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Lessons of Combined Arms



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Dylan Baird (Moroch)

Introduction

Combined arms in its broadest sense is the coordination of all different elements of a military operation in order to have a mutually beneficial tactical effect. The actual structure of military units which make-up combined arms forces depends on the operation involved — for example, the broadest sense of the combination of land, airpower, and naval forces each with their own subdivisions as combat environments change. In an historical sense, combined arms warfare has existed since the emergence of warfare in general, as any combined force of different units — with different skill sets or equipment — can have a dramatic influence on the outcome of a battle.¹ Since the end of the Second World War, combined arms warfare has been enthusiastically embraced into the global military zeitgeist. Moreover, different strategic traditions place their emphasis on different units, and this has evolved over time due to various economic and pragmatic conditions.

Although not a complete analysis by any means, the inaugural issue of this journal focuses on a specific aspect of combined arms operations: the role of airpower. All of the papers within this issue are investigating the various implications of airpower in combined arms throughout history. Quinn Beggs' contribution is a novel comparative analysis of the role of airpower in both the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian conflict and the Yom Kippur War. In which, he identifies the concept of 'good enough' equipment as a crucial factor in combined arms warfare. Meanwhile, Dylan Baird's paper explores the role of airpower in the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, as well as the idea that the ideology of a force exists as a Clausewitzian strategic multiplier. Altogether, each paper within this issue aims to explore new approaches to familiar events, in the case of Baird's contribution, and more recent examples such as the unfinished conflict in Ukraine. The directors felt that combined arms warfare is a suitable theme for the first issue of the journal due to current events — thus, combining the aims of both the Institute for Strategy and History and the *Journal of Warfare Inquiry* in an appropriate manner.

The papers written have been based on the premise of combined arms warfare and the specific effects in which air power can play a role. More specifically, how forgetting the history of how air power has integrated into combined arms warfare can lead to military failures, resulting in unnecessary casualties and a waste of precious resources and money. Combined arms tactics are an issue rearing its head in today's conflicts, so it was fitting for the first issue to have this as a

¹ For example, see the infantry and archers at the Battle of Agincourt, infantry and armoured divisions at the Second Battle of El Alamein, and the American island hopping campaign of the Second World War.

historical theme. Comparing past combined arms conflicts to the modern era is very applicable, as these papers demonstrate. The technology may have changed, but the ability to exploit the capabilities of any technology through training and tactics is still paramount in combined arms conflicts.

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Quinn Beggs, 'Lessons Lost: Recalibrating Capabilities and Expectations in Ukrainian Combined Arms Operations', *Journal of Warfare Inquiry*, 1.1 (2024), pp. 3-19.

Abstract

This article discusses the short-sightedness of Western nations due to unwillingness and economic restraints to maintain a defence industrial capability, proper strategic and tactical operating procedures, and the inability to unite political agendas to deter or enforce NATO strategic policies. In particular, the inability of all NATO nations and the lack of focus early in the conflict has left Ukraine in the lurch against Russian aggression. This paper will focus on one significant aid shortfall regarding the military aid packages, the indecision to provide aircraft to the Ukrainian Air Force, and the narrative by Western militaries that their high-tech advantage did not need air cover. This paper will examine how this discourse went against military combined arms knowledge provided by the most previous combined arms modern war, the Yom Kippur War of 1973. This short-sightedness would only bring about a failed offensive, loss of men and equipment, and prolonged this war in the future. The discourse used by NATO to suggest that the advanced equipment sent to Ukraine could overcome the lack of air cover in combined arms operations was to convince the press and themselves that a shortcut which goes against all operating procedures could be taken. They were ignoring not only NATO operational doctrine but also historical evidence of the importance of aircraft in combined arms operations.

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Abbreviations

AMRAAM - Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missile

CAP – Combat Air Patrol

CAS – Combat Air Support

CRINK – China, Russia, Iran, North Korea

IADS – Integrated Air Defence Systems

IAF – Israeli Air Force

IDF – Israeli Defence Force

LCS – Littoral Class Ship

MBT – Main Battle Tank

MRAP – Mine Resistant Ambush Protected

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NM – Nautical Mile

Lessons Lost

Recalibrating Capabilities and Expectations in Ukrainian Combined Arms Operations

Quinn Beggs

‘Everything is very simple in war, but the simplest thing is difficult’.²

This paper will focus on what realistic goals should have been expected of the Ukrainian counter-offensive in the summer of 2023 and how the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries and their budgetary issues and political discourses, with a possible mix of sheer incompetence, set Ukraine up for failure. This will be done by looking at the last full-scale peer-vs-peer combined arms war, the Yom Kippur War from October 6-23 1973, and comparing the tactics and the equipment types used to decipher the extreme expectations placed on the Ukrainian military. The Israelis in 1973 had quality advantages over the Egyptians and Syrians in training and some equipment but not all, as many of the tanks used by the Arabs were overall better than anything Israel could field, like the T-62 main battle tank (MBT). The Israelis had improved the Centurion tank with a main armament that fired further, but overall, the T-62 was a superior MBT. No comparison is perfect, but the Yom Kippur War exemplifies the correct and incorrect use of combined arms tactics in a peer vs peer conflict.

Since the end of the Cold War in the early nineties, western nations have been downsizing their militaries to reduce and re-focus budgetary dollars. The new digital age took hold of society in the mid-nineties, and the lack of need for large conventional combined arms armies led to the belief that a highly technical military could replace the large, heavy armoured divisions built for the Cold War. At the same time, it was providing economic savings by decreasing the minimum manning state of readiness needed to deter and defend against the perceived threats to NATO. Smaller high-tech units could fight on even ground with multiple times more significant units in equipment and manning, reducing costs by having fewer soldiers to pay and equipment to maintain. The post-9/11 world only cemented this belief as Western nations in the War on Terror sent highly sophisticated military units to fight larger opponents numerically and, at a tactical level, came out on top. This created a procurement policy that

² Carl von Clausewitz. 1873. *On War*. Translated by James John, COL Graham. London: N. Trubner.
<https://www.clausewitz.com/readings/OnWar1873/BK1ch01.html>.p.75

would cause the US military to buy vast numbers of one-purpose equipment for these low-intensity military operations.

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014, this policy started to be questioned, as vehicles like the Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicle bought in unneeded numbers, and the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) are starting to look like billions of dollars wasted. NATO, led by the United States, began to downsize military units and change the parameters of future equipment procurements from a combined arms ability to a counter-insurgency and limited operational conflicts. Two of the most significant expenditures on equipment that were conceived to operate in only one theatre-specific conflict were the LCS and MRAP. Upon the realisation of the resurgence of the combined arms operations, specifically when opposing China, Russia, Iran or North Korean (CRINK) nations, that defence procurement dollars in the American defence department were being misspent on mission-specific equipment which was not able to operate against peer opposition like the CRINK nations.

With billions of dollars already spent on these pieces of useless equipment, the American military scraps new MRAPs off the line as they have no buyers and retires 200 million dollar LCSs only a few years old as the US Navy acknowledges the lack of utility of these ships in peer-vs-peer battles, specifically in China the nation which has the most significant ability to reach military parity with the United States due to their economy. Moreover, some MRAP vehicles are donated to police units within the United States; others are sold for scrap when they come off the assembly line.³ These issues came to the forefront after the Russian invasion of the remainder of Ukraine in 2022, as the West, specifically the United States, scrambled to produce enough ammunition and equipment to supply the Ukrainian military in combined arms combat.

Over the twenty years since 9/11, high-tech equipment has become much cheaper and more accessible. It created the ability for all nations, no matter their economic situation, to field a high-tech military in large numbers, with drones, anti-tank, and air missiles that are effective and cheap. Adages from previous wars thought to be side-lined by high tech became relevant again, such as ‘good enough is good enough’, and ‘quantity has a quality all its own’. This is especially true when creating a distinct advantage when the quality is good enough, and the quantity is more significant. This has been caused by technical equipment becoming very

³ The LCS ships which are to be mothballed will undergo a process for storage; this entails removing all the electronics and weapons, mooring the ship to a pier, and sucking all the oxygen out of the interior of the ship to reduce the metal from oxidizing. Then a plastic wrap is sucked into place with a vacuum seal on the ship that is above the water line and leaving it moored to a pier in the dark corner of an American naval yard.

cheap, and all militaries can field high-tech devices cheaply on the battlefield, as civilian tech, such as drones, are cheaply modified for military purposes. The tech level or military ability of equipment used in combat does not need to be the best; it only has not to be obsolete or ineffective. Allowing most militaries to field a military with a decent tech level brings back to military relevance the size of the military, the quantities of the tech equipment, and the ability to fill the industrial needs of the military through a country's or their allies' industrial capacity.

An excellent example of this is Allied tanks in the Second World War. The German tanks were superior in armour protection and firepower but could not deal with the number of Allied tanks they faced. The Americans knew the Sherman tank on every level was inferior to any German tank; they put a British 7 lb gun on the tank to penetrate the armour at range, mass-produced many thousands of them, and swarmed the German military as the Sherman tank could get the job done through superior numbers and logistical support. Good enough is good enough; the Americans could let industrialised mass production win the war through superior numbers, as quantity has its own quality.

The advantage the Russians presently have over the Ukrainian military is in large numbers of good enough equipment; the Ukrainians have a technical advantage with the more advanced Western equipment. However, the Russians have a substantial numerical superiority, as the Western delivery of the promised equipment still has not been filled, and even if it were, the Russian numerical advantage would be considerable. The failed Ukrainian counter-offensive in the summer of 2023 did not have all the promised equipment. It was missing substantial pieces to be a successful combined arms offensive, including one of the most critical pieces of equipment due to its versatility, manoeuvrability and force multiplier effect: aircraft. The Western media, media experts, and government press releases pushing a Ukrainian offensive caused the groundwork for the eventual failure of the Ukrainian military. How a combined arms military operates and what equipment is required seems to have been forgotten by these so-called media experts pushing a favourable western political narrative for domestic audiences.

Some politicians who think they understand combined arms warfare and are informed by knowledgeable military leaders employ media proxies to dull the inevitable setbacks in war. This involves favourable media stations with former military leaders and experts to back the needed political discourse. This discourse's manifest function is to ensure that the politician's most pressing matter is confirmed: re-election. These discourses are evident in the politics of the Ukrainian defence of their country from Russian aggression, with nations spending billions of dollars on needed equipment to fight an overseas war that has minimal effect on daily

domestic life. For politicians, this is a tough sell, spending this money over domestic needs, combined with the failures and doubts as the war continues not to have a foreseeable ending. The pressure put on the budgets becomes an easy target for opposition parties as the country's supporting Ukraine inch closer to general elections.

How much of the guidance from the military is not from an underlying attempt to maintain their position by placating the elected officials, as all generals work for the elected leaders? Are there advisors giving good advice, and then have this knowledge ignored for political reasons by the elected officials? The question then becomes how good the knowledge from the military leaders is when it comes to combined arms operations, and is the knowledge, if correct, then being twisted to support political needs? If politicians had told the truth, would the populations of nations supporting Ukraine have pulled their support knowing the economic implications? No matter the reason, the result is that Ukraine did not have the equipment it needed for an offensive, and indecision only prolonged the problem, which became evident after the Ukrainian failure in 2023.

Airpower and other Equipment Shortfalls in Ukraine

Western Democracies are following the classic historical prophecy of history repeating itself by not learning from the past, thinking that the past is irrelevant due to technology. These shortcomings are evident yet ignored regarding the recent military conflict in Ukraine; many so-called experts and politicians have overlooked the primary reasons for the failure of the Ukrainian counter-offensive in 2023. Causing finger-pointing and passing the blame to those who cannot defend themselves in the online real-time dump of armchair blogging generals. In the Western press, '[a]nonymous officials took issue with Ukraine's slow progress on the battlefield and questioned its military tactics'.⁴ Politicians and military leaders ignore historical precedents of combined arms tactics based on perceived technological advances. These shortcomings were multiplied by the ever-changing domestic politics within a democracy, the ignorance of how wars are fought, and the time frames involved. It was not new, as in August of 1914, everyone thought the soldiers would be home by Christmas, and those who knew better kept a low profile to avoid being maligned. Airpower, or the lack of it, has been overlooked, and though discussed, experts argued that it was not needed with the superior technology in fighting vehicles supplied to Ukraine. The last peer-vs-peer conflict to compare

⁴ Counsels, of War. 2023. *Are Ukraine's Tactics Working?* September 12. Accessed January 25, 2023. <https://www.economist.com/international/2023/09/12/are-ukraines-tactics-working.p.3>

the Russo-Ukrainian war is the Yom Kippur War, over 50 years old. It gives an excellent example of how airpower and the lack of airpower affected combined arms operations.

The Ukrainian Air Force has minimal abilities, which is being generous, but how would having a minimal number of up-to-standard aircraft change the counter-offensive outcome? The answer is that an air force can fill many roles under four main headings: Combat Air Patrol (CAP), Combat Air Support (CAS) and interdiction, Strategic Air Support, and Ancillary. CAP is used to enforce air superiority in airspace; this is most widely known when you have aerial dogfights in which aces are born. The CAP provides security and air cover for the aircraft performing the other three roles. CAS is used to attack enemy front-line military units and support friendly units. This type of support is an integral part of combined arms fighting and requires intense training and coordination to avoid targeting friendly soldiers, known as fratricide or, in common military language, blue-on-blue engagements.⁵ CAS can be difficult during combat between fast-moving, manoeuvring friendly forces and strategic airstrikes involving hitting enemy front-line and rear-echelon service support areas. Ancillary roles include troop transport, resupplying forces, air refuelling, medevac of wounded, and the non-direct combat use of aircraft.

It was not until May 2023, at the G7 summit in Japan,⁶ that American President Biden announced that Ukrainian pilots would be training on the F-16, the plane the Ukrainians had wanted since the beginning of the war over a year earlier. This leaves the Ukrainian Air Force unable to dominate airspace until mid-2024 at the earliest and causes CAS operations with the army by providing intimate air support even later after extensive training. This creates a hole in the Ukrainian army's tactical, operational, and strategic abilities to fight as a combined arms unit. Any thought of a successful counterattack without plausible airpower was misleading and possibly ignorant of what combined arms operations require.

In a smoke and mirrors move, NATO nations used army equipment promised to make the Ukrainians look impressive to domestic voters, the leaders pledging the equipment to save democracy. According to the Economist, by the end of July of 2023, much of the promised equipment from the West had yet to arrive, and some still had not in early 2024. Taking the number of tanks for one example, Russia started the war with 3,417 operational tanks, Ukraine 987, with 471 others delivered by NATO, and another 286 that had been promised but have

⁵ As friendly forces are in blue on a map and enemy in red and obstacles and neutral forces are in green.

⁶ Yanchik, Olivia. 2023. F-16 delays leave Ukraine exposed to deadly Russian air superiority. August 10. Accessed January 25, 2023. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/f-16-delays-leave-ukraine-exposed-to-deadly-russian-air-superiority/>.p.1

yet to arrive.⁷ So, by the end of July of 2023, a large proportion of stock had yet to show up, and the large amounts of old Russian equipment were quickly becoming tough to operate as ammunition and replacement parts became scarce as they were no longer available from Russia. Lacking aircover, having inferior numbers, and a lack of training to become proficient at combined arms warfare due to time and equipment shortfalls created unrealistic expectations of the Ukrainian military.

The Israeli Difference over Ukraine

Initially, the Egyptian crossing of the Suez Canal and the defeat of the Bar Lev Line came as a surprise to the Israelis, along with the Syrian advance in the Golan Heights. The Israeli military designated that the primary threat was from Syria, so the Israeli Air Force (IAF) had to fill in the gaps in the ground defences while their reserve army mobilized. The IAF was critical in slowing and stopping the Syrian ground advance, as the limited number of tanks in the Golan Heights would not have held up without CAS or would have been outmanoeuvred by Syrian forces. The advantage of having a modern air force is that it can quickly fill in gaps in the defence with focused CAS attacks, slowing or stalling an enemy's advance or providing support for a counterattack. The IAF completed this mission while providing CAP on all fronts, which was an ominous task.

Unlike the Egyptians, Israel's most experienced and formidable units were the mobilizing reserve units, not their standing units, whose unit ranks were mostly occupied by soldiers who had just been trained and were fulfilling their mandatory service. Most veterans of the 1967 war, and possibly the 1956 Suez crisis, were in the Israeli reserve units and not in the tiny standing army, though there were numerous veterans in the IAF. On 8 October, the Israeli command calculated that there were enough tanks in the Sinai to counterattack without proper combined arms support, artillery, infantry, or CAS, as the IAF prioritized the Golan Heights for CAS. 'This optimistic assessment proved to be divorced from reality. The counterattack quickly turned into a debacle'.⁸ The Egyptian infantry armed with the new Russian-supplied Sagger anti-tank missile wiped out two Israeli tank battalions of about 150 tanks.⁹ A combination of lack of knowledge of this new equipment, no artillery prep of the

⁷ Daily, Chart. 2023. Economist.com. July 20. Accessed January 25, 2023.

<https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2023/07/20/could-ukraines-allies-be-doing-more.p.3>

⁸ David, Rodman. 2017. *Israel in the 1973 Yom Kippur War*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press. Accessed the 25th of January, 2023. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv3029jp6.4.p.50>

⁹ Central Intelligence Agency. 1975. The 1973 Arab-Israeli War. Overview and Analysis of the Conflict. Intelligence Report, Langley Virginia: Central Intelligence Agency. Accessed January 25, 2024. <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/51112a4b993247d4d83944fb.p.16>

Egyptian position, no CAS airstrikes or infantry to attack the Sagger anti-tank missile trenches, and a disorganised attack against a larger stalwart enemy failed miserably. This failure by an experienced army pinpoints the issues of an unorganised combined arms attack. This caused the Israeli forces to sit in a defensive posture until 14 October, which would only be broken by an Egyptian attack.

The Israelis could turn this failure around in quick succession as their military and Air Force were trained in and experienced in combined arms warfare; the attack on the 8th of October was a gross overstep to try and quickly end the conflict. Unlike Ukraine, Israel at the start of the conflict, had 354 planes in the Air Force: 61 Mirages, 99 F-4s, 172 A-4's and 22 Mystere; the Syrians also had 354 aircraft with 186 Mig-21's and the Egyptians 659 aircraft with 326 Mig-21's. The IAF shot down 334 Egyptian and Syria planes, a 56-1 ratio, and a further 100 were lost to Integrated Air Defence Systems (IADS) and 81 to technical difficulties or destruction on the ground. While the Israelis lost 3 to air-to-air combat, 81 to (IADS) and 25 to technical failures and destruction on the ground.¹⁰ These victories opened the way for the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) to hold the mountain passes and use combined defensive arms with tanks, artillery, infantry and CAS to destroy the Egyptian forces. Israel lost 10-20 tanks while destroying 250-300 tanks.¹¹ The Israelis continued with combined arms manoeuvres and eventually defeated the Egyptians, crossed the Suez Canal, and were advancing with two divisions toward Cairo when a cease-fire would come into effect.

The Israelis could turn around tactical and operational defeats with combined arms manoeuvres in a matter of 6 days. The IDF armoured corps had armour that was good enough in combination with well-trained infantry and artillery and an IAF that could deliver air superiority, allowing CAS sorties that turned the tides of war. The Israelis, early in the Sinai conflict, had tried to '[a]pply a doctrine that had been used successfully in 1967—the use of unsupported tanks against infantry'.¹² The Israelis could not take heavy losses as they did not have a stockpile of equipment that numerically equalled their opposition. What they lacked in more advanced equipment, the IDF ensured that their 'superiority over the Arab armies was greatest in the quality of the training and initiative of the lower ranks—individual soldiers, NCOs, and platoon- and company-grade officers'.¹³

¹⁰ CIA. Arab-Israeli War.p.28

¹¹ Rodman. 2017. Yom Kippur War.p.52

¹² CIA. Arab-Israeli War.p.101

¹³ CIA. Arab-Israeli War.p.107

Two Sides of the Same Coin

The present position that the Ukrainian military finds itself in also has a historical reference, which does not fare as well. As there are two sides to every coin, there are two sides to every war, and the Egyptian position on 15 October 1973 is one in which, if the Russians could emulate the Israeli armour breakthrough,¹⁴ would spell inevitable defeat for Ukraine. Israeli General and hero of Abu-Ageila and future Prime Minister Ariel Sharon would lead an operation on 15 October called Stought Hearted Man to ensure Israel's victory in the Yom Kippur War.¹⁵ This operation involved Israeli armoured and Airbourne units getting across the Suez Canal behind the Egyptian front-line combat units and breakthrough into the rear echelons of the Egyptian military, where the Israeli units could operate with impunity. Once in the rear areas, these units hunted down the Egyptian IADS, particularly the Surface Air Missiles (SAMs) provided by Russia. Once Israeli ground forces neutralized the SAM systems, the IAF could limit counterattacks by the Egyptians, negating any counterattack ability and forcing the United States and Russia to step in and stop the IDF from an unhindered march on Cairo.

Ukraine is also in this precarious predicament. Russia does not seem to have the organisational ability, resources or a general of Sharon's ability. These settings do not all need to be in place; if the Ukrainian military were to make a mistake or lack the resources to defend itself, it could be a quick victory for Russia. They could not counterattack an offensive like the Egyptians in 1973 without a viable air force. A Russian breakthrough, enabling combat units to engage Ukrainian air defences would create a situation without recovery. Without CAS, at present, Ukraine cannot conduct successful offensive operations; without IADS, the Russian air force would be able to fix and destroy the Ukrainian military, as the Ukrainians would no longer have the ability to defend their airspace. This is a situation that the Ukrainian military is presently in without the F-16s, theoretically one Russian victory away from losing the war and not being able to properly counter any Russian offensives or breakthroughs in their lines of defence. The mobility of their new western tanks would not matter as they would be hunted by Russian aerial units fixed and rotary-winged. In a situation in which the discourse was never

¹⁴ Breakthrough is offensive, advancing through an enemys defense. Breakout is when encircled forces create a breakthrough to rejoin friendly forces.

¹⁵ Battle of Abu-Ageilia started on the 5th of June 1967. General Sharon moved a armoured brigade through the lines of a second brigade that was fighting the Egyptian military. An extremely difficult operation, but with the success of this manoeuvre, the Israeli armoured units were able to route the entire Egyptian army and capture the Sinai Desert.

discussed, it is hard to tell if NATO thought the aid packages were through for Ukraine or if the politicians got cheap and lazy.

Conclusions

Like the IDF, Ukraine is fighting a much larger military with supposedly technically inferior equipment but has not been given all the tools it needs to crack a stalwart defence. They have no air force that can instantly focus force on specific points on the battlefield multiple times a day with the same equipment. They do not have the training that the Israelis need in order to operate military equipment in a combined arms manner with other elements within the army and Air Force. It takes years to train soldiers to understand commanders' tactics to master leadership, enabling maximum flexibility at all levels. This is only achievable when soldiers and junior commanders understand the job requirements of the soldier above them; this can only be done once they master their job.

'The Ukrainians are still tied to Soviet doctrine, complains an American Official',¹⁶ trying to save their career by finger-pointing to dismiss the issues of the Ukrainian failure, denial at its best.¹⁷ Israel did not have success without an air force in support of the counterattacks in the Sinai desert, an operation which went against the lessons learned in the Six-Day War of 1967. 'After the 1967 war, the Israelis considered a superior air force and air superiority to be essential to maneuver [sic] warfare'.¹⁸ The IDF could soften any assault on their positions rapidly and quickly with airpower. The Russians are doing this to the assaults made by the Ukrainians with their airpower, and the Ukrainians have no capable CAP. The Russian air force does not have to come within the Ukrainian air defence range using glide bombs very effectively from 25 miles from the front lines to protect their air force, which Russia would have trouble replacing. The AIM 120 Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missile (AMRAAM), which can be loaded on an F-16 for air-to-air combat, and has hit a target at 87 nautical miles (nm) or (161 km/100 miles).¹⁹ This range would allow the F-16s to hold off the Russian air force with limited numbers while not subjecting the F-16s to Russian anti-air assets, forcing the Russian air force to retire or enter the Ukrainian air defence bubble.

¹⁶ Counsels of War. 2023. Are Ukraine's Tactics Working? The 12th of September. Accessed the 25th of January, 2023. <https://www.economist.com/international/2023/09/12/are-ukraines-tactics-working>.p.8

¹⁷ Russian doctrine uses a more frontal attack derived mechanized formations, but still places air support as paramount for success both fixed wing and rotary winged support of ground manoeuvre operations.

¹⁸ Givens, Robert P. 2002. *Turning the Vertical Flank*. Airpower as a Maneuver Force in the Theater Campaign, US Air Force, Maxwell AFB Alabama: Air University Press, 27-48. Accessed the 25th of January, 2023. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep13973.9.p.37>

¹⁹ 1st Lt Savannah, Bray. 2021. US Air Force. April 14. Accessed February 23, 2023. <https://www.53rdwing.af.mil/News/Article/2572350/f-15c-records-longest-known-missile-shot/>.

One retired military officer suggests using First World War tactics on the defensive Russian lines; this '[s]olution was smaller, nimbler and well-drilled "storm troopers" which could cross enemy lines and grab territory, with heavier units moving up later'.²⁰ Again, even if the small group takes land, air power can blunt the heavier units as they fly over or around this land, leaving these smaller units to be cut off. Insult to injury, the Ukrainian military did not like using smoke for cover as '[s]enior commanders did not want to obscure their view of the battle from drones circling overhead'.²¹ Micromanaging destroys initiative, which was a key to Israeli success; sometimes, you must let the upper commanders chew radio static and invoke some personal initiative to have success.

The Russians have built a large military that is good enough, high tech enough to compete and big enough to take some blows when the higher tech western equipment manages to strike. So, the Ukrainians are in no position to reorganize after the failure of the counterattack and regroup for another in the foreseeable future. The Ukrainian equipment numbers are too small in all aspects, including personnel, and the longer the war goes on, the more the stalling of Western military aid will exponentially expand the Russian numerical advantage. Most of the equipment used by the Ukrainian military is Russian, which requires parts and ammunition from Russia, to which they no longer have access.

The technological advantage of the IDF was not as great over Syria and Egypt as Ukraine's over Russia, as western equipment slowly becomes the primary equipment used. Some of the IDF equipment was slightly better, but the numerical advantage of the Arab armies could make up for this advantage; falling under the heading good enough is good enough when discussing military equipment. So, the failure of the Ukrainian military falls into two categories when it comes to successful manoeuvre warfare or, as the Germans who invented the concept called it, *Bewegungskrieg*; *blitzkrieg* was an allied term, according to Heinz Guderian.²² Though Ukraine has only dropped conscription to 25 from 27 recently²³, a flaw not lost on Western allies when discussing Ukrainian corruption and the lack of manpower affecting Ukraine's ability even to stop Russian advances. The reason behind the decision not to conscript able bodies under 25 and the other loopholes that allow avoidance of military service

²⁰ Counsels of War. Ukraine's Tactics.p.8

²¹ Ibid

²² JP, Harris. 1995. "The Myth of Blitzkrieg." *War in History* 2 (3): 335-352. Accessed April 2, 2024. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26004454>.p.338

²³ Hanna Arhirova, and Samya Kullab. 2024. "Ukraine lowers its conscription age to 25 to replenish its beleaguered troops." *AP News*. April 3. Accessed April 7, 2024. <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-conscription-mobilization-251058a942a253f3eac2c53373adf03>.p.1

was that they had been put into effect to allow the industrial ability of Ukraine not to suffer by keeping able bodies in industrial production. The lack of Western support must take some of the blame for this unwillingness to fight Ukrainian youths, but not all of it. The topics of corruption and Ukrainian youths' willingness to fight go beyond this paper's scope, but the relevance of these domestic issues is not lost on the author. Though important, the lack of proper equipment is paramount, and changing the draft age to 18 and a crackdown on corruption would not be enough to overcome the equipment and supply shortfalls due to a lack of focused and strong NATO support.

In the first category, Ukraine has an air force that cannot deny air superiority in any air space, no matter how small. This forces the Ukrainians to thin their lines to cover the entire front, as possible Russian breakthroughs cannot be blunted quickly by scrambled CAS aircraft. The Ukrainian army without CAP also could not mass army formations to move into the area to counterattack and lost ground to Russian advances for fear of Russian CAS. Ukrainian CAP operations to stop Russian CAS operations or enable Ukrainian CAS operations to destroy fighting vehicles and interdiction operations on supply trains are needed to stall advancing Russian armoured columns or go on the offensive. The lack of the F-16 gave little operational leeway to the Ukrainian military. In combination with the NATO political pressure applied to the Ukrainians by domestic demand for cost recapture of the billions spent to see results, the Ukrainians were forced into an unwinnable offensive. The losses of Western equipment and the inability to access ammunition and spare parts for their Russian equipment will have severe repercussions. With the loss of Adiiivka, it has become clear that the Ukrainians cannot defend the present battle lines in force due to a lack of equipment, soldiers, and ammunition. They also cannot use mass units for counterattacks as their units have to occupy the defensive lines, and the flexibility of air mobile ground units is not an option without CAP.

The second category is training. It takes years to perfect manoeuvring combined arms warfare. A realistic view of equipment and training would have been in 2024 if the United States had given the F-16 Fighting Falcons to the Ukrainians over a year ago. So, with the present calendar of F-16 delivery, a realistic but overly optimistic, fully operational combined arms attack could have units operationally ready by 2025. When Western armies train young officers, they lead platoons with many career soldiers with decades of experience in their unit. These experienced professional soldiers' know-how combined arms attacks and defences work and can nudge junior commanders into making the right decision. The Ukraine has none of this experience and a drafted military, so a lack of confidence hurts morale. This experience and confidence are needed and the reason the Israelis were able to turn the tide in the Yom

Kippur War. The soldiers had confidence in their commander's tactical decisions and the commanders in their soldier's execution of the tactical plan.

The Ukrainian military desperately needs the new F-16s as quickly as possible before the situation escalates for the Ukrainian government. The Ukrainians need to start training their military and deny the Russians the ability to dictate the airspace not only for aircraft but also for drone coverage. The specialized units of GPS and signal jamming equipment and the logistics of the Russians do not have to fear a Ukrainian CAS interdiction attack, and they are working with impunity. Experts all point fingers at the Ukrainian tactics and say that the advantage of Western technology should have won the day and would have with others commanding the assault. The finger-pointing is directed at the failure of the Ukrainian army, which was unfairly set up for failure in combined arms warfare due to a lack of training and equipment. The Russians had their issues, but thinking the Ukrainian military could be successful with the state of equipment and training was a prime example of underestimating the enemy. Sun Tzu wrote in *The Art of War*, 'He will win who has military capacity and is not interfered with by the sovereign'.²⁴ In Ukraine's case, many sovereigns from many countries are interfering, not realising that Russian technology was good enough, and even with inferior technology, poor training and conscripted soldiers, the Russian quantity of equipment created a quality that could bridge this gap. As the war goes on, the Russians will also be working on their shortcomings to prepare for possible improvements by the Ukrainians. Another failed offensive by the Ukrainian military would force them to a cease-fire from a disadvantaged position. Suppose NATO is set on pushing the Russian military from all Ukrainian lands or forcing the Russians into a disadvantaged situation. In that case, the supporting NATO countries must take a more realistic strategic position involving equipment, money, and the timeline to achieve this. This would give Ukraine the upper hand militarily and dictate the peace terms that will eventually be negotiated.

²⁴ Sun Tzu. 2002. *The Art of War*. Translated by Lionel Giles. Mineola: Dover Publications.p.51

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Abstract

The failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 is a remarkable example of both the success of combined arms, and a cautionary tale of its failure. Cuban forces during the invasion, using an already depleted air force, demonstrate the strength of this tactic; meanwhile, the political and sectarian struggles the CIA and the United States faced ensured their defeat. Moreover, the Bay of Pigs invasion is also a perfect example for applying ideology as a Clausewitzian force multiplier — one which creates outcomes which are otherwise unexpected.

¡Viva Cuba!

On the Bay of Pigs and Yankee Imperialism

Dylan Baird (Moroch)

*‘What the imperialists cannot forgive is that we are here. What the imperialists cannot forgive is the dignity, the firmness, the courage, the ideological integrity, the spirit of sacrifice, and the revolutionary spirit of the Cuban people’.*¹

The failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, created by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), was the catalyst for increased aggression by the United States against socialist Cuba — including the infamous Cuban Missile Crisis. It is no secret that the CIA was behind the invasion, although it took the US government time to admit it. Since victory in 1959, the United States was determined to crush the Revolution, and immediately began preparing in order to do so. The botched invasion ultimately inspired Latin America to reconsider the god-like status of Yankee imperialism, and the truth of the Revolution began to be understood — that socialist Cuba actually is made by and represents the Cuban people. There is no question as to the failure of US strategy in this context, but why they failed is a worthwhile investigation. The reason is twofold, it is the combination of the role of airpower, tactical mistakes, and ideology as contributing strategic factors in combined arms operation. In order to substantiate this claim I will first address the role of airpower prior to the invasion and during, and then explain how the ideology of a force is a contributing multiplier to victory in this context. Furthermore, why socialist Cuba is justifiably exceptional in this context.²

Politics, Plausible Deniability, and Airpower

The CIA was inspired by the history of semi-clandestine landings in Cuba and aimed to contribute their own. However, like many of these invasions before, it was poorly organised and poorly executed.³ Most importantly, the so-called intelligence of which the United States acted on was considerably flawed: the CIA anticipated that, if they could sponsor a guerrilla

¹ Fidel Castro, ‘What the Imperialists cannot forgive — Fidel Castro’s speech in advance of the Bay of Pigs invasion’, *Cuba Solidarity Campaign* (16 April 2021).

² This paper will be a brief exploration of the topic, as the author is currently working on a longer form analysis of this event included in a broader investigation on Cuban Military exceptionalism.

³ Richard Gott, *Cuba: A New History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 190.

force on the island, then a popular anti-Fidel revolt *would* occur.⁴ It never did. The CIA's original plan for the invasion changed over time due to a number of factors. Richard Bissell's initial plan, the CIA operative assigned the operation, was to ferment a guerrilla war and 'beat Fidel at his own game'.⁵ The trained exiles would create a beachhead, and then create an anti-Fidel revolt. However, once Bissell started preparation with the bandits that were roaming specific areas of the countryside of Cuba at that point, the Revolutionary government noticed and Fidel created a farmers' militia of some 800 trained combatants.⁶ The people and governments of Latin America also remembered what inspired the CIA in their Cuban operations, the defeat of Jacobo Árbenz left-wing Guatemalan government. This is what the CIA wished to reproduce in Cuba. However, due to the lack of secrecy and the apparent assumption that the United States would try something in the island, the Yankee government and the CIA began to consider a conventional strategy.⁷ Meaning, that if the trained counter-revolutionaries could create a beachhead, the CIA could immediately infiltrate a 'government in-exile' that the United States government would officially recognise; thus, allowing Yankee military support. The location selected for this effort: The Bay of Pigs (*Bahía de Cochinos*), near *Playa Girón*.

The counter-revolutionary force which the CIA and the United States government trained became known as Brigade 2506 and consisted of six battalions of 180 men each.⁸ Their initial training grounds varied and included: Usseppa Island, Fort Gulick in Panama, and locations in Guatemala.⁹ They were taught, via CIA 'intelligence', that the Cuban population would welcome them as liberators — something akin to the Second World War rather than any reality in 1961. However, the brigade was still plagued with factionalism between groups, and most importantly, between left and right political ideals. By late 1960 some of these counter-revolutionaries included ex-members of the 26th of July Movement, the result of this was a split between anti-Batista and Batista supporters within the ranks, and a 230 man general strike until the matter was resolved. The CIA dealt with this problem by putting twelve of the leaders in a 'jungle jail'.¹⁰

⁴ Naturally, the United States contributes greatly to the Great Man history applied to Cuba. That is, 'Castro' always means Fidel, and socialist Cuba is always at his whims. Of course this is baseless, see 'The Origins of the Cuban Revolution', *The World Today*, 19.10 (1963), p. 448, by Hugh Thomas.

⁵ Gott, p. 192.

⁶ Gott, p. 192.

⁷ I will use the term 'Yankee' and US interchangeably as the descriptor of things or people from the United States. Although this is English, it is to avoid 'American' as the term is considerably less popular in other languages, especially Spanish.

⁸ Donald Moore, 'The Bay of Pigs: An Analysis', *Naval War College Review*, 19, 3 (1966), p. 12.

⁹ Gott, p. 191.

¹⁰ Moore, p. 12.

After the ranks were purged and the training completed, Allan Dulles, then director of the CIA began to brief John F. Kennedy on the plan. Kennedy was given all assurances and complete faith in what the CIA had created, most importantly Kennedy was assured that their intelligence indicated strongly that a popular anti-Castro revolt would occur. It never did. To support the invasion, the CIA planned advanced airstrikes against the Cuban Revolutionary Air and Air Defence Force (DAAFAR) in order to secure air superiority; however, Kennedy cancelled half of these strikes a few days before.¹¹ This event started a ‘back and forth’ between the US government and the CIA which lasts until today, both placing the failure to each other due to the lack of airpower. However, much of the English language literature about the event focus too much on this ‘blame-game’ so to speak. As the Cubans argue themselves, the more important factor is the act of *yanqui* imperialism, irrelevant of which function of state-capitalism was more at fault than the other.¹² Moreover, far too many analyses solely focus on Yankee failure, rather than Cuban success in creating their own victory. Although much of the DAAFAR was destroyed by the remaining airstrikes, a number of machine-gun equipped training planes and fully armed Hawker Sea-Furies were able to provide close-air-support (CAS) for the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) and militia forces.¹³ Therefore, denying Yankee air-supremacy. Cuban air forces also managed to sink the troop transport which the counter-revolutionaries depended on.

The invasion lasted three days, and the CIA’s hopes of a popular revolt were shattered in one. Brigade 2506 landed at the Bay of Pigs and were quickly descended upon by Fidel’s militia — although not experienced soldiers in any sense of the word, they fought well and delayed the invasion until Fidel and regular troops arrived.¹⁴ Hal Klepak summarises Brigade 2506’s defeat most concisely,

The armed forces, led by Fidel but organised and trained by Raúl, had stood the test and held their own. The Revolution trumpeted ‘imperialism’s first defeat’, and indeed the event was the first time in history that a determined military effort engineered or mounted officially by the United States to unseat an ‘undesirable’ government in Latin America had failed.¹⁵

Moreover, Klepak correctly identifies that it was courage and forcefulness, more than organisation, which had won the day. This is due to what he argues was a ‘young person’s war’, as many of the leading Cuban commanders were mere second lieutenants, militia lieutenants,

¹¹ John T Correll, ‘Airpower at the Bay of Pigs’, *Air & Space Forces Magazine* (30 May 2017).

¹² For a more in-depth exploration using Cuban sources, see ‘*Vivan los Barbudos*: The Strategy, Ideology, and Exceptionalism of the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2026).

¹³ Gott, p. 193.

¹⁴ Hal Klepak, *Raúl Castro and Cuba: A Military Story* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 33.

¹⁵ Klepak, p. 33.

corporals, and one captain. This is certainly more evidence toward the exceptionalism hypothesis. Fidel, for his part, was deeply troubled at their success, as he rightfully doubted whether the Yankee machine would allow such a defeat. Only a year later would that escalation come.

The outcome of the battle saw 1200 of 1400 counter-revolutionary forces arrested, and the rest dead.¹⁶ Meanwhile, 160 Cubans dead.¹⁷ The result of this was the public trial of all who were arrested, and although the Cuban public demanded *paredón* (to the wall), only five officers were executed.¹⁸ General José Ramón Fernández, who had taught at the Cuban military academy before the Revolution, knew each commanding officer in the counter-revolutionary force by name; many of them had been his students.¹⁹ It is clear that lack of airpower from the United States was a contributing factor toward the counter-revolutionary defeat, but it must also be considered how the limited CAS capabilities which the Cuban's still possessed also contributes to their success. Could the counter-revolutionaries have held longer if they had CAS of their own? Probably, but it risks escalations and alternatives which have too many counterfactuals to accurately comment upon.

The Force Multiplier

Why was a farmers' militia able to hold-out, at least until regular troops arrived, against supposedly highly trained combatants? The answer is simple, the little CAS they had, and a Clausewitzian force multiplier — something which Che Guevara and Raúl, either knowingly or unknowingly, built into the ethos of what it means to be a socialist Cuban soldier. In point five, *Utmost exertion of powers*, of 'What is War'? in *On War*, Carl von Clausewitz outlines that if one desires to defeat their enemy, one must use proportional efforts to one's enemy's power of resistance.²⁰ Put simply, the product of the sum of available means and the strength of *will*. This is also the third example of what Clausewitz terms reciprocal action, as in, both the enemy and one's own intent is the assessment of one's enemy's means and *will* — thus, both essentially create an escalation race with the goal of overcoming the other.

How does this apply to the Bay of Pigs invasion? While it is true that the limiting of Yankee airstrikes had a strategic effect on the outcome, the plan in general was not going to

¹⁶ The actual number of Brigade 2506 is debated. However, estimates range from 1200-1500. I am inclined to trust Klepak's approximate of 1400.

¹⁷ Gott, p. 194.

¹⁸ Gott, p. 194.

¹⁹ Gott, p. 194.

²⁰ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. by Colonel J.J. Graham (Vancouver: Royal Classics, 2020), p. 36.

work anyway. This is primarily due to the CIA's expectation, or hope, of an anti-Fidel popular revolt which could never materialise. The CIA had an expectation that the Bay of Pigs invasion could have been a low-cost and low-intensity military operation which would solve their 'problem' in Cuba — that is, a Marxist-Leninist state in what many Yankees viewed as 'their' hemisphere.²¹ Although airpower is a crucial contribution to combined arms operations, the Bay of Pigs invasion is a worthy example of ideology as the force multiplier, of not only combined arms, but warfare in general. Put simply, the airpower mattered less than the idea of a popular revolt. The force multiplier can alter outcomes which otherwise seem clear, and in 1961 the high morale, enthusiasm, and ideological discipline of the FAR and militia forces shaped Cuban victory. Furthermore, the actual successful use of remaining DAAFAR planes in a CAS role, combined with the infantry strength of the joint FAR-militia force did fine work in creating victory.

Furthermore, this discipline within the FAR comes from Raúl Castro. Even during the Revolution he became famous for good staff-work and regular correspondence to higher command — his brother. Klepak correctly identifies the unusual nature of this phenomenon in insurgency warfare, in *Raúl Castro and Cuba: A Military Story*, in which he also argues Raúl is the architect of the Revolution's survival. This is due to the incredible discipline which Raúl expected of himself, but also his forces. Thus, after taking control and creating the first socialist state in the Third World, he worked tirelessly on creating a military in that image, one of high discipline, morale, and effectiveness.²² Contributing to what Klepak argues is the reality of the post-1959 experience, that it is the military which borne the brunt of political intent: assassination attempts, US-sponsored terrorism, and the US funding and creating of a guerrilla invasion force.²³

Conclusions

Although airpower is a necessary function in successful combined arms operation, ideology must also be included. It is simple to conclude that 'true believers' make better soldiers — and there are countless examples throughout history: the FAR, *Avispas Negras*, KGB, Viet Cong, North Vietnamese Army (NVA), and *Schutzstaffel* (SS) to name a few. Meaning that the ideal combined arms super-function is actually the inter-working of infantry, armour, and airpower

²¹ K. S. Karol, *Guerrillas in Power: The Course of the Cuban Revolution* (London: Johnathan Cape, 1971), pp. 4-5.

²² For an example of this, see the Cuban Intervention in the Angolan Civil War. The FAR often had better morale and discipline than the local MPLA.

²³ Klepak, p. xii.

multiplied by ideology, or *will*. There is much debate regarding Cuban exceptionalism; however, this contribution argues firmly for the case of socialist Cuban exceptionalism in all of its forms. Moreover, even if more airstrikes based in the United States occurred, as well as increased Yankee military involvement, this would not have increased Brigade 2506 success. The fighting would have occurred over weeks, not days, and more importantly it is doubtful that the Soviet Union would have ignored the blatant aggression against their ally. This is not to say the creation of a Third World War in 1961, but it is probable that some escalation would have occurred.

Socialist Cuba continues to survive against incredible odds, all the while maintaining high discipline, morale, and effectiveness in its military since 1959. The combination of effective material military tactics, multiplied by Cuba's Marxist-Leninist ideology, creates an operational grand strategy which produces success. The Bay of Pigs and Cuban success ought to be an outstanding, if overlooked, example of what a successful combined arms operation looks like in military history.

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