

OTHER BOOTS ON THE GROUND

Before any ground forces are committed to the operation against the Islamic State, C6ISR forces – elying on a proper integration of technology, commando, special operations units and covert intelligence services – will constitute the interim phase in the use of force. Exclusive article

By Brig. Gen. (ret.) Gal Hirsch

The doubts about committing ground forces to an operation present a difficult dilemma to the decision makers. Traumatic past experiences, concerns about public criticism, moral-ethical dilemmas and the fear of unexpected developments lead to reluctance and eventually to the preference of other tactics. Apparently, in this day and age, the ground maneuver option will be last on the scale of priorities for the use of force. Bitter experience has taught us about the development that repeats itself in ground operations with regard to the operational aspect as well as with regard to the consciousness aspect. Concepts like "The Lebanese Mire", "Vietnamization", "Bloodshed" and so forth convey the sense of failure experienced when the maneuvering momentum has been blocked, the advance and assault battles have evolved into defensive, retreat and delay battles and the stage of holding on to the captured territory and remaining in it has turned the hunter into the game, the attacker into the defender and the threatening element into a cluster of targets. The narrative changes accordingly: the heroic-supportive attitude is replaced by a critical attitude and patience gradually

diminishes. The desire to "deliver a decisive blow and get out" is not usually practicable. The diplomatic accomplishment is the outcome of the military move. It requires that the territory be maintained until the situation has been stabilized and resolved, and the process of remaining in the captured territory exacts a bloody toll and creates a conscious sense of failure.

The US offensive during Operation Iraqi Freedom ended with the toppling of the statues in Baghdad, a "victorious image" and a sense of success and achievement. Immediately thereafter came the defensive presence stage. The advantages of the local opponent emerged and the regular "standard" military found it difficult to cope with terrorism and guerrilla tactics.

US presence in Vietnam is perceived as a period of bloody failure. Operation Peace for Galilee (1982) started out as a legitimate heroic move, but evolved into the Lebanon War – 18 years of anti-guerrilla warfare in the Security Belt were etched into Israeli national consciousness as "Wallowing in the Lebanese Mire". The accomplishments of the attack stage were eroded during the period of



● controlling the captured territory. The legitimacy batteries, both domestic and foreign, are depleted in view of the cost, and if the diplomatic accomplishment is not consequential and immediate – history might repeat itself.

The use-of-force dilemma currently arises once again: the Islamic State organization (ISIS) has been identified as a global threat – it is no longer regarded as merely a local or regional problem. The forces of the free world, the superpowers and their partners, operate against ISIS through various coalitions and focus on air strikes. ISIS is a stealthy opponent, generating a small signature. As a guerrilla organization, it is highly proficient in terrorism tactics. Uprooting ISIS necessitates a ground operation and apparently, the superpowers have thus far relied on Kurdish and Iraqi forces (or on some other Arab forces) as the future of the ground maneuver against it.

About the Ground Move

An aerial operation has the nature of a single decisive blow, a "knockout" of sorts and creates an illusion of action (a lot of noise, documented bombing operations, a high media profile), along with lower levels of friction and risk.

The superiority of the "intelligence/air" concept reigns supreme in most modern armed forces and their power build-up efforts are diverted in that direction primarily. Long-term investments channeled in this direction have inflicted an inherent damage on the ground forces and have led to the loss of significant ground superiority. Quite naturally, this raises concerns about limited capabilities opposite the challenging opponent of this day and age.

Effective overbalance, as per its classic-symbolic meaning, can only be achieved through the deployment of forces generating a sufficiently high signature on the ground, in a visible manner and while actually dominating key areas, routes, observation points, command and control centers and so forth.

A thorough elimination of enemy infrastructures necessitates combing (through the infrastructures), fighting



Intelligence gathering (Photo: Meir Azuley)

and direct engagement using fire. These axioms are valid with regard to symmetrical opponents and most certainly with regard to asymmetrical opponents. Only an approach of systemic dismantling (as was demonstrated during Operation Defensive Shield in 2002, for example) can uproot the opponent from his infrastructures in the built-up area, tear him away from the cover provided by the civilian population and pull him out of the subterranean medium and his fortified localities.

The "Western" approach aspires for a prompt settlement at the conclusion of every war, and does not take kindly to prolonged operations and to a "routine of combat". It imposes time limits on the conduct of operations and leads to an on-going quest for "exit stations". A ground operation has an on-going nature, and a high level of friction is one of its characteristics. The unwillingness to "sustain" over a long period of time is highly typical of contemporary leadership. Concerns about domestic public criticism are much in evidence, with regard to being drawn into entanglement that leads to massive casualties, to the commitment of more and more forces and to the familiar claims by various segments of the public, according to which "this is not our war."

Neither the ground maneuver nor the aerial maneuver are surgical and both find it difficult to be selective. In air strikes, accuracy can be improved but effectiveness – not necessarily, especially when the

enemy is fortified and benefits from the cover provided by human shields – the local population. When methodical dismantling is required on the ground and under the ground, the result will be a high level of friction. Guerrilla warfare and terrorism will aspire to push and channel enemy military forces into the multidimensional environment: the populated, built-up, afforested, dense, mountainous areas and the subterranean medium – all those spaces where maneuverability is restricted and the advantages of regular military forces are seriously impaired. Damage inflicted on the civilian population can undermine the legitimacy of the operation, both domestically and externally. The opponent fights from within the civilian population and inflicts casualties on the attacker. Under such circumstances, massive forces must be used in order to minimize casualties and accomplish the mission. Massive employment of fire for extrication purposes or for air support or a highly destructive engineering operation become an asset for the enemy's consciousness warfare campaign and a burden for the rapidly-depleting "legitimacy battery".

Although the ground maneuver is a high-friction process, contrary to air strikes, it may enable relative selectivity and minimize the damage inflicted on uninvolved parties. Only the actual entry into the buildings, fortifications and tunnels can eliminate the enemy's warfighters, infrastructures

● and equipment in a pin-point, focused manner. Combined with specialized skills and suitable equipment, the damage inflicted on uninvolved parties may be minimized as well.

In the face of terrorism and guerrilla, there is no substitute for ground operations and any other solution is nothing but a mechanism for 'buying time' and for putting on a temporary show of "fighting". Understandably, suitable operational preparations and deployment are required, along with the advance preparation of public opinion and the promotion of diplomatic processes, but the tangible danger of Jihadist terrorism generates the desire to present accomplishments quickly, preferably as early as during the interim phase, while engaging in stand-off strikes and before any ground forces have been committed to battle. The interim phase, in this scenario, can consist of committing C6ISR formations to battle.

C6ISR

In my previous article (Israel Defense Issue #16, October 2013), I described the development of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) in the early 1980s. This revolution brought into the world the formula we know as C4ISR, where the four "Cs" stand for Command, Control, Communications & Computing. More recently, there are many who have accepted the notion according to which a fifth "C", for cyber warfare, should be added to this formula. The "I" reflects the central role played intelligence; the "S" reflects the importance of surveillance and the "R" stands for reconnaissance.

This formula was appropriate for the needs of those days – the destruction of enemy armed forces (which consisted primarily of armored formations) and the elimination of the threat of an invasion. The contemporary opponent is different. Regular armed forces currently face cells, networked organizations and armies of terrorism, guerrilla and insurgency. It is time to agree on the next Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA2) and revise the formula accordingly.

Operations always strive for symmetry, and in the face of asymmetrical threats,

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gap-bridging capabilities are developed (for example, the Iron Dome system, developed as a solution to the high-trajectory threat). Prompt adaptation is required and relevant operational solutions must be developed afresh. It is appropriate to combine technological opportunities with an organizational-conceptual revision. In the face of the unique opponent we should develop unique organizations – "formations" based primarily on an effective combination between technology and suitable forces.

The official-state-military version of insurgency, guerrilla and terrorism is special forces, commando units and covert services. They provide the appropriate solution for the type of opponent we now face. These elements may operate in accordance with and by virtue of a unique doctrine and dedicated legislation and adopt changes and adaptations relatively easily. This is the effective solution for the characteristics and pace of the contemporary opponent.

Thus far, special operations forces were committed to battle in order to support the primary maneuver, fill gaps and execute strategic missions. According to the new concept, they will constitute the primary maneuvering element, bringing to bear many of the capabilities of the "standard" military, and even more. A substantial change will be required with regard to the operational manifestation of the modes of battle, operational doctrines and combat techniques. New operational patterns will have to be created. These will be flexible, creative and technology-intensive, and the maneuvers of the specialist forces will include commando operations on a large

scale.

Accordingly, the sixth "C" that should be added to the existing formula is the "C" that stands for Commando! Hence, the appropriate forces for the operations of this generation are C6ISR forces.

C6ISR Forces as an Interim Phase

Special operations forces are, first and foremost, groups of special individuals, possessing unique strengths and resilience as well as unusual training. They benefit from high-standard selection and a particularly high degree of combat competence. They have at their disposal the latest cutting-edge weapon systems and most importantly – they possess a different, adaptive and creative character.

Weather and topographic challenges or the toughest opponent – these are no obstacle for the special operations forces. It is their natural environment and they are built to cope, to initiate, to adapt and to create something out of nothing – new ideas, new solutions, even if they are not exactly by-the-book. These forces are, indeed, what their title implies – "special".

Special forces are highly competent in precision and accuracy using state-of-the-art technology, but can also import into the theater of operations massive firepower (in the form of air support and other types of fire support). The need to be able to handle hostage situations provides them with selective capabilities and a selective approach to planning and execution, as a minimum requirement and as a mindset in every mission and on every battlefield.

Special operations are normally surgical, precise and meticulously planned, so they do not include the employment of statistical weapons. This experience enables planning and execution of limited ground maneuvers characterized by selective, precise, cautious fighting, with minimum damage inflicted on the civilian population, with carefully calculated friction and with a minimum of errors.

The close, year-round cooperation with all of the national (and even some international) intelligence agencies and with the various ●



Special forces training (Photo: IDF)

defense/security authorities, enable these forces to benefit from readily-available intelligence of the highest quality. This enables "special" maneuvers to be different and unorthodox – they may not necessarily involve massive firepower and intensive maneuvering, but rather focused maneuvering, high-precision fire, infiltration, stealth and lethality based on the other elements of the formula (C6ISR). The support provided by these elements enable the special force to be limited in size but still highly effective.

As far as policy and official statements are concerned, the dispatching of specialist forces is not conceived as a full-fledged ground maneuver, and consequently we hear about occasional commando operations alongside the air strikes. In some cases, these operations enhance the effectiveness of the air strikes, but they also signify that risk management allows special operations and from a public point of view, it is "OK" to employ such forces.

"Special Maneuvers"

In their present format, C6ISR forces do not possess the critical mass required for a ground maneuver – certainly not for methodical dismantling of the enemy. Their activity is normally characterized by a small signature, but the assumption according to which special forces mean small units is no longer valid. Operational reality and the nature of the opponent call for a revision of the force build-up process in any modern military organization. What we need are larger formations of small, high-quality forces. The combat teams and operational structure may remain small and intimate, but the scope of the

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Order of Battle should increase substantially. In their new, revised format, these forces will be able to operate effectively on the ground, to dismantle enemy infrastructures, to create an effect of presence and position themselves with a high-enough signature, but in their own unique way.

Such forces, even when they operate as larger-than-usual formations, will still be able to change their form, to change their modes of operation and avoid becoming targets – prey for guerrilla and terrorism.

But more forces and larger formations are not the only issue here. Along with the build-up of enough C6ISR formations, the form of maneuvering should be adapted along with the typical envelope of these forces with regard to the aspects of intelligence, C2, logistics and technology. The solid, extensive support that is the hallmark of special operations is intended to secure, support and backup a small force executing a unique, dedicated mission. Maneuvers by special forces intended to take over, search, dismantle and destroy enemy compound will require a different envelope, better adapted to the larger scope but still possessing the same ability to secure the survivability of the forces and provide a high-quality C2 standard, as is currently the norm in the conduct of special operations.

C6ISR formations operating continuously on the ground could help resolve the dilemma world leaders face with regard to initiating ground operations in crisis areas. They could

constitute the interim phase and a strategic bridging element between stand-off strikes and a full-scale ground operation. Under-governed frontiers currently characterize the current theater of operations in the Middle East and provide a natural environment for special forces. These forces will execute missions that are typical of ground military forces, but using different methods, state-of-the-art technology and small teams. Their human advantage, the quality of the warfighters and commanders, their creative ability and the ability to improvise and adapt solutions to complex situations – all of these elements will enable them to err less, to operate with a "surgical" mindset and accomplish the missions assigned to them. C6ISR forces will get the job done in their own way, even if that way cannot currently be found in the doctrine manuals – these forces are adaptable and know how to invent new combat doctrines in the field and write them into the manuals later. ☺

The author of this article, Brig. Gen. (ret.) Gal Hirsch, is a co-owner and the chairman of the board of Defensive Shield. In the past, some of the positions he served in included commander of the IAF Shaldag Unit, commander of the IDF Benjamin Brigade during the fighting in the Judea & Samaria region, J-3 of IDF Central Command during Operation Defensive Shield and the building of the Israeli West Bank Barrier, commandant of the IDF Officer Training School and commander of the IDF Galilee Division (91st Division) during the Second Lebanon War. As a reservist, he served as deputy commander of the IDF Depth Corps HQ.

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