On Syrian Regime Strategy, US Drone Strikes, and Why Snitches Could Cost You Your Life

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The Syrian conflict, and the state's response to the revolution on the ground can actually tell us a lot about US military and IDF strategy as we transition into Fourth Generation Warfare. If we look at the progression of the tactical dynamic we can see a series of dynamics surrounding the interaction between the resistance's attempts to accelerate movement in space, and political possibility, while the regime attempts to cease movement. This has followed a specific trajectory that we can track between the advent of regime snipers and the current insurgent attacks on airports that has accelerated over the last two weeks. But to understand this it is necessary to go over a much abbreviated discussion of the tactical trajectories present on the ground, as well as some basic tactical theory, mostly deriving from Chapter 2 of Book 1, in Clausewitz's On War.

At the beginning of the conflict, in the unarmed phase of the uprising, the regime began opening fire on demonstrators on the first days of the demonstrations, making the demonstrations more militant, generating more conflict on the ground, and beginning the process of the political movement attempting to work around the tactics of the regime, eventually resorting to armed guards at demonstrations. The regime moved from opening fire on demonstrators from lines positioned on streets, which required them to respond to demonstrations that were occurring, to attempting to control the possibilities of movements, through the advent of checkpoints and snipers. Checkpoints in this context serve a series of roles; they not only prevent movement but provide logistical bases for regime troops, allowing them to consolidate troops at rally points and store equipment while maintaining constant presence. Snipers were used due to the threat that was posed by the range and accuracy of gunfire, by positioning them on the tops of tall structures snipers have a large fire zone, in which movement stops; this was also used by Gaddafi in Misrata.

With the advent of the armed resistance rebels began, the ability to use weapons of range cleared regime soldiers off the streets for periods of time, making regime movements into areas with rebel presence risky and high cost. Regime troops had, at this point, begun to incorporate irregular forces, Shabiha (foot-soldiers of Assad family aligned gangs) into regular forces, and the most intense period of massacres, with the exception of the past month, began. This escalation, and the indiscriminate shelling of of cities caused rebel forces spread out from cities, and other bands formed in the rural areas, putting pressure on checkpoints, and cutting supply lines, preventing artillery batteries from being able to maintain the shelling. At this point defections increased dramatically, leading the regime to pull soldiers off the streets even more, limiting risk, and policing their own ranks to prevent defections. As regime soldiers retreated from cities, and troops defected into the countryside, the battlefield shifted to roads, supply lines and checkpoints.

The result of pulling troops back from the streets has been three-fold. Firstly, outside of areas that the regime continues to contest (mostly areas along the coastal areas outside Latakia, the western parts of Aleppo, and the core of Damascus and the area around the Mezzah military airport), they have moved into a strategy of government localization and attempts to contain resistance. This represents the devolution of state capacity, the inverse of the Italian fasci strategy of the 1920s, where the gradual policing of space eventually found logistical coherence after the March on Rome. There is an obvious problem with this strategy however, outside of the wanton murder of innocent non-combatants, on both ethical and tactical levels. This strategy requires the ability to maintain air superiority in order to move supplies and troops between isolated areas in which the regime maintains operations. This brings us to the new phase of the war, what has begun to be called the "war of the airports".

The regime has begun to move into the increasing use of air-power, both to resupply troops and to carry out strikes. This is due to the inability of the regime troops to move on the ground without the threat pf ambush or isolation after reaching an objective. In short, the regime is retreating from the ground plane of conflict and moved into a plane of conflict that they dominate, the air. This has been disrupted, through, by a series of shifts in rebel strategy and arms. Firstly, both through Islamist militias acquiring advanced anti-aircraft weapons from Saudi Arabia, Qatar and outside funding, combined with Free Syrian Army units acquiring anti-aircraft weapons from raids on regime bases, the rebels have a limited capacity to actually down regime aircraft; mostly helicopters, but there have been various Mig Fighter-Bombers and training aircraft shot down. Secondly, rebel troops have begun to attack, and even capture airports.

Taftanaz Airport is a major military heliport southwest of Aleppo, which the majority of regime supplies for troops in the northwest of the country were dispatched from. It was taken by

Islamist rebels last week, and a large number of weapons captured. The loss of this airport makes it significantly more difficult for the regime to maintain military positions in the northern half of the country, and as a result they have begun a final assault on areas of Aleppo outside of their control, hoping to dislodge resistance before they run out of supplies. As with all wars of attrition, as the Battle of Aleppo is at this point, the ability to maintain supply is critical, and the regime has just lost much of their capacity to do so.

The Mezzah Airbase, southwest of Damascus, has recently been surrounded by rebels fighting in the Daraya suburb outside Damascus, a rebel stronghold since the early days of the revolution. This has been accomplished through the mortaring of the base itself and the downing of fighter-bombers leaving or arriving at the airport itself. As a result the regime has attempted to launch attacks into the neighborhood almost every day for the past two months, without making any headway. This is the primary fighter and fighter-bomber base for the entire country, and the primary site where airstrikes, such as the Thermite cluster bombings, are launched from.

There has also been a Free Syrian Army led siege of the Meng Airport, north of Aleppo. This airport serves as a primary support and logistics hub for all forces fighting in Aleppo itself, as well as any of the forces that may be attempting to hold space in the Kurdish areas of the north, along the border with Turkey. This base has been under siege, on and off, for a month and a half, but there is a renewed rebel push occurring currently.

Formerly civilian airports are playing a role in the conflict as well, mostly serving as supply hubs for external supplies and personnel, including supplies and troops from Iran that have been entering the country. Both Damascus International Airport, southeast of Damascus, and Aleppo International Airport, east of the city, have been under intermittent attack, which have damaged the runways and prevented planes from making landings.

requires identification of single threats, and thus relies completely on intelligence gathering So, once again, remember loose lips sink ships, or get your house blown up by a flying death robot.

gic airstrikes on command and control posts, air defense stations and radar installations, while in Palestine these tend to be buildings that have been identified as logistics hubs for the resistance. At this initial point the threshold of information is relatively low, and information for targeting relatively easy to come by. As these targets are eliminated, and forces become more asymmetric, targets begin to become of less logistical importance, reducing to the point where NATO bombers were hitting single tanks and trucks in Libya, and drones are hitting single houses in Pakistan. Here the threshold of information is high, and targeting tends to be imprecise. The difficulty of targeting in this environment is compensated for, somewhat, by on the ground intelligence, and collateral damage is limited by the use of flash special forces raids, as in Palestine or in Afghanistan/Pakistan.

However, in this approach the ability to attempt to control the contingencies of space are sacrificed for the ability to police specific threats totally, arbitrarily, and on a plane of movement that is separate from the ability to disrupt that specific movement. This means that targeting can only focus on single targets, or small groups of targets that are essential for the functioning of resistance movements. But, as resistance becomes more generalized throughout a space, or as resistance eschews concepts of command structures, this targeting becomes impossible as the ability to gather information dries up. To amplify resistance in space is to also eliminate the core of all military strategy and force projection, visibility and the ability to gather information. As force leaves space, due to the resistance in that space, their ability to make sense of space is lowered dramatically, creating a zone of indiscernibility, and this occurs in sites in which insurrection occurs. In the process of eliminating the actual concentration of force in a single space, and the visibility in a single space that one achieves through occupation, there is less of an ability to monitor space; hence the use of informants to facilitate drone warfare. Drone warfare and special forces centric military strategies are strategies built to eliminate single threats, but this

These attacks have begun to degrade the regimes ability to launch attacks into areas, forcing them to increasingly retreat to areas under their control. This points to a fundamental fallacy of the media's understanding of this conflict, and asymmetric conflict generally. As in Syria, the ability of the rebels to disrupt the regime's ability to move through space also disrupts the regime's ability to maintain logistical operations, both through the loss of materiel, but also through a loss of the ability to carry out operations, at the same time giving themselves the ability to have space to organize and launch attacks. It is not a question of rebels holding space, as the media constantly claims, but it more about the ability to prevent the regime from holding space; this is the core of all insurgent dynamics.

As Clausewitz argues, the ability to end war, or dissipate conflict, is dependent on the ability to not only eliminate the ability of the adversary to fight, but also to prevent this possibility from arising in any future moment, and this requires a total occupation of space, for perpetual periods of time. This is also the methodology of policing, for law to function it must function in all places at all times, and that depends on the logistical capacity of total mobilizations of force across the entirety of time and space; the state only functions to the degree that this total social war perpetuates. But, as Clausewitz argues, later into Book Two, this is always an impossibility. On one hand, this is a numerical impossibility, if the deployment of conflict causes effects, and effects change the dynamics of action, then there is no unity of force to begin with, let alone one that is numerically sufficient to project across the totality of time and space. On the other hand, it is the deployment of force itself that causes effects, as all actions do, meaning that there is not a static situation, or unity of time and space, that is able to be controlled to begin with. As such, conflict and insurgency are both possible, and are potentially successful, because of the impossibility of a total deployment of a logistically coherent policing. As actions occur, and as dynamics change due to the effects of action, policing must be-

come mobile to operate in space, to cover space, and project outside of the numerical and historical limitations of the totality of policing. As such, policing becomes a spatialized phenomena, which is not unitary in itself.

Historically there have been mechanisms to maintain the concept of the coherence of force logistics, such as nationalism, uniforms, common supply lines, training and internal policing. But, because force can never be coherent (the particularity of the dynamics of actions, and the particularity of those that take action can never be eliminated), and all actions have effects, then the threat of disorganization through the effects of action and counter-action are potentially high. The actions taken shift the dynamics of conflict, meaning that all attempts to project force into space depends on the ability to project the possible contingencies generated by this projection. As Clausewitz argues in the second chapter of Book One of On War, this projection is based on two calculations, that this movement will generate a probability of success, and that this success will not be too costly, on the level of maintaining logistical capacity. As resistance increases in space these movements through space become impossible, as we can see in Syria, but also during the early phases of the Troubles in Northern Ireland and the creation of the autonomous zones in Catholic areas of Derry, such as Free Derry.

In the case of Syria, the regime has deemed it too dangerous to move into and through most spaces, forcing them to attempt to hold together coherence over distance. The attacks on airports has both cut them off from external sources of supply, primarily Iran, but also the ability to move supplies across space. Much has been made in the media this week about how the taking of the Taftanaz Airbase will prevent the regime from bombing cities from helicopters, which is true (a lot of areas in the northwest of the country are now outside of helicopter range), but the primary impact is that a lot of the isolated bases, and small enclaves, of regime troops are now cut off from supply, and this includes various regime elements

that are currently under siege and cut off from moving over land. But, there is another fascinating element of this dynamic that has little to do with Syria, this mirrors the US military's force recomposition plans and the move into Fourth Generation Warfare, which is also underway in the IDF.

There has been two primary shifts in recent US/IDF strategy that have been similar, the removal of troops from the ground in resistant terrains and the use of remote projections of force on planes where they hold superiority. As resistance increased in Afghanistan, or in Iraq, counter-insurgency began to break down. Soldiers are asked to go into towns to "build connections" within counter-insurgency doctrine, but this requires the ability of soldiers to be certain of the contingencies of their movements. A single attack, road-side bomb, ambush and movement through space is no longer certain. To increase the probability of safety requires the raiding of houses and the construction of checkpoints, moves which generate conflict on the ground, amplifying resistance, increasing the defensive posture and so on, until terrain becomes difficult to move through. In Palestine this began with the IDF pull out from the Occupied Territories and the construction of the Apartheid Wall. This withdrawal is an attempt to limit the force footprint on the ground, eliminating risk to front-line troops, eliminating the logistics of maintaining supply lines, but also giving up on the concept of occupation of space.

This has moved into the attempt to maintain constant force presence in the air, and through flash raids. As the US and IDf move into drone strikes and tactical air strikes as a tactic a problem has arisen though. At the beginning of a campaign like this the elimination of the force footprint in the area cuts off access to information, while removing the problem of having to move through resistant terrain. In the initial phases of a campaign, and this was also the prototype model for the initial CIA-affiliated local forces strategy in Afghanistan in the early phases of the invasion, specific targets can be infrastructural. In Afghanistan and Libya there were strate-