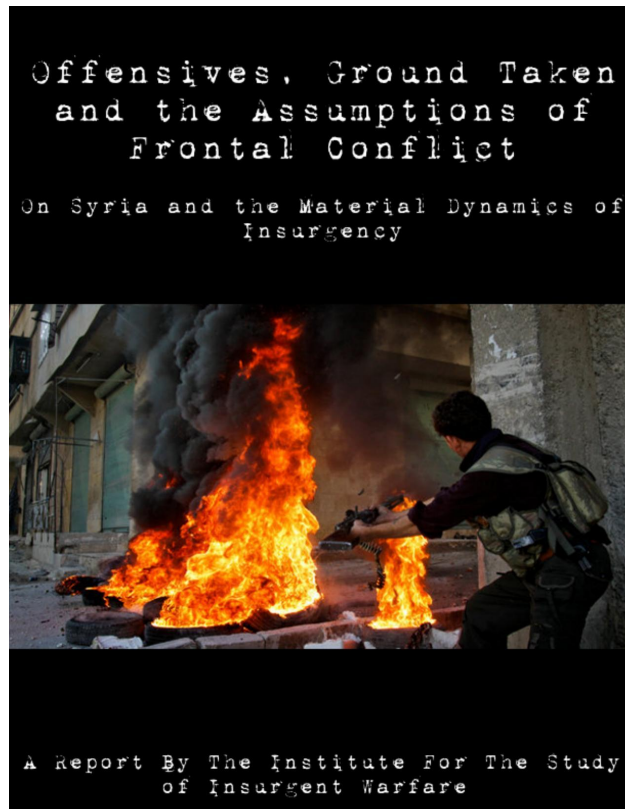# Offensives, Ground Taken and The Assumptions of Frontal Conflict

On Syria and The Material Dynamics of Insurgency

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Contents

The Poverty of the Frontal Narrative of Warfare

Linearity is an assumption that forms the foundation of the common framework through which war is understood. This assumption is based on the concept of unitary poles in conflict within a concentrated form of clash, or battle, in which unitary bodies defeat enemies through annihilation or occupation. While one can superficially apply this narrative to the analysis of warfare, it is not useful in understanding the dynamics of conflict. As Clausewitz discusses, we can impose unitary, singular narratives on the dynamics of warfare, and the bodies that engage in warfare, but these narrative concepts exist at an infinite distance from the actual dynamics of adversarial conflict. Adversarial conflict is a material relation born out of material clash, a particular thing that occurs in a particular moment. The battle, the point of engagement, the concentrated space of clash, occurs as a dynamic of conflict within a space, but the dynamics of that clash form through the particularities of individual conflicts, tactical actions that occur materially. Each and every action occurs within the dynamic formed by the effects of all moments that have come before it, creating conflict as a opaque density that is unable to be understood conceptually with any accuracy. The same can be said of the bodies in conflict, the logistical operations that are termed fighting units, militaries, police units and so on. Far from unitary organizations, these logistical connections are formed by particular people, who engage in their tasks in particular ways, in situations of extreme disruption and friction, and so are subject to collapse[1]. The developments in the technics of warfare have not come to fragment the terrain of conflict and the bodies involved in adversarial conflict, as the common narrative posits, but instead have come to both influence tactics and illustrate the poverty of the narrative of frontal warfare.

Historically, the shape of state warfare has changed in such a way as to underscore the fundamental distance between the narrative categories used to make sense of conflict and the dynamics of conflict themselves. Before the advent of firearms, adversarial conflicts were largely based in melee, the clash of two forces in direct physical contact, using weapons of limited range, such as swords, and modes of limited movement. At the point of physical clash the structure of the fighting force as an organized unit tended to break down, even in more rigid structures such as the Greek phalanx and Roman infantry formation. This direct immediate form of close hand to hand combat was disrupted by archery and the use of the horse, with Mongolian warmachines combining the two into a form of rapid mobile warfare at a distance[2]. As the firearm became

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[1] Clausewitz, 1968; Clausewitz argues that we have to understand the dynamics of conflict as those that particular people engage in. As such, we can never speak of some essential characteristic of comparable moments, but only of a density of conflict, dynamics of action and reaction, and the effects this has on those engaged in action, such as fear. Therefore, there is no way to speak of laws of war or essential aspects of conflict, just conflict and the particularity of the moment of conflict, without ever being able to fully express the complexity of a moment conceptually. This means that the planning of strategy, the attempt to plan large scale actions over time, is an impossibility, and tactics, the immediate dynamics of conflict, are unable to be conceptualized directly.

[2] Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 2000

prominent within warfare the distance of combat increased to a certain degree. But, even at this point the bayonet charge was still largely the decisive move in any form of firearmsbased warfare until the advent of the selfcontained bullet cartridge[3]. The image of two lines of troops opening fire on one another, a formation based war of maneuver that seems suicidal on its surface, was largely a product of the limits of firearms technology and communications at the time. The smoke generated, the noise, the slow rate of reloading (which had to be done while standing or kneeling, preventing troops from taking cover) and the lack of communications at distance forced large bodies of soldiers into tight formations[4]. As the rate and range of fire increased it eliminated the inertia of combat, leading to trench warfare, which began in the decades before the First World War, largely due to the impossibility of moving across open terrain within view of the enemy[5]. This lack of movement began to be broken down through the use of small unit tactics (sniper units, advanced shock troops, sabotage, and so on) and the combined use of armored vehicles and infantry support[6]. As mobility was restored to state warfare it began a process of increasing speed of movement with concomitant fragmentation of the concept of a war of fronts[7]. As the concentrated point of conflict was fragmented through terrain, advanced communications and mobility, such as provided by the helicopter, were used in order to maintain logistical coordination between disparate units dispersed across terrain. As the rate of action increases, and as mobility and communications allow strikes and attacks to be launched at a distance, the concentration of conflict at decisive points evaporates, while the potential terrain of engagement widens.

The superficial appearance of a linear warfare, based in unitary polar clash, is one that was largely a product of the spatial limitation of the terrains of concentrated clash, a result of the technological limitations of weaponry and communications, rather than a function of an actual unity of force. Even in these spatially limited forms of adversarial conflict the collapse of the enemy was a function of the inability to continue to mobilize force, rather than a function of the occupation of space. In other words, the ability to mobilize force collapses not because space is occupied, but because supply logistics cannot be maintained, casualties degrade the ability to fight, desertions and mutiny break down force logistics and the capacity to contain crisis is exhausted[8]. The increased speed of movement and fire in state warfare has served to expose the inadequacies of frontal narratives of warfare, rather than generate them. Napoleonic warfare, for example, functioned by exploiting the impossibility of the unity of the fighting force through the use of pursuit and mobility. The ability of Napoleon's forces to move without supply trains, through the requisitioning of supplies as they moved through space and the dispersed networks of supply depots that they constructed, increased the speed of maneuver, allowing attacks to occur without warning, and before defense could be mounted[9]. This speed of movement carried into and through the terrain of conflict, pursuing enemy forces in retreat, preventing rest and reestablishment of contact with dispersed units thus further fragmenting a force in retreat, increasing

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[3] Griffith, 1981
[4] Dupuy, 1982
[5] Delanda, 1991
[6] Griffith, 1981
[7] Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 2000
[8] Clausewitz, 1968
[9] Clausewitz, 1968

rates of desertion, cutting enemy troops off from communication with command structures, and forcing enemy forces to abandon supplies.

As the enemy forces' capacity to contain this crisis evaporated through the speed of movement and the elimination of their logistical capacity, which in a time before wireless communications was a function of eliminating physical concentration, the ability to mobilize force also evaporated.

The inadequacies of linear narratives of warfare are even more clear in reference to asymmetric warfare since the advent of the firearm. With firearms asymmetric forces were able to utilize hit and run tactics that avoided the ability of large scale state forces to counterattack. Prefirearm guerrilla forces were relegated to ambush tactics that required frontal contact at short distance with forces that possessed superior numbers and weapons, dramatically limiting the ability of asymmetric forces to fight effectively. With the advent of the bullet cartridge and magazines asymmetric forces were able to fire multiple long range shots, at a distance, from behind cover, even further increasing the ability to utilize speed and mobility as a way to compensate for a lack of firepower. We can see the effects of the firearm in asymmetric warfare in the socalled French and Indian War, where British troops were ambushed by a guerrilla force of 600 indigenous fighters, resulting in the death of 1000 British troops in the attempt to take Fort Duquesne (in what is now downtown Pittsburgh)[10], the hybrid warfare utilized by American colonists in the American Revolution where British officers were routinely picked off by snipers using rifled muskets[11], or the Peninsular War, where Napoleonic forces, who had to resort to the use of traditional supply logistics in situations of occupation, were pushed out of Spain by a combination of British irregular forces and Spanish guerrilla fighters[12]. The distance that projectile weapons allow, combined with the speed of the movement of small forces that are not attempting to occupy terrain, allowed guerrilla forces to manifest at any moment, in any place. Occupation forces began to be faced with a problem. Without being able to rely on numerical advantage, and without being able to move quickly enough to support forces under attack or cover supply lines completely, vulnerabilities existed that could overwhelm their ability to function logistically. In other words, what has become apparent is that the ability to eliminate an enemy's capacity to mobilize force is not a question of annihilation or occupation, which only dissipates conflict through space, but a question of disorganization, speed and movement.

In the narrative of frontal warfare adversarial conflict is reduced to a collision of singular forces, which operate in singular ways, obscuring the particularity of the dynamics of conflict and the contingencies unleashed by targeted action. The focus always remains on the firepower, numerical organization and the ground held in a frontal fight on limited terrain. This focus on positive space fundamentally obscures the nonunity of the state military force and the inability to maintain constant, total occupation. As Clausewitz argues, the destruction of the enemy is not a function of the occupation of space, which is impossible in a total way. Destruction is

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[10] Gott, 2011

[11] Raphael, 2001

[12] Hindley, 2010; During this campaign French supply lines, which were a necessity of an increasingly drawn out occupation, were constantly under attack by Spanish guerrilla fighters, prompting one Prussian officer serving with the French to have say, "Wherever we arrived, they disappeared, whenever we left, they arrived—they were everywhere and nowhere, they had no tangible center which could be attacked.

accomplished by the generation of sufficient friction within the organizational capacity of the enemy that his mobilization of force becomes impossible to maintain[13].

In the wake of the armed uprisings in Libya and Syria this narrative of frontal warfare persists in contemporary media discourse, perhaps due to the conveniences it allows in regard to simplification. In the context of radical movements this narrative persists as well, through the concept of a movement or organization in frontal conflict with the state, a narrative with its modern roots in Leninism[14]. Latent in this narrative is an understanding of the state as a spatial consistency, a constant presence in space, until some mythical liberatory moment when it vanishes. We could see this narrative at work within Occupy, where the park became both a "liberated area" and a space to be defended and held at all costs, to the detriment of occupiers' mobility and capacity for escalation. This narrative is not only inaccurate all narratives of the dynamics of immediate moments are inaccuratebut it presents a reductionist framework for understanding conflict that is counterproductive to a movement's attempts to understand and mobilize conflict materially.

To begin to chart a way out of this narrative, and the linearity that it imposes, it is necessary to see how it fails to express the complexity of the dynamics of conflict on the ground, and to look at other ways to make sense of the concentrations and movement of forces within insurgent situations. To do this we will be taking a look at the much publicized regime offensives that are currently occurring within Syria, and some of the dynamics that these have generated. Before exploring the situation on the ground and the innumerable problems with the frontal warfare narrative we would like to posit a comparative separation between insurgent operations in Syria and their counterparts in Libya.

In the coverage of the Libyan uprising the narrative of frontal clash functioned slightly better than in other scenarios.

The vast majority of the Libyan population lives immediately along the Mediterranean coast near major highways built during the Gaddafi regime. Therefore most of the fighting was carried out along these relatively linear routes, specifically on the roads between Sirtre and Benghazi, Misrata and Tripoli, and Tripoli and Zawiyah, as well as an axis of conflict south to southwest of Tripoli through the spine of the Nafusa Mountains. In this scenario, characterized by long range artillery engagements, one could pinpoint lines of conflict to a certain extent. There were a series of reasons why this was the case. The first, and primary, reason is the physical terrain itself, characterized by flat open deserts and coastal plains without, outside of the Nafusa, much elevation variance. We can see this in narratives surrounding the struggle between the German and British tank corps during World War II, where Rommel used deception tactics to make up for the loss of terrain variance, and the ability to hide numbers. This tactic was used against him by Montgomery during the Battle of El Alamein[15]. The second reason was the unification of rebel military command, pushed forward by NATO intervention and logistical support. This led to a unified command structure, but at the cost of the political possibilities unleashed by insurgency. NATO intervention was primarily structured in an attempt to define the postGaddafi

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[13] Clausewitz, 1969: ; Specifically, the occupation of space, for Clausewitz, is merely a method through which to accelerate this logistical rupture, rather than a goal in itself, contrary to traditional narratives of linear warfare.

[14] Culp, 2013 Most generally, this sociology looks to theories of organization for the key to unlock a singular path to political success. Its sociological method evaluates the potential for political success in three categories, all leftovers from Lenin: structure, cohesion, and the definition of objectives. When those categories are operationalized, social movements are analyzed according to organizational forms, collective identities, and types of mobilizations.

[15] Griffith, 1981

era and eliminate the possibilities that could have resulted from the Libyan uprising in an attempt to maintain Western influence in the region. This scenario is an exception though, and this category of analysis, which did not really function in analyzing the Libya conflict (specifically the final internal assault on Tripoli[16]) is definitely outmoded in reference to other insurgent contexts. This can be clearly seen in the attempt to graft the same framework on to the Syrian uprising, specifically in reference to the three front offensive currently being launched by the regime/Hezbollah/supporting forces. In discussing the distance between the narrative categories of frontal engagement and the dynamic kinetics on the ground we can come to understand some aspects of insurgencies.

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[16] Nakhoul, 2011

The Three Front Offensive in Syria

To set the stage for this discussion it is important to begin with the situation as it existed on the ground in Syria at a pivotal point at the end of 2013. Regime force logistics are being supported by outside forces, and insurgent forces have begun to operate in more disciplined ways. Up to this point the discussion within the Western press has largely focused on the refugee situation, the shelling of cities by regime forces and the frequent massacres of civilians by regimealigned militias. This discussion has obscured the material dynamics on the ground within Syria, and even over the declared borders of Syria into Lebanon. But there is another discussion that is relevant here, the actual dynamics of conflict as they exist, even if we are glimpsing them through a series of momentary snapshots and spatially removed reports. The political discussion, largely framed through a metaethical assertion of liberal humanist ethics, has dominated the narrative to this point, except in generally obscure circles of amateur analysts. Understanding the dynamics of conflict on the ground requires us to suspend our political and ethical frames of analysis. As terrible as the situation for civilians is, and as uncertain as the future is for Shami peoples, the analysis of the material dynamics of conflict must occur in a separate space, as a separate question. It is this question, and the concepts that can be derived from analyzing it, that we set out to examine here.

As the dynamics of the Syrian insurgency have developed, the terrain[1] in which regime forces can reliably operate has become constricted. This is partially a result of the spatial pluralism of the insurgency itself, and partially due to the impact that attrition has had on regime force logistics. Since May 2013 there has been discussion of a building offensive by the regime in an attempt to move into space in which they have been unable to functionally operate for the past several months. This offensive has arisen amidst shifts on the ground which have fundamentally changed the situation. For starters, there has been a contraction of the terrain that the regime can reliably operate within. This has been the product of a long series of insurgent operations against outlying forces like checkpoints, the ability of rebel groups to occupy airbases[2], which served as a primary form of supply for outlying garrisons of regime troops, and the consequent concentration of regime forces in three primary areas: the areas along the coast, specifically around the city of Latakia, which has been a political stronghold of the regime for decades, the western and southern areas of Aleppo, where regime troops were pushed after an escalating series of insurgent operations in the city, and Damascus, the administrative and logistical hub of the regime itself, specifically the central and western parts of the city.

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[1] The term terrain means the space in which something occurs, and cannot be limited to a discussion of physical characteristics of geographic space, but must also encompass the totality of the dynamics of action within that space.

[2] For more on the dynamic of fighting around airbases and airports, and the centrality of these airbases to regime supply logistics see http://introtoanarchy.blogspot.com/2013/01/onsyrianregimestrategyusdrone.html (January, 18, 2013)

Throughout the summer, culminating in the movement of hundreds of Hezbollah troops over the border during the assault on the border city of Quasayr[3], speculation began to build that the regime forces were on the verge of launching assaults toward Aleppo, into the Homs area, and into areas around Damascus north and east of the city center. This has culminated in what has begun to be termed the threefront offensive[4].

The three front offensive is centered on the Qualamoun Mountain range, northwest of Damascus, aimed at opening up the DamascusAleppo Highway[5] for supplies, with regime movements centered on the towns of Yarbud and Nabk, with rebels moving in from the north, along the highway, into the town of Deir Atiah, operating in much of the high ground in the mountains and the highway north of this area, and coming in from the southwestern areas of Eastern Ghoutta, specifically towns around Douma. The area is characterized by rolling hills and mountain peaks, with a series of small narrow valleys cutting through the terrain, a generally sparse population, and few primary roads. This terrain provides a number of sites of concealment for insurgent forces, who tend to avoid main roads and the mobile checkpoints that sometimes appear on them.

This terrain is difficult for regime troops to penetrate, leading them to prefer travel in large columns on primary roads.

The limited access leads naturally to ambush tactics, which insurgents have been utilizing consistently both along the main highway and the smaller access roads through the mountains. This axis of engagement has been active primarily since November 2013, with regime forces benefiting from the influx of Hezbollah troops that began in May of 2013

with the assault on alQuasayr[6]. As of the time of writing[7], regime troops have moved into Nabk , but have been unable to sustain any operations outside of the town[8], with the highway still blocked by insurgent operations to the north of Nabk, and regime convoys coming under attack from the hills above the highway in the attempt to move on Yarbud. Without being able to move through space reliably, without being a target of ambush or other forms of attack, regime troops have once again come to rely on holding a minor amount of space, such as a checkpoint, and using that space to shell towns harboring insurgents.

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[3] http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/05/2013529105510937115.html, May 29, 2013

[4] http://eaworldview.com/2013/11/syriaforecastregimes3frontoffensive/, November, 17, 2013

[5] The DamascusAleppo Highway is officially called the M5 Highway. The Highway runs from Damascus to Homs, and then to Aleppo

[6] Nassief, 2013: Institute For The Study of War report "Hezbollah and the Fight for Control in Qualamoun", November 26, 2013

[7] December 18, 2013

[8] http://lopforum.tumblr.com/post/67083080881/qalamounoffensive

Figure 1: Terrain Map around Nabk[9]

The second offensive is a regime pincer move progressing west to east across the southern side of Aleppo, with a second column moving up from the areas around Safira, and much of the fighting concentrating around Base 80, just north of Aleppo International Airport. The base had been under regime control until the middle of the summer of 2013, and serves to protect the main supply route out of the Aleppo International Airport into the city itself. The regime was able, as a part of this offensive, to reoccupy the base on November 10th. This is the only area, outside of a narrow band to the south of the city and the western neighborhoods of the city itself that has constituted a consistent operational terrain for the regime since the launching of armed insurgent operations in Aleppo in July of 2012. Another regime column is coming north through Safira, a town on the southeastern edge of the Aleppo area and home to major munitions and chemical weapons storage and production sites, which lie west of the city itself. This axis of movement is meeting up with a push south by regime troops that were stationed at Aleppo International Airport. The offensive has developed into a three pronged attack, since the capture of Base 80, with the movement of regime and Hezbollah troops along the southern edge of the city from west to east, the movement of regime troops north through Safira, and a smaller supporting movement meant to link the other two running south from the Aleppo International Airport to Safira.

The strategic trajectory seems to be an attempt to open and secure a supply route into the city that avoids the DamascusAleppo Highway, not only by opening the route itself, but also by securing a corridor across the southern edge of Aleppo, from Safira to the International Airport, and from this area in the southeast of the city to concentrations of regime troops attempting to maintain operations in the western edge of Aleppo[10]. Outside of the western edges of the city itself the regime has been largely pushed out of most of Aleppo province, with the exception of this recent line of movement and a small strip on the northern corridor into the city, centered around the Kindi Hospital, which regime forces were pushed out of on December 20, 2013, and Aleppo Central Prison, which is only supplied by airdrops. This line of attack has recently stalled after the regime was forced to divert attention and resources to the offensive in the Qalamoun Mountain region. Recently, the regime's moves around Aleppo have focused on air strikes against areas outside of their control, mostly inhabited by civilians, resulting in heavy casualties[11].

[10] http://eaworldview.com/2013/11/syriaforecastregimes3frontoffensive/, November 17, 2013
[11] http://beta.syriadeeply.org/2013/12/statebattleassadforcesescalateoffensivealeppo/, December 18, 2013
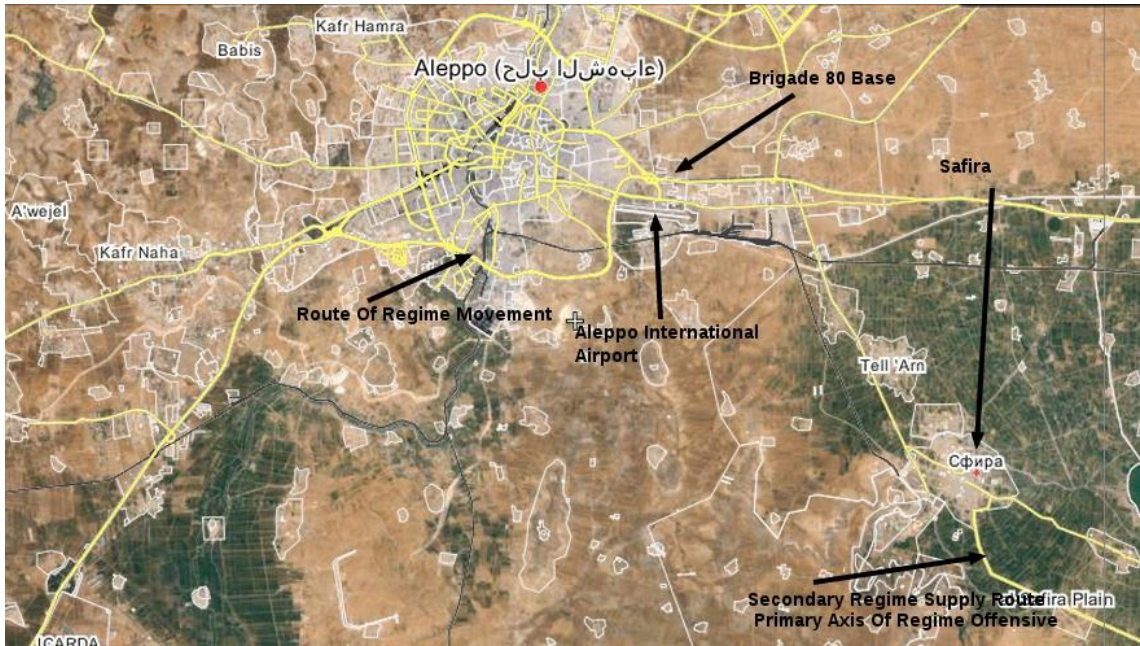
Figure 2: Regime Movements South and West of Aleppo

The third offensive concentrates on the southern suburbs of Damascus, in an attempt to cut off rebel movements into the city from the Daraa area along the Jordanian border. This offensive has departed largely from the military bases that border the suburbs of Maadamiyeh and Daraya, with artillery strikes and daily incursions focused on both areas, longstanding insurgent operational areas that regime forces have attempted to enter frequently, and been repelled every time. The offensive is targeting cities that have already been under siege for over a year, and have been the site of repeated regime attacks and failed incursions. These cities sit near key regime airfields and a high concentration of military installations, making them sites which insurgents can and do attack from, but also sites against which regime attacks can be readily launched. The most important of these is Mezzeh Military Airport, the largest military airport in Syria[12]. To the east of this area is the Yarmouk Palestinian Refugee Camp, the site of fighting between regime forces and allied Palestinian factions, specifically the Popular Front For The Liberation of PalestineGeneral Command[13], and insurgent groups aligned with other Palestinian factions, including Hamas, Fatah and others.

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[12] http://eaworldview.com/2013/11/syriaforecastregimes3frontoffensive/, November, 17, 2013

[13] This is not the same faction as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the General Command faction is a Syrian regime sponsored organization.
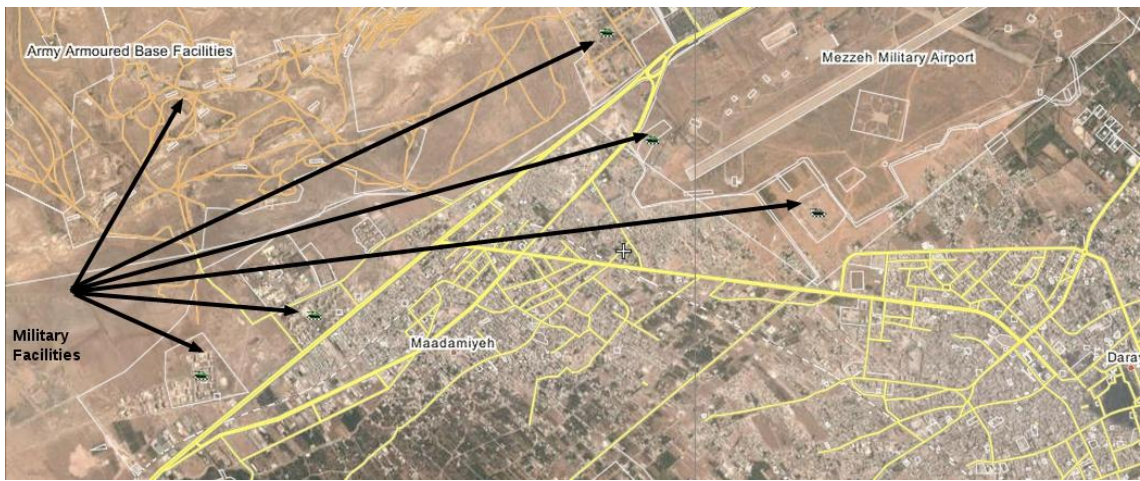
Figure 3: Maadamiyeh, Daraya (on the far right of the map), with arrows pointing to military installations.

These offensives occur at a time where regime forces are operating in increasingly spatially and logistically limited ways. Much was made of the intervention of Hezbollah troops along the border with Lebanon, and their dispersal throughout the country, specifically to the outskirts of Homs, to Damascus and to Aleppo. These outside regime forces have been bolstered by the intervention of a number of Iraqi Shiite militias, Iranian military personnel and the growth of the National Defense Forces, which are local militias made up of regime sympathizers[14]. These additional forces have served primarily to reinforce regime positions and support limited offensives. Iranian military advisors have been reportedly training local militia forces along the Basij Militia model, while Hezbollah and Iraqi Shia forces have been largely left to defend areas around Damascus and Aleppo alone, with little Syrian military direction or oversight. With the intervention of outside forces, as was mentioned earlier, it became clear that the regime was on the verge of launching a series of attacks, but the fact that it took three months to concentrate forces enough for even limited incursions illustrates how stretched the logistical capacity of the regime forces currently is. Even with the launching of these offensive lines of movement it has become clear how reliant the regime currently is on forces from outside Syria, a further indicator of regime force logistical deficiencies.[15]

The increasing reliance on outside forces presents a series of problems for the Assad regime. The first is that outside forces have to go home eventually. In the history of American military's intervention in far off conflicts, such as Vietnam and Afghanistan, there is a period of time that these outside forces can maintain operations outside of their own native areas of operation. These operations are politically and logistically expensive to engage in and continue, and tend to only be successful to the degree that there is a point where local forces can eventually take on policing operations.[16] Secondly, outside forces present problems of command and control for linear military forces.

Historically, as the British found out repeatedly, outside forces are likely to be less motivated to fight to the death, less motivated to take risks, and present the problem of divided loyalties, with competing command structures vying to channel their efforts. This seems to point to a fundamentally different narrative than the one that is coming from the thinktanks. Report after report has been issued recently indicating that the movement of regime forces through space indicates some form of advantage on the ground. We would like to offer a fundamentally different reading. With the attempts to expand the terrain of operations there are operational sacrifices being made, specifically the concentration of forces in other areas, leading to gaps in coverage. There has been an attempt to use outside forces to address these weaknesses in the depth of regime defensive structures. However, with the increasing length of supply lines, decreasing concentration of forces, and the increased area that the regime is attempting to cover, and given their prior tendency to concentrate force due to reduced operational capacity, this increasingly seems like an all or nothing strategy, an attempt to put everything into reconfiguring the tactical terrain, rather than a fundamental advance or shift.

With the advent of these three offensives regime forces have concentrated dramatically, leading to a series of effects.

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[14] There are numerous groups involved in outside intervention on the side of the regime in Syria. A good directory of these groups can be found at http://jihadology.net/hizballahcavalcade/

[15] White, 2013; http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policyanalysis/view/thesyrianregimesmilitarysolution-tothewar

[16] Jones, 2010

Linear military force movements require a high degree of command, control and logistics coordination, based on a relatively static understanding of terrain and the dynamics of conflict[17]. To be able to gather forces, especially in the face of geographically widespread resistance, requires the convergence of troops in concentrated locations, the movement of supplies to depots in proximity to lines of movement, and the elimination of nonessential operations.

The effects of this form of force concentration are made clear by dynamics that have been documented over the past few months. Firstly, activity in large areas of Syria has decelerated, with all additional regime forces being deployed to the offensive fronts. One can see this clearly in the daily reports of attacks and minute by minute updates on Twitter, which document regime and insurgent operations[18]. There is clearly activity in other areas of the country, but regime activities in these areas have largely consisted of long range shelling of cities, air strikes, and the attempt to defend the last remaining outposts in some areas of the country, specifically in the northeastern Kurdish areas and the extreme centraleastern areas of the country near the Iraqi border, such as Deir ezZor[19]. The lack of regime offensive movements, instead relying on longrange attacks that do not require ground forces to be at immediate risk, demonstrates the degree to which regime operations have come to focus on a relatively narrow axis of movement geographically. Secondly, this can tell us a lot about regime long term strategy objectives, or lack thereof. With this sort of force concentration large areas of the terrain become gaps in regime coverage, allowing insurgents to develop infrastructure and move through space to more advantageous positions, in the eventuality that the regime may attempt to move into these areas again. This seems to indicate a strategy of force concentration in the attempt to reconfigure the dynamics of force within this terrain. By abandoning large swaths of space the regime is lessening its exposure to attack, but only to the degree that they are limiting their own ability to project through space, and thus their ability to operate as a nationstate.[20] The intention seems to be to generate a more favorable situation on the ground in the long term, with offensives concentrated on areas where they need to maintain supply lines, or areas where they are attempting to cut insurgent routes of movement[21].

This means that these offensives are not, in themselves, the objective, but are largely being launched in the attempt to generate a situation in which the regime can maintain logistical operations. This points to a military logistics on the verge of collapse. Linear force movements and the maintenance of linear force operations present difficulties on two planes, movement and supply chains, which are necessarily connected. In the attempt to operate across the entirety of the terrain, at all moments, and thus to operate the state as a material phenomenon, linear state forces must be able to predictably move across space, and maintain supply chains and communications across the entirety of that space38. To the degree that conflict increases in space, movement across that space becomes more difficult to predict, complicating the maintenance of supply and support logistics accordingly. The degree to which the regime has had to contract op-

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[17] Atkinson, 1994

[18] A good way to follow these reports is to follow aggregation sites and forums. We recommend following yalla-souriya.wordpress.com, lopforum.tumblr.com, and freedomfalconofsyria.blogspot.com

[19] http://brownmoses.blogspot.co.uk/2013/12/thefactionsofabukamal.html, December 18, 2013

[20] Clausewitz, 1968 and Nagl, 2005

[21] White, 2013, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policyanalysis/view/thesyrianregimesmilitarysolution-tothewar

erations, even given outside support, indicate the difficulty of maintaining logistical and supply operations across a broad area.

The contraction of operational space fundamentally prevents regime policing from functioning across a broader space, and limits the space in which the state can operate materially, multiplying the gaps in coverage and force projection.

This has led to a situation in which space can be moved through, but operational consistency in that space cannot be maintained over time. As of December 10th it has been reported that government forces, along with Hezbollah troops, have taken the town of Nabk, claim to control the highway and are pushing toward Yarbud, but this is deceptive on a certain level. The town may have experienced a retreat of insurgent units, but this is different than saying that the regime controls the area, which would require the regime to actually be able to police the area unimpeded.

As regime forces move into an area, as of the last six months or so, they have been staging large scale raids, arrests and mass killing campaigns in order to force a large number of people from their homes. This seems to be an attempt to empty the battle space of civilians, and limit the variables in the space, making this a form of scorched earth policy.

Over time, this generates more conflict within that space and in surrounding areas, where the civilian population has had such a price exacted on them that many of these areas move away from regime control the moment that regime forces leave. This is a dynamic that is common in counterinsurgency campaigns. As main force concentrations move through an area, and civilian populations have to deal with the effects of occupation force operations, there is a tendency for resistance to begin in that area after the main force has moved on. The response has tended to be large scale forced population displacement, or the complete reconfiguring of space to facilitate occupation, such as the building of the apartheid wall between Israel and Palestine[22], or the separation of neighborhoods in Baghdad with walls and checkpoints by American troops[23]. In Malaya, the case study taken as a model for US counterinsurgency doctrine, large portions of the local population in the zones of conflict were forcibly displaced and moved into camps run by the British, in order to cut insurgents off from their logistical support base.

In this situation, for any number of reasons, Syrian regime troops seem content to drive people from their spaces of residence, without moving them into concentration camps. They've lost, therefore, control over the movements of these people, many of whom end up joining insurgent units. Further, control of a town only implies control over a minor stretch of a highway that runs 100 miles from Damascus to Homs, and another 120 miles past Homs to Aleppo. Even in a situation in which the regime and its adjunct forces can maintain a certain operational consistency within space, this has shown itself to be temporary. The operational corridor is thin, and has no depth outside of the immediate space occupied by regime forces.

As Clausewitz discusses, actual physical presence is not of fundamental importance operationally. Policing forces and forces of occupation are always numerically partial in an immediate sense, and can only operate in so many spaces at the same time.[24] As such, policing only functions to the degree that force can be projected across space, into all moments, at all times, which in itself is an impossibility[25]. To compensate for their inability to enact absolute occupation, oc-

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[22] Weizman, 2007

[23] Rosen, 2010

[24] Clausewitz, 1968

[25] Virilio, 2008

cupation forces must undertake coordinated movements through space, as well as increasingly rely on forms of surveillance and information gathering. In terrains of potential conflict this movement and possibility of coordination is disrupted, causing force to concentrate, restricting projection. This force concentration can only adapt to a limited amount of speed and dispersion of conflict in the terrain before the capacity to contain conflict is overwhelmed and the logistics of policing rupture. Galula identified this difficulty through a relatively simple declaration, while occupation forces have to defend everywhere, insurgent forces can attack anywhere. This poses a choice. Occupation forces can choose to operate in a dispersed form, opening up the possibility of attack, or concentrating force, limiting the projection of force through space. This is the fundamental paradox of counterinsurgency, that in the attempt to maximize force projection through attempts to decelerate conflict, through repression of complicity, linear forces must occupy space, deploying conflict, causing effects, often attacks, that limit their ability to project across space. As forces concentrate to contain conflict in one area, their forces in other areas become more dispersed. This leads to gaps in coverage, and widens the terrain of potential conflict. The higher the concentration of conflict in a space, the higher the concentration of force, and the wider the gaps in coverage become.

Reports indicate insurgent forces have retreated from the town into the countryside, along the highway to the north, and southeast into the town of Rima, between Nabk and Yarbud[26]. As regime forces concentrate in space, in order to move along a limited spatial axis, insurgent units are simply moving to areas outside of zones of frontal confrontation. This means that, far from controlling the highway, which has remained blocked throughout the entire offensive, or achieving a significant advancement in the offensive, regime forces have accomplished little but to shift the zones of kinetic activity from inside the town to outside the town and into areas outside of the primary axis of movement, such as Eastern Ghoutta, southeast of the Qalamoun.

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[26] http://lopforum.tumblr.com/post/67083080881/qalamounoffensive

Force Concentration and Movements in Terrain

Insurgents have begun to take advantage of coverage gaps to launch attacks to break the siege of Eastern Ghoutta, northeast to east of Damascus, with operations stretching from Adra in the northeast to Dayr al Asafir to the east of the city[1]. This series of operations had been under a voluntary media blackout, meaning that insurgent forces were not revealing their positions through the widespread practice of releasing Youtube videos to announce every operation. On December 17, 2013 an alliance of insurgent groups released a joint statement declaring the removal of regime force concentrations from a 40km band to the east of Damascus, and announcing "Phase 2" of an offensive that is moving toward the Damascus International Airport.[2] Along with these operations there have been a series of moves around Aleppo. As the regime offensive attempts to cut across the southern edge of the city and up from Safira, a move that has been completely immobilized in the absence of pincer converge southeast of the city, insurgent forces have been launching operations north of the city on the Kindi Hospital barracks,[3] the regime's largest barracks in the city, as well as to the southeast of the city in between the axes of regime movement, from areas to the east of Aleppo outside of regime control. On December 20, 2013 insurgents drove regime forces from the Kindi Hospital barracks, which had been under siege since April, freeing up forces for increasing attacks on regime positions to the southeast of Aleppo, including the areas around Safira[4]. As regime forces have concentrated in order to attempt to move along a limited series of axes, formerly strong positions have become weakened, and insurgent groups have taken this space to launch operations against foundational aspects of regime logistics.

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[1] http://lopforum.tumblr.com/post/67767585746/easternghoutaoffensive

[2] http://eaworldview.com/2013/12/syriaanalysisinsurgentbreakthrougheastghoutaneardamascus/, December 17, 2013

[3] This is a hospital complex north of Aleppo that has been turned into a barracks by regime forces, and that has been under siege since April. http://wikimapia.org/8410556/KindiHospital

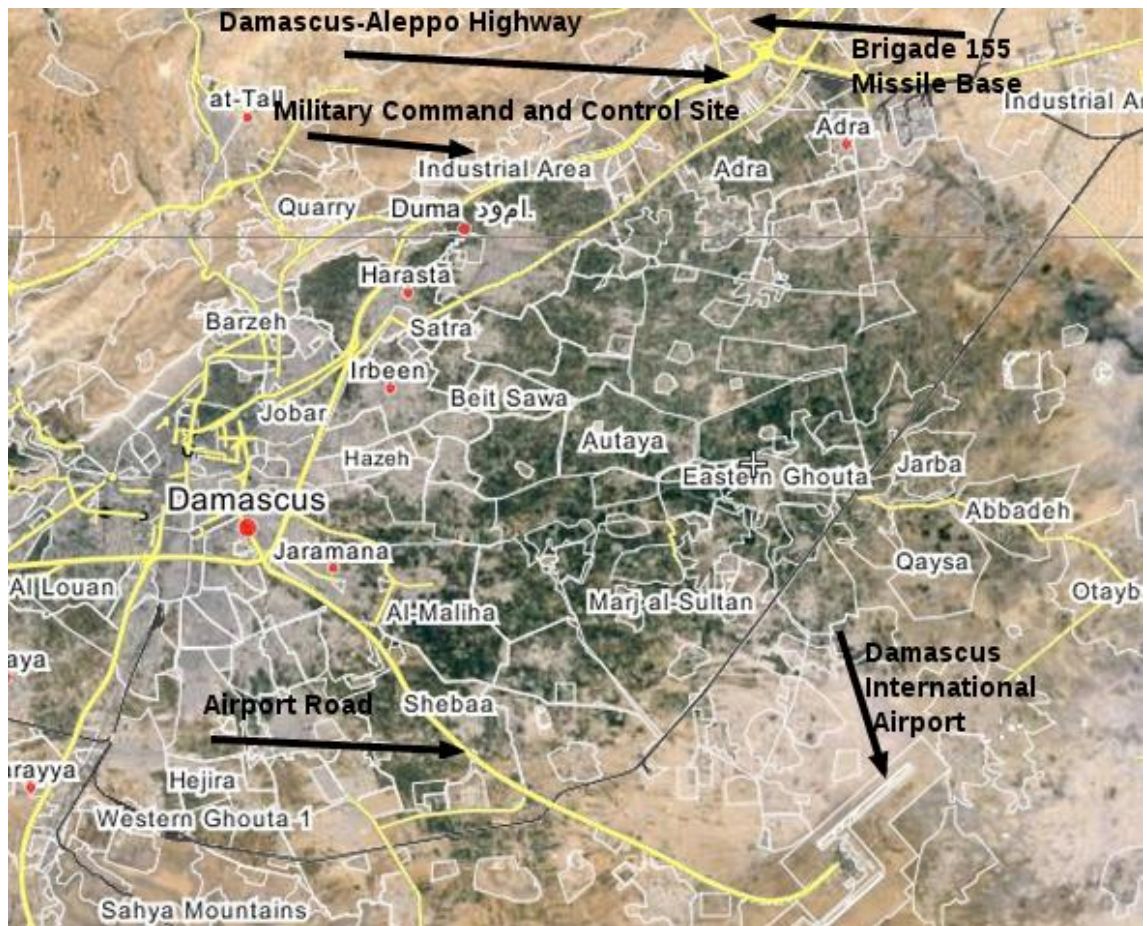[4] http://eaworldview.com/2013/12/syriatodayinsurgentbreakthroughaleppo/, December 21, 2013
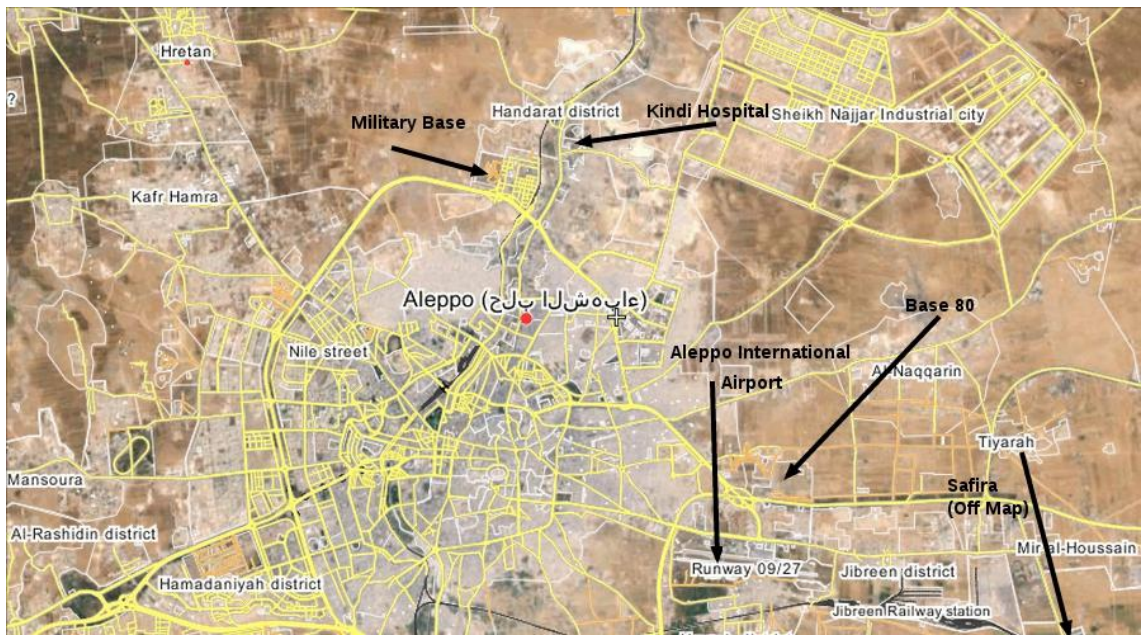
Figure 4: Eastern Ghoutta

Figure 5: Relationship of Kindi Hospital barracks to the Remainder of Aleppo

Insurgent movements to drive regime forces out of long held areas, and the move toward Damascus and Aleppo International Airports, fundamentally threaten regime command, control, and supply logistical capacity. As an ISIW member noted in a post on the Intro To Anarchy blog[5], the airports are largely being used to supply otherwise cut off troops. The military and civilian international airports are essential for ferrying in supplies and troops because the ability of insurgents to continue to attack along the highways (specifically the highway from Damascus to Aleppo), to continue infiltration along the Airport Road outside Damascus, and to sustain attacks in the areas around Aleppo International Airport severely inhibits the regime's ability to resupply or find replacement parts or fuel for their heavy weapons. (Fuel has become more of a concern due to insurgent attacks on oil fields in the eastern deserts, a space where the regime has little presence).

Supply lines are notoriously vulnerable to asymmetric attacks. They are long and tend to cover widely traveled routes, making them readily accessible targets. Regime forces have tended to try to move supplies in large convoys, with a detachment of guard troops, which not only takes troops from other areas but also generates a concentration of troops that, once they travel out of range of rapid reinforcement, become isolated. In concentrating force along limited axes of movement the regime has opened the remainder of the terrain to almost unimpeded insurgent movements against whatever latent regime forces may be left in the area. Increasingly, this is leading to a situation in which these lines of movement, and the forces concentrated along them, are isolated from any reinforcements, as insurgents continually attack behind regime troop movements. As the offensives move forward regime forces find they can move through space when concentrated, even somewhat easily, but are cut off from support to the degree that they lack the force to hold the space they are moving through.

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[5] http://introtoanarchy.blogspot.com/2013/01/onsyrianregimestrategyusdrone.html, January 18, 2013

Mobility and Attrition

A dynamic of expanding crisis is beginning to take on increasing speed. Insurgents have begun to move into the gaps in coverage and have launched operations to threaten important logistical nodes in regime command, control, and supply infrastructure. The regime is facing a conundrum. If they continue to carry forward with the the dynamics of force concentration that are necessary to continue linear movements through space in the attempt to achieve specific material objectives then they are leaving their infrastructural logistics vulnerable, but if they disperse force to protect logistical infrastructure then they are unable to concentrate force enough to reliably move through space. This is a common problem in counterinsurgency campaigns, and regime actions in this scenario would very much constitute counterinsurgency, regardless of doctrinal differences between American military training on the subject and Syrian regime activity.

In Iraq and Afghanistan American forces had to rely on the use of removed fire bases outside of primary areas of conflict in order to limit the number of casualties that would occur if they attempted to maintain a constant presence on the street in a dispersed form. Such presence is necessary to actually occupy space, but it exposes forces to attack. As attacks increased in frequency this tendency became more and more entrenched, and became coupled with a tendency to carry out large force operations, rather than the dispersed operations that a functional counterinsurgency operation would require, of course combined with large scale population displacement and the use of force proxies.[1] This dynamic becomes infinitely more pronounced to the degree that insurgent forces deemphasize frontal attacks in favor of dispersed temporary attacks, preventing occupation forces from launching counterattacks. You cannot attack what is not there, or predict the effects of its movements. When attacks begin to occur across a wide terrain, regardless of frequency, containment of conflict becomes infinitely more difficult.[2]

The primary examples used in the development of counterinsurgency thinking, specifically British operations in Malaya and French operations in Algeria, not only involved mass internment, and the use of torture to get information, but also involved large scale, almost wholesale, population displacement in order to attempt to separate insurgents from the communities where they derived support. The primary fallacy in counterinsurgency thinking within the US military is to assume that there is a difference between insurgents and communities to begin with; in Syria we can clearly see that, in large part, this is not the case and when this is not the case large scale displacement or forced collaboration becomes a strategic necessity. We can see similar dynamics in the interplay between gentrification and community policing within American police methodology.

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[1] Rosen, 2010; This dynamic has been noted in a series of recent works about American counterinsurgency thinking.

[2] TseTung, 1961

Force Concentration and Asymmetry

Within the North American anarchist milieu there has been a running discussion of the strategic possibility of engaging in the preplanned large scale confrontations that exist around summits and conferences. On the one hand, there is the possibility, with concentrations of insurgent forces on the street, and advanced communications and movement, to use pure speed to fragment police operations and still achieve limited and direct objectives, as occurred during the International Monetary Fund demonstrations in April 2009 or during the G20 summit demonstrations in Pittsburgh in September 2009. But, at the same time, it is important to keep in mind two things when analyzing this tendency to rush to the scene of high police concentration. Firstly, these confrontations tend to be very isolated and temporary in their resonance; they occur in a limited period of time, and the conflicts tend to be frontally defined through an anarchistagainstcops dynamic that is difficult to transcend. These limits broke down during the G20, when students began rioting, but that is more an exception than a rule. Given the synthetic aspects of the scenario, the artificially assembled police force, and the necessity of visiting anarchists to leave town after a major concentration, the ability of events like this to generate a concentrated dynamic of accelerating crisis on police logistics in a local and immediate terrain is limited. Secondly, strategically we have to recognize our disadvantage in these situations. There are high concentrations of police forces who have all sorts of fun new toys to play with, toys that they seem to have a sadistic sort of fun shooting in our direction. Even when these dynamics of conflict with the police arise on a local level, such as in Oakland, the manifestations of this conflict tend to flare and dissipate relatively quickly, and converge around focal point events and spaces, such as Oscar Grant demonstrations or Occupy Oakland, where there is a high concentration of police force. Even in places like Seattle and Portland, where there have been direct attacks on police equipment and spaces, these attacks tend to be limited in their consistency, and as such, they can be weathered without a dramatic effect on police logistics.

These attacks point to something interesting however. Hitting soft targets, at times where they are not being protected, begins to generate a dynamic like the one discussed above; at the point where one piece of equipment becomes vulnerable, all the vulnerabilities in police coverage become apparent and exposed. Far from being important on the level of revenge[1], these sorts of actions are important on operational levels, and begin a process of kinetic engagement which has the possibility to have immediate and tactical effects on the terrain of conflict itself.

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[1] The thinking around these actions, from the communiques, seems to be along the lines of rhetorical statement. The importance of these actions, though, exists on an immediate and material level, they have the ability to generate crisis on police operational logistics,and if focused on impacting material logistics, can have even more of an effect.

Negative Space

The narrative of frontal conflict focuses entirely on positive space, or space where kinetic incidents occur, points of clash. It is not focused on negative space, space outside of the limited terrains of frontal clash. This narrative concentrates entirely on "fronts" and "battles" and not on the conditions and dynamics that make these clashes possible, thereby neglecting any condition of possibility of conflict. When we speak of a terrain of conflict we must look beyond the limited geographic spaces in which clashes occur, particularly when attempting to analyze the dynamics of insurgencies. Since asymmetric forces tend not to hold space, in the traditional narrative of "ground taken" the dynamics of negative space, of movement, of speed and logistical rupture become completely obscured. It is not always a question of engagement, but sometimes one of patience, waiting and position. It is not always a question of "winning", but a question of the cost of engagement and the possibility of withdrawal. It is at points of direct confrontation where asymmetric forces are at a primary disadvantage, generating a dynamic of engagement in which, to the degree that it is effective, the presence of insurgents at the point of clash tends to be temporary. Rather, insurgencies flourish when negative space, the space outside of immediate frontal clash, is multiplied and the terrain outside of these limited spaces becomes more conducive to insurrection.

Objectives

Most counterinsurgency campaigns are characterized, especially for outside forces, by the attempt to achieve a series of immediate objectives. In the summit demonstration scenario the only objective is to contain crisis enough to let the summit proceed. In the case of the Syrian regime offensives the question of objectives has yet to really be answered.

How is the regime connecting its movements to some sort of endgame? Jeffery White from the Washington Institute claims, in a piece released in December 18, 2013[1], that regime movements can be understood in relation to three general strategic objectives: to use enough violence to demoralize the community base of the insurgency or drive them out of the country, to deprive insurgent groups of local support in such a way as to avoid international intervention (as they did in the agreement to give up their chemical weapons program to avoid American military air strikes after the August 21st chemical attacks in Eastern Ghoutta), and to maintain the internal narrative that they feed to supporters to maintain their own support base.

Though there is some evidence for the final two posited objectives, the first objective, and the only immediate objective mentioned in White's piece, seems problematic for two primary reasons, and these difficulties point to the weakness of regime logistics. Firstly, as airbases come under attack, and as their axes of material movement become increasingly limited, any attacks on civilian areas require a form of force projection, which, as discussed earlier, requires either a force dispersal which could be catastrophic, if possible at all, or a force concentration which entails expanding the gaps in their coverage of terrain. Secondly, this potentially immediate objective fundamentally undermines the attempts of the state to function in perpetuity in the future. The insurgency has so thoroughly permeated the terrain, eliminating any sort of containment of the conflict, that there are very few areas that have not experienced the impacts of regime military action. This has led to the well publicized refugee crisis, as well as tens of thousands of deaths.

As Sorel discusses[2], conflict never disperses entirely, but rather changes its own terrain by its very occurrence. Say, for the sake of discussion, that the regime "wins" militarily, that insurgent activity decelerates to a manageable and containable level. This in no way eliminates the effects of insurgency, or the causes of insurgency. There would still be billions of dollars of infrastructure to be rebuilt, for a population returning to find that regime troops had burned their homes, killed their families and shelled their cities. Even if this manifestation of armed conflict decelerates, Syria will likely remain a space that is unable to be policed in any coherent way. Earlier manifestations of government repression, specifically the 1982 massacre in Hama, where government troops literally bulldozed whole sections of the city and killed thousands, were spatially limited and did not result in mass resistance across the entirety of the terrain, but were largely limited spatially and did not achieve significant duration or degrading effect on state logistical capacity. Due to regime uses of heavy shelling, air strikes on civilian areas, and wholesale killings, along

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[1] White, 2013, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policyanalysis/view/thesyrianregimesmilitarysolution-tothewar

[2] Sorel, 2004

with the basis of the uprising in mass local demonstrations and the foundations of the armed resistance in early military defections to the uprising, this scenario presents a fundamentally different set of dynamics. Even after past uprisings and government repression the conflict did not dissipate, but remained latent and took on different forms in periods of subterranean organization, organization that set the stage for this most recent explosion. With the rapid acceleration of conflict over a widely dispersed terrain, the latent effects of this uprising, even if we assume that the state can reorganize a logistics of policing that can operate consistently in space for extended periods of time, have fundamentally changed the terrain of conflict within Syria. It remains difficult to imagine a scenario in which the state is able to contain this conflict for any period of time. As a Middle Eastern anarchist going by the name Leila Shrooms argues, even with the intervention of counterrevolutionary jihadist organizations, who are both fighting the regime and other insurgent formations, we cannot ignore the largely selforganized depth of the revolution itself[3], a depth that also ensures the continuation of resistance, regardless of the manifestation or concentration.

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[3] https://tahriricn.wordpress.com/2013/11/28/syriainterviewwithapatrisonthesyrianrevolution/#more1479

Demands and Occupation

Spatial victory, the taking and holding of space, is not a metric that insurgencies can be measured by. Rather we have to begin to discuss regime operational capacity, and the abilities of insurgencies to exhaust it. We can see this in the Qualamoun Mountain offensive, where the regime has taken the towns up the highway itself, but has yet been unable to move up into the mountains or deploy enough force to end the blockades of the highway north of these populated areas.

The deployment of force to take the towns up the highway has opened them up to attack in the Eastern Ghoutta region, where they suffered large numbers of casualties in fighting, largely due to the dispersion of their defenses, and has led to increased vulnerability of forces around Damascus International Airport. These spatial movements have cost the regime logistically, even if space has been taken, leaving them much weaker than before the offensive began, and with a less defined direction of movement. The ability of insurgents to move through space while exacting logistical losses on the regime prevents them from being contained spatially, meaning that space can be taken by the regime, but the cost of this movement and its temporariness puts them in a worse position in relation to the kinetics of the terrain. As the US has seen in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is not a question of whether one can move through space, or take and occupy space, it is a question of the inability to operate in all spaces at once, the logistical toll of attempting to do so, and the strategic costs of not attempting to do so.

The spatialization of state warfare, and the tactics through which it is waged, have become more dispersed and rapid in their movement, but the space still remains one defined by the movements of defined forces.. In some situations, insurgencies too can be discussed as defined forces in frontal conflict with the state. As we can see if we take a look at the Red Army Faction, or the Provisional IRA, these attempts to combat state policing logistics fail to the degree that they become linear and organizationally selfreferential. In other words, to the degree that they carry out a linear struggle between a numerically limited insurgent organization and the state, those within the organization can more easily be identified, targeted, and the organization more easily contained. At the same time the monopolization of struggle within the organization prevents insurgent action from becoming generalized, spreading out through space, and accelerating conflict. This is one of the primary fallacies of the concept of the unitary organization or the unity of the movement. Even in this case, the narrative of frontal confrontation merely implies a dynamic that favors certain tactical decisions, but that is also radically despatialized with respect to the insurgent movement across terrain, in these cases as an underground invisible force. To the degree that insurgencies break out of the containment of political identity, existing organizational forms, and identifiability, the narrative of frontal warfare becomes irrelevant.

Insurgency is not a question of alternate forces occupying space, nor of guerrilla units making demands of the state. but of an occupation's ability to function logistically. The question is not of ground taken, but of the ability to maintain logistical operations within space. This becomes increasingly difficult as forces become limited numerically, limited spatially, and stretched out

across terrain, such as a road. The primary narrative that is not being discussed is one of depth of presence, and concentration of force, and conflict within a space. In other words, "victory"[1] in insurgent situations is not about taking and holding space, the Winter Palace model, but rather about generating dynamics that result in a tactical rupture in police operations in an actual and immediate time and space.

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[1] The term "victory" here merely means the amplification of conflict to the degree that the logistics of policing ruptures, the achievement of some immediate objective. This does not imply some absolute control, utopian situation or the generation of some idealized positivist goal. All attempts to portray insurgency as the attempt to create something, some political form that is supposed to result from insurgency, implies the attempt to define existence materially, and as such, the construction of a dynamic of policing, a dynamic of attempting to end the revolution. This is what we are witnessing in Egypt or Libya now, as well as the same dynamic that generated the Red Terror after the October Revolution.

Uncertainty

While insurgent forces posit uncertainty and limit the projection of regime forces simply through the possibility of their presence, through the very existence of gaps in coverage, regime forces only function to the degree that they can police all moments simultaneously, covering the entirety of terrain. The operative category of analysis is therefore not the momentary movement of insurgent forces out of a space, the "ground taken" framework, but rather a question of whether police and occupation forces are able to maintain logistical operations and force projection in space, or not. It is never a question of whether insurgents hold space.

A misunderstanding of this concept, combined with liberal nonprofits and professional activists demonizing anarchists, generated a fundamental fallacy at the core of Occupy in which camps tended to be protected as some end in themselves, as some space to be held, some form of autonomous zone, even if these camps were constantly infiltrated and completely contained. In the attempt to protect camps and hold space, the camps became elements of selfcontainment that decelerated conflict by their very existence and created zones of easily identifiable and limited conflict mobilization. As such, these camps could be surrounded and evicted, taking the movement with them.

Depth

The continued existence of the insurgency in Syria and the sheer depth of insurgent operations in space indicate the scope of the locally specific support infrastructure that exists to support armed action, an infrastructure which forms the core of the roots of the insurgency but is not primarily made up of armed fighters, an infrastructure that cannot be spoken of as a singular phenomenon. This depth of infrastructure, and the numbers of people involved in sustaining it, as well as the medical clinics, media centers and documentation networks, lead us to question whether the regime ever had control of its populace to begin with, and the inadequacy of the narrative of frontal clash and "ground taken" in this, or any, tactically effective[1] insurgent situation.

As has been widely witnessed in recent insurgencies, insurgent forces tend to be effective to the degree that mobility is maintained, and frontal conflict is avoided. This not only means eliminating the possibility of material counterattack after an operation, which requires retreat, dispersal and a structure of fighting outside of taking space, but also being able to operate without set supply lines and supply depots, all of which one would have to devote resources to defend[2].

This generates a dynamic which is only understandable in reference to the immediate particularities of the terrain in a material sense, rather than through a narrative of force generalization and definition, of frontal warfare.

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[1] TseTung, 1961; Mao argues that insurgencies tend to succeed to the degree that they arise from, and become the terrain of conflict. This is not some discussion of representationalism of conflict by frontal insurgent organizations, as contemporary Maoists tend to argue, but rather a more basic strategic statement; to the degree that insurgent forces can rely on the terrain, and move within the terrain, not only can forces exist without supply lines, and not only can this facilitate a process in which insurgency breaks out of the definition of the organization fighting the state, but also, this facilitates movement in that terrain, and the ability to strike and retreat before counterattack.

[2] Guevara, 2006

Invisibility

This depth is aided by an element of invisibility and the generation of operational uncertainty[1]. Through the generation of uncertainty in movement, channeled through tactics that generally attempt to avoid frontal confrontation, the ability of state forces to coordinate actions in response to insurgent operations becomes almost nonexistent. This invisibility operates in two forms, a physical withdrawal of visual contact from space creating a specifically empty battlefield, and the impossibility of codifying asymmetric operations within conceptual frameworks with any degree of accuracy. This is clear if we take a look at early American operations in Afghanistan in October and November of 2001, before the main force invasion. At this point American operations were largely confined to special forces and CIA based covert operations supported by air power. Special forces operated largely to spot Taliban government logistics bases for the purpose of guiding air strikes, while the CIA, coupled with other elements of American special forces, attempted to use local forces to do most of the fighting on the ground. After the initial round of air strikes, which eliminated most identifiable military infrastructure relatively quickly, identifiable targets became scarce as resistance fighters began to move into the mountains and hide their equipment. The main force invasion was an unintended strategy necessitated by the deficiencies of this mode of operations and the effects of the invisibility of insurgent forces. When invisibility is undercut the attempt to identify the movements of insurgents and contain this potential conflict becomes much easier. American counterinsurgency doctrine is fundamentally built on an assumption of the identifiable separation between insurgent and noninsurgent elements in the disputed terrain, but this is a fallacious understanding.

As can be seen from the examples of Syria, Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq, insurgencies tend to function more effectively to the degree that this separation does not exist, to the degree that insurgency is not an organizationally defined phenomena, but a dispersed and varied dynamic that can be engaged in in innumerable ways, built through complicity on a wide scale. In the tendency to engage in organizationally defined forms of conflict, in which organizations are portrayed as unique sites of political struggle, lines are often posited between organizations and the outside. When insurgencies become operationally selfdefined they tend to operate at a distinct disadvantage tactically, with this disadvantage being built around the identifiability of insurgents and the separation of insurgency from everyday life. In a limited terrain of potential conflict state force can be concentrated on the limited terrains of movement that can be utilized by organizationally defined insurgents, narrowing the terrain that state forces have to project into.

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[1] Scott, 1998

Identifiability

Identifiability also occurs through the ability of regime forces to gather intelligence, meaning that the snitch is not just one who violates trust but is one that is essential to regime/police operations, and also that the tendency to video tape everything in the age of social media becomes a multiplication of regime surveillance capabilities. During the Syrian uprising there has been a tendency to record footage of operations and post it to Youtube within 24 hours of the operation itself. By watching these videos the regime was able to build a more accurate operational map of insurgent movements than they would have otherwise been able to, and they have targeted operations based on this information.

We saw a similar dynamic during Occupy, where socalled independent journalists were so overzealous that everything was put out on Livestream, including general assemblies, footage of actions and so on, usually with no care as to the legal consequences of this footage, what information the police could gather from watching this footage, or the stated desires of some participants to not be filmed. This reached such a point that police infiltration of camps and meetings became irrelevant they could just watch Livestream and get all the information they needed. During the first phase

of the recent insurgent operations in Eastern Ghoutta a blackout was adhered to by insurgent groups and media activists in order to deprive the regime of this sort of operational information. The withdrawal of information, and concealment of insurgent forces and operational dynamics, is not only a function of clandestinity and a recognition of the risks of fighting, but also a process of eliminating the operational definability of insurgent conflict itself.

Conclusions

These are the problems that insurgencies present, and the problems that insurgencies leverage to the degree that they are successful. In deepening space, connecting to the immediacy of terrain in a material moment, and obscuring the frontal form of conflict, insurgents are able to multiply the space that must be covered, from streets and roads, open space and towns in which a regime can fight isolated insurgents, to all terrain, every room, every family. This situation of absolute potential conflict raises the stakes of simple regime movements, because attacks can occur in any space, and be undertaken by anyone within that space. This uncertainty is not due to the potential of some final apocalyptic blow that could destroy the regime instantly. Rather, the situation is fundamentally connected to the space of movement itself, the immediacy of the space itself.

The tendency to understand conflict as a frontal clash of two fairly similar forces infects not only the media narrative around the conflict in Syria, but also the strategic and tactical discourse in the North American radical circles. There is a tendency to discuss what "we" should do, how "we" should engage, which not only assumes that the dynamics of conflict are able to be understood on the level of political identity, but also posits a framework of conflict based in an isolated frontal clash with the state. This model is deeply rooted in the ways that we work through questions of strategy within radical movements, and has been since before the Russian revolution.

By using this framework we make two fundamental mistakes. First, we become a limited, identifiable, and therefore containable force that exists at a distinct disadvantage, at this moment and in most geographic locations, in relation to the ability of the state to confront it. This limits the terrain of conflict, and puts us at a further disadvantage. This was the fundamental problem of tactical thinking in Occupy. The attempt to define the movement in a singular way was coupled with the attempt to hold containable and limited spaces to generate a dynamic in which all the inertia of action was eliminated, in most places, almost entirely. Secondly, we reinforce this isolated frontal clash, and thus our own tactical disadvantages, through a mentality based on the implicit assumption that radical "movements" are the sole site of political struggle. Not only does this obscure the subterranean forms of struggle that exist on the plane of everyday life, from worker absenteeism to theft and outright resistance, and dismisses these forms of organic struggle as "apolitical", but separates the dynamics of insurgency from the very terrain that asymmetric forces rely on for survival, support, invisibility and effectiveness.

It is important to begin to think of what "we" are doing in a fundamentally different light, one connected to terrain, one that acknowledges the disadvantages that we face in most situations, the tactical adjustments that have to be made, and the importance of internal discipline and strategic focus in being able to do this. This means reimagining the role of the insurgent, from one that is based in winning frontal conflict, to one that is based on antagonism, on shifting terrain, on expanding conflict and exhausting the logistical capacity of the state to police anything.

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