring up smaller units to the level of arms and services (land, air and maritime) for joint, that is combined-arms, execution of joint tasks.
- The capability of executing a task far from home territories is to be permanently maintained. The tasks are to be implemented with a high degree of autonomy, a restrictive legal environment and scarce resources, on the basis of the superior command's instructions. The supplies, replacements and supplements for the operation should be provided from home bases.
- Military forces are frequently deployed in asymmetric warfare.

- In many cases not only traditional military tasks are to be executed in a fundamentally different culture, in addition to destroyed, degraded infrastructure, under extreme physical (geographical and man-made) and climatic conditions.
- From the aspect of a “third party” the active forces in the area of operations, the attitude and willingness of local authorities, the general public, formal and informal opinion-makers to accept military force and the international efforts in relation to the aims and ultimate objectives are essential. This behaviour may be supportive, neutral or negative.
- The local people’s behaviour, the spatial relations of human terrain and those that fundamentally affect the execution of the task (acceptance) and pose a threat to military forces (different values and reaction). The individual, the traditional large and small communities can influence our troops because the actions and reactions of different historical, cultural, religious and empirical reasons vary. Different standards and unknown cultural background pose a serious threat to military force and to international intervention participants.

For managing changes in operational environment NATO has developed the NATO Response Forces<sup>4</sup> (NRF) concept and military force. The NRF comprises the NATO countries’ military units previously with 6-, today 12-month rotation. Its objective is to protect the values and interests of the alliance not only within the borders (collective defense, CDO), but also in remote conflict zones. Basic requirements are: high readiness, deployability, immediate response capacity and the capability to maintain continuous operation. If necessary, the deployed NRF units will be followed by the main forces that expand the success, restore peace and achieve the identified political and military objectives.

NATO and the EU strive to use the capabilities of member countries effectively within the alliance and between the two alliances. The Pooling and Sharing and the Smart Defence ideas serve this purpose. For conflict management strategic transport is also essential besides the executive forces and their equipment. The number of countries who have such strategic transport capabilities is limited. Parallel with the commitment of the necessary forces for operations such transport

<sup>4</sup> The NATO Response Force (<http://www.aco.nato.int/page349011837.aspx>, downloaded: 20 January 2014).

capacity has to be provided as well. But in this case the nation or community providing strategic transport aircraft becomes a party to the operation, this is a legal category.

In addition to the NRF there is another important military task system where time and speed are of great importance. The Non-Combatant Evacuation Operation (NEO) also requires fast, accurate, highly independent and adequate power in a military unit. During the evacuation of national, NATO or EU citizens from crisis areas intelligence, forecast, speed, surprise, strategic transport capacity are also essential factors.

## **The airborne forces**

The post-Cold War crises, conflicts and wars, NATO and EU responses to these challenges require a new type of military forces and capabilities. These requirements show a lot of similarities with the airborne forces' existing capabilities. In other areas the parachute capabilities are additionally, indirectly related to the expectations.

### **Characteristics**

The existence, composition, training level, battle procedures, deployability and mental state of airborne forces fundamentally determine their useability. The airborne forces' application has the following characteristics:

- Training / execution: the paratroopers are always trained in the expected operational environment and conditions of their deployment: "Train as you fight, fight as you trained."
- A long distance from their own forces;
- Small unit in large geographical area;
- Limited supply;
- Confusing security environment;
- Improvised protective equipment;

- After attack building up defence and holding positions;
- After clarifying the situation (in case of resupply) attack if needed;
- Difficulties with command and control of the site and higher headquarters;
- Assets, equipment are air-droppable or air-transportable so their size, firepower and armour protection are limited.

## 2.2, Paratrooper:

Because of the characteristics of the branch a paratrooper has good health, excellent physical and mental conditions. The parachute jumps require continuous medical supervision and periodical medical examination. The mental health check is part of the examinations as well. A parachute jump involves heavy physical load so it is necessary to maintain the appropriate physical condition.

During the jumps immediate life-threatening situation can happen after leaving the aircraft. During the optimum opening process high-stress situation also develops. The management of any opening disorder or emergencies evolving during descent requires quick, decisive decision-making ability.

The paratroopers' morale is always high. This comes from their elite-consciousness, they do what no one in the army: parachute jumps arrive in unknown enemy territory, where they can count only on themselves and their comrades. Among the paratroopers confidence is even stronger. Confidence in themselves and their mates, equipment and their commander.

## Assets

The airborne forces' equipment is strongly influenced by the size and capacity of means of transport, the unloading method (dropping, landing). All materiel, tools and weapons should be air-droppable, so their size, weight, fragility is defined.

But the number of transport and dropping equipment (aerial vehicles), including their availability, also determines the deployment of troops.

Airplanes, helicopters, parachutes, dropping container, ramps are all preconditions of deploying paratroopers.

An airborne unit must be fully equipped, air-droppable, and quickly deployable. The individual and collective equipment, combat vehicles and motor vehicles, weapons, ammunition, food, water, protection and housing materials, medical materials, signal and computer tools, and their resupply also have to be provided by air.

## Procedures

Procedures used by the airborne forces are determined primarily by enemy forces, assets and procedures but their own existing forces and equipment affect them too. The strength of parachute forces is speed and surprise. The high value fighting forces can be rapidly deployed by aircraft anywhere in the world<sup>5</sup>. The unexpectedness and speed result in a competitive advantage which multiplies the effectiveness of deployed forces. The airborne forces generally belong to high-readiness forces, their personnel, equipment and materials are stationed together and fully charged. Thanks to their high strength, morale and level of training they are rapidly deployable to execute unknown and unexpected tasks.

Throughout the history of airborne forces paratroopers were deployed in a wide variety of missions:

- Large, massive air assault operations;
- Limited tasks, operations to take possession of areas or objects, to destroy them;
- Insertion of small reconnaissance forces;
- Insertion of special operations forces for special tasks;
- Air transport, reception of landing forces;
- Delivery or dropping of supplies;
- (Combat) Search and Rescue jumps;
- The common use of combined procedures, essentially the use of ground and parachute forces and air forces in Counter Insurgency Operations (COIN)

<sup>5</sup> The Future of Airborne Forces in NATO, NDC Conference Report (Research Division, NATO Defense College, Rome-Italy, 11-12 April 2013) p 2.

(such as Rhodesian Light Infantry - Fire Force concept<sup>6</sup>). In a remote and large geographical area finding and eliminating a relatively small enemy force is very hard;

- According to the method of insertion parachute jumps can fall into different categories:
  - mass jump;
  - high altitude - low opening ( HALO);
  - high altitude - high opening ( HAHO) so called gliding team;
  - low altitude - low opening, quick touchdown, almost immediate combat readiness.

Wherever parachute forces were used in history, the operations had the following features:

- Extreme conditions, destroyed infrastructure, hostile environment, long-distance, large area and small unit;
- Unexpected situations: unknown location, unknown human terrain and combat situation;
- Unexpected challenges: a rapidly changing situation and new tasks for the forces;
- Isolation: own forces in large distance;
- Self-sufficiency: the supply and supplements can be delivered only by air;
- Ability to maintain continuity of operations;
- Erratic command and control systems.

Operations carried out by the airborne forces often have characteristics similar to the present and the future conflicts and military operations.

## **Command and control**

A command using parachute troops has to keep maintaining the connection with the units and higher headquarters. The command and control is not easily feasible

<sup>6</sup> Dr J.R.T. Wood: Fire Force, Helicopter Warfare in Rhodesia: 1962-1980 ([http://www.jrtwood.com/article\\_fireforce.asp](http://www.jrtwood.com/article_fireforce.asp), downloaded: 21 January 2014).

but it is required for knowing the changes of the operational environment. The command and control system ensures waging the battle by the units. Appropriate combat support (air, artillery) can be provided by friendly troops in the distance. The airborne forces perform their duties independently which makes arranging their supply difficult. Therefore, sufficient time is necessary to claim it. For this a solid, reliable and constantly maintained command and control system is needed.

## Conclusion

Defence is a fundamental role of a state. The armed forces must be prepared for high intensity, collective national defense tasks as well. Including vertical envelopment, closing the flanks, means of speed and surprise and the parachute forces.

Airborne capability is a special capability. Its strength is not only the vertical envelopment by air transportation, landing in the enemy's back to occupy or destroy objects or eliminate enemy. The circumstances of the deployment of airborne forces and the operational environment has many similarities to those of present and future wars and conflicts.

- Given the importance of the objectives (strategic interests) increased political and media attention;
- As the first force in the conflict area it has to solve complex tasks immediately, together with other players already there in force, with local or allied military forces, law enforcement forces, and in possible cooperation with international organizations;
- The deployment of the airborne forces solves tasks with a relatively small unit in a large geographical area, far away from friendly forces;
- During airborne operations their mission is executed in close cooperation with the air force, artillery and with the follow-on incoming ground forces in combined arms way;
- During deployment continuous operational capability should be sustained (independently if there is no in-house air resupply);

- First arriving in the conflict zone, in a civil war, asymmetric warfare procedures apply (Haiti, Iraq or Afghanistan) in many times;
- The types of the conflict zone differ from home conditions in many cases: extreme physical and climatic conditions, destroyed infrastructure, human environment different from the typical.

Paratroopers are at high physical, medical, mental and moral levels. The airborne traditions and policies require them to maintain high readiness, speed and flexibility. During parachute training life-threatening situations repeatedly need to be resolved, fear must be overcome and rapid decisions are to be made. Paratroopers, both as soldiers and as a team are well trained, well equipped, with high combat value. Their medical, physical and psychological conditions are good and periodically inspected.

Special Operations Forces' soldiers are often recruited from among paratroopers<sup>7</sup>.

The level of training, the fighting spirit, resources (material, human) and medical fitness make the airborne troopers and units immediately deployable.

During the use of airborne forces the means of transport is a difficult question, which can take up a relatively large number of troops and equipment and deliver them into strategic distances.

The means and equipment of airborne forces can be transported by any aircraft or other means of transportation. The command post formation can be installed and used quickly. The strength of airborne units, their equipment and supplies are filled up even in peace time, in the normal situation. Thus, airborne forces comprise rapidly deployable teams with high combat-value and readiness.

A typical feature of the process of airborne combat is that missions are to be executed in large geographical areas, far away from friendly forces and often without resupply. Commanders have a high level of decision-making autonomy, they see the situation better and are able to determine the execution of a particular task.

<sup>7</sup> The Future of Airborne Forces (<http://www.thinkdefence.co.uk/2013/04/the-future-of-airborne-forces/>, downloaded: 20 January 2014).

Parachute troops can be deployed not only by jump and drop. But the specialty and characteristics of such units make them well suited for executing rapid response (NRF) operations.

The success of operations executed in extreme conditions and in troubled military and security situations depends largely on the speed of actions, on surprise and on the soldiers fighting spirit. This fighting spirit is at very high level in the airborne units.

## **Suggestion**

The development of airborne forces, their keeping in military structure and deepening their integration is important.

- Their high-level readiness and deployability ensure that paratroopers are to be used as a first force military at the beginning of operations. With their deployable assets their mission- task can be carried out in extreme circumstances, unexpected situations and unfamiliar environment. Penetration into enemy territory from a friendly country is not always possible. But there may not be enough time available for ground penetration. In such a case rapidly deployable airborne troops should be used (such as January 2013, Timbuktu mission).
- Because of their characteristics parachute forces can comprise an effective component of NRF standby forces.
- One of the features of present and future operational environments is the small units operating in a large geographical area. But even more important features are the destroyed infrastructure, road system, bridges and airports. So the only way of fast long-distance delivery is strategic airlift and parachute jump. Where there are no airports, airfields or airstrips applied forces can not be deployed and helicopters without proper bases are suitable only for short-haul tasks and are extremely vulnerable to simple small arms during take-off and landing.
- The limited transport assets, and low number of trained flying, jump-master personnel require the collaboration of the allied nations in order to develop such capacities.

- It is sensible to establish a Center of Excellence in order to develop the procedures and training of airborne forces. Their scientific results and the lessons learned of the operations would be processed and offered for members of the alliance.

Beside the airborne forces' direct military advantages "collateral benefits" are also to be taken into consideration:

- The capabilities of demobilized paratroopers can be used by civil societies and governments. They are able to make decision and act in extreme situations. Thus, in case of emergency they can be useful to help society.
- Civil parachutist training provides appropriate preliminary training for recruits of airborne units. Potential recruits learn discipline, test themselves in extreme situations.
- Paratroopers take regular medical and psychological check-ups, which helps with protecting health.

Today, more and more high-tech tools, GPSs, drones, robots help people's lives, support troops in combat. But the human being, the soldier keeps to be still the most important factor. Civil wars are one of the most important features of today's conflicts. In such situations hard-to-identify people (in civilian clothes) fight with the use of small arms. The elimination of such groups, the weapons collection and the normalization of the situation on the ground require military presence. Airborne units and individual paratroopers comprise a useful part of the present and future management of conflicts. On the basis of their capabilities and arms specialties airborne units, paratroopers, are best suited for fast and effective intervention in unknown situations and extreme environments.

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COL BOLDIZSÁR currently serves in the Hungarian National University of Public Service as the Dean of Military Science and Officers Training Faculty. During his military carrier he served the UN in Mozambique and Kosovo. He has two tours in ISAF as a deputy and the commander of the Hungarian PRT. In Hungary he served at long range reconnaissance, staff officer at battalion and general staff, desk officer in the MoD and the commander of HDF CIMIC and PSYOPS Centre.