THE ANALYSIS OF THE ADJUSTMENT OF SOME OF THE PRINCIPLES OF WAR TO THE SPECIFIC OF THE ISLAMIC STATE’S CRISIS

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ABSTRACT

The Islamic State (IS) represents a real problem to Iraq and Syria, and also to the other nations, starting to extend its influence all over the world. For a better chance in countering this phenomenon, certain principles of war should be adjusted to its specifics, taking into consideration its dual character, using terrorist and conventional methods as well, what it means: Irregular Warfare.

The purpose of this paper is to discover the principles of war, whose applicability in the Islamic State crisis is surpassed, and to analyse the adjustments, which can improve their implementation, ensuring a better utility in this environment. The principles of war represent the fundamentals of armed conflict and their adjustment to the specific of Islamic State tactics can ensure the success in the future confrontations against this force.

KEYWORDS: principles of war, irregular warfare, Islamic State, adjustment, tactics, technology.

1. Introduction

The evolution of technology has highly influenced each branch of human activities, especially the military phenomenon which has one of the biggest impact on the world that we are living in and as it can be seen many of the recent conflicts are starting to influence the everyday life of every citizen.

Terrorist attacks are occurring all over the world, the Ukraine is engaged in a full-scaled war with pro-Russian rebels, the Islamic State (IS) has managed to capture and maintain their influence in huge regions in Iraq and Syria. These are just a few examples of modern conflicts (irregular warfare) that are completely different from the conventional warfare, with different characteristics, conflicts that are extremely hard to be solved because of their particularities.
The situation concerning the Islamic State (IS) represents a major problem for the Middle-East and for the rest of the world as well. The United States, along with other nations are trying to counter this phenomenon and to restore the captured regions to their former states. Still, considering the irregular warfare conducted by the IS troops, the local forces and the international community have issues in successfully opposing this group.

In order to have a better chance in solving these conflicts some elements of the military science can be adjusted to their specifics, including the principles of war which represent the fundamentals of armed conflicts.

Considering the IS fighters are using advanced tactics, managing to fully exploit the potential of the guerrilla warfare they are conducting, it is required to analyse this whole situation in detail and to determine the best way of using the military theory on the battlefield in order to repeal the threat. An important part of this analysis is represented by the principles of war which can be defined as “the enduring bedrock of Army doctrine” [1]. These concepts represent the fundamentals of military science and their proper use on the battlefield can make the difference between defeat and success. For this reason, it is required to know their meaning and when to apply them efficiently.

The principles of war, as any other concept, are constantly changing, being influenced by the evolution of technology and warfare. In order to determine this changes it is required to establish certain reference points. As a reference point would be the Second Gulf War, which has redefined modern warfare, by the use of modern technologies and by the intelligent coordination of the Joint operations requiring the full participation of all forces (army, air force, navy).

By using this reference point, we are able to describe the adjustments of the principles of war, by referring to the differences between the current enemy, represented by the IS, and the Iraqi troops in the Second Gulf War and also to the different situations in which the principles of war must be applied, the first reference being characterised by conventional tactics while the latter one is a mix between terrorist and conventional tactics.

2. The Specifics of the Types of Warfare Used in the Contemporary Military Conflicts

After 1990, considering the end of the Cold War and the disappearing of the bipolar structure of the world, an increasing number of countries and groups, structured by different criteria like ethnical, religious, etc., had access to a huge variety of weapons from the most basic rifles to chemical and biological weapons. This has led to new types of threats with a larger spectre of risks like: ethnical tensions, drugs, radioactive substances and human trafficking, transnational organized crime, political instability in some areas.

A new type of risk is the asymmetrical one, hybrid risk that consists of military or non-military actions, having as purpose the destabilization of the national security by causing direct and indirect consequences on the economic and social life of a country. Some of those risks are the transnational and international terrorism, the actions that can affect the safety of internal and international transport system, the individual or collective actions of hacking in the informational system, actions for discrediting the image of a certain country or the deliberate cause of ecological catastrophes [2].

The modern conflicts are represented by new types of warfare that are highly dependent on the new technologies, especially on the informational system, and that are used in the detriment of other types, being of course more reliable and more efficient. Nevertheless, the old types of warfare are still used considering the level of industrialization in many countries is low
and the cost of using such technologies is extremely expensive.

Compared to the modern warfare, the old ones are more conventional types of warfare with more basic technology, a lower flexibility and with a lesser knowledge of the own troops location and actions in the battlefield, considering the information system is basically inexistent. Thus, the time gap between the occurred actions and the received information is considerable, the decision-making process being inefficient [3].

When we talk about the types of warfare mostly used in the current conflicts we have at the forefront the Network Centric Warfare and the Irregular (Asymmetric) Warfare.

The discovery of the Network Centric Warfare is relatively recent and even nowadays its understanding is not complete, this warfare not being used at its full potential. For this concept to operate, it is required for the entities that are using it to have the latest technologies, a cosmic dimension and a capacity to develop real and virtual networks.

The Network-Centric Warfare has been firstly used in the Second Gulf War by the American Army and continued to be used in the next conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Even though this type of warfare provides some advantages, the results are not too spectacular considering that the insurgents carried out a guerrilla warfare and managed to overcome the technological differences [4].

Irregular Warfare has been existing for ages but the current conflicts have some particularities that make them different from the old ones. The Irregular Warfare is represented by the means used by an army, inferior in number, in order to take advantage of the enemy’s weaknesses or by a superior army in order to minimise the casualties. Therefore, in the Irregular Warfare, the inferior army tries to avoid direct contact with the enemy and to exploit his vulnerabilities.

The most relevant example of Irregular Warfare is counterterrorism operations, where it is hard to anticipate its evolution and that can involve military, non-military and paramilitary forces and ethnic or multi-ethnic terrorist groups, using weapons from the most basic to the latest generation, its effects having a huge influence on the whole world.

In order to accomplish a mission a commander must know the meaning of the principles of war and how to apply them in a real situation. The history has proved that the leaders that used these concepts efficiently, have overcome the enemy. But the war is in constant change and the recent conflicts have shown that the new terrorist tactics are becoming troubling for the commanders participating in an operation theatre. Therefore, it is required to analyse the present conflicts in order to discover how some principles of war should adjust to these new characteristics and tactics in order to better counter them.

3. The Analysis Concerning the Evolution of Some of the Coalition’s Principles of War in the Second Gulf War (Operation Desert Storm, 1991)

In the Second Gulf War new technologies and new tactics, which have led to some changes within the principles of war, can be noticed.

If we are to analyse the course of the battles we can observe that each of the principles of war has been used successfully at some point. Still, some of them feature some differences from the original meaning due to the evolution of technology and to new strategies.

In the following we will illustrate the principles that presented some important changes during the Second Gulf War and that can be further used as a reference point for the research.

a) Manoeuvre: the concept of manoeuvre maintained its meaning but it expanded its area of applicability, reaching the fourth dimension, the space. This was possible by the use of military satellites which provided
more information about the enemy with more details. This created the possibility of using the terrain and the ground forces more efficiently. Also the use of satellites has facilitated a better communication between all forces (army, air force, navy). This has provided a strong synergy between these forces, the commanders being able to use them better in the maneuver [5].

b) Freedom of action (offensive): this concept has been influenced by the improvement of communications. Even though the process of transmitting the information was not instant, the time between the sender and the receiver was decreased providing the commanders with more time to take a decision. Also the decision was more efficient since it better adapted to the situation. Therefore, the decision-making process was faster, leading to a decisive offensive against a known enemy, without giving the enemy the chance to change his location or his plans.

Further, due to the new technologies which permitted to advance through the rough terrain and also permitted to destroy the Iraqi troops without encountering any difficulties, the concept of offensive has shown improvements, becoming significantly faster and leading to a success [6].

c) Surprise: the concept of surprise has been highly facilitated by the opportunity of information, provided by the use of drones, military satellites and by the of the GPS, which showed the exact position of their position, the American troops being able to better coordinate, leading to an efficient implementation of this principle. Also, considering the commanders had a better background picture of the enemy’s actions, they could better predict the enemy’s plans. These predictions helped in creating a more efficient strategy with a better chance of surprising the enemy [7].

The surprise was also improved by the use of new war technologies: the attack helicopters that were able to move through sandstorms or during night and to attack any target from a long range, without even being noticed, the Abrams tank, with a really good accuracy, being able to aim even when moving. This all has increased the effect created by the use of this principle, resulting in a high drop in the Iraqi troops morale, which can be seen in the huge number of enemies that surrendered to the coalition forces [8].

d) Security: the concept of security has also been improved by the evolution of technology. For example, the American Army managed to successfully destroy almost all the Iraqi SCUDs [9] with their Patriot system, only once a SCUD destroyed an American barrack in a military base and killing twenty-eight soldiers [10], but considering the huge number of enemy’s missiles countered by the American anti-missile system, this incident should not be taken into consideration. Therefore, the exceeded Iraqi technology could not provide any significant damage to the American defence systems.

Beside this, the accurate and detailed information about the enemy, obtained by drones or satellites, helped the American commanders to predict the course of action, taking measures to successfully counter any planned surprise.

4. Tactics Used by IS Fighters and the Necessity to Adjust the Principles of War

The IS fighters are bound to lead an asymmetrical type of warfare, due to the small number of troops, exploiting their enemy’s weaknesses in order to have the advantage. Still, this “war” features new characteristics, different from the previous ones, IS representing a “complex enemy – a hybrid terrorist organization and a conventional army” [11], which uses guerrilla tactics and conventional methods as well.

4.1. The Terrorist Tactics

The specific terrorist tactics are similar to the ones used in Iraq war and in Afghanistan and their main purpose is to
weaken the local troops and to lower the morale. Thus, they are using guerrilla raids, represented by a few fighters, attacking their targets and afterwards, blending in the civilian population. Also they use suicide bombers and improvised explosive devices to cause panic and many victims. They aim for a psychological warfare by firstly befriending and indoctrinating the local population with their beliefs and later creating panic through mediated executions, tortures, threats and even genocide.

The IS fighters are characterized by flexibility and surprise. Due to the small number of soldiers participating in their offensives, they are capable of surprising the local forces and also of withdrawing without having problems, using the crowded areas to lose their trace [12].

The captured artillery and tanks are only used by IS fighters for inducing panic and for intimidation and not for creating damage. For inflicting decisive blows they are resorting to suicide bombers, improvised explosive devices (IED) or vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED) [13].

4.2. Conventional Tactics

The conventional tactics are used in capturing and maintaining control over certain points of interest, which can provide a benefit for the IS.

The IS fighters are well trained and equipped and also they are able to coordinate their attacks, using efficiently the heavy weapons in supporting the ground troops, making them an enemy different from the ones already encountered in Iraq War or Afghanistan that were usually using only small weapons and conducted operation using a very small number of fighters. This is possible due to the former Iraqi officers that are controlling all these operations and that have a vast experience in this fieldwork [14].

They also developed a communications network by using mobile phones and the Internet, controlling the forces over vast areas.

An important tactic is represented by the occupation of a certain objective which in a first stage does not represent an immediate threat, but in time it gets stronger and at some moment acquires the necessary power to become a threat. This tactic is an adaptation, due to their small number which does not permit to continue an attack immediately after another. Considering one purpose of this organisation is to destabilise the security of Iraq and Syria, the new occupation of the Damascus refugee camp could provide a starting point for a direct attack on the Syrian regime [15].

They also use feints in order to draw the attention from their main target or to test their adversary, gaining information about them and hitting in the most opportune moment.

While changing their stance to defence after capturing an objective, IS’s soldiers analyse the areas where it is most possible to receive a counter-attack and quickly reinforce the most dangerous zones by using earth berms, vehicles or block the path by flooding the lowlands [16].

5. The Analysis of the Adjustment of Some Principles of War to the Specific of IS Crisis in the Middle-East

Considering the specifics of the IS fighters, the use of some principles of war has been surpassed, even though, their efficiency in a conventional warfare has increased.

When we talk about these specifics we should refer to the extremely large battlefield with a small number of enemies and also the unpredictable and quick actions of the enemy.

In the following paragraphs we show the adjustments which can improve the utility of some principles of war considering these characteristics.

a) Manoeuvre. As we described before, this principle has improved its efficiency in a conventional war, but in this type of conflict, due to the enemy’s unpredictability and high flexibility it is hard to acquire
information about him and about his plans. For increasing its utility, manoeuver should focus on obtaining accurate information on the IS troops. For this to happen it is required to improve the efficiency of the reconnaissance troops in order to be able to provide more detailed information on the enemy, without being observed, therefore not allowing him to change his plans.

Also manoeuver should focus on surpassing the enemy’s troops flexibility in order to avoid detection and more importantly to avoid getting surprised by him. Therefore, when attacking the enemy and starting a manoeuver, it is required to send in a small unit for a higher flexibility and to lower the chances for the enemy to discover their position and intentions. For this purpose the used technologies and weapons should be adjusted to become stealthier, in this case discretions being as important as firepower. Also, it is recommended to find a good balance between the flexibility and the fire power of the unit, because if any of these two is overcome by the enemy, the manoeuver will fail [17].

As we can see the opportunity of information is not the same as in a conventional war, considering the enemy does not distinct from the civilian population and also that his actions are unpredictable.

\textit{b) Offensive (freedom of action).} This principle cannot be used as in a conventional war, due to the limited amount of information of the enemy, which slows the decision-making process, resulting in an inefficient use of this concept. Therefore, as in manoeuver, the reconnaissance troops must improve their efficiency and they must focus on obtaining accurate and detailed information on the enemy’s position and actions, in order to better apply this principle.

Further, considering the enemy habit of blending in within the crowds, it is hard to distinguish the enemies. Therefore, the offensive must be selective considering the possibility for civilians to be in the offensive area. If the offensive is not selective the mission might end with many civilian casualties, which represent war crimes and result in failure.

For a more efficient offensive the commanders should use feints, a tactic also used by the enemy, in this manner being able to measure the enemy’s capability and also to attract him in less populated areas where the offensive can take place without endangering the civilians. Therefore, for this principle to be applied properly, it should be used in coordination with the manoeuver, which can provide certain advantages over the enemy [18].

Compared to the offensive used in the Second Gulf War, it can be seen that in the current situation this principle is more limited and implies more risks, requiring a more complex decision-making process and also having access to a limited amount of information.

\textit{c) Surprise.} Even though, the surprise has shown a certain improvement provided by the new technologies, in this conflict it is hard to be accomplished due to the enemy’s unpredictability. The information needs to be extremely accurate and relevant in order to know exactly the enemy’s location and plans. For this principle to be achieved, the opportunity of information is crucial. The commanders must take all details into consideration and to think of the best way to surprise the enemy. Therefore, it is required to focus on the information gathering process, by improving the efficiency of the reconnaissance troops.

Also the number of members in the assigned unit must be small for a high flexibility. The soldiers should use stealth focused technologies in the detriment of a high firepower in order to avoid detection by the enemy, in this case the mission failed. Still, the commander must maintain a good balance between stealth, flexibility and firepower in order to destroy the enemy without being overcome and for creating
the superiority required to confuse the enemy and create panic within his members [19].

Also for a more efficient surprise, the commanders should use this principle in coordination with the manoeuvre, which can mislead the enemy, using this to their advantage.

Compared to the Second Gulf War, where technology represented the main element of surprise, in the current situation, the guerrilla tactics used by the adversary have overcome the importance of these technologies requiring different tactics to counter them.

d) Security. Compared to a conventional war, in the IS case this principle is extremely difficult to attain considering the limited information on the enemy and his high unpredictability. In order for security to be successfully applied, it needs to counter any of the enemy actions out or inside the own territory. Since the enemy’s actions are unpredictable and fast-paced, it is hard to prevent them all. For this principle to be more effective in this environment, it is necessary to improve the information system, by increasing the efficiency of the reconnaissance troops, in order to have a higher chance to discover the enemy’s plans.

Also, since the information is limited and the IS troops are constantly relocating, it is recommended to strike the enemy known location in order to weaken him while the location of the own troops should be changed at different intervals of time, becoming as well, unpredictable for the enemy. This helps in diminishing the already inferior enemy military force and does not allow him to take action since his knowledge of our own location is uncertain. For this to work, it requires a high flexibility and manoeuvrability [20].

Probably one of the most efficient ways to counter the enemy’s actions is to improve the defence systems, by analysing the enemy’s capabilities and actions. Therefore, the improvements should focus on countering the IEDs, which can represent a huge threat to both military and civilians. Also it is important to consider the heavy weapons used by IS fighters, which can as well produce damage to the armoured vehicles and defences [21]. This can be attained by upgrading the armour for vehicles and the protective equipment of the soldiers.

Further, the use of this principle in an operational base should focus on covering all the areas surrounding the base by installing advanced surveillance and detection systems, in order to prevent surprise from any direction, which can be represented by a guerrilla raid or even by a VBIED (vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices). Also the patrols itinerary and hours should be changed constantly, in order to prevent the enemy from taking action and also to eliminate the routine [22].

Compared to the Second Gulf War, this principle is extremely hard to achieve due to some of the enemy’s characteristics and since technology is not the main solution, this situation requiring a different approach.

6. Conclusions

The groundwork for this paper is represented by the situation generated by the Islamic State, the results referring to the tactics used by this particular group, which are characterised by terrorist and conventional methods.

By gathering and analysing all these results, we offer a description, focusing on the IS tactics, about the adjustments required for manoeuvre, offensive, surprise and security in order to counter efficiently the enemy’s actions and also to defeat him in any circumstances. Therefore, these principles have to adapt to the enemy’s flexibility and unpredictability by improving the same characteristics, making harder for the IS fighters to reach their objectives.

As a starting point for all analysed principles, the main adjustment must aim towards the improvement of the information system, in order to surpass the enemy’s unpredictability and to efficiently counter
his actions. In order to implement this change, it is required to improve the efficiency of the reconnaissance troops, for providing more detailed and accurate information on the enemy. This requires a special training and also a thorough analysis on the enemy’s position and tactics, which can prove to be challenging, considering the limited knowledge on this matter.

Starting with the manoeuvre, for a better implementation of this principle, it is required to surpass the enemy’s flexibility, by assigning smaller units and also by upgrading the technology to provide this characteristic. This change involves spending a large amount of money on the research and development of the required upgrades, necessary for the used technologies.

For offensive, to be more efficient, it requires a different approach, becoming more selective, considering the civilian population which may be present in the area. This can prove hard to accomplish, since it may endanger the own troops, and also because it is hard to distinguish the enemy from the civilians, considering his habit of blending in.

Regarding the principle of surprise, this concept should aim, like manoeuvre, towards an increase in flexibility, but also it should consider a stealthier approach in order to remain undetected and to prevent the enemy from countering the surprise. This change requires also upgraded technologies and special training, which can cost a huge amount of money and time.

The last but not least, in order to efficiently apply the concept of security, routine must be avoided and also the defence systems must be upgraded, taking into consideration the enemy’s capabilities. This requires a complex process of analysis and planning, which can prove time consuming. Also, regarding the upgrades, it involves a large amount of money, for research and development.

Finally, these principles must take into consideration improving the defence of the own troops, by taking into consideration the enemy’s weapons and tactics.

The Islamic State situation is an issue that should provide interest to everyone, this phenomenon spreading its influence all over the world, for which it is required to find any way possible to counter and remove the threat. For this reason the author considers the chosen topic of great importance and stresses the necessity to direct all efforts towards solving this matter.

REFERENCES


9. SCUD is a series of tactical ballistic missiles developed by the Soviet Union during the Cold War.


