
War on Tito's Yugoslavia? The Hungarian Army in Early Cold War Soviet Strategy

László Ritter

INTRODUCTION

The confrontation between the Soviet bloc and Tito's Yugoslavia was the first crisis within the Communist world and one of the key events of the early period of the Cold War. Since then numerous memoirs, documents and analytical works have been published concerning the subject. Despite these works, fundamental questions in the history of this conflict remain unanswered. Among these the most obvious ones are the Soviet intentions and plans to resolve the conflict.

Béla Király, Commander-in-chief of the Infantry of the Hungarian army in 1949-1950, claims that Stalin had made a decision to resolve the conflict by military force.¹ In his essay based on his recollections, *The Aborted Soviet Military Plans Against Tito's Yugoslavia*, and its later versions - which contain numerous discrepancies, indeed many contradictions - he recounted the preparation for the invasion of Yugoslavia by

¹ Béla Király (1912). After completing the Military Academy in 1939, he served in the 10th Artillery Regiment. In 1940 he won a place at the Staff Officers' Academy which he finished with distinction in 1942. Later he served in the Ministry of Defence and in the 8th Division. In March 1945, he volunteered to command the defence group being formed to defend the town of Kőszeg. He and his forces changed to the Soviet side and were sent to prisoner-of-war camp. However, he managed to escape while being transported to the Soviet Union. Returning home, he joined the Hungarian Communist Party. Early in 1946, he became a lieutenant colonel and was then appointed commander of the 1st Division. He became head of the Training Department of the Ministry of Defence in 1947, then Commander-in-chief of the Infantry in 1949. In May 1950, he became the Commander of the Army Academy. However, he was arrested in August 1951 on trumped-up charges of war crimes and activity against the state. He was sentenced to death but on appeal, this was changed to life imprisonment. He was freed on 2 September 1956. He participated in the 1956 Revolution and Independence War as Commander-in-chief of the National Guard. He emigrated to the United States and became one of the leaders of the Hungarian emigration. Later he became professor of military history at Brooklyn College and the City University of New York. In 1989 he returned to Hungary and became a member of Parliament.

the Hungarian army with other forces from the Soviet bloc.² The attack had allegedly been planned from 1949 onwards, and the huge military build-up, exercises and the final war game on the basis of the “actual plan of attack” were concluded by the spring of 1951. According to Király, after the forceful answer of the United States to the North Korean attack on South Korea, the Soviet leadership thought better of their plan and quietly abandoned it after 1951.

Because of the inaccessibility of archival documents dealing with the Soviet bloc’s military plans and activities, Király’s account of the planned attack became not only the best known, but also widely accepted in Cold War historiography. For example, such scholars as Ivo Banac, Beatrice Heuser, and Lorraine M. Lees, as well as military writer William T. Lee used his account as a fundamental source.³ While the others only deal with Király’s account as evidence of the military threat to Yugoslavia, Lee, following Király, believes that “Yugoslavia was the next on Stalin’s list after Korea.” He even stresses that the North Korean and satellite military build-up and war preparations were not only analogous, but closely connected. With the opening of the archives in the 1990s, numerous studies and even a monograph appeared on Hungarian

² Bela Kiraly, “The Aborted Soviet Military Plans against Tito’s Yugoslavia,” in Wayne S. Vucinich, ed., *At the Brink of War and Peace: The Tito-Stalin Split in Historic Perspective* (New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1982), pp. 273-288. Bela Kiraly, “The Hungarian Revolution and Soviet Readiness to Wage War Against Socialist States” in Béla Király, Barbara Lotze and Nándor F. Dreisziger eds., *The First War Between Socialist States: The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and its Impact*. (New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1982), pp. 3-31. Béla Király, *Honvédségből Néphadsereg. Személyes visszaemlékezések 1944-1956* [From Honvéd Army to People’s Army: Personal Recollections 1944-1956] (Budapest: Co-Nexus, 1989), pp. 162-172. László Székely, “A történelem szemtanúja. Interjú Király Bélával.” [Eyewitness of History. Interview with Béla Király] in Béla Király, *Forradalomtól forradalomig, Válogatott tanulmányok, beszédek és interjúk 1982-1990*. [From One Revolution to Another. Selected Studies, Speeches and Interviews 1982-1990] (Budapest: Századvég- Atlanti Kutató és Kiadó Társulat, 1990), pp. 37-48. Bela Kiraly, “Hungarian Army under Soviet Control,” in Ignác Romsics, ed. *20th century Hungary and the Great Powers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 229-244. Béla Király, “An Abortive and the First Real War between Socialist Countries,” in László Veszprémy and Béla Király, eds., *A Millennium of Hungarian Military History*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 535-556.

³ Ivo Banac, *Stalin Against Tito: Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 131; Beatrice Heuser, *Western "Containment" Policies in the Cold War: The Yugoslav Case, 1948-1953* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 128-130; Lorraine M. Lees, *Keeping Tito Afloat. The United States, Yugoslavia and the Cold War* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), pp. 99-111; William T. Lee, *The Korean War was Stalin's Show* (Charlottesville: Center for National Security Law, 1999)

military policy in the Stalinist era.⁴ Although the ground-breaking role of these studies is unquestionable, they have several shortcomings. Beside the fact that they neglect to investigate the trustworthiness of Király's thesis, the authors paid little attention to the critical examination of the archival documents, which led to several errors of fact and analysis, especially in connection with Yugoslavia. Finally, these works have also been outdated by the continuing release of classified material.

The research paper shows that the Hungarian military was *not* preparing for an invasion on Yugoslavia as Király claimed. Between 1949 and 1955, the basic role of the Hungarian army was to repel an enemy attack on Hungary first by defensive and then by counter-attack operations in case of a potential world war. There is no doubt that the utmost attention was paid to Yugoslavia, but this was only because it was the direction from which the Hungarian leadership expected a direct attack. Military planning, exercises, war preparations including the construction of the Southern Defence System along the Hungarian-Yugoslav border all support this and not Király's argument. Beyond its defensive role, the Hungarian People's Army would not have been able to accomplish a large-scale attacking manoeuvre between 1949 and 1951. In spite of the huge military build-up, neither its armament nor the qualifications and morale of the troops were suitable for that kind of task. This was clear not only for the Soviet leadership but for the West and Yugoslavia as some important available sources reveal.

The research paper is based, above all, on declassified documents from the Hungarian National Archives (MOL), Hungarian War History Archives (HL) and the Archives of the Institute for History of Politics (PIL). These include notes, reports and memoranda from the secretariats of the top party leaders, the party's main decision-making bodies and the Ministry of Defence, including the General Staff of the Hungarian army. The documents available in the National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA) and the Open Society Archives (OSA) are also important sources. The absence of research in the Russian (Soviet)

⁴ The most important of these include Imre Okváth, "In the Shadow of the Kremlin: Hungarian Military Policy in the Early Period of the Cold War, 1945-1956," in William W. Epley, ed. *International Cold War Military Records and History: proceedings of the International Conference on Cold War Military Records and History held in Washington, D.C., 21-26 March 1994*. (Washington D.C.: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1996) pp. 457-469; István Balló, "A katonapolitikai elképzelések megvalósítása a Magyar Néphadsereg szárazföldi csapatainál 1951-1953" [The Realization of Military Political Ideas in the Ground Forces of the Hungarian People's Army, 1951-1953.], *Hadtörténeti Közlemények*, 3 (1994), pp. 121-135; István Balló, "Törekvések Magyarország háborús felkészítésére (1951-1953)" [Attempts to Prepare Hungary for War (1951-1953)], *Új Honvédségi Szemle* 5 (1994), pp. 48-59; István Balló, "Adalékok Magyarország 1949-1953 közötti háborús felkészítéséről, a várható hadszíntér előkészítéséről" [Data on Hungary's War Preparations between 1949 and 1953 and on the Arrangements in the Possible Theatre of Operations], *Hadtörténeti Közlemények* 12 (4), pp. 800-823. Miklós Horváth, "A honvédségtől a néphadseregig (1944-1956)" [From Honvéd Army to People's Army 1944-1956] in István Kollega Tarsoly, *Magyarország a XX. században I.* [Hungary in the 20th century I.] (Szekszárd: Babits, 1996.) pp. 399-415. Imre Okváth, *Bástya a béke frontján. Magyar haderő és katonapolitika 1945-1956* [Bastion on the Front of Peace. Hungarian Military Force and Policy 1945-1956] (Budapest: Aquila, 1998).

and Yugoslav archival sources is a deficiency. One should take into consideration, however, that the archives responsible for defence policy in Moscow have partly or completely denied researchers access to their holdings for the period under discussion. Nevertheless, all is not entirely lost. Careful research could reveal which Hungarian documents were compiled for the talks with the Soviet leadership or sent to the Soviet chief advisers. Moreover, recently published collections of documents, including a selection mainly from the material of the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (AVP RF), contain numerous documents concerning Hungarian defence policy.⁵ These form an important part of the study.

A relatively minor, yet essential, portion of primary sources used to prepare this research paper are oral history interviews conducted by the author with high-ranking Hungarian military and state security officials of the Stalinist period. These include interviews with the late Gyula Váradi, Commander-in-chief of the Hungarian Armoured Forces; late Vladimir Farkas, the son of the minister of defence Mihály Farkas; László Ott, who served at the Defence Constructions Department of the Operational Directorate of the General Staff as well as Béla Király.

1. THE QUESTION OF STALIN'S DECISION

Király states that by the summer of 1948 Stalin had already decided that in case his political, psychological and economic war against Yugoslavia failed, he would topple the Tito regime by military force.⁶

The analysis of Király's statements must be started by noting that as Commander-in-chief of the infantry and Commander of the Army Academy he could not have had even indirect information about the military plans of Stalin and the Soviet leadership. The archival sources and memoirs make it clear that even the party secretary Mátyás Rákosi or the minister of defence Mihály Farkas had no insight of this until January 1951 at the Moscow conference of the socialist countries' political and military leaders, to be discussed below.⁷

⁵ Noskova A.F. and others, eds., *Vostochnaia Evropa v Dokumentakh Rossiiskikh Arkhivov, 1944-1953*, tom I-II. [Eastern Europe in the Documents of the Russian Archives] (Moscow-Novosibirsk: Sibirskii khronograf, 1996-1997); Lajos Izsák and Miklós Kun, eds., *Moszkvának jelentjük. Titkos dokumentumok 1944-1948*. [Reporting to Moscow. Secret Documents 1944-1948] (Budapest: Századvég, 1994); G. Procacci and others, eds., *The Cominform. Minutes of the Three Conferences 1947/1948/1949*, Fondazione Feltrinelli, Annali, XXX (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1994).

⁶ Béla Király, *Honvédségből Néphadsereg. Személyes visszaemlékezések 1944-1956*, p. 162, 164 and László Székely, "A történelem szemtanúja. Interjú Király Bélával.", p. 39.

⁷ Interview with Vladimir Farkas by the author. Tape recording. Budapest, January 2000.

Furthermore, Király's assertion has not been supported by any Soviet (Russian) archival source to the present day. Despite the fact that the archives have yielded ample evidence about the Soviet Union's political, economic and intelligence measures against Tito's regime, nothing has emerged to support the idea that the Soviet leadership at any time seriously thought about using military force against Yugoslavia.⁸ The *only* Soviet military measure that is known of regarding Yugoslavia was a sabre-rattling manoeuvre on the Yugoslav border. At the 9 July 1955 Meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, N. S. Khrushchev commented on N. A. Bulganin's remarks on Yugoslavia's military policy during the confrontation as follows: "Well, we deployed a division on the Yugoslav border."⁹ From the available sources, it can be concluded that this deployment might have been made by the middle of August 1949 – at the time when the Soviet Union threatened Yugoslavia with "more effective means" in response to the arrest of White Russian émigrés for espionage.¹⁰ The division Khrushchev mentioned might have been the 2nd Soviet Guards Mechanised Division, which at the time was relocated from Romania to Hungary along the Yugoslav border.¹¹ The deployment, however, could not have meant anything other than a sabre-rattling manoeuvre as this single division was brought up to full strength in terms of manpower and arms immediately after it occupied its new garrison in Hungary.¹²

Neither do any Russian memoirs refer to a plan for an invasion – and we now have reminiscences not only by Khrushchev, but also V. M. Molotov and L. M. Kaganovich from Stalin's inner circle.¹³ In fact, Khrushchev in his memoirs claimed that there were two reasons for Stalin not to launch an attack on Yugoslavia: the Soviet Union had no common border with Yugoslavia and he was afraid that the United

⁸ See for instance G. Procacci and others, eds., *The Cominform. Minutes of the Three Conferences 1947/1948/1949*, p. 1025. Footnote 123.

⁹ "A szovjet-jugoszláv tárgyalások eredményeiről. Bulganyin elvtárs felszólalása." [About the Results of the Soviet-Yugoslav Negotiations. Comrade Bulganin's remarks] *Az SZKP KB. 1955 július 9. ülésének jegyzőkönyve*. [Minutes of the Plenum of CC CPSU of 9 July 1955] MOL M-KS 276. f. 74/- ö.e., p. 106.

¹⁰ Stephen Clissold, ed. *Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union 1939-1973. A Documentary Survey*. (London: Oxford University Press for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1975), p. 219.

¹¹ One year later, the British Ambassador to Hungary G. A. Wallinger mentioned the relocation, which for a few days caused real fear of a war in Yugoslavia and the West, in his report as follows: "You will recall that there were similar reports and rumours last summer and that visual observation soon established that one extra Soviet division, with possibly some extra ancillary troops, had been newly posted on Hungarian territory, largely in the Kecskemet-Szolnok-Cegled area." *Review of the Military Situation in Hungary. Likelihood of an Immediate Offensive Against Yugoslavia Discounted*. 11 August 1950. TNA FO 371/87865, p. 4. and Sergiu Verona, *Military Occupation and Diplomacy. Soviet Troops in Romania 1944-1958*. (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1992), pp. 52-53.

¹² *H.M. Military Attaché's Annual Report on the Hungarian People's Army and Para-Military Organisations in Hungary*. 18 January 1950. TNA FO 371/87867, p. 10.

¹³ N. S. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament*. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974); Felix Chuev, *Molotov Remembers: Inside Kremlin Politics. Conversations with Felix Chuev*. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993); L. M. Kaganovich, *Pamiatnye Zapiski* [Recollections], (Moscow: Vagrius, 1996).

States would have actively supported the Yugoslavs.¹⁴ Among memoirs of the political and military leaders in the rest of the Soviet bloc, beside Király's, only Enver Hoxha's and Mátyás Rákosi's reminiscences refer to the idea of an armed intervention on Yugoslavia. While Hoxha claimed that Stalin ruled out the attack, Rákosi stated that the idea of the people's democracies' invasion of Yugoslavia was only "part of the Western imperialist whispering campaign."¹⁵

However, the main rebuttal of Király's statement is given by what we know about the January 1951 conference of the people's democracies' first secretaries and defence ministers in Moscow. Several different sources report on the conference, and to the present day these have yielded the most information about Stalin's cold war military plans.¹⁶ As it will be shown in Chapter 2, however, none of them contains any reference to any decision or plan concerning Yugoslavia.

¹⁴ "I'm absolutely sure that if the Soviet Union had a common border with Yugoslavia, Stalin would have intervened militarily. As it was, though, he would have had to go through Bulgaria, and Stalin knew we weren't strong enough to get away with that. He was afraid the American imperialists would have actively supported the Yugoslavs – not out of sympathy with the Yugoslav form of socialism, but in order to split and demoralize the socialist camp." N. S.

Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament*, p. 181.

¹⁵ "With a chuckle expressing both anger and deep irony, Stalin said: And now Tito is accusing us, the Soviets, of allegedly interfering in the internal affairs of Yugoslavia, of allegedly wanting to attack Yugoslavia! No, we have never wanted to do such a thing and it has never even crossed our minds because we are Marxist-Leninists, we are a socialist country, and we cannot act as Tito thinks and acts." Enver Hoxha, *Memoirs from my Meetings with Stalin*. (Tirana: 8 Nentori Publishing House, 1981), pp. 142-143. "In this connection I dealt with Yugoslavia as well, which in these critical months [autumn 1950 – author's note] was a favourite subject of the propaganda in the imperialist press. Sometimes it was threateningly mentioned how much stronger Tito's army was than the combined force of the peaceful neighbouring countries, and sometimes precisely the opposite, that the people's democracies intended to attack Yugoslavia. This was all part of the imperialist warmongering." Mátyás, Rákosi. *Visszaemlékezések 1940-1956* [Reminiscences 1940-1956] 2. (Budapest: Napvilág, 1997), p. 843.

¹⁶ See footnote 55.

2. THE QUESTION OF THE MILITARY DEVELOPMENT

According to Király, Stalin's military designs on Yugoslavia were behind the development of the armies of Soviet bloc countries in the late forties and early fifties. As he "did not want the Soviet Union to wage war on its own", he immediately or - according to another version - in autumn 1948 launched the development and reorganisation of the armies of the satellite states on the Soviet model.¹⁷ In Hungary as elsewhere, a feverish army build-up started under the direction of Soviet advisers "to enable a large-scale Hungarian army to participate in Stalin's war against Yugoslavia."¹⁸ Although the description of the Sovietisation of the army concurs with the different versions of Király's recollections, he gives differing accounts about how the development was conducted. In the first version of his memoirs, Király claims that "in light arms, medium tanks and artillery Hungary received the newest models from the Soviet Union."¹⁹ However, no "sophisticated modern weapons" like heavy tanks or bombers were delivered. Subsequently, he drew the conclusion that the nature of the equipment "made the Hungarian People's Army cannon fodder for the more advanced Soviet armed forces" or that it was only able to perform as an "advance-guard and second-line unit."²⁰ In one of the later versions of his memoirs, however, he claims the opposite: "A huge amount of the most modern weapons, with the exception of rockets, came to Hungary. In brief: in the course of 1949 a modern, conventional army was built equipped with the most up-to-date weaponry and organised on the Soviet model."²¹ The end result of the build-up, however, is the same in all versions: Király unambiguously states that by the summer of 1950 or the spring of 1951 an over 250,000 strong Hungarian army was ready for war against Yugoslavia.²²

Archival sources outline a different picture of the military development. Based on that, the process can be divided into three distinct phases. The first phase is between January 1948 and February 1949, the second between January 1949 and December 1950, and the third between December 1950 and July 1953. As also shown by the phases, Moscow amended the pace of development twice, on both occasions accelerating and increasing the scale of the build-up. The archival sources clearly reveal that although in the second and third phases the confrontation between the Soviet Bloc and Yugoslavia had a great impact on the scale of

¹⁷ László Székely, "A történelem szemtanúja. Interjú Király Bélával.", p. 39.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Bela Kiraly, *The Aborted Soviet Military Plans against Tito's Yugoslavia*, p. 280.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ László Székely, "A történelem szemtanúja. Interjú Király Bélával.", p. 44.

²² Ibid. and Bela Kiraly, *The Aborted Soviet Military Plans against Tito's Yugoslavia*, p. 279.

development, a *determining factor* behind the build-up was how Moscow evaluated its short- and long-term military position in Europe compared to the United States and its allies.

2.1 The First Phase

The Hungarian army in effect did not exist until 1948. Although the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty permitted Hungary to maintain armed forces with a total strength of 70,000 people, at the end of 1947 the Hungarian army did not even have a quarter of that strength.²³ Together with the border guard, its effective force did not reach 15,000. This in practice meant that two poorly armed cadre divisions and 15 border guard battalions were maintained.

In spite of this weakness, building and rearming the Hungarian military was not a serious issue in the plans of the Soviet and, consequently, the Hungarian leadership. The Soviet Union had no need for a combat-ready Hungarian army. Since the end of World War II, Soviet troops had been stationed in Hungary.²⁴ The neighbouring countries, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Romania, were also under Soviet influence and the eastern part of Austria belonged to the Soviet occupation zone. Only the supply and communication lines crossing the country and linking the Soviet Union and the Soviet occupation zone in Austria gave Hungary its military importance. These, however, were guaranteed by Soviet troops.

This position of the military changed only after the Conference of the Communist and Workers Parties in Szklarska Poręba in September 1947. Referring to A. A. Zhdanov's speech on the international situation, which stressed that the imperialist camp is "preparing to launch a new imperialist war", delegates of the Hungarian Communist Party (HCP) on their return from the conference urged a revision of party views on

²³ Békeszerződés a Szövetséges és Társult Hatalmak és Magyarország között. 1947. február 10. [Peace Treaty between the Allied and Associated Powers and Hungary. 10 February 1947.] Part III. Military and Air Provisions. See Dénes Halmosy ed., *Nemzetközi szerződések gyűjteménye 1945-1958* [Collection of International Treaties 1945-1958] (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi, 1958). pp. 140-143.

²⁴ Article 22 of Part IV of the treaty authorised the Soviet Union to station troops even in Hungary in order to secure the supply and communication lines of the Soviet occupation forces in Austria. These troops were to stay as long as the allied occupation of Austria lasted. Since their strength and composition were not regulated, the Soviet Union could station as many forces in Hungary as it pleased. Ibid.

the development of the army.²⁵ The HCP Politburo reached a decision on the issue at its meeting on 11 December.²⁶

The army development plan was devised by Lt. Gen. György Pálffy, Superintendent of the Army. Taking the country's economic capacity into account, the plan wished to establish the 70,000 strong armed forces permitted by the peace treaty in 4 years between 1 October 1948 and 30 September 1952. By the end of the second year the army's four corps were to be created with a strength of 45,000 men altogether. Bringing them up to full strength would have happened in 1952.²⁷ After the Soviet leadership's approval, the plan was accepted by the HCP Politburo at its meeting on 28 January 1948.²⁸

Phase of Development, Code name	Time period	Total strength of the Army (Fighting force)
1, "Pilis-I"	15 April 1948 – 1 October 1948	33,472 (20,134)
2, "Pilis-II"	1 October 1948 – 15 March 1949	35,920 (20,905)

Table 1. The Materialized Phases of the "Pálffy" development plan. Source: *A Magyar Néphadsereg statisztikai évkönyve 1953*. [Yearbook of the Hungarian People's Army 1953] 27 February 1953. HL MN 102/05/345/1. pp. 7-8 and 20.

The Hungarian leadership wished to obtain the arms and equipment necessary to execute the "Pálffy plan" from the Soviet Union. An agreement was reached to this end as early as February 1948, following the signing of the Hungarian-Soviet treaty of friendship, co-operation and mutual assistance. The Soviet leadership also promised to assist with training and organisation by allowing Hungarian officers the possibility to study at Soviet military academies and sending 8 military advisers to Hungary.²⁹

²⁵ G. Procacci and others, eds., *The Cominform. Minutes of the Three Conferences 1947/1948/1949*, pp. 217-251.

²⁶ *Az MKP PB 1947 december 11-i jegyzőkönyve* [Minutes of the HCP Politburo on 11 December 1947], PIL 274. f. 3/123. ö.e., p. 5. Before taking a decision Mátyás Rákosi wrote Stalin a letter on 29 November in which he sought approval for military development: "While we did not have the right cadres, we consciously did not develop the armed forces. Now, however, the problem of increasing the army and its equipment are on the agenda. We should like to coordinate the arming of our army with the Soviet Army. It would be desirable to send young Hungarian officers and cadets to train in the Soviet Army. For this your decision in principle is needed." It was probably approved at the talks between Stalin and Rákosi on 9 December 1947. See *Rákosi Mátyás levele Sztálinnak. 1947. november 29.* [Mátyás Rákosi's letter to Stalin on 29 November 1947] Lajos Izsák and Miklós Kun, eds., *Moszkvának jelentjük. Titkos dokumentumok 1944-1948.* p. 235.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ *MKP PB. 1948. január 28-i ülésének jegyzőkönyve.* [Minutes of the Meeting of the HCP Politburo on 28 January 1948] PIL 274. f. 3/129 ö. e., pp. 4-5.

²⁹ *Emlékeztető a Szovjet Hadsereggel folytatott tárgyalásokról. 1948. február 26.* [Memorandum on the Talks with the Soviet Army on 26 February 1948] HL HM Szervek 844. d. 6., pp. 2-5.

The implementation of the “Pálffy plan” started in April 1948. Training the troops, whose ranks had swollen to 20,000, continued undisturbed in the course of the summer according to the original plans.³⁰ The documents show no sign that the Berlin crisis and the Soviet-Yugoslav conflict in June 1948 had any impact on the Hungarian army. The Soviet advisers arrived at the beginning of October from the High Command of the Soviet Occupation Force in Austria under the leadership of Maj. Gen. J. M. Prokofiev. They began their work by appraising the state of the Hungarian Army. Prokofiev’s *Report on the state of the Hungarian army on 20 October 1948* - a copy of which the Hungarians were also given - made it clear that the Hungarian Army still represented only a minimal force. The rifle and artillery divisions were divisions in name; they were not even of battalion strength. Prokofiev adjudged only the motorised battalion and the engineer battalion to be suitable for affecting lighter combat duties. All the other units he described as insufficiently equipped cadre units only fit for basic training duties.³¹

In his report, the chief adviser criticized the organisation and training of the army on several points, pointing out its obsolescence. Based on his proposals, the Hungarian army’s transformation on the Soviet model started in November 1948. Decisions were reached on the translation of the most important Soviet military regulations, providing the conditions for Soviet-style officer training, and the reorganisation of the Ministry of Defence on the Soviet pattern. None of these, however, affected the bases of Pálffy’s development plan for the army, the planned strength and the deadlines, also approved by the Soviet leadership.

2.2 The Second Phase

The military build-up required more Soviet advisers, and more weaponry and military equipment.³² At the end of January 1949, Lt. Gen. László Sólyom, Chief of the newly established General Staff, and Lt. Gen. Sándor Nógrádi, Chief of the Political Department, went to Moscow to discuss these issues with Marshal A. M. Vasilevsky, Chief of the General Staff of the Soviet Army.³³ Unlike for the talks held in February 1948, there are no summarising reports available on this meeting. At the same time, on the basis of the Hungarian

³⁰ The total strength of the army in spring 1948 (including the ministry’s and other military organs’ military and civil personnel) was 33,472. *A Magyar Néphadsereg statisztikai évkönyve 1953*. [Yearbook of the Hungarian People’s Army 1953] 27 February 1953. HL MN 102/05/345/1. pp. 7-8 and 20.

³¹ *Jelentés a magyar hadsereg 1948. év október 20 -ai helyzetéről* [Report on the State of the Hungarian Army on 20 October 1948] HL MN 1948/T 844 d. pp. 31-45.

³² *Jegyzőkönyv az Államvédelmi Bizottság 1948. november 17-én tartott üléséről* [Minutes on the Meeting of the State Defence Committee on 17 November 1948] MOL 276 f. 84/1 ö.e., pp. 1-4.

³³ *Jegyzőkönyv az Államvédelmi Bizottság 1948. december 2-án tartott üléséről* [Minutes on the Meeting of the State Defence Committee on 2 December 1948] MOL 276 f. 84/1 ö.e., pp. 5-7.

measures following the talks and documents related to the Moscow talks a year later, we can in effect precisely reconstruct the events. Accordingly, Vasilevsky called on the Hungarian leaders to accelerate the military build-up and to increase the planned strength of the army. By October 1951, nine rifle divisions, one motorised rifle division, one mechanised division, small artillery, air force and air defence artillery had to be developed. The manpower level was to be 100,000 which they had to realise by issuing four orders of battle.³⁴

Vasilevsky's proposal was part of the Soviet military response to the Western military measures concerning the Berlin blockade on the one hand and to European-American defence talks which led to the emergence of NATO on the other. Vojtech Mastny fittingly called this "moderate rather than alarmist" as no immediate changes occurred in the Soviet military positions.³⁵ The Soviet conventional forces had, both in military capabilities and potential, clear superiority in Europe.³⁶ Moreover, Moscow, thanks to its spies which infiltrated the inner circles of Western decision-making bodies, had detailed information about the other side's plans and actual military strength.³⁷ At the same time, however, Moscow wanted to preserve its superiority and thus decided on the long-term reinforcement of its forces in Central and Eastern Europe. On the one hand, it meant the organisation of the armies in the satellite countries along Soviet lines and their integration into the Soviet order of battle, and the reinforcement of the Soviet forces on the other. This is clearly proved by another proposal by Vasilevsky. He asked for the construction and subsequent handing over of Hungarian airfields to the Soviet Air Force.³⁸ The airfields were later used by the 177th Guards Bomber Division and the 195th Guards Fighter Division, which Moscow deployed in Hungary to provide air defence for the country in the second half of 1949.³⁹ At the same time, Soviet ground forces in the country were significantly reinforced by the previously mentioned 2nd Guards Mechanised Division.

³⁴ *A Honvédelmi Minisztérium 5 éves tervnek javaslattervezete* [Proposal for the Five Year Plan of the Ministry of Defence] 17 February 1949. HL MN 1949/T. 5/13. 137. ö.e., p. 114.

³⁵ Vojtech Mastny, "NATO in the Beholder's Eye: Soviet Perceptions and Policies, 1949-1956" Working Paper no. 35, *Cold War International History Project* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2002), p. 20.

³⁶ Victor Gobarev, "Soviet Military Plans and Actions During the First Berlin Crisis 1948-1949" *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 10 (3) (September 1997), pp. 9-13.

³⁷ The famous "Cambridge Five" spy ring constantly supplied the Soviets with highly classified information from London and Washington. Among others see Sheila Kerr, "The Secret Hotline to Moscow: Donald Maclean and the Berlin Crisis of 1948", in Ann Deighton ed., *Britain and the First Cold War* (London: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 71-87 and Yuri Modin, *My Five Cambridge Friends: Burgess, Maclean, Philby, Blunt, and Cairncross by Their KGB Controller*. (London: Headline, 1994), pp. 137, 155.

³⁸ *A magyar katonai küldöttség moszkvai tárgyalásának anyaga*. [Material of the Moscow talks of the Hungarian Military Delegation] 20 January 1950. MOL 276.f. 67/166 ö.e., pp. 31-33.

³⁹ Károly Vándor, *Soviet Air Forces in Hungary & Austria*. 2nd edition. (Vándor Private Publishing: Nagyiván, 2004), p. 22.

Following Vasilevsky's instructions, the necessary changes to the military development plan were made in February 1949, and the first phase came into force on 15 March 1949. In the first phase regiments were introduced into the organisation, replacing the thereto highest subunits, the battalions. The armoured forces were in the centre of the build-up. In the second phase, in which mostly the strength of the rifle units were increased, type "A", i.e. full strength, and type "B", i.e. reduced strength, divisions were set up on the Soviet pattern.

Phase of Development, Code name	Time Period	Total strength of the Army (Fighting force)
1, "Klapka"	15 March 1949 – 1 October 1949	46,920 (16,638)
2, "Petőfi"	1 October 1949 – 15 March 1950	52,636 (25,500)
3, "Rákóczi"	15 March 1950 – 1 November 1950	56,866 (27,682)
4, "Kossuth"	1 November 1950 – (1 October 1951)	133,927 (87,110)

Table 2. The Materialized Phases of the "Pálffy" development plan. Source: *A Magyar Néphadsereg statisztikai évkönyve 1953*. [Yearbook of the Hungarian People's Army 1953] 27 February 1953. HL MN 102/05/345/1. pp. 8-17 and 22-25.

In the third phase the first corps was formed while the air force and air defence units were strengthened significantly. In the fourth phase - which was put into effect on 1 November 1950 - a second corps was formed. With the new units, the order of battle included three type "A", i.e. full strength, rifle divisions, four type "B", i.e. reduced strength, divisions, one type "A" motorised division, one type "B" armoured division, one type "B" assault artillery division, two type "A" air defence artillery divisions, one type "A" fighter aviation division and several other smaller units.⁴⁰ The total strength of the army reached 133,927.

2.3 The Results of the Second Phase

It is clear that the army underwent a very impressive development. In less than two years an army with a structure embracing all branches of service, based on the Soviet principles and modern by Hungarian standards, was built from scratch. At the same time, the build-up was pushed through at such a pace that it

⁴⁰These were the following: a cannon, a mortar, an anti-tank artillery, an engineer and a pontoon bridge brigade and numerous signals, river guard and chemical warfare units. *A Magyar Néphadsereg statisztikai évkönyve 1953*. [Yearbook of the Hungarian People's Army 1953] 27 February 1953. HL MN 102/05/345/1. pp. 11-14.

was unable to satisfy the fundamental aim of increasing the defensive capabilities of the country. The *Informatory Report on the Hungarian Army* of 1 January 1951 prepared for the Soviet leadership made it clear that the fighting efficiency and combat readiness of the army remained weak.⁴¹

Three reasons for this need to be highlighted: the “decapitation” of the officer corps, the morale, and the chronic shortage of weaponry and equipment. The great majority of the army’s officer corps in 1948 comprised well-trained and experienced staff officers of the former Hungarian Royal Army. Many joined the communists, but many simply wished to serve their country according to their profession, irrespective of its political system. In 1949 and 1950, 78% of them were forcibly dismissed from the army.⁴² A great many of them, in particular those who formerly had held leading positions, awaited arrest and execution.⁴³ They were replaced by officers who were deemed politically reliable due to their working class or peasant background, and who had undergone three- or six-month crash officer training courses and most of whom only had primary education.

The shortcomings in their knowledge is best assessed in the summary about the results of the training year 1949-50 entitled *the General Report on the Operational/Tactical Training of the Hungarian Army’s General and Officer Corps* of July 1950.⁴⁴ According to the report, although the Hungarian army’s general and officer corps adopted the Soviet Army’s training and organisational methods, “the deficiencies in the area of their military knowledge are so great and serious that in the new training year the fundamental reorganisation of the commander and staff training will be necessary”. The report states that the commanders and staff “organise both defence and attack without professional knowledge and wrongly, and they know the bases of combined arms combat, the reorganisation of troops and the issue of orders and measures only superficially.”⁴⁵ Not surprisingly, the results of the management and training duties entrusted to them show the same picture. In addition to the lack of professional knowledge and experience, the forced pace of development also played a great role: the biannual reorganisations made the formation of efficient fighting units impossible.

⁴¹ *Tájékoztató jelentés a magyar hadseregről*. [Informatory Report on the Hungarian Army] 1 January 1951. MN 1967/T/154. ö.e. pp. 34.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.1.

⁴³ Imre Okváth, “A katonai elit metamorfózisa, 1945-1950.” [Metamorphosis of the Military Elite, 1945-1950], in Imre Okváth, ed. *Katonai perek a kommunista diktatúra időszakában 1945-1958: Tanulmányok a fegyveres testületek tagjai elleni megtorlásokról a hidegháború kezdeti időszakában* [Military Trials in the Period of the Communist Autocracy, 1945-1958: Essays on the Persecution of Members of the Armed Forces in the Early Years of the Cold War], (Budapest: Történeti Hivatal, 2001) pp. 34-35.

⁴⁴ *A Honvédség táborkainak és Főtisztjeinek hadműveleti-harcászati kiképzése az 1950/51-es évre* [The Operational/Tactical Training of the Hungarian Army’s General and Officer Corps] 30 October 1951. HL MN 1950/T 1/1, pp. 197-207.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 195-196.

The state and the external judgement of the rank and file and officer corps, and indeed the entire army were bad.⁴⁶ The majority of the conscripts came from peasant families, whose spirit had largely been influenced by the aggressive collectivisation and compulsory surrender of produce to the state that was just starting. Due to the bad conditions, principally the appalling rations, the morale of the rank and file did not improve after taking the oath either. It was characteristic that the majority of the conscripts made themselves seem stupid and clumsy so as not to be promoted to non-commissioned officer, which would have increased their period of service from two to three years.⁴⁷ As a consequence of the reorganisations, the majority of officers were re-stationed once, if not twice every year. If an officer had a family, the family had to remain in the old garrison until some form of quarters could be found for them in the new garrison, and this frequently took several months. Because of the chronic lack of accommodation, however, an increasing number were forced to live apart.⁴⁸ Moreover, following the Soviet pattern, the units had to go on a summer camp every year “to be able to fight in different geographical circumstances.”⁴⁹ Besides being absolutely pointless in Hungarian conditions, this method meant that for several months officers could only go home exceptionally with special permission, even though their garrison was often only a couple of kilometres away. This caused problems in private life and resulted in the disintegration of countless officers’ families.⁵⁰

Finally, the most serious problem arose in the supply of military equipment. It is an undeniable fact that through Soviet supplies the Hungarian army acquired a large quantity of modern equipment in 1949-1950, but it was by no means sufficient for the build-up prescribed by the Soviets.⁵¹ Although the army’s needs were satisfied as regards deliveries of small arms and artillery pieces, there was a permanent shortage of armour, multiple rocket launchers, aircraft, and trucks and tractors. With regard to trucks and tractors, the situation was so critical that most transport tasks for the troops had to be done by horse and cart.⁵² There were numerous problems with the received equipment as well. Much of it had already been used and thus needed frequent repair. As Gyula Váradi, Commander-in-chief of the Hungarian Armoured Forces, remembered, “many of the tanks and self-propelled guns were in such a battle-worn condition that their tracks were paper thin. What’s more, we got a lot of them ‘empty’: before being shipped, Soviet mechanics

⁴⁶ Miklós Szűcs, *Ezredes voltam 1956-ban a vezérkarnál*. [I was a Colonel at the General Staff in 1956] (Budapest: Szabad Tér, 1989), p. 34.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

⁵¹ For the best summary on Soviet supplies, see Imre Okváth, *Bástya a béke frontján. Magyar haderő és katonapolitika 1945-1956*. pp. 262-270.

⁵² István Balló, “Adalékok Magyarország 1949–1953 közötti háborús felkészítéséről, a várható hadszíntér előkészítéséről”, pp. 812-813.

had ‘thoroughly’ stripped them of the parts they needed.”⁵³ Furthermore, due to careless storage and transportation, even many of the new items were useless upon arrival. For instance, of the 47 Jak-9p fighters delivered in 1950, 22 had motors that did not work because they had been maintained with poor quality oil.⁵⁴

2.4 The Third Phase

The military build-up’s third and last amendment took place after the January 1951 conference of the Soviet bloc’s first secretaries and defence ministers in Moscow. To understand the reasons for this, we briefly have to review events at the conference on the basis of the available sources. The most detailed and probably most genuine of these is the hand-written note of Emil Bodnăraş, Romanian minister of defence, but the later recollections of Rákosi, and Alexej Čepička, the Czechoslovak minister of defence, and Edward Ochab, the and Polish deputy minister of defence, also provide important information.⁵⁵

The conference started on the evening of 9 January with Stalin’s address. He announced that although the United States was preparing for the outbreak of a world war, it had been proved that it was not even capable of winning a small war like that in Korea let alone a world war. As it would be years before the Americans would be ready and they were also tied down in Asia for a long time, circumstances were “very favourable” for the world revolutionary movement. He stressed that it was “abnormal” that the people’s democracies should have weak armed forces and gave the order that “the People’s Democracies must, within two to three years, create modern and powerful armies that must be combat ready by the end of the three-year period.”⁵⁶ The conference continued with 20-30 minute reports by the ministers of defence about the organisational structure of the armies, manpower levels, results of development and deficiencies.

Bodnăraş stresses that “the reports led to the conclusion that none of the People’s Democracies could meet the requirements of a war at the present time. While their level of preparedness is practically identical, the countries have not coordinated their military organisation and procurement plans”. Stalin, accordingly, stated that by the end of 1953 the people’s democracies should have 1,140,000 soldiers available in

⁵³ *Interview with Gyula Váradi by the author.* Tape recording, Budapest, Hungary, 14 March 2000.

⁵⁴ *Tájékoztató jelentés a magyar hadseregről*, p.5.

⁵⁵ C. Cristescu, “Ianuarie 1951: Stalin decide înarmarea Romanei” [January 1951: Stalin Decides to Arm Romania], *Magazin Istoric* (10) 1999, pp. 15-23; The English translation is available from <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB14/>; Internet; accessed 26 April, 2001, pp. 1-5; Karel Kaplan, *Dans les archives du comité central: Trente ans de secrets du bloc soviétique* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1978), p. 166. The English translation is available from <http://www.gwu.edu>; Internet; accessed 26 April, 2001; Mátyás Rákosi, *Visszaemlékezések 1940-1956* 2, pp. 860-862 and Teresa Torańska, *ONI: Stalin's Polish Puppets* (New York: Collins Harvill, 1987), p. 46.

⁵⁶ C. Cristescu, “Ianuarie 1951: Stalin decide înarmarea Romanei”, p. 2.

peacetime and 3,000,000 in wartime. To achieve this, manpower levels were set for each country.⁵⁷ In order to ensure the build-up, Stalin promised to grant the necessary licences for weaponry and defence industry products including the supply of jet fighters and bombers to equip one air group and 2 radar groups in each country. The details were worked out on 10-11 January 1951 under Vasilevsky's direction. In the course of this the wartime manpower levels of Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria were modified. Hungary had to set up an army of 200,000 in peacetime and 400,000 in wartime. At the closing session of the conference, Stalin again stressed the seriousness of the task:

“Let me remind you that the three years at our disposal are not for sleeping, but for arming, and arming well. Why is this necessary? This is necessary in view of the imperialists' way of thinking: they are in the habit of attacking unarmed or weakly armed countries in order to liquidate them, but they keep away from well-armed countries. This is why you need to arm during this respite, and arm well, in order that the imperialists respect you and keep away from you.”⁵⁸

The question arises: what was really behind the order given to increase the scale of and speed of the military build-up of the people's democracies? The remarks made by Stalin at the closing session show that the aim was deterrence, the prevention of a war. But how can the evident self-confidence and the statement about the very favourable circumstances for the world revolutionary movement be explained? Why did Stalin wish to deliver bombers to the people's democracies and at the same time claim that “the fighter jets are for defence, you need a bomber force for the offence, at least one bomber division per country in the first stage”?⁵⁹ This does not indicate “deterrence” or, as Rákosi put it, “counterbalance”.⁶⁰ The Czechoslovak minister of defence Alexej Čepička's less than fully reliable recollections, as recounted second-hand by a former official party historian after his defection to the West, suggest that Stalin's intention for a military build-up was not to reinforce the defence of the Soviet bloc but to storm Western Europe. According to Čepička, after the defence ministers had given their reports, Stalin said the following:

“No European army is in a position to seriously oppose the Soviet army and it can even be anticipated that there will be no resistance at all. The current military power of the United States is not very great. For the time being, the Soviet camp therefore enjoys a distinct superiority. But this is merely temporary, for some three or four years. Afterward, the United States will have at its disposal means for transporting reinforcements to Europe and will also be able to take advantage of its atomic superiority. Consequently, it will be necessary to make use of this brief interval to systematically prepare our armies by mobilizing all our economic, political, and human resources. During the forthcoming three or four years, all of our domestic and international policies will be subordinated to this goal. Only the total mobilization of our

⁵⁷ Poland: 350,000 in peacetime, 900,000 in wartime; Czechoslovakia: 250,000 in peacetime, 700,000 in wartime; Hungary: 150,000 in peacetime, 350,000 in wartime; Romania: 250,000 in peacetime, 700,000 in wartime; Bulgaria: 140,000 in peacetime, 350,000 in wartime.

⁵⁸ C. Cristescu, “Januarie 1951: Stalin decide înarmarea Romanei?”, p. 5.

⁵⁹ Ibid. p.3.

⁶⁰ “The point was that by the end of 1953 NATO would be fully ready and to counterbalance this, the armies of the socialist countries likewise needed to be duly prepared.” Mátyás Rákosi, *Visszaemlékezések 1940-1956* 2, pp. 860-861.

resources will allow us to grasp this unique opportunity to extend socialism throughout the whole of Europe.”⁶¹

Archival documents that have recently come to light in respect of the Korean War from the Russian and Chinese archives show that the repeated successes of the Chinese troops in Korea, reports of weak resistance by the American troops, and the indecision of the American leadership and its dispute with the British leadership at that time indeed raised the Soviet leadership's self-confidence to the level implied by Čepička's recollection.⁶² It is conceivable that the possibility of a quick victory in Korea even raised the hope of “spreading socialism to Western Europe”. This euphoria, however, rapidly evaporated after the American counterattack at the end of January 1951, and with the collapse of the offensive by Chinese-North Korean troops in April 1951 it disappeared entirely together with both possibilities.⁶³ Therefore, because of the changed situation in Korea, Stalin could not have seriously considered “storming” Western Europe. Such an idea seems to have been only a temporary one. Only the original minutes of the conference, however, can give a final answer to the question which version of the events is the authoritative one. One thing, however, is certain. The available sources of the Moscow conference contradict Király's statements. They make it clear that neither the Hungarian army nor the other satellite countries were ready to wage war in 1950-1951. Moreover, none of them contains any reference to any decision or plan concerning Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia is only mentioned once as one of Bulgaria's three opposing neighbours.⁶⁴ Therefore, it seems highly improbable that the Soviet leadership planned anything against Yugoslavia within a few months as Király claimed.⁶⁵

⁶¹ *Dans les Archives du comité central: Trente ans de secrets du bloc soviétique*, p. -.

⁶² This is well demonstrated by the telegrams Stalin sent to Mao Zedong on 1 December 1950 and 8 January 1951. See Evgueni Bajanov, “Assessing the Politics of the Korean War, 1949-51” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 6-7 (1995), pp. 89-90.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ “Comrade Stalin took the floor to draw the conclusions (rendition from the notebook): You allotted too few jet fighter airplanes to Bulgaria. You proceeded from the size of its population, instead of proceeding from strategic considerations. Bulgaria has many enemies along its borders: Turkey, Greece, Yugoslavia. We must allot Bulgaria more jet fighter airplanes.” Cristescu, “Ianuarie 1951: Stalin decide înarmarea Romanei”, p. 5.

⁶⁵ It is important to note that a similar assessment was made in February 1951 by the Yugoslav leadership. According to George Allen, the U.S. Ambassador to Yugoslavia, the Tito leadership doubted the possibility of military aggression against Yugoslavia: “High Yugoslav leaders are still confident that the attack against this country is not imminent. Recent party line has been somewhat less confident than the tone used by Kardelj and Tito in speaking to Perkins [...], but change is probably due to desire by the leaders to avoid overconfidence or relaxation. Admiral Manola, Chief of Yugoslav Military Intelligence, told Air Attaché Burnett today that he still had no knowledge of military activity in satellite countries indicating preparation for attack.” The Ambassador in Yugoslavia to the Secretary of State. Belgrade, 24 February 1951. United States, Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1950, Central and Eastern Europe; The Soviet Union*. vol. IV. (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1980), p. 1740.

After the Moscow conference, the satellite countries continued to carry out military build-up plans as ordered by Stalin. The Hungarian army development plan was amended in January and accepted in February. As, however, there was a great shortfall in the supply of weaponry and equipment as well as building quarters even compared to the original plans, no new order of battle was issued in the spring of 1951. Only the most urgent changes were implemented, of which the most essential was the creation of one type “A” aviation division with MiG-15 jet fighters. Finally, the task set by Stalin was implemented through the reorganisations of autumn 1951 and autumn 1952. With this, both the number of type “A” and type “B” rifle divisions grew to five, while the total strength of the army rose to 202,405. 149,204 men belonged to the fighting force. However, the armaments and equipment never caught up with this number. The lack of equipment became so severe by January 1953 that even the provision of arms and equipment for type “A” units could not be guaranteed.⁶⁶

As it has been shown, the strength described by Király was reached – but not in the summer of 1950, but over two years later, in autumn 1952. The Hungarian army, however, was still not ready for war. Although the organisational restructuring was concluded and the training of the officer corps had been successfully completed, due to the lack of arms and equipment, the Hungarian army was in 1952 still unfit to make the large-scale attack described by Király and analysed in detail below.

⁶⁶*Farkas Mihály jelentése Rákosi Mátyás részére a Magyar Néphadsereg béke és “M” hadfelszerelési ellátottságáról.* [Mihály Farkas’s Report on the Peace and “M” State of Supply of Military Equipment of the Hungarian People’s Army to Mátyás Rákosi] 10 December 1952. M-KS 276. f. 65/191. ő. e. p. 1.

3. THE QUESTION OF THE MILITARY PLANNING

Király's description of the planning of the campaign is contradictory from several aspects. In one version of his memoirs he writes that "planning the attack" began in late spring 1949.⁶⁷ Elsewhere, he emphasises that "when in the summer of 1949 I was promoted [...] to commander of the infantry, the general strategic plan for a mobilized Hungarian People's Army had already been completed by the General Staff."⁶⁸ Moreover, if only indirectly, a third date is also mentioned. Király states that the reason behind Prokofiev's recall at the end of December 1949 and the transfer of Lieutenant General V. R. Boyko to Hungary was that the Soviet chief adviser from then on had to deal with "war plans and not organisation."⁶⁹ Király alleges that although he was not "directly involved" with the planning, as a commander of the infantry "he was connected and hence familiar with all stages".⁷⁰ In spite of this, hardly anything has come to light about the planning itself – apart from the war game discussed in detail later. While at one point he talks about the General Staff's "feverish strategic planning", at another he states that "operational plans were brought ready-prepared from Moscow and they only had to be translated into Hungarian."⁷¹

3.1 The Operational Plan

The Hungarian army's General Staff and its Operations Directorate dealing with military planning was created in January 1949. The first Soviet advisers led by Major General K. F. Vasilchenko arrived at the Directorate at the end of the summer and under their direction initial planning for troop deployment began in autumn 1949.⁷² However, due to the initial stage of the military build-up, no operational plan discussing the army's deployment in case of war was prepared. The earliest available archival document that mentions the operational plan is the 30-page *Material of the Moscow talks of the Hungarian Military Delegation* from January 1950.⁷³ The document was prepared by Sólyom for the annual Hungarian-Soviet military talks and was handed over to Vasilevsky. It admitted that "the Hungarian army had no real operational plan" and that

⁶⁷ László Székely, "A történelem szemtanúja. Interjú Király Bélával.", p. 40.

⁶⁸ Bela Kiraly, *The Aborted Soviet Military Plans against Tito's Yugoslavia*, p. 282.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 283.

⁷¹ Ibid and Béla Király, *Honvédségből Néphadsereg. Személyes visszaemlékezések 1944-1956*, p. 165.

⁷² László Ott, *A Magyar Néphadsereg Vezérkara Hadműveleti Csoportfőnökségének története*. [The History of the Operations Directorate of the Hungarian People's Army's General Staff] HL Tanulmánygyűjtény. [Collection of Essays] II. II/B-3/a.

⁷³ *A magyar katonai küldöttség moszkvai tárgyalásának anyaga*. [Material of the Moscow talks of the Hungarian Military Delegation] 20 January 1950. MOL M-KS 276.f. 67/166. ö.e., pp. 19-33.

the first plan for the order of battle to be formed in May 1950 would be devised by the Operations Directorate of the General Staff “over the winter.”⁷⁴ On the other hand, “the deployment of troops to be stationed near the Yugoslav border to eliminate provocations and border incidents expected on the Yugoslav part” had been prepared.⁷⁵ The document clearly shows that the Hungarian army had no operational plan “brought ready-prepared from Moscow” in 1949 contrary to Király’s statement, and that the only deployment plan served as *defence* against an aggressive Yugoslav step.

According to available sources, the real operational plan was ready by the end of 1950. It was created by the Operations Department of the Operations Directorate of the General Staff on the basis of the directives of the Soviet advisers.⁷⁶ Unfortunately, the plan itself has not survived. Modified versions of the plan were in use right up to 1955, when relations with Yugoslavia were settled. Then they were subsequently destroyed.⁷⁷ The concept of the operational plan, however, can be reconstructed from the report of a document entitled *General Report for the Minister of Defence Comrade* of 5 January 1951.⁷⁸ It was compiled by the head of the Operations Department, Miklós Szűcs. This is the most comprehensive archival document that can be found on the Hungarian military in the Stalinist period. It shows that the Hungarian leadership’s concept of defence policy was built on the false assumption that Yugoslavia had joined the “imperialist” camp and because of their hostile plans Hungary was threatened with a “direct attack at any moment.”⁷⁹

The Szűcs report assumes this would happen simultaneously with a large-scale Western attack on the one hand, or following a potential Yugoslav provocation with “Anglo-American” help on the other. The report assesses Hungary’s position, as the “south-western border state of the bloc of people’s democracies”, to be of outstanding importance.⁸⁰ The report predicts two principal directions for the Yugoslav attack: from the south-west and the south. As this was the shortest route from the Adriatic Sea to the Hungarian border, the report foresees a joint attack by the Yugoslav-“Anglo-American” forces primarily from the south-western direction. The report hoped that the hilly parts of Transdanubia would slow down the attack and allow the organisation of defensive manoeuvres. As there was no natural obstacle in the path of the

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ “The bases of the operational plan are currently being devised, and in this respect a final decision has not yet been made and approval given.” *Előterjesztés a déli országhatár műszaki megerősítésére*. [Proposal for the construction of fortifications on the country’s southern border.] 8 November 1950. HL MN 1950/T/7/2 ö.e. p. 1.

⁷⁷ Interview with Gyula Váradi and László Ott by the author. Tape recording. Budapest, June 2001. It is probable that the copies handed over to the Soviets have survived in the General Staff Archives (AGSh) or in the Archives of the Ministry of Defence (TsAMO RF) in Moscow, but this material is not currently available for research.

⁷⁸ *Összefoglaló jelentés a Honvédelmi Miniszter Bjts. számára* [General Report for the Minister of Defence Comrade] 5 January 1951. HL MN 1956/T/26 pp. 1-26.

⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 2.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

aggressor, the southern operational sector was considered the most dangerous area. There were two favourable operational directions here for the Yugoslav attack: the Baranya triangle, and the area between the rivers Danube and Tisza. The report assumes that the objective of an attack launched from the first area was the occupation of Transdanubia, and the aim of a thrust between the Danube and the Tisza was to cut Hungary in two and to surround Budapest.

Concerning the Hungarian response, the Szűcs report assessed two types of Yugoslav attack. One was a surprise attack and the other is the detection of enemy preparations to attack. In the event of the first, Border Guard units would engage the enemy initially and at the same time alert the army's type "A" units and the air force. After they had been pushed forward, alerted type "A" divisions would take up their previously designated and prepared positions. If the enemy's main thrust were launched between the Danube and the Tisza, a type "A" Corps (with three type "A" rifle divisions) would take up defensive positions in the sector mentioned, while a type "A" rifle division would close the direction of the Baranya triangle and another that of Nagykanizsa (Variant A). In case of a thrust launched from the Baranya triangle on the western part of Transdanubia, the concentration would be modified by withdrawing one or two rifle divisions of the rifle corps stationed between the Danube and the Tisza to the right bank of the Danube in order to repel the enemy's main thrust (Variant B). If the main enemy forces pushed through from the direction of Nagykanizsa, they would again be repelled by one or two repositioned rifle divisions of the type "A" rifle corps (Variant C). Simultaneously, type "B" units to be deployed in the first phase would be mobilised.

The Szűcs report clearly shows that the Hungarian army's main role was to repel the enemy attack on Hungary first by defensive and then by counter-attack operations. Although this is in striking contrast with Király's thesis, it is consistent with the available sources about the Soviets' and their satellites' military planning.⁸¹ The Polish operational plan of 1951, for instance, has striking similarities with the Szűcs report, both in misperceptions of threat and the main role of defence.⁸²

⁸¹ For the Soviet planning in 1946 and 1948, see David M. Glantz, *The Military Strategy of the Soviet Union. A History*. (London: Frank Cass, 1992), pp. 180-187. and Vojtech Mastny, "NATO in the Beholder's Eye: Soviet Perceptions and Policies, 1949-1956", pp. 12-13. For the Polish and Czechoslovak planning in the Stalinist period, see Petr Luňák, *The Warsaw War Plan of 1964*. Available from http://www.isn.ethz.ch/php/documents/collection_1/texts/intropl.pdf; Internet; accessed 10 November 2003.

⁸² "*Plan operacyjny rozwinięcia 1 i 2 Armii Wojska Polskiego na wypad działań wojennych w 1951 r.*" [Operational Plan for the Dislocation of the 1st and 2nd Polish Armies in Case of War Operations in 1951] The facsimile and English translation available from http://www.isn.ethz.ch/php/documents/collection_1/docs/warplan2-engl.htm; Internet; accessed 10 November 2003.

3.2 The Mobilization Plan

Simultaneously and in conjunction with the operational plan, the mobilization plan was being prepared. This was based on the so-called “hidden mobilization” concept, which, on the basis of auxiliary headquarters and the individual conscription system, would have enabled the first phase units of key importance (e.g. the air and artillery units) to be brought up to strength as quickly as possible even prior to the commencement of hostilities. Mihály Farkas explained to Rákosi his proposal related to the above like this:

“In order to enable the country to fully mobilise, it is imperative that the country’s southern borders be securely sealed by an adequate military force. We must get ready for solid, stout defence. [...] to be able to repel an enemy attack, to stoutly defend our southern borders and to implement mobilisation according to plan, it is absolutely essential to execute concealed mobilisation.”⁸³

In spite of this, the mobilization plan counted on the possibility that following an attack areas on the border would temporarily fall into enemy hands. For this reason, it was planned to evacuate all men eligible for military service but not in type “A” units from a 20-30 km wide section along the Yugoslav border in order to avoid a further reduction in the number of reserves, which was already low, through their loss.⁸⁴ It is clear that all this supports the defence concept of the Szűcs report and not Király’s. Moreover, the first trial mobilization took place over a year later on 21 September 1952.⁸⁵

⁸³ *Farkas Mihály javaslata a mozgósítási rendszerrel kapcsolatban* [Proposal by Mihály Farkas on the System of Mobilization] 5 July 1951. MOL M-KS 276. f. 65/191 ő.e. p. 70.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁸⁵ *A 4. lövészadosztály mozgósításának értékelése* [The evaluation of the mobilization of the 4th Rifle Division] 24 September 1952. HL MN 1952 7/2/8 p. 251.

4. THE QUESTION OF THE PREPARATORY WORKS FOR MILITARY OPERATIONS

4.1 The Southern Defence System

All Hungarian preparatory works for military operations are consistent with the defence concept of the Szűcs report. Among these the construction of the so-called Southern Defence System along the entire Yugoslav border is the most significant. Soviet advisers proposed the fortification of the Yugoslav border as early as August 1949. As regards the circumstances of the request, Miklós Szűcs refers to it in his memoirs in the following way:

“When the so-called ‘Yugoslav problem’ arose in 1949, Soviet advisers suggested to Rákosi that Hungary, directly neighbouring Yugoslavia, should build a system of fortifications along the entire Yugoslav border (about 630 kilometres) to defend against potential ‘Yugoslav aggression’. Sólyom positively objected to this plan, which demanded enormous financial sacrifices. His argument was that there was no system of fortifications in either the First or the Second World War that could not be rounded or broken through. He suggested that instead of the terribly costly system of fortifications the Hungarian army should be equipped with weaponry and defence technology with which they could reliably repel a potential Yugoslav attack.”⁸⁶

Despite Sólyom’s opposition, the plan for strengthening the border – the third phase of which was the construction of the defence system – was accepted on 29 September 1949.⁸⁷ After the works on the first two phases were completed, a detailed proposal under the guidance of the Soviet advisers was prepared about the third phase in November 1950.⁸⁸ The proposal of the Southern Defence System emphasised that in the south-western and southern operational directions fortified positions would have to be constructed for the “A” divisions, which would allow time for the strengthening, mobilization and deployment of the remaining part of the armed forces. Although the proposal was accepted, it went through a number of changes until its

⁸⁶ Miklós Szűcs, *Ezredes voltam 1956-ban a vezérkarnál*, p. 54.

⁸⁷ The plan, submitted by Dániel Görgényi, Chief of the Engineer Troops, wished to strengthen the Hungarian-Yugoslav border in three phases. In the first phase the single wire fencing on the southern border would be changed into a double wire fencing and then within the defence wiring, 5 metres from it, a 10-15 m boundary zone would be ploughed up and harrowed to detect intrusion. The second phase included mining the border with anti-personnel mines between the double wire fencing, and the final phase envisaged the development of a *defensive system* along the southern border. *Jegyzőkönyv az Államvédelmi Bizottság 1949. szeptember 29-én tartott üléséről* [Minutes on the meeting of the State Defence Committee on 29 September 1949] 29 September 1949. MOL M-KS 276 f. 84/20 ö.e., p. 31.

⁸⁸ *Előterjesztés a déli országhatár műszaki megerősítésére*, p. 1.

implementation in practice started in February 1952. Besides the enormous costs and the serious organisational and technical difficulties, the Soviet advisers insisted on the plan's full implementation.⁸⁹

It comprised three belts: the first (safety) belt, the main defensive belt and the third defensive belt. The depth of each of the belts varied between 10-25 km. The main defence belt consisted of reinforced concrete pillboxes and other fortified positions to house machine-guns, mortars, anti-tank guns and light artillery, as well as observation and command posts. These were complemented by field fortifications: battalion and company defensive areas, section and squad bases made of earth and wood. Obstacle centres against tanks, which included preparations for the explosion of key road sections and bridges, were established in the main operational directions from the border with Yugoslavia up to the boundary of Budapest. By the end of the construction, the Southern Defence System consisted of 2408 pillboxes and other fortified positions, 90 battalion and 25 company defensive areas, 201 section and 146 squad bases, 963 obstacle centres to military operations, as well as several hundred mock constructions.⁹⁰

The type and the size of the defence structures clearly show that the Southern Defence System went far beyond the level of simple field fortifications to secure, for instance, a troop deployment. It was clearly created to slow down and stop a massive offensive. Moreover, from 1951 onwards similar fortified positions were built along the Romanian-Yugoslav and Bulgarian-Yugoslav borders. In both cases, the main goal was the same as in Hungary: defence from a possible attack from the direction of Yugoslavia.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Rákosi remembers it like this: "When it came up that some places needed to be strengthened against Yugoslavia, plans were worked out with the aid of the advisers. When they were ready and I saw them, it came to light that a 2,000 km² area with 140,000 inhabitants and 40,000 buildings would have had to be cleared. Our Soviet comrades saw nothing peculiar in this and I had to argue at length before the defence plans were adapted to Hungarian conditions." Mátyás, Rákosi. *Visszaemlékezések 1940-1956*, p. 863.

⁹⁰ A ténylegesen megépült létesítmények, harcárkok és akadályok kimutatása [Report on facilities, ditches and obstacles actually constructed] HL MN 1967/T/256 8249/77/231, pp. 202-204. For the best summary on the construction of the Southern Defence System, see István Balló, "Adalékok Magyarország 1949–1953 közötti háborús felkészítéséről, a várható hadszíntér előkészítéséről", pp. 818-821. See also Imre Kovács, Magyarország déli határa mentén végrehajtott műszaki zár és erődítési védművek munkái 1950-1953 között. [The Construction of the Technical Barrage and Fortification along Hungary's Southern Border] HL Tanulmánygyűjtemény. II-194; Gyula Léka, *A műszaki zár- és erődrendszer (vasfüggöny) és felszámolása, 1948-1989* [The Elimination of the Technical Barrage and Fortification System (Iron Curtain), 1948-1989] Available from <http://www.zmka.hu/kulso/mhtt/hadtudomany/1999/ht-1999-34-17.html>; Internet; accessed 30 December 2003;

⁹¹ For the Romanian border fortifications, see Open Society Archives (OSA) 300-60-1. 311 War preparations, 1951-1967; 313 Defense and Fortification, 1951-1962 and 400 Border zones: Military, 1951-1952 and 1953-1966; Petre Opris, *Attempts to Expanding the Warsaw Treaty Organization Towards Asia*. Paper presented on September 2003 at the Cold War in Asia Conference, Budapest, 1956 Institute. For the Bulgarian fortifications, see OSA 300-20-1 311 War Preparations 1951-1992 and Iordan Baev, *Voennopoliticheskiye konflikt i sled vtorata svetovna vojna i B'lgariia* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na ministerstvoto na otbranata "Sv. Georgi Pobedonosets", 1995), pp. 126-127.

4.2 The Railway and Road System

The other preparatory work for military operations also deserves attention. Király claims that “roads were built and railways modernised from a strategic viewpoint.”⁹² On the basis of archival documents, one can only agree with his statement. Once again, however, there is a problem with the main goal and the planned deadline of these projects.

Railways	Requirement Permeability (Train/Hour)	Planned deadline for the construction works
Čop (SU) –Miskolc	24/24	The end of 1953
Érmihályfalva (RO)-Debrecen-	24/24	The end of 1953
Budapest-Szombathely		
Odera(RO)-Mezőtúr-Szentes-Baja-	24/24	The end of 1953
Nagykanizsa		
Salonta(RO) –Szeged	24/24	The end of 1953
Bratislava(CS) –Hegyeshalom-	24/24	The end of 1953
Nagykanizsa		
Budapest-(Kunszentmiklós-	60/24	The end of 1953
Kiskunhalas) – Kelebia		
Kunszentmiklós-Kiskunhalas	30/24	The end of 1953
Kunszentmiklós-Dunapataj-Baja	30/24	The end of 1953
Budapest-Rétság-Bátaszék-Baja	18/24	The end of 1951
Sahy(CS)-Szolnok-Kecskemét-Szeged	24/24	The end of 1953
Kosice(CS)-Miskolc-Füzesabony-	24/24	The end of 1953
Szentes		
Su=Soviet Union, RO=Romania, CS=Czechoslovakia		

Table 3. The earmarked railway lines for development with the requirements and planned deadlines of the construction. Source: Javaslat [Proposal] (a közlekedéssel kapcsolatos új honvédelmi követelményekről) [about the New Defence Requirements related to Transport] 19 July 1951. MOL M-KS 276. fond 65. cs. 195 ö.e. pp. 111-114.

On 28 June 1951 the Secretariat of the HWP accepted the proposal of the Ministry of Defence for the development of railways and roads, and the related buildings, stipulating the increased amount of rolling stock required from a military point-of-view.⁹³ The roads and railway lines that were earmarked for development on the one hand connected the Soviet Union with Austria and created a network for the area between the Danube and Tisza, and Transdanubia, and linked them up directly with the countries of the

⁹² Béla Király, *Honvédségből Néphadsereg. Személyes visszaemlékezések 1944-1956*, p. 165.

⁹³ Javaslat [Proposal] (a közlekedéssel kapcsolatos új honvédelmi követelményekről) [about the New Defence Requirements related to Transport] 19 July 1951. MOL 276. f. 65/195 ö.e. pp. 111-121.

Soviet bloc on the other. The majority of lines coming from Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union and Romania led directly to the Southern Defence System (Nagykanizsa, Baja, Kiskunhalas, Szeged), or planned troop assembly areas (Székesfehérvár-Rétság, and the area of Kecskemét-Kiskunfélegyháza) by the shortest route avoiding Budapest.

Roads	Requirement (Width, weight-bearing capacity)	Planned deadline for the construction works
Berehove(SU)-Debrecen- Szolnok-Debrecen-Győr	6.5 metres, 80 tons 6,000	The end of 1951
Sátoraljaújhely-Miskolc- Budapest-Nagykanizsa	5.5 metres, 60 tons, 6,000	The end of 1952
Sahy(CS)-Vác-Budapest- Cegléd-Kiskunfélegyháza- Baja	5.5 metres, 60 tons, 3,000	The end of 1952
Hatvan-Cegléd	6.5 metres, 60 tons, 6,000	During 1951
SU=Soviet Union, CS=Czechoslovakia		

Table 4. The earmarked roads for development with the requirements and planned deadlines of the construction. Source: Javaslát [Proposal] (a közlekedéssel kapcsolatos új honvédelmi követelményekről) [about the New Defence Requirements related to Transport] 19 July 1951. MOL 276. fond 65. cs. 195 ő.e. p. 115.

It is clear that the development had two goals. The first goal was to strengthen the communication and supply lines between the Soviet Union and the Soviet Occupation Zone in Austria. The second was to ensure the Southern Defence System, then a counterattack by the people's democracies against Yugoslavia. This conclusion is also supported by the demands for roads and railways. The planned deadline, as Tables 3 and 4 show, was the *end of 1952* for the roads, the *end of 1953* for the railways, and for the technical buildings the *end of 1953* or *1956* and not 1950/1951 as Király's essay might imply. Moreover, the vast majority of the plans were not realised due to the lack of money or materials.⁹⁴ One year later, in July 1952 the Ministry of Transport and Finance told the General Staff that the set targets could not be achieved on time. It turned out

⁹⁴ The severity of the expected problems had already been drawn to Rákosi's attention by Ernő Gerő, Assistant General Secretary of the Hungarian Workers' Party and Deputy Prime Minister, in August 1951: "As far as the transport projects are concerned, it must be clearly stated that we were misled when the issue was put forward for decision. At that time a figure in the order of two hundred million was put forward for 1952 and not 1076 million. It must not be forgotten that this and the extra cost of the fortifications did not feature in any plan at all. [...] We are unable to fulfil the plan of the Ministry of Defence for transport projects, the plan for vehicle procurements, etc. We need to make very strong efforts to strengthen the army but these must be kept in proportion, as otherwise we will undermine the people's economy." Gerő Ernő feljegyzése Rákosi Mátyásnak [Ernő Gerő's note for Mátyás Rákosi] August 3 1951. MOL 276. f. 65/195 ő.e. p 4.

that the majority of the railway construction had not even started. Indeed, the implementation of these did not even feature in the Ministry's plan for 1953.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ (A közlekedési beruházások helyzetéről) [On the situation of the transport projects] July 27 1952. HL MN 1952/T 6/1, pp. 52-55.

5. THE QUESTION OF THE MILITARY EXERCISES

According to Király, the preparation of the Hungarian army was completed by the summer of 1950. Now only a “trial attack” was to be conducted at military exercises. First, on “a divisional level” in the summer of 1950 twenty kilometres from the Yugoslav border, then at the week-long war game of January 1951.⁹⁶

5.1 The Divisional-Level Exercise

The problem, however, is that in the summer of 1950 there was no military exercise at divisional level. During the entire year there was just one between 13 and 20 September 1950 for the 12th Division. All documents relating to this exercise have survived. According to these, the 12th Division's task was to concentrate its troops, scattered following a “blue” (i.e. Yugoslav) attack between the Danube and the Tisza, prepare for defence, and launch a counterattack.⁹⁷ Thus the aim of the exercise was to prepare to repel an attack coming from Yugoslavia and not to prepare for an attack against Yugoslavia.

One should consider another factor. According to Király, four Hungarian army corps, three rifle and one mechanized, would have participated in the first wave of the attack across the Danube.⁹⁸ Gyula Váradi, however, insisted in the interview conducted by the author that divisional level exercises are insufficient to prepare a corps or a larger force to conduct a highly complex manoeuvre like that. Such manoeuvres are in the domain of army level exercises. The Hungarian army did have a river-crossing army-level exercise, but only in September 1952 and not in 1950 or 1951.⁹⁹

In connection with the Hungarian army's combat readiness, *the General Report on the Operational/Tactical Training of the Hungarian Army's General and Officer Corps from July 1950* has already been mentioned.¹⁰⁰ This report, however, is of key importance from another aspect. It states that in order to improve the knowledge of organising attack and defence, the General Staff “should plan an

⁹⁶ László Székely, “A történelem szemtanúja. Interjú Király Bélával.”, p. 43.

⁹⁷ Farkas Mihály értékelése a 12. hadosztály harcászati gyakorlatáról. [Mihály Farkas's evaluation on the exercise of the 12th division] HL MN 1954 /T 4/1. See also Vilmos Urbán, *A haza fegyveres szolgálatában 1949-1990. Életrajzi és hadtörténelmi visszaemlékezés*. [Military Service for the Motherland 1949-1990. Biographical and Military Historical Recollection] (Szeged: Bába és Társai, 2000), p. 75.

⁹⁸ Béla Király, *Honvédségből Néphadsereg. Személyes visszaemlékezések 1944-1956*, p. 166; László Székely, “A történelem szemtanúja. Interjú Király Bélával.”, p. 40 and Bela Kiraly, “An Abortive and the First Real War between Socialist Countries.”, p. 544.

⁹⁹ Interview with Gyula Váradi by the author. For the army level exercise of the Hungarian army in September 1952, see HL MN 1954/T 4/1. pp. 48-50.

¹⁰⁰ *A Honvédség táborkainak és főtisztjeinek hadműveleti-harcászati kiképzése az 1950/51-es évre*. pp. 197-207.

attacking army operation within the framework of a *war game* and staff exercises to be held on two different grounds for each corps and divisional staff.”¹⁰¹

5.2 The War Game: What we know from Király

The war game has a major role in Király's thesis. In an interview in 1999, Király confirmed his view to the author that “the war game was based on the actual invasion plan.”¹⁰² He stated that its main goal was to “drill the exact stages of the forthcoming invasion of Yugoslavia.”¹⁰³ Király placed the date of the war game in January 1951. He claimed that it was held in the Main Hall of the Hungarian Army House in Budapest under the supervision of Mihály Farkas, Minister of Defence. Király himself, as a commander of the General Staff Academy, was the umpire of the game. All top and medium level officers, from the high command to divisional and brigade level were present with their own staff.¹⁰⁴

Király recalled the basic concept of the plans to have been the following: the armies of the people's democracies bordering Yugoslavia supplemented by Polish and Czechoslovak troops would have formed the first echelon of the attack. Their objectives would have been to break through the Yugoslav border defences, and to establish and hold bridgeheads. Soviet troops would have attacked in the second wave. Their mission would have been to capture Belgrade and neutralise the main force of the Yugoslav army. Király believed the attack was planned on three fronts. Troops on the northern front would have attacked from between the Danube and the Tisza in Hungary, on the south-eastern front from the area of the Bánság, the Iron Gate and the Lower Danube in Romania and, on the southern front, from the valley of the Vardar River in Albania.¹⁰⁵ According to Király, in the attack the Hungarian army would have been charged with significant objectives. The mission of the army's three corps would have been to break through the Yugoslav border defences in the direction of the main thrust to the south and west of Subotica. On the third day the armoured corps would have been pushed forward from occupied positions with the aim of crossing the Danube and securing a bridgehead in the Fruska Gora mountains. The bridgehead would have had to have been held until they were relieved by the second wave Soviet troops. Launching a diversionary attack would have been another Hungarian task. Reinforced border guard units would have struck from Transdanubia towards Zagreb.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Interview with Béla Király by author.

¹⁰³ Ibid. and László Székely, “A történelem szemtanúja. Interjú Király Bélával.”, p. 43.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Béla Király by author.

¹⁰⁵ *Béla Király, Honvédségből Néphadsereg. Személyes visszaemlékezések 1944-1956*, p. 166.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. pp. 166-167.

5.3 The War Game: What the archival sources reveal

Two documents have survived in the collection of the Hungarian War History Archives about the 1951 war game.

The first, the *Plan of the War Game*, consists of 19 pages and a sketch map. The last page, signed by Endre Mátékovits, shows that it was written on 7 May 1951.¹⁰⁷ At first sight, it seems that the document deals with an offensive manoeuvre against Yugoslavia and it has certain similarities with Király's recollection. On this basis, Imre Okváth, in his 1998 monograph on the Hungarian military force and military policy, commented on the document as follows: "An offensive plan was prepared in July 1951, which most vividly demonstrates the operational intentions of the socialist camp led by the Soviet Union towards the south to occupy Belgrade." Moreover, Okváth accompanied his text with a map - based on the document's sketch map - under the grandiose title: "The Soviet Plan of Attack Against Yugoslavia."¹⁰⁸

The detailed analysis of the document, however, clearly shows that it was not an invasion plan. Therefore the war game was indeed a war *game* and not a preparation or "rehearsal" of an invasion of Yugoslavia as Király claimed; only part of the routine high-level military training, which includes both defensive and offensive exercises.¹⁰⁹

First of all, the second part of the document, the "Situation of the Enemy Forces", begins with the following sentences:

"We are confronted by the troops of the "Green" 3rd Army. [...] In the attack until now, of the 4 corps of the army the 22nd and 21st Corps have suffered losses of 28-30% in manpower and 18-20% in military equipment. From this it may be concluded that these corps will be withdrawn to operational depth"¹¹⁰

In other words, the manoeuvre in the document is not an attack, but a *counterattack*, an *imaginary response to an imaginary attack* on Hungary.

Both names and army designations support this argument. According to the document, the manoeuvre was performed by three armies, the 8th, 6th and 2nd. All of these forces belonged to the "Southern Front". Their first task on this front was to launch a counteroffensive to encircle the "Green" forces. Their second task was to cross the Danube and seize Belgrade along with the forces of the "Eastern Front". It is striking even at first sight that the document calls the hostile army the "Green" army. We do not know

¹⁰⁷ *Térképgyakorlat terve*. [Plan of the War Game] 7 May 1951. HL MN 1951/T/24/2, pp. 208-226.

¹⁰⁸ Imre Okváth, *Bástya a béke frontján. Magyar haderő és katonapolitika 1945-1956*, p. 139.

¹⁰⁹ These statements are also supported by the discussion of the document with Gyula Váradi and László Ott, whom also participated in the war game. They both expressly consider the war game to be a training activity and not a rehearsal for an attack on Yugoslavia.

¹¹⁰ *Térképgyakorlat terve*, p. 212.

whether it is a Yugoslav or an American army. In the first part, “The Clarification of the Task”, the enemy forces are mentioned as “Green” and “Blue” forces without definition. The assumption that the 3rd “Green” Army in the plan is identical with the 3rd Yugoslav Army leads nowhere, as it did not exist at the time.¹¹¹ Similarly, if the 3rd “Green” Army was substituted for the 3rd U.S. Army, it is even further from reality as there was not a single American military adviser in Yugoslavia in May 1951.¹¹²

We find much the same situation with the “friendly forces.” One must assume that the 8th Army was a Hungarian Army (as the others were Soviet) because the document deals only with this army in detail. But the 8th Hungarian Army, its divisions and brigades never existed. At that time, the order of battle of the Hungarian armed forces was only two rifle *corps* (3rd and 6th) and one mechanised corps (11th). Thus neither the “enemy” troops nor the Hungarian troops in the document actually existed.

What is even more telling is that while the document goes into minute detail about the mobilization, grouping and forward deployment of the 8th Army, as well as the stages of the offensive, there is not even a single word about its practical co-operation with the 6th army, despite the fact that the first part of the document mentions this as a key issue from the point of view of success on the Southern Front.¹¹³

The second document provides a definite answer to the question concerning the aim of the war game. It is called *Summary of the Operational/Tactical Training of the Hungarian Army's General and Officer Corps* of 20 July 1951 and it reviews the experiences of the training of the General Staff in the 1950-51 training year.¹¹⁴ We can learn from this document that there was only one war game that year and it took place between 8-12 May 1951 and not in January. The most important, however, is the aim of the war game:

“The aim of the war game was to give a picture to the generals and high-ranking officers of the Operations Directorate of the General Staff and different services, an up-to-date plan of large-scale offensive manoeuvres, the organisation and command of the manoeuvres in difficult ground and air conditions. For the sake of this a reduced number Army Command was formed by the generals and high-ranking officers of the Operations Directorate of the General Staff and different services to execute the war game. [...] The war game and the summary of the Defence Minister provided an overview and established a basis for a more detailed study of a large-scale offensive manoeuvre for the participants.”¹¹⁵

It was the last stage of the training of generals and high-ranking officers in 1950-51, so it is obvious that Király misinterpreted this last offensive training stage for an invasion plan against Yugoslavia.

¹¹¹ *Annual Report on the Yugoslav Army for 1951*. 24 February 1951. TNA FO 371/102231, p. 4. and Ivan Bajlo, *Yugoslav People's Army's Orders of Battle (June 1950 and January 1952)*. Available from <http://www.vojska.net/military/yugoslavia/oob/1950.asp> and [1952.asp](http://www.vojska.net/military/yugoslavia/oob/1952.asp); Internet; accessed 9 August, 2004.

¹¹² Lorraine M. Lees, *Keeping Tito Afloat.*, p. 111.

¹¹³ *Térképgyakorlat terve*, p. 211.

¹¹⁴ *Összefoglaló a Honvédség tábornokainak és Főtisztjeinek hadműveleti-harcászati kiképzéséről az 1950/51-es évben*. [Summary of the Operational/Tactical Training of the Hungarian Army's General and Officer Corps] 20 July 1951. HL MN 1951/T/ 25. pp. 304-305.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

In the introduction to one of his memoirs Király stresses that he wrote it with the intention of contributing to the history of the period.¹¹⁶ The word ‘history’ with its connotation of ‘story’ reminds us that history is a version of events. All history is selective. This is especially true for the history by an eyewitness. With this in mind, the aim of this research paper is not to discredit Király himself or his memories, but solely to examine his thesis regarding Yugoslavia. It is important to emphasise this as Király not only agreed with clarifying the matter, but also took part in so doing by giving the author two interviews.

The results achieved are described in five chapters in the research paper. The first chapter showed that Király’s statement that Stalin would have made a decision to attack Yugoslavia has not to the present day been substantiated by any Russian (Soviet) or other satellite country’s archival source or other memoirs. Moreover, Király, as the commander of the infantry of the Hungarian army, then of the military academy, was in no position to have received any form of information whatsoever about Stalin’s or the Soviet leadership’s military plans.

The second chapter examined Király’s statements on the military build-up. On the basis of the archival documents related to the 1948-1950 Hungarian-Soviet military negotiations and recollections of the January 1951 Moscow conference, it was shown that, contrary to Király’s statements, Stalin’s military plans against Yugoslavia were not behind the military build-up. The development of the military was divided into three distinct phases and the determining factor for these was how Moscow evaluated its short- and long-term military position in Europe compared to the United States and its allies. The chapter showed that the results of the build-up were significant: from the 15,000 strong force consisting of two poorly armed cadre divisions in early 1948, a 120,000 strong combat-able army with all branches of service and modern by Hungarian standards was created by early 1951. This did not mean, however, that the Hungarian army was ready to fight a war. The *Informatory Report on the Hungarian Army* of 1 January 1951 prepared for the Soviet leadership also made it clear that the fighting efficiency and combat readiness of the army remained weak. The main reasons for this were a lack of professional knowledge and experience of the new officer corps, the bad state and the external judgement of the army, and the chronic shortage of weaponry and equipment.

The third chapter looked at the question of military planning. It showed that the Hungarian army had no operational plan against Yugoslavia “brought ready-prepared from Moscow” in 1949, contrary to Király’s statement, and the only deployment plan served as *defence* against an aggressive Yugoslav step. A real

¹¹⁶ Béla Király, *Honvédségből Néphadsereg. Személyes visszaemlékezések 1944-1956*, p. 5.

operational plan was made by the end of 1950, which can be reconstructed based on the *General Report for the Minister of Defence Comrade* of 5 January 1951. The report shows that the Hungarian leadership's concept of defence policy was built on the false assumption that Yugoslavia had joined the "imperialist" camp and because of their hostile plans Hungary was threatened with a "direct attack at any moment." Therefore the Hungarian army's main role was to repel the Yugoslav attack on Hungary first by defensive and then by counter-attack operations. Although this is in striking contrast with Király's thesis, it is consistent with the available sources about the Soviets' and their satellites' military planning.

In the fourth chapter, it was shown that the preparatory works for military operations supported the above and not Király's thesis. It described how, on the initiative of the Soviets, fortifications, the Southern Defence System, consisting of reinforced concrete pillboxes, different fortified positions and field fortifications, was built along the Hungarian-Yugoslav border between 1952 and January 1955. The size and type of the fortifications make it clear that its purpose was to slow down and stop a massive offensive from the direction of Yugoslavia.

The last chapter examined the 1950-51 military exercises and showed that, contrary to Király's statement, the subject of the divisional level military exercise in 1950 was not an attack on Yugoslavia but stopping and repelling an incursion by Yugoslavia. Furthermore, the exercise organised on a divisional level would not have been suitable for practising a complex military operation involving an army and crossing a river of the sort outlined by Király. The first exercise of this nature could only be and was only conducted in the final stage of the military development in autumn 1952. According to Király, the war game held in 1951 was the "dress rehearsal" for the attack. The documents and recollections of others involved, however, leave no doubt that the war game was only and exclusively for educational purposes as the last stage of the training of generals and high-ranking officers in 1950-51.

Once all the Soviet (Russian) and former Yugoslav archives are open, Cold War historians will be able to complete the picture of both Hungary's and the Soviet bloc's military policy concerning Yugoslavia. In the absence of these, however, the author believes that this research paper in any event reflects the baselines of Soviet policy if not their actual plans.

LÁSZLÓ RITTER (1977): Historian, PhD student, documentary film maker. Ritter graduated from Eötvös Lóránd University of Arts and Sciences and obtained his M.A. in History from Central European University, both in Budapest. Since 2001 he has been a research fellow at the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. His main research areas are Yugoslav-Hungarian relations, Hungarian security policy and military planning, and the activities of the British Secret Intelligence Service in Hungary during the Second World War and the early Cold War period.