The US Military in Iraq and the IDF in Judea and Samaria

Giora Segal

Introduction

In recent years the phenomenon of war has been commonly divided into symmetrical warfare and asymmetrical warfare. Notwithstanding new semantics, however, there is nothing new about this division,[1] which represents the two principal interrelated components of war[2] and therefore demands ongoing professional study.[3] Confrontations between countries are liable to develop into symmetrical conventional wars, and at the same time or in their wake, a confrontation with asymmetrical properties can ensue. The transition from fighting a conventional enemy to fighting terror and guerilla tactics is a direct and natural transition.

For some years there has been an understanding in the Middle East that a limited confrontation takes place alongside and pursuant to the conventional war.[4] Armed forces must prepare to cope with the new aspects of this phenomenon, both in terms of force buildup and deployment. What is especially new in this phenomenon is that force deployment of this nature by non-state organizations and the challenge they pose to democratic countries is growing. The term "a terrorilla army"[5] describes both the operational ability of a terror organization to be a quasi-military organization, and the difficulty democratic countries face in coping with it in military terms, as these organizations operate from within civilian populations and use them as human shields.

Against this background, this essay examines some selected issues to compare the deployment of the United States armed forces in Iraq since 2003 and IDF deployment in Judea and Samaria.

Col. (ret.) Giora Segal is a research associate in the Military and Strategic Affairs Program at INSS.

The Background to the United States Fighting in Iraq

After occupying Iraq in 2003, the US instituted military rule. The US strategy in Iraq, which was devised after the occupation, determined that control must be built, strengthened, and transferred to a local Iraqi administration under the right conditions:[6] a degree of governmental stability, a low level of violence, and the basis for a reasonable civilian life. Achieving these conditions is necessary throughout Iraq, down to the level of the local authority. Three operational components were derived from this strategy:

a. Economics: international humanitarian aid, aid to develop regional economic infrastructures, resource management, and establishment of an economic growth capability.

b. Government: restructuring the Iraqi administration, institutionaliz-ing and strengthening self-government, and developing a functional capability in civilian areas and social rehabilitation.

c. Defense: reducing the level of violence by means of a comprehensive and direct campaign by the United States against terror, building up the Iraqi military, forging local and regional police forces, improving the personal security of civilians, enhancing public security, and safeguarding civilian life.

The tensions between the national political system in Iraq, especially the Shiite dominance balanced by the Sunnis and Kurds in the representative central government in Baghdad, and the local community politics based on religious, party, and tribal allegiance are a springboard for violence. Thus violence in Iraq, which comprises the overall threat, is inter- and intra-community violence and violence based on "resistance." After General Petraeus was appointed commander of the American forces in Iraq in the spring of 2007, the US adopted the "surge" strategy, significantly boosted their forces in Iraq, and started concerted military operations designed to inflict heavy damage on terror elements and neutralize their treat.[7] The essence of this strategy was to infuse the field with military force and conduct an intensive operation against the armed uprising as well as an extensive action within the civilian population in cooperation with all the available security organizations.[8] From June 2007, four months after the start of this campaign, there was a marked decline in inter-community violence.

From the United States' point of view the initial results of the surge strategy[9] were successful, both as there were very few fighting incidents in the operational areas of responsibility, and because the security stability in the areas under US responsibility improved appreciably. In addition, the civilian rehabilitation of these areas greatly boosted cooperation between the Iraqi civilians and the Americans. These developments created a sense that the situation was proceeding in the right direction and that the surge strategy and all that it entails (improvement in the local infrastructures following work by American rehabilitation teams, local economic improvement, and other civilian improvement components at local town, village, or municipal levels where the military activity has been successful) will ultimately further the possibility of withdrawal of American forces from Iraq.

Nevertheless, the tensions still exist,[10] as control of the area by large US and Iraqi forces under the aegis of the Americans has remained a crucial condition of maintaining the achievements of the surge. Transferring US forces to Afghanistan, which was initially at the expense of the forces in Iraq, necessitated significantly increasing and boosting the Iraqi forces in cooperation with the United States, to make the surge achievements possible.

In January 2010, the Americans decided to attempt a similar strategy in Afghanistan against the Taliban and al-Qaeda, reflected in President Obama's decision in December 2009 to add 30,000 troops to the force in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, violent incidents continue in Iraq, and although the intensity has decreased, the potential for their extensive renewal exists.

The way to attain sustainable achievements requires the ability to transfer the authority resulting from occupation of the territory to local forces that can impose the necessary order. As of now, this has yet to be achieved in Iraq, and it is not clear if withdrawal will generate regional stability. Large scale terror is liable to develop in a place where there is no regional stability or a reasonable means of administration.

Iraq and the West Bank: Mapping the Threat

For some years the Judea and Samaria area has been the IDF's main arena for combating threats of terror and urban guerilla warfare (as opposed to threats of high trajectory mortar and rocket fire from the Gaza arena).

In the Judea and Samaria arena the IDF has faced the threat of terror warfare in a long and ongoing campaign of attrition. In the past this was reflected in direct attacks on military forces and administrative civilian operational elements, and in indirect systemic damage to governmental and administration systems, civilian life, the security of the Israeli and Palestinian populations, and the pursuit of normal life in the region. The level of this threat has lessened significantly since Operation Defensive Shield in 2002 and the subsequent years of the anti-terror campaign in Judea and Samaria, though the potential exists and is kept at a low level through continuous operational activity by Central Command and the IDF's security organizations.

In Iraq the threat is actualized by terrorist elements and by criminal organizations that damage the fabric of governmental life. This threat is no different from that described in the principles that T. E. Lawrence formulated in the 1920s not far from Iraq while combating guerilla fighters in the Middle East.[11] The difference between the challenge that Lawrence talked about and the challenge the Americans now face in Iraq lies in the operational and military technological capabilities acquired by irregular forces.

An initial observation suggests that the tactical threats in the West Bank and in Iraq are similar and incorporate the following common elements:

a. Direct guerilla and terror attacks on military forces and civilian systems
b. Use of snipers in urban areas and open areas
c. Fire from ambush in urban areas and on traffic routes
d. High trajectory mortar and rocket fire
e. Suicide bombers, attacks on guerilla units, outposts, and roadblocks
f. Car bombs in combined attacks
g. Attempts to kidnap soldiers, civilians, and employees of government and civilian support organizations

There is also much similarity between the urban domains where some of the warfare occurs. In-depth knowledge of the urban domain – i.e., knowledge of the older parts of typical Middle East cities, e.g., the "kasbah," understanding of the population, familiarity with the use of underground areas as a significant operational domain in the urban space

– enables terror and guerilla activists to establish an effective operational capability.

Fighting in Judea and Samaria vs. Fighting in al-Anbar

Examination of the fighting against terror and guerilla activities in Judea and Samaria and in western Iraq in 2003-2009 is intriguing and generates important conclusions.[12] In September 2007, as part of the surge strategy operations, General Allen's division, which was stationed in western Iraq,[13] was given the following mission: carry out combat operations against the guerilla and terror activities to achieve security and civilian stability; overcome el-Qaeda in the region; neutralize the popular uprising in the district; formulate internal security capabilities; establish a local administrative capability; and enable economic development, in collaboration with the leadership in al-Anbar and together with the US provincial reconstruction rehabilitation (PRT) team, in order to allow the transfer of governmental and security authority to the local administration and to the renewed Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). The mission will be completed when regional stability is achieved; a time frame was not stipulated.

The district of al-Anbar is bordered on the west by Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, and on the east by central Iraq and the Tigris-Euphrates basin. The size of the area is the equivalent of Britain. The main cities there are Rahava, Hith, al-Asad, Rithba, Fluja, and Ramadi, all with over 200,000 residents and surrounded by many other towns in Iraq's western desert. The total population of the area is around 1.5 million inhabitants. Responsibility for this enormous area rested with a divisional command with aerial and special forces capabilities, and two BCT American structured regiments.[14] The principal enemy named by the Americans was al-Qaeda.

The assault operations focused mainly on the cities. The operations in the area were principally arrest and interrogation operations, targeted killings, raids, and obstruction and screening operations. The use of military intelligence, HUMINT, VISINT, and SIGINT, and the use of trained dogs were essential and hence widespread. The urban area brigades operated in a number of ways, first, in offensive and defensive operations. The main effort was in offensive operations, with the defensive operations designed to protect the forces and permanent

bases. The second element was the use of an established Iraqi force and the building of an Iraqi force to collaborate with the Americans on control and enforcement of regional security. In the future this force can assume responsibility for the entire region. Meanwhile the American forces aimed to achieve stability by addressing the needs of the population on all physical infrastructure levels. The US premise was that addressing the needs of the Iraqi population at the regime level and the level of the local authority will allow a reasonable degree of normal life and will divert support away from terror. The idea was based on regional rehabilitation.

With regard to offensive activity, the IDF's activity in Judea and Samaria has similar attributes to those employed in the al-Anbar district. These include an offensive effort against terror, a defensive effort centered on operational military bases and Israeli centers of population, and a focused civilian effort to maintain the civilian infrastructure and fabric of life of the Palestinian civilians in the West Bank.

The principal differences are in the tactical modes of operation, and in the intelligence context and inter-organizational cooperation. Here one can identify a significant difference in the ability to enjoy in-depth cooperation between non-military organizations, which in the American context include intelligence organizations and the civilian support system, and in the IDF context include the GSS, the Civil Administration, and so on. In contrast with events in Iraq, where US intelligence activity does not involve the Iraqis with regard to the use of unique intelligence resources such as SIGINT and HUMINT, inter-organizational cooperation enables the IDF to continue to thwart terror activity. In addition, in Judea and Samaria an attempt has been made to build up local capabilities (police, PA security forces) to handle law and order on a local level. A Palestinian force trained by the Americans is operational in the Jenin, Nablus, and Ramallah districts, and its operational area and capabilities are slated for expansion. The removal of most of the roadblocks in Judea and Samaria, the withdrawal of most of the IDF force from the cities, and the open borders with Jordan allow impressive economic development.[15]

Management of criminal activity in Judea and Samaria is different from its counterpart in al-Anbar. Concurrent with the tactical operational activity in the Anbar district, the Americans engaged in building a strong Iraqi police force based on the understanding that the criminal organizations are strongly connected to terror activity and that the local

forces should handle the criminal organizations. The aim of building a police force was to transfer control of criminal issues to it after the withdrawal of the American forces. Keeping law and order was also a fundamental goal. Thus, the principles were:

a. Establishing Iraqi units against insurgents outside the cities
b. Establishing strong police forces in the towns
c. Deploying Iraqi units along the borders with Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia
d. Setting up a regional division comprising two or three American regional regiments, which carry out offensive and defensive activities and civil rehabilitation

Herein, therefore, lies a fundamental difference. In Iraq the general intent is to build up an army and security forces with skills and a range of abilities, while activity in Judea and Samaria is oriented towards developing forces for maintaining law and order that will be able to prevent terror (with Israel's support). Israel does not have any intention of developing state military abilities in the Palestinian Autonomy.

The Americans' main success in this region is combating al-Qaeda, though stabilization of the situation depends on continuous activity. This is likewise true for the Judea and Samaria arena. The recovery ability of terror in al-Anabar is similar to its potential to reemerge in Nablus, Ramallah, and Jenin. In both cases it appears that the preventive factor with the greatest impact is the presence and activity in the field and the urban areas where the civilian population is the main focus.

Accordingly, retaining a force's ongoing presence, maintaining initiative and an offensive approach, identifying operational opportunities, and conducting military operational activity supported by the police and civilian security elements are critical elements of success. The situation of Judea and Samaria is similar to al-Anbar in qualitative terms. In other words, while the IDF and the local police forces in the Palestinian areas, including the security systems there, do not work together, they coordinate their work in the complex West Bank reality. The result in terms of civilian life in the field is similar: a degree of stability and of law and order makes it possible to maintain the fabric of civilian life.

Urban Fighting in Baghdad

In addition to examining these principles of warfare, it is worthwhile looking at the elements of warfare in the urban domains. The typical mission of a division responsible for AO in Baghdad in the surge[16] days was to conduct a combined arm battle and carry out various kinds of military operations; and to provide security to the population, by overcoming the guerilla and terror elements and the criminal organizations in the division's area of responsibility and by reducing the activity of local cult or religious uprising units while enhancing the operational abilities of the Iraqi army and the local government capabilities. The divisional commander claims that this is not just a matter of combating terror and guerilla warfare but also a matter of complete municipal authority operations. As such, the divisional commander is responsible for many divergent elements, from various divisions, including Iraqi forces with a complex civil administration, to various kinds of intelligence units.

The Americans conducted campaigns with tactical properties similar to those used by the IDF in Judea and Samaria, though of longer duration. For example, operations involving entry into the northwestern part of Baghdad and beyond, from one target to another in the city's neighborhoods, continued over a period of several weeks. This is how an operational capability is formed, familiarization is achieved, and a large amount of knowledge of the area is accumulated. However, a significant difficulty results from the fact that a large part of the fighters and the chain of command are replaced every six months. This turnover impedes preservation of the operational knowledge over time.

The operational method in northwest Baghdad was based on operations in the field, as far as possible maintaining operational freedom of activity, and offensive campaigns with direct contact against terror elements, i.e., actual warfare. At the same time an operational effort was conducted with cooperation with local sheikhs. Cracks between organizations were exploited to procure collaborators, and by means of continuous payment, they were included as "salary recipients" of the US army. Activity of the ISF in close coordination with the Americans continued.

It is interesting to review the special campaigns in the divisional domain. They were conducted separately from the divisional command and control, and in many cases these operations were difficult to integrate

in the division's activity. Frequently there is a conflict of interest between the method of operation of the divisional commander and the nature of activity of the special operations. This is a consequence of the difference between the missions. The effort of the special operations must derive from insight into the operational environment of the division; if not, campaigns that go wrong can destroy long months of success of combat cooperation with locals. This resulted, for example, from extreme use of force in special operations by the Americans without the need, from their point of view, for coordinating with the divisional parties.

The use of force by the special forces in their operational arena is liable to be aggressive, utilizing all the abundant operational ability they have at their disposal. An operation can cause the deaths of collaborators or their families, due to the special force's lack of knowledge of the environment in which they are fighting, and local connection and cooperation efforts built up over several months may be wasted. Even though the inter-organizational cooperation and principles of command and control of the IDF were devised in order to avoid similar occurrences, this danger exists in Judea and Samaria too, and care should be taken to ensure that this lesson has been learned and applied.

Another important lesson learned by the Americans relates to dividing the region into regimental areas of activity. In their eyes this is one of the main keys to success, and therefore constant activity is maintained in the regimental fighting arena, including searches for hostile terrorist activity infrastructures, targeted killings, arrests, and interrogations, based on unified command and regimental coordination. Theses include combat operations − various types of ambushes, arrests and interrogations, specific attacks, targeted attacks, damaging the chain of command of the organizations in the urban area, psychological warfare campaigns with rumors and practical campaigns that support the rumors, use of SIGINT and HUMINT, and use of local collaborators that are suitable for a specific area. In this way the regiments also became a type of spatial regiment.

This analysis generates a number of insights in the context of the IDF:
a. Presence in the urban arena and ongoing familiarization with it generate an operational freedom of activity that allows greater potency against terror elements over time. The IDF has to find the best way to preserve this operational freedom of activity in the West

Bank cities, in order to preserve the ability to harm terror elements and undermine threats to regional stability.

b. The centers of operational knowledge that specialize in the area should be preserved as much as possible in the IDF, and as far as possible severing the knowledge chain by the frequent mobility of commanders should be avoided. The need to scale forces in other operational arenas (in Gaza and on the northern border, in particular following the Second Lebanon War) which leads to forces being moved around necessitates examining how it will be possible to continue to preserve the know how in the best possible way.

c. Special campaigns must be coordinated and linked on two levels: the first is on the level of operational coordination, meaning that the regional division commander has to be involved in the special operations in order to ensure that they are synchronized with the other divisional activity; and the second relates to the need to ensure that the objectives of the special campaign are compatible with the long term operational insights formed in the regional division.

d. The independence granted to the spatial American regiment is not suitable for application in Judea and Samaria. In Judea and Samaria the area is divided into regiments, which for the purpose of carrying out their missions mainly depend on the spatial division, and enjoy limited overall operational independence. Thus in many cases, an operational activity takes place in an area that does not come under the authority of the "spatial" divisional commander.

Conclusion

In the last few years of fighting and in particular since Operation Defensive Shield, the Americans have learned a lot from Israel and vice versa. Baghdad is a model for operational learning about warfare in a city, and the conclusions from the fighting in Baghdad can be applied to cities in Judea and Samaria. The reverse is also true.

An analysis of the situation in Iraq of 2009 concluded: "The semblance of stability in Iraq throughout the spring of 2009 and anticipation of the pending withdrawal of US combat forces have created a tendency among Americans to label the Iraq War a 'victory.' Such thinking overlooks the sectarian chaos of 2006 and 2007 and downplays the fact that Iraq's explosive internal disputes are largely held in check by the immediate

presence of US combat power."[17] Indeed, the overall connection between fighting and stabilization activities is worthy of examination. The American view and the British view of the need for civilian security stabilization operations result from their understanding of the population as the focus in the fighting arena against terror and guerilla activities. Stabilization operations should be researched for operational use by the IDF.

The stability achieved in Judea and Samaria since Operation Defensive Shield and the campaign against terror, which has been conducted continuously with varying degrees of intensity, persist only because the IDF is present there and undertakes extensive operational activity. The operational similarity is clear and therefore affords an important insight. A significant reduction in the IDF forces in Judea and Samaria is liable to return the region to the difficult security reality that existed before Operation Defensive Shield. The State of Israel must consider that in any future political agreement.

Notes

1   Yehoshafat Harakbi, *War and Strategy* (Tel Aviv: Maarachot, 1992), pp. 436-37. On symmetry and asymmetry in attrition see the example of the Boer War, 1899-1902.
2   Werner Hahlweg, *Clausewitz and Modern Strategy*, ed. Michael I Handel (London: Frank Cass, 1986), pp. 127-33. This article indicates that Clausewitz also related to guerilla warfare in his language as a small war, although the context of his reference was initially the fall of Prussia in 1806-7 and later the fighting in Russia in 1812. In a lecture series at a German war college in 1810-11, Clausewitz addressed this topic and defines the phenomenon and the connection between all the components of the phenomenon of war. In other words there is nothing new in "small" wars and in their juxtaposition to "big" wars, and the connection should be studied with regard to both force buildup and force operation in this kind of hybrid confrontation.
3   Giora Segal, "The Threat to Ground Maneuver as a Deciding Element," *Strategic Assessment* 10, no. 4 (2008): 27-35. In addition, the principle of equilibrium, which involves finding a balance between these two types of confrontation that always exist in war, demands attention when planning force buildup and operation in order to be ready for any type of confrontation. See also Harkabi, pp. 193-214. The analysis offered with regard to guerilla warfare and terror indicates the need for regular professional examination, with consideration to dealing with the unique situation while recognizing the historical background of this generic phenomenon. As Harakbi puts it, guerilla warfare is the oldest known form of war.

4   According to IDF thinking the asymmetrical confrontation is defined as "a limited confrontation."

5   Yoram Schweitzer, "The Limitations of War against a Terrorilla Army," *Military and Strategic Affairs* 1, no. 1 (2009).

6   David Kilcullen was one of the close advisors of General Petraeus. See David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla, Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (London: Hurst & Company, 2009).

7   Bing West, *The Strongest Tribe: War, Politics and the Endgame in Iraq* (New York: Random House, 2008), pp. 247-79. This campaign was led by General Petraeus and his staff, and was inspired by his ideas on combating guerilla warfare and terror. It was highly intensive and was based on his understanding of the way to deal with uprisings, guerilla warfare, and terror. Petraeus's view of the civilians as a strategic and operative focus in combating uprising largely enabled him to act in a determined fashion, using a large force against the terror and guerilla warfare activists.

8   Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla*. The chapter in the book devoted to the surge describes the formulation of this strategy. The idea is based on a well formed approach to combating uprisings, which believes in integration and cohesion of all the levels involved in this warfare context – the operational, civilian, and political levels. This holistic vision served as the basis of Petraeus's operational concept. It is interesting to note the interface between prior knowledge, history, learning from events in the field, and from the unique conditions in the fighting arena itself.

9   Ephraim Kam, "Entanglement in Iraq: Light at the End of the Tunnel?" *Strategic Assessment* 10, no 3 (2007): 6-13. The potential for tensions presented in this 2007 article still exists. The American presence in the region is the element that enables progress towards implementing a withdrawal strategy. The argument is paradoxical, but accurate.

10 Ibid.

11 T. E. Lawrence, *War & Peace*, ed. Malcolm Brown (London: Greenhill Books, 2005), pp. 275-84.

12 The difference between the al-Anbar district in Iraq and Judea and Samaria is clear, in terms of the size of the geographical area and the size and nature of the population. On the other hand, a qualitative comparison can be made in activity and the elements of the operational and strategic perception without any attempt to compare the general problem faced by the commander of the al-Anbar district and the commander of Judea and Samaria.

13 West, *The Strongest Tribe*, pp. 281-92. The Americans defined the operational results of the campaign against the uprising in Anbar as a victory and a successful implementation of the concept of combating the uprising introduced by General Petraeus and his team. Following the operations and the campaign as a whole, the Americans relate to their success in al-Anbar as a point for comparison and emulation. This is also the case with regard to their parallel campaign in Afghanistan.

14 BCT – Brigade Combat Team.
15 One should not overestimate the potential for cooperation. In this con-
    text one can learn a lot from the killing of the three people involved in the
    murder of Rabbi Meir Hai on December 26, 2009, whereby the IDF and GSS
    preferred to operate independently, even though the Palestinians could ap-
    parently have arrested those involved.
16 Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla*, pp. 115-85.
17 Clint ZumBrunnen, "Guardians of a Tense Peace: US Combat Forces in
    Iraq," *Strategic Assessment*, 12, no. 2 (2009): 79-90.