



**REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE
TURKISH NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY
ATATÜRK STRATEGIC STUDIES AND GRADUATE
INSTITUTE
DEPARTMENT OF WAR STUDIES
WAR STUDIES PROGRAM**

**UNDERSTANDING URBAN WARFARE IN THE
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY WITHIN THE
CONTEXT OF WAR IN UKRAINE**

MASTER'S THESIS

**SELEN ÇETİN
2021103106**

SUPERVISOR: ASST. PROF. KEMAL OLÇAR, Ph.D.

**ISTANBUL
JULY 2024**

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**This thesis is hereby officially accepted as partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Master of War Studies.**

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**ISTANBUL
JULY 2024**

ÖZGÜNLÜK RAPORU

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ETİK BEYAN

Millî Savunma Üniversitesi Enstitüleri Dönem Projesi ve Lisansüstü Tez Hazırlama Kılavuzu'nda yer alan kurallarına uygun olarak hazırladığım bu tez çalışmada; tez içinde sunduğum verileri, bilgileri ve dokümanları akademik ve etik kurallar çerçevesinde elde ettiğimi, tüm bilgi, belge, değerlendirme ve sonuçları bilimsel etik ve ahlak kurallarına uygun olarak sunduğumu, tez çalışmada yararlandığım eserlerin tümüne uygun atıfta bulunarak kaynak gösterdiğimi, kullanılan verilerde herhangi bir değişiklik yapmadığımı, bu tezde sunduğum çalışmanın özgün olduğunu, bildirir; aksi bir durumda aleyhime doğabilecek tüm hak kayıplarını kabullendiğimi beyan ederim.

Bu tezdeki düşünce, görüş, varsayım, sav veya tezler bana aittir; Millî Savunma Bakanlığı, Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri, Millî Savunma Üniversitesi ve Atatürk Stratejik Araştırmalar ve Lisansüstü Eğitim Enstitüsü sorumlu tutulamaz.

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To my beloved family



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ABBREVIATIONS

1GW	: First generation warfare
2GW	: Second generation warfare
3GW	: Third generation warfare
4GW	: Fourth generation warfare
5GW	: Fifth-generation warfare
AFAD	: The Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency
C3I	: Command, control, communications and intelligence
DAESH	: al-Dawla al-Islamiya fil Iraq wa al-Sham
DPR	: Donetsk People's Republic
ERW	: Explosive remnants of war
EU	: European Union
GPS	: Global positioning system
ICRC	: International Committee of the Red Cross
IEDs	: Improvised explosive devices
KCK	: Kurdistan Communities Union
MANPADS	: Man-Portable Air-Defence Systems
MDO	: Multi-Domain Operations
MLRS	: Multiple launch rocket systems
NATO	: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OECD	: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHCHR	: The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OSCE	: Organisation for Cooperation and Security in Europe
PYD	: Democratic Union Party
SOBR	: Spetsial'nyy Otryad Bystrogo Reagirovaniya
U.S.	: United States
UAVs	: Unmanned Aerial Vehicles
UCAVs	: Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles
UN	: United Nations
UNCHR	: The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNESCO	: The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
PKK	: Kurdistan Workers' Party
USA	: The United States of America
WWI	: First World War
WWII	: Second World War
YPG	: The People's Protection Units

ÖZ

Ukrayna'daki Savaş Bağlamında Yirmi Birinci Yüzyıldaki Meskûn Mahal Muharebelerini Anlamak

Selen Çetin

Millî Savunma Üniversitesi, Atatürk Stratejik Araştırmalar ve Lisansüstü Eğitim Enstitüsü

İstanbul, Temmuz 2024

Yirmi birinci yüzyıldaki yüksek kentleşme oranı dünya nüfusunun önemli bir kısmının kentsel alanlarda yaşamasına neden olmuştur. Bu sebeple, ordular her ne kadar meskûn mahallerde savaşmaktan kaçınmayı tercih etseler de yerleşim alanlarının sürekli genişlemesi askerleri eninde sonunda meskûn mahal muharebelerine girmeye zorlayabilir. Öte yandan, devletler stratejik, siyasi, operasyonel ve taktik hedeflerine daha kolay ulaşmak için şehirleri ele geçirmeye çalışabilirler. Dolayısıyla sembolik, stratejik ve ekonomik öneme sahip şehirler, antik çağlarda olduğu gibi günümüzde de ordular için değerli hedefler olmaya devam edecektir. Bu tez, 2022 yılında Ukrayna'da patlak veren savaşa odaklanarak ve Mariupol'deki meskûn mahal muharebesini inceleyerek, orduların bu tip savaşlar sırasında karşılaşılabileceği temel özellikleri ve zorlukları keşfetmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışmada nitel araştırma yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Bu bağlamda, araştırma sorularını yanıtlamak için kitaplar, dergiler ve gazeteler dahil olmak üzere çeşitli kaynaklardan toplanan veriler analiz edilmiştir. Tez, kentsel alanların hem fiziksel hem de sosyal boyutlarının ordular için çeşitli zorluklar yaratabileceğini göstermektedir. Rus güçlerinin ayırım gözetmeyen saldırıları, yoğun nüfuslu bölgelerde meydana gelen çatışmaların muhtemel sonuçlarının son derece ağır olacağını bir kez daha teyit etmiştir. Ayrıca, 21. yüzyıldaki meskûn mahal muharebelerinin asimetrik ve hibrit unsurlara sahip olabileceği vurgulanmıştır. Mariupol kuşatması, eski meskûn mahal muharebe taktiklerinin henüz miadının dolmadığını ortaya koymuştur. Meskûn mahal muharebelerinin yarattığı temel zorluğun sivililerin varlığı olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Meskûn mahal muharebeleri, Ukrayna'daki Savaş, Mariupol, Kentleşme, Hibrit savaş.

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ABSTRACT

Understanding Urban Warfare in the Twenty-First Century within the Context of War in Ukraine

Selen Çetin

Turkish National Defense University, Atatürk Strategic Studies and Graduate
Institute

İstanbul, July 2024

The high urbanization rate in the 21st century has resulted in a significant portion of the global population inhabiting in urban areas. Therefore, although armies may opt to avoid fighting in urbanized terrains, the persistent expansion of built-up areas may eventually compel soldiers to engage in urban combat. On the other hand, states may also attempt to capture cities to achieve their strategic, political, operational, and tactical goals with greater ease. Therefore, cities, harbouring symbolic, strategic and economic importance, would continue to be valuable targets for armies today as they were in ancient times. This thesis aims to explore the key characteristics and challenges that the militaries may face during this type of warfare, by focusing on the war in Ukraine that erupted in 2022 and examining urban warfare in Mariupol. In this study, qualitative research methods were used. In this context, to answer research questions, the data gathered from various sources, including books, journals, and newspapers was analysed. The thesis illustrates both the physical and social dimensions of urban areas can pose various difficulties to armies. The indiscriminate attacks of Russian forces reaffirmed potential consequences of combat taking place in densely populated areas would be extremely severe. Moreover, it was highlighted that urban battles in the 21st century can have asymmetric and hybrid elements. The siege of Mariupol revealed old tactics of urban warfare were not outdated yet. It was concluded that the primary challenge that urban warfare creates is the presence of civilians.

Keywords: Urban warfare, War in Ukraine, Mariupol, Urbanisation, Hybrid warfare.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Although urban warfare has existed since the establishment of city-states, the size of the urban population has grown exponentially in the twenty-first century. According to The World Bank, the number of inhabitants in the cities skyrockets as the latest statistics estimate that the population in these artificial environments has reached 4.4 billion which corresponds to approximately 56 per cent of the world population. By 2050, it is predicted that over seven out of ten people will be urban citizens.¹

In a similar vein, the projections of the United Nations (UN), support the growing urbanization trend and the World Bank's figures; as it estimates urban areas will be hubs for two-thirds of the global population by 2050.² In addition to this, figures released by the UN in 2022 have explored the same pattern by arguing that even though some residents left the cities due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the flow of people is not permanent and will not have any remarkable effect on the global urbanisation trend.³

Moreover, growth in the urban population gave birth to the term "megacities" which is used to define cities where the population is more than 10 million. In the UN report, it was stated that in 2018 the number of megacities was 33 but it was projected this number will jump to 43 by 2030.⁴ Furthermore, cities that are home to over 20 million people are also referred to as metacities.⁵ Therefore, many scholars pay attention to urbanisation and presume that contemporary conflicts will be urbanised.

¹ "Urban Development", The World Bank, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/urbandevelopment/overview> [Accessed: 18.03.2024].

² Sam Meredith, "Two-thirds of global population will live in cities by 2050, UN says", <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/05/17/two-thirds-of-global-population-will-live-in-cities-by-2050-un-says.html> [Accessed: 5. 11.2022].

³ UN-HABITAT, *Envisaging the Future of Cities* (Nairobi, 2022), XV.

⁴ United Nations, *The World's Cities in 2018* (2018), 2. https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/urbanization/the_worlds_cities_in_2018_data_booklet.pdf [Accessed: 5. 11.2022].

⁵ UN Habitat, *State of The World's Cities 2006/7* (2006-2007), 8. <https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/download-manager-files/State%20of%20the%20World%E2%80%99s%20Cities%20062007.pdf> [Accessed: 12. 11.2022].

1.1.Aims and Importance

In light of the given information, one can argue that this century will continue to see urban conflicts. Fighting in the cities will put millions of people's lives in peril, destroy cultural and historical sites and jeopardise the economy. Furthermore, most scholars carry out research on intra-state wars and insurgencies which break out in built-up settings while exploring the concept of urban warfare.⁶ Given the considerable decrease in the occurrence of inter-state conflicts following the Second World War,⁷ it is understandable that a lot of extensive research has been directed towards these cases. However, there is still a probability that urban areas can be scenes of war being conducted between states. The armed forces of states can fight against each other in these man-made environments in the twenty-first century as well.⁸

Historically, cities always possessed a great degree of significance rooted in several elements. For instance, most cities are economic powerhouses of a country contributing to its development with trade by accumulating wealth and increasing prosperity. Moreover, urban areas are often dominated by large-scale mass production activities and become vital industrial venues. While some cities have symbolic, religious, and historical importance, representing intangible values beyond their material attributes, others are strategically important due to their geopolitical location and their potential to bridge over between an actor and critical infrastructure such as vital ports, rich resources, or territory. For these reasons, cities not only attract people searching for a better life but also the armed forces. Although war knocked on the door of many cities and left them in ruins throughout history, the exponential growth in urban population, the expansion of built-up settings, the diversity of actors involved in conflicts and advancements in technology particularly in the field of defence have magnified the destructiveness of urban warfare in the twenty-first century.

In this context, this research aims to explore the key characteristics and challenges of urban warfare by presenting the war in Ukraine that erupted in 2022 with an in-depth focus on urban warfare in Mariupol and fierce fighting in the city's streets.

⁶ Anthony King, "Will inter-state war take place in cities?", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 45, No.1 (2022): 71, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2021.1991797>.

⁷ Aaron Clauset, "Trends and fluctuations in the severity of interstate wars", *Science Advances*, 4, No.2 (2018): 1, doi: 10.1126/sciadv.aao3580.

⁸ King, *ibid*, 71.

1.2. The Hypotheses

Based on the information provided above, the following hypotheses have been developed:

States may fight against each other in the cities because taking control of urban areas would facilitate accomplishing strategic, political, operational, and tactical objectives.

Russian Federation seeks to capture key urban centres in order to pave the way for achieving its strategic, political, operational, and tactical goals.

1.3. Research Questions

While urban warfare is a concept that has been with humans since ancient times, conflicts emerging in various towns and cities around the world affirm that urban environments will continue to be fundamental battlegrounds in this century. According to recent reports illustrated by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 50 million people suffer from the destructive effects of urbanized conflicts and violence.⁹ In this context, understanding urban warfare is crucial in order to mitigate at least the level of threats that it may pose to civilians, policymakers, and the armed forces. Accordingly, this paper will seek to provide answers to the following research questions:

What are the key challenges of urban warfare in the 21st century?

What are the consequences of urban warfare in the 21st century?

What are the primary characteristics of urban warfare in the 21st century?

How are these wars conducted in the cities in the 21st century?

What aspects and difficulties of urban warfare were present in Mariupol?

What were the gains of the urban battles in Mariupol for the Russian Army?

1.4. Methodology

In order to address the research questions and test the hypotheses, a qualitative research design will be constructed in the thesis. The war in Ukraine and the urban battle in Mariupol will be presented as a case study. In this context, semantic discourse analysis

⁹ “When War Moves to Cities: Protection of Civilians in Urban Areas”, InterAction, When War Moves to Cities: Protection of Civilians in Urban Areas - InterAction [Accessed: 5.11.2022].

methods will be used extensively in this research because of the fact that the majority of the data regarding the war in Ukraine and the urban battle in Mariupol was collected from various trusted and well-known newspapers and news agencies. Moreover, the statements made by political leaders and figures both from Ukraine and the Russian Federation will be carefully interpreted to understand and paint a picture of the incidents that took place during urban warfare in Mariupol. The data will be drawn from both primary and secondary sources such as books, army field manuals, journal articles, newspaper articles and news agencies.

1.5. Scope And Limitations Of The Research

This research will illustrate the war in Ukraine as a case study because the armed conflict in the country can be considered the most recent example of urban warfare that emerged in the twenty-first century as various cities became key theatres of the fighting. Additionally, Ukraine is a case in point because the invasion of the country by Russian forces demonstrates that urban battles can still be fought between different independent state forces. The research will cover the period between March 2014 when Crimea was annexed by Russia since the illegal annexation of the territory can be considered a milestone forming a basis for the full-scale invasion of Ukraine that was launched in February 2022. Even though several cities such as Kyiv, Odesa, Dnipro, Kharkiv and Lviv were targeted by the Russian armed forces, the study will analyse the siege and battle of Mariupol; the port city that became the target of intense shelling on February 24, 2022, when the invasion began, surrounded on March 2, and fell on May 20.¹⁰

¹⁰ “May 21, 2022 Russia-Ukraine news”, CNN, https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/russia-ukraine-war-news-05-21-22/h_1fd57f039cf8a3e40bc41fd0bc85665f [Accessed: 18. 12.2022]

2. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Hybrid Warfare

Undoubtedly, although the concept of “hybrid warfare” draws the attention of many scholars and is a popular research topic, its definition is still imprecise and has no clear-cut. Nonetheless, most of the literature on hybrid warfare meets on common ground regarding that it is a type of warfare which integrates conventional tactics with additional components of irregular and regular forces to engender unpredictability and mistrust.¹¹ Hybrid warfare is not an entirely novel concept at all, as evidenced by the many conflicts that have arisen over time.¹² However, interest in the notion crested in the wake of Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014.¹³ As this type of warfare is known as being less costly both politically and economically, various actors seek to wage hybrid wars.¹⁴

Hybrid warfare is rich in characteristics but taking advantage of the vulnerability of targets by resorting to a lower degree of force, making it difficult for the aggressor to be accused of engaging in aggression is one of the most prominent aspects of this concept as by doing so, the aggressor can be in denial of undertaking offensive actions and deter the target from taking any measures that could escalate the situation.¹⁵

For this reason, blurring the line between peace and war deliberately is also hybrid warfare's one of the fundamental features as it deprives targeted countries of reacting promptly. The ability to attack a target without being caught on the radar of the adversary poses challenges for states in terms of identifying aggressive actions and counter-attacking. As a result, before the targeted nation assesses the threat, the offensive party may successfully achieve its goal and this ambiguity seems like a

¹¹ Helmut Philipp Aust, “Hybrid Warfare and the Turn to Resilience: Back to the Cold War?”, *Humanitäres Völkerrecht: Journal of International Law of Peace and Armed Conflict*, 3, No. 3/4, (December 2020): 296-300, <https://doi.org/10.35998/huv-2020-0017>.

¹² John Mecklin, “Introduction: The evolving threat of hybrid war”, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 73, No.5,(2017): 298.

¹³ Aust, *ibid*, 296.

¹⁴ Pol Bargués and Moussa Bourekba, *War By All Means: The Rise Of Hybrid Warfare* (Barcelona: CIDOB Report, 2022): 12-13.
https://www.cidob.org/en/articulos/cidob_report/n_8/war_by_all_means_the_rise_of_hybrid_warfare [Accessed: 10. 12.2022].

¹⁵ Chiara Libiseller, “‘Hybrid warfare’ as an academic fashion”, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 46, No.4 (2023): 867, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2023.2177987>.

challenge at first sight, it can be turned into an advantage.^{16 17} The standard rules of combat fall off the map while anarchy looms on the battlefield in hybridized conflicts.¹⁸ In this context, fighting against enemies in hybrid warfare is much like chasing ghosts, as they appear and haunt in the dark whilst their actions cannot be proven.

On the other hand, hybrid warfare can be considered as an additional layer added to compound warfare which is a term used to define warfare that combines the use of “irregular and regular force”. It is considered that by introducing modern instruments like terrorism, hybrid warfare broadens the spectrum of compound warfare.¹⁹ Thus, hybrid warfare resembles a plastic surgery giving and reshaping the face of the conflicts with some adjustments and changes.

Asymmetry and the significance of using non-kinetic means are key elements of hybrid warfare as well. Due to this, in this kind of war, using military strength slightly merged into the background. In this sense, hybrid conflicts are about fighting against the invisible with unseen methods and weapons.²⁰

In the literature related to hybrid warfare, it can be observed that there is an acute tendency to link hybrid warfare with non-state actors which is apprehensible since the term particularly functions well to understand the ability of such actors to operate and fight on the battlefield by combining both military and non-military methods during conflicts in Chechnya, Lebanon, Afghanistan and Iraq.²¹

The main underlying reason that non-state actors get an immense amount of attention

¹⁶ Aapo Cederberg and Pasi Eronen, “How can Societies be Defended against Hybrid Threats?”, *Strategic Security Analysis*, No.9 (2015): 4.

¹⁷ Milinko S. Vračar and Milica T. Ćurčić, “The evolution of European perception of the term 'hybrid warfare’”, *Vojno delo*, 70, No. 1 (2018): 14-16.

¹⁸ Mirosław Banasik, “How To Understand The Hybrid War”, *Securitologia*, No.1(2015): 19.

¹⁹ Stefano Marcuzzi, “Hybrid Warfare in Historical Perspectives” (Presentation from the Max Weber International Workshop “Fears of Trolls and Little Green Men. Does Hybrid Warfare Work, for Whom, and When?”, NATO Foundation Defense College, 2018)
https://www.natofoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/NDCF_StefanoMarcuzzi_Paper.pdf
[Accessed: 10. 12.2022].

²⁰ James K. Wither, “Defining Hybrid Warfare”, *per Concordiam Journal of European Security and Defense*, 10. No. 1, (2020): 8.

²¹ Erik Reichborn-Kjennerud, Patrick Cullen, “What is Hybrid Warfare?”, *Norwegian Institute for International Affairs (NUPI)*, 1, https://nupi.brage.unit.no/nupi-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2380867/NUPI_Policy_Brief_1_Reichborn_Kjennerud_Cullen.pdf
[Accessed: 10. 01.2023].

is that these opponents have broadened their horizons beyond military action and realised growing significance of non-military instruments. Additionally, they improved their capacity to employ cutting-edge weaponry, strategies, and technology that were previously unattainable. They also acquired specific abilities to successfully and concurrently apply their techniques in the same combat zone.²²

In this regard, it can be said that the hybridity of warfare puts a monopoly of legitimate use of force in peril. However, Hoffman, one of the first scholars who established a bond between hybrid wars and non-state actors and is considered a leading scholar who deals with the concept, indicates that narrowing down the hybrid challenges to non-state actors would be fallacious. Implementing novel tactics and switching from existing conventional units to irregular formations can also be strategies that states developed.²³

The annexation of Crimea, depicting clearly visible resorts to hybrid tactics by the Russian state can be an example aligning with Hoffman's statement. In a way to further back up this statement, it is argued that after the onset of the crisis in Ukraine state-centric approach to hybrid warfare evolved and the scope of the concept has widened.²⁴ Moreover, Hoffman also identifies hybrid threats by stating that they are "any adversary that simultaneously and adaptively employs a fused mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism and criminal activities in the battle space to obtain their political objectives".²⁵

Within this framework, hybrid warfare produced the term "hybrid tools" which can be cyber-attacks to target a state's networks, the spread of false news, the initiation of disinformation campaigns and the construction of antagonistic narratives by using propaganda tactics. The use of these instruments mainly aims to give invisible but severe harm to the adversary as these attacks do not always leave any seeable mark on the adversary and often take place in the digital realm. In this sense, with the rise of modern hybrid warfare, the arsenal of states has begun to include non-visible weapons

²² *ibid.*

²³ Frank G. Hoffman, "Hybrid Warfare and Challenges", *Joint Force Quarterly*, 1. No. 52 (2009): 37.

²⁴ Vračar and Ćurčić, *ibid.*, 15-16.

²⁵ Frank G. Hoffman, "Hybrid vs. compound war", <http://armedforcesjournal.com/hybrid-vs-compound-war/> [Accessed: 10.12 .2022].

such as malware since cyber tools have started to be deployed.²⁶

As we live in the information age, hybrid warfare cannot be evaluated independently from the media and the internet. While it takes advantage of mass communication networks²⁷ and traditional media is still an effective tool, social and new media are a force multiplier for the aggressive state and add a more complex layer to psychological and cognitive warfare. With millions or even billions of members, the virtual world has opened a new front in the cognitive domain and cyberspace. While this warfare occurs in a digital context, actions and events taking place in this domain have concrete and serious implications for the “real world”.²⁸ In the twenty-first century, the interconnectivity in the world created multi-threat domains, and, in this respect, it poses vital risks for states, making the individuals more vulnerable and potential targets of a non-kinetic strike.²⁹

Therefore, it can be argued that there is a strong attachment between hybrid warfare and cyber warfare. By attacking electronic devices or systems that manage and hold information on a country’s infrastructure, it is possible to successfully occupy a country without deploying even one soldier.³⁰ The hybrid wars in this context are fought with “cyber weapons” which could become more preferable to traditional weapons as they do not cost the earth in comparison to other military equipment.³¹

However, despite the fact that digital tools are widely used and have proven their effectiveness, hybrid warfare is not limited to them. Intervention in electoral processes or elections can be an instrument of hybrid warfare. Opponents may carry out campaigns by using both traditional and social media or secure funding for political

²⁶ Tughrul Yamin, “Hybrid Warfare – Challenges For Pakistan”, *Strategic Thought*, No.1, (2019): 130.

²⁷ VK Ahluwalia, “Hybrid Warfare: Battlegrounds of the Future”, *CLAWS Journal*, 12, No.2 (2019): 21.

²⁸ Haseeb ur Rehman Warrich, Muhammad Waqas Haider, and Tahir Mahmood Azad, “Media as an Instrument of Hybrid Warfare: A Case Study of Pakistan,” *Global Mass Communication Review*, 6, No. 1, (2021): 14, [https://doi.org/10.31703/gmcr.2021\(VI-I\).02](https://doi.org/10.31703/gmcr.2021(VI-I).02).

²⁹ Ibid, 22.

³⁰ Manel Medina Llinàs, *Hybrid Attacks On Critical Infrastructure* (Barcelona: CIDOB Report, 2022), 37, https://www.cidob.org/en/articulos/cidob_report/n_8/hybrid_attacks_on_critical_infrastructure [Accessed: 12. 12.2022].

³¹ Ibid, 36.

parties to determine the result of the elections which better suits their own interests.³²

The states or other actors of hybrid warfare may also resort to their economic power. They can sign energy-supply agreements which do not provide any advantages to the adversary, invest money or grant credits to establish a financial influence and pressure.³³ Moreover, countries may favour supporting organizations or think tanks financially that espouse beliefs, values and ideas that align with their interests to advance their own agendas and exert greater impact in political and social spheres in a state.³⁴

The influx of migration may coerce states to surrender their adversaries because experiencing the arrival of a mass number of immigrants can worsen prosperity and put pressure on various sectors. All of these may trigger disturbances in society and instigate significant political crises.³⁵

The use of proxies is another widespread practice in hybrid warfare. Proxies can be in any form of entities diverging from paramilitary organizations, political parties, or protests or separationist groups. While they can prevent a state to directly involved in a conflict, they can collect information and help its patron state to increase its political power in foreign lands. They can also engage in combat on behalf of states that have control over them.³⁶

2.2. Asymmetrical Warfare

Asymmetrical warfare is deeply analysed by scholars to examine especially recent conflicts. However, it is argued that most of the conflicts in history share asymmetric features where opponents' vulnerabilities are exploited. In this regard, the presence of dissimilarities in the relative military power between warring parties is not a unique trait that belongs to contemporary warfare. Asymmetry is a product of the past since

³² Jovana Marović, "Wars of Ideas: Hybrid Warfare, Political Interference, and Disinformation", <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2019/11/28/wars-of-ideas-hybrid-warfare-political-interference-and-disinformation-pub-80419> [Accessed: 12. 12.2022].

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Gregory F. Treverton, Andrew Thvedt, Alicia R. Chen, Kathy Lee and Madeline McCue, *Addressing Hybrid Threats* (Stockholm: Swedish Defence University, 2018), 50-51. Addressing Hybrid Threats (hybridcoe.fi) [Accessed: 12. 12.2022].

³⁵ Sascha-Dominik Dov Bachmann and Anthony Paphiti, "Mass Migration as a Hybrid Threat? – A Legal Perspective", *Polish Political Science Yearbook*, 50, No.1, (2021): 120, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15804/ppsy202122>.

³⁶ Treverton, et al, *ibid*, 58.

its patterns can be traced back to the Biblical tales of David and Goliath.³⁷

As wars are an inseparable part of human history and it is argued that almost all the conflicts were essentially conducted between adversaries whose power mismatch, it became necessary to define the concept of asymmetric warfare. Consequently, the term "asymmetric" was addressed in 1975 by Andrew J. R. Mack in his article titled "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars". Within the context of his writings, this term was used to refer to significant power imbalance between enemies.³⁸ Later, the definition of "asymmetric conflict" was provided by Paul Thazha Varkey in 1994, in his book. According to his definition, asymmetric conflict is a "conflict involving two states with unequal overall military and economic power resources".³⁹

Asymmetric wars pertain to engagements in which combatants utilize non-traditional tactics to attain strategic advantages and leverage their enemy's vulnerabilities. This terminology gained popularity following the conclusion of the Cold War because the number of conventional army-to-army confrontations decreased over time and "guerrilla warfare, espionage, terrorism, cyber-attacks, and economic sanctions" started to be new parts of conflicts. The distinguished characteristics of these type of conflicts involve being adaptable as it can be used in various physical terrains, having more decentralised decision-making processes, and its capacity to mentally affect the enemy.⁴⁰

Asymmetric warfare is fought between two parties and their powers are politically, financially, and militarily unequal. In this context, the adversary which is inferior position, may not always refer to a state or nation but a non-state actor or a group which represents different "ethnic, religious, or criminal interests".⁴¹ Moreover,

³⁷ Toni Pfanner, "Asymmetrical warfare from the perspective of humanitarian law and humanitarian action", *International Review of The Red Cross*, 87, No. 857 (2005): 150-151.

³⁸ Andrew Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict", *World Politics*, 27 No. 2 (1975): 175-200 (Quoted in: Lautaro N. Rubbi, Victoria Álvarez Magañini, Lucas Nascimento, and Dana Sager, "Asymmetric Warfare: Exploratory Study on the Non-Conventional Military Developments of the People's Republic of China in the Period 2012 – 2018," *Revista SAAP*, 14, No.1 (2020): 185, <https://doi.org/10.46468/rasap.14.1.N3> .

³⁹ Paul Thazha Varkey, *Asymmetric Conflicts: War Initiation by Weaker Powers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 20.

⁴⁰ Tudor Cherhat, "South China Sea: Asymmetric Conflicts. The Role of Chinese Paramilitary Forces", *Conflict Studies Quarterly*, 39, (2022): 24.

⁴¹ Raymond Mharapar, Lucky Bassie Bangidza and Steven Gwekwerere, "Asymmetric Warfare: Experiences, Perspectives, Inkling And Challenges With A Focus On Zimbabwe", *Austral: Brazilian Journal of Strategy & International Relations*, 3, No.5, (2014): 100.

despite the common idea in the field is that weaker parties of the conflicts benefit from asymmetry, parties that hold more power can also conduct asymmetrical warfare.⁴²

In this context, Steven Metz and Douglas V. Johnson II analysing asymmetry state that it is “acting, organizing, and thinking differently than opponents to maximize one’s own advantages, exploit an opponent’s weaknesses, attain the initiative, or gain greater freedom of action”.⁴³ Moreover, they concentrate on technological asymmetry in warfare concluding its presence was frequently witnessed throughout military history and this asymmetry influences the conflicts in which the weaker side of the war lacks the time to catch up with or fails to adapt to the superior adversary’s technology.⁴⁴ In their research, the scholars also presented the terms “asymmetry of will” and “normative asymmetries” to explain the conflicts that interests, legal and ethical standards of the enemy are diverse. As they attest, this diversity can be conclusive.⁴⁵

In line with their ideas, J. G. Eaton explains ‘cultural asymmetries’, and states that presuming that individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds share the same or at least similar ideas is a mistake. Culture can play an important role in the upcoming hostilities.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the scholar also contributes to the topic by examining the ‘asymmetry of stakeholding’. This type of asymmetry is significant as it builds a bridge between the parties of the conflict and their motivation. He argues that due to the fact that people's dedication to the causes could be impacted by how dire the situation is, to extent which an actor's vital interests are in danger is critical in a conflict.⁴⁷

In a battlefield dominated by asymmetric characteristics, non-traditional enemies do not adhere to international law and have no respect for its principles. Due to their unknown status as they are not considered as official belligerents, it is uncertain where their actions take place. Moreover, these so-called combatants frequently disguise themselves as innocent civilians, creating a challenge in discerning between regular

⁴² Cherhat, *ibid*, 25-26.

⁴³ Steven Metz and Douglas V. Johnson II, *Asymmetry And U.S. Military Strategy: Definition, Background, And Strategic Concepts* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2001), 5, Asymmetry and US Military Strategy (ethz.ch) [Accessed: 14. 12.2022].

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 10.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 10-11.

⁴⁶ J. G. Eaton, “The beauty of asymmetry: An examination of the context and practice of asymmetric and unconventional warfare from a western/centrist perspective,” *Defence Studies*, 2, No.1 (2007): 61-62, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14702430208405011>.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 67.

citizens and combatants actively involved in the hostilities.⁴⁸ While the methods of asymmetric warfare may include "suicide attacks, arms and drug trading, bombings, cyberattacks, economic warfare, and psychological warfare", these wars can spread far beyond national borders easily, delineating the borders of conflict zones is difficult.⁴⁹

On the other hand, asymmetric warfare is commonly associated with terrorism. Yet, considering these concepts as corresponding words would be inaccurate and misleading. Terrorism is not a form of asymmetric warfare itself. Indeed, terrorism is a method applied by an inferior actor in the combat zone and encompassed by the concept.⁵⁰

The combatants in asymmetric conflicts are cognizant of the benefits that modern technology offers and are more creative in terms of the strategies and tools they use. Today, devices that are part of our daily lives are low-priced. However, affordability can turn these devices into killing machines. They can be weaponised by actors involved in asymmetric warfare.⁵¹

The concept of asymmetric warfare is multifaceted. At its core, however, lies the notion of grappling with the 'unknown'. This means that there is always the element of surprise due to the unpredictability of the opponent stemming from disparities. In this regard, one can say uncertainty and asymmetry go hand in hand in asymmetric battlespaces.⁵²

2.3. Fifth Generation Warfare

Fourth Generation Warfare theory was introduced by Army and US (United States) Marine Corps officers under the lead of William S. Lind in 1989. The theory was developed to analyze and distinguish the changes and developments in warfare throughout time. In the paper written by William S. Lind and his peers, modern military history was divided into three different periods where it was claimed that the

⁴⁸ Małgorzata Kuć, "The Specific Nature Of Asymmetric Conflicts", *Teka Komisji Prawniczej PAN Oddział w Lublinie*, 13, No. 2 (2020): 377, <https://doi.org/10.32084/tekapr.2020.13.2-28>.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 378.

⁵⁰ Ajey Lele, "Asymmetric Warfare: A State vs Non-State Conflict", *Oasis*, 20, (2014): 101-102.

⁵¹ Richard Robert, "Guerrilla 2.0: Asymmetric warfare in the tech era," <https://www.polytechnique-insights.com/en/braincamps/geopolitics/asymmetrical-warfare-new-strategies-on-the-battlefield/guerrilla-2-0-asymmetric-warfare-in-the-tech-era/> [Accessed: 15. 12.2022].

⁵² Clinton J. Ancker and Michael D. Burke, "Doctrine for Asymmetric Warfare", *Military Review*, 83, No. 4 (2003): 18.

fourth generation warfare is forming its bases and key defining elements of these periods were presented and called “generations”.⁵³

According to William S. Lind, the Peace of Westphalia signed in 1648 is the date when four generations of warfare were born. The treaty monopolised the legal right to wage war. In other words, violence became exclusive to states, it was the privilege of the state to start and conduct a war. Therefore, a new chapter in history has begun. Within this framework, this date is considered the starting date of the first generation warfare (1GW) which terminated around 1860.⁵⁴

As it was indicated by Lind, 1GW characterized by a formal and orderly approach to battles, with “line-and-column tactics” dominating the battlefield. The creation of military culture was observed in the first generation which placed great emphasis on orderliness in the military and battlefield, resulting in the development of “uniforms, saluting, and careful gradations of rank”. However, in the mid-19th century, old tactics had grown antiquated, and maintaining order became problematic. The consistency in the culture of order decreased while disorder in the battlefield increased. Naturally, this contrast caused issues.⁵⁵

The second generation warfare (2GW) offered a solution to the inconsistencies between the culture of order and disorderliness. The priority of obedience over initiative is well established, as the latter may peril synchronization. As such, the military embraced a “top-down approach” to enforce discipline.⁵⁶ Moreover, “massed firepower” took the place of “massed manpower” because of the fact that “indirect fire” has started to have its influence significantly on the scenes of war. ⁵⁷The vast firepower and the financial capacity to supply the necessary materials were both made possible by technology. Ideas and technology were the primary elements that helped the first and second generations to come into leaf.⁵⁸

During the First World War (WWI), enhanced firepower capabilities led to the

⁵³William S Lind, Keith Nightengale, John F Schmitt, Joseph W Sutton, and Gary I Wilson, “The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation,” *Marine Corps Gazette* (1989): 22-23.

⁵⁴ William S. Lind, “Understanding Fourth Generation War”, *Military Review*, (2004): 12.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 12.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 12.

⁵⁷ Robert J. Bunker, “Generations, Waves, And Epochs Modes Of Warfare And The RPMA”, *Airpower Journal*, (1996): 2.

⁵⁸ Cornelis van der Klaauw, “GENERATIONS OF WARFARE: An Outdated Concept?”, *The Three Swords Magazine*, 37, (2021): 72.

emergence of third-generation warfare (3GW). While the part that technology plays cannot be ignored, mainly ideas sparked the beginning of this new generation of warfare. The fighting transformed into a non-linear form and during this period, the German military improved new tactics because of their inferior material capacity in comparison to other parties in the war. The forces relied on maneuver and, nonlinear tactics were used in the battlefield. Even though primary elements of third-generation tactics were valid by 1918, the manufacture of more advanced tanks led to remarkable alterations at the operational level in the Second World War. With the development of the Blitzkrieg concept aiming to defeat the enemy promptly⁵⁹, time management centred on military operational art.⁶⁰

The fourth generation warfare (4GW) was driven by ideas. In this generation of warfare, various actors have joined the theatre of war. Hence, states were no longer exclusive and sole units that have ability to use force.⁶¹ While Western ideas and culture dominated the world, it was believed that non-Western ideas and values such as Islamic culture might gain more prominence and give birth to 4GW.⁶²

Irregularity and asymmetry are defining elements of 4GW. In this generation of warfare, non-state actors have become involved in conflicts. Although the motives and strategies of modern non-state actors differ from the ancient non-state groups, 4GW was a resurgence of the pre-Westphalian world where various entities in addition to the states take part in conflicts.⁶³

Globalization is at the core of 4GW which enabled people to bind with each other by utilising novel technology. However, globalisation not only enabled ordinary, innocent citizens to connect, travel or trade, with each other and the rest of the world but also allowed terrorists and insurgents to access weapons, and resources which would

⁵⁹ “Blitzkrieg”, History, <https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/blitzkrieg> [Accessed: 16. 12.2022].

⁶⁰ Lind et al., *ibid*, 23.

⁶¹ William S. Lind, “The Canon and the Four Generations,” <https://original.antiwar.com/lind/2004/06/11/the-canon-and-the-four-generations/> [Accessed: 16. 12.2022].

⁶² Lind et al., *ibid*, 25.

⁶³ van der Klaauw, *ibid*, 73.

enhance their inventory and help them to take violent actions in various locations.⁶⁴

In this context, 4GW brought new challenges to the military in corresponding to the attacks of non-state actors because as mentioned above these groups can blend into the society and any force applied in this mixed environment can breach the principle of proportionality which would cause the armed forces of a country and a state finding themselves in a difficult position. In this context, relying on conventional modes of warfare became less relevant. Therefore, it is argued that 4GW is more about convincing the enemy to surrender and concluding wars with words, not guns. Due to this fact and to make a sweet deal, it is considered that negotiating skills are pivotal in 4GW.⁶⁵

In addition to the statement made by Lind and his peers, by noting that in 4GW it is aimed to have a direct effect on the decision-making of the enemy's policymakers, Hammes presented his own thoughts on the subject. According to Hammes, the old methods are vain, and the total annihilation of the enemy's forces is not on the carpet in 4GW. In the modern era, belligerents opt for less violent but still highly effective tools such as sending particular messages to the leaders of a country or the people who have a voice in the decision-making process and close ties with the policymakers. Accordingly, one can conclude that targets in the conflicts are not always physical.⁶⁶

Another critical point made by Hammes is that fighters of 4GW can leverage international networks to their advantage. Although there are various international organizations, they have their weaknesses that can be subtly exploited by these fighters. The political leaders of the member countries of these organizations can be a target of a 'political message' sent by actors of 4GW. Due to their limitations in compelling its member states to react in a certain way, the exploitation of these organizations may not enable warriors to alter the policymakers' perspectives of whom they target but they may decelerate the decision-making process or incapacitate the organisations to act.⁶⁷ Likewise transnational organizations such as religion-based,

⁶⁴ Simon Murden, "Staying the Course in 'Fourth-Generation Warfare': Persuasion and Perseverance in the Era of the symmetric Bargaining War," *Contemporary Security Policy*, 28, No.1, (2007): 198, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260701240682>.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 199.

⁶⁶ Thomas X. Hammes, "Insurgency: Modern Warfare Evolves into a Fourth Generation", *Strategic Forum*, No. 214 (2005): 2.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 3.

humanitarian or even criminal organizations can be instruments serving to enlist new members to augment manpower or discreetly transfer individuals and resources.⁶⁸ Furthermore, subnational organizations can be instruments of actors of 4GW.⁶⁹

Additionally in another paper, Hammes states commercial technology gave the combatants the ability to conduct their operations effectively. While they lack a large command-and-control system, it is sufficient for combatants to have a credit card and a computer to communicate with other peers or gather information about their adversaries' actions. As these opponents may also be capable of covering their tracks, finding the identity and location of these opponents may be tricky.⁷⁰

In these conflicts, information persists to be an essential part of warfare, and even its importance will increase due to the extensive use of technology. Media coverage might transform into a functional weapon that has greater potency to harm the enemy than a tank.⁷¹ Moreover, private military companies and rebel groups can be sent to a country both during a conflict to take an active part in hostilities and during peacetime with various objectives such as destabilising the area.⁷²

While discussions on fourth-generation warfare prevail, it is argued that fifth-generation warfare (5GW) arrived. According to Thomas Hammes patterns of other generations of warfare will not vanish entirely but the domination of 4GW will decrease eventually as 5GW is on its way. He indicates that the most prominent elements of 5GW will be advances in biotechnology and nanotechnology.⁷³

Another characteristic of 5GW is the emergence of idiosyncratic citizens created by the virtual world. As humans start to spend more time in the digital world, they can develop a problematic sense of belonging and loyalty to this artificial environment. The strong attachment of people to cyber purposes may cause serious issues such as radicalisation and extremism. These individuals can be reached easily through online

⁶⁸ Ibid, 3.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 4.

⁷⁰ Thomas X. Hammes, "War evolves into the fourth generation", *Contemporary Security Policy*, 26, No.2 (2005): 211,. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260500190500> .

⁷¹ Khurshid Khan and Afifa Kiran, "Understanding Fourth Generation Warfare And It's Relevance To Pakistan", *IPRI Journal*, 12, No. 2 (2012): 94.

⁷² Waseem Ahmad Qureshi, "Fourth- and Fifth-Generation Warfare: Technology and Perceptions", *San Diego International Law Journal (SDILJ)*, 21, No.187 (2019): 192-193.

⁷³ Thomas X. Hammes, "Fourth Generation Warfare Evolves, FIFTH EMERGES", *Military Review*, 87, No. 3 (2007): 20-21.

platforms.⁷⁴ 5GW can also be considered “the battle of perceptions and information” bending the truth and creating alternative realities to shape people’s opinions.⁷⁵

Likewise, Reed also analyses 5GW. According to Reed, fifth-generation warfare goes beyond the scope of 4GW by incorporating the “physical (land, air, and sea), information (cyber), cognitive, and social (political)” realms into combat.⁷⁶ Similarly, Daniel Abbott tackles the emergence of 5GW stating that it is possible for an adversary fighting in 5GW to be unaware of its opponent. One party may also deny the existence of war in a case in which the war is conducted perfectly.⁷⁷

In addition, George Michael considers that lack of leadership makes this generation of warfare unique.⁷⁸ 5GW is an exceptionally sophisticated form of insurgency characterized by its quite customized and distributed nature. However, as insurgents and terrorists can act independently and organize attacks randomly, countering them would be arduous.⁷⁹

2.4. The Concept of Urban Warfare

2.4.1. Defining A “City”

Before delving into urban warfare providing a definition of urban area and city is required to form a basis to have a good understanding of fighting in cities. First of all, urban area is a more overarching term which is used to address, towns, cities, and suburbs. This term can also describe an area which encircles around a city.⁸⁰ While the urban area is a less contested notion, labelling an area as a “city” is often more

⁷⁴ Ibid, 21.

⁷⁵ Qureshi, *ibid*, 190.

⁷⁶ Donald J. Reed. “Beyond the War on Terror: Into the Fifth Generation of War and Conflict”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 31, No.8 (2008): 692, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100802206533>.

⁷⁷ Daniel H. Abbott, “Go Deep: OODA and the Rainbow of xGW”, *The Handbook of 5GW*, ed. Daniel H. Abbott (Nimble Books, 2010), 180. (Quoted in Armin Krishnan, “Fifth Generation Warfare, Hybrid Warfare, and Gray Zone Conflict: A Comparison”, *Journal of Strategic Security*, 15, No. 4 (2022): 17-18. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.15.4.2013>).

⁷⁸ George Michael, *Lone Wolf Terror and the Rise of Leaderless Resistance* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012), 155. (Quoted in Armin Krishnan, “Fifth Generation Warfare, Hybrid Warfare, and Gray Zone Conflict: A Comparison”, *Journal of Strategic Security*, 15, No. 4 (2022): 18. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.15.4.2013>).

⁷⁹ Armin Krishnan, “Fifth Generation Warfare, Hybrid Warfare, and Gray Zone Conflict: A Comparison”, *Journal of Strategic Security*, 15, No. 4 (2022): 18. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.15.4.2013>).

⁸⁰ “Urban Area”, National Geographic, <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/urban-area/> [Accessed: 17.12.2022].

problematic since there is no consensus on what a city is because all the existing definitions differ from country to country.⁸¹

The difficulty in reaching a global agreement stems from the fact that many countries identify a human settlement as a “city” when the number of people exceeds a particular threshold whereas others do not only take the population into account but also consider if additional services are available. For these countries having a particular amount of people living in an area is not sufficient, there should be certain facilities to deliver services to its inhabitants.⁸²

However, the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) presents a more harmonised definition to mitigate the level of confusion that arose from disagreements on the topic. According to its report, contiguous grid cells with a density of no less than “1,500 people per km²” or areas where a minimum of fifty per cent of them consists of built-up settings are considered cities. Moreover, in order to be defined as a city, no less than 50,000 inhabitants should be residing in this built-up and densely populated area.⁸³

Cities may have “physical forms and functional or economic forms”. While physical form refers to the urban area consisting of various structures, the latter alludes to not only the built-up urban area but also the surrounding region linked economically to the outside where the heart of the city’s labour market is located.⁸⁴

On the other hand, some scholars approach the notion from a sociological perspective. For instance, cities are described as “large settlements” by Max Weber. Yet, the most crucial features for a settlement to be qualified as a “city” are being in possession of market and having an economy centred on production and trade.⁸⁵ Stated differently,

⁸¹, “What is A City”, European Commission, <https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/thefutureofcities/what-is-a-city#the-chapter>. [Accessed: 5.06.2023].

⁸² *ibid*

⁸³ “1. A new perspective on urbanisation”, OECD iLibrary, Cities in the World: A New Perspective on Urbanisation, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/d0efcbda-en/1/3/1/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/d0efcbda-en&csp_=29e66c6b271e1232011215f7024775fa&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=book [Accessed: 14.01.2023].

⁸⁴ “Definition of Urban Terms Demographia World Urban Areas”, Demographia, <http://www.demographia.com/db-define.pdf> [Accessed: 18. 01.2023].

⁸⁵ Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, Vol. 2, ed. Guenter Roth and Claus Wittich, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 1212-1214. (Quoted in Lütü Sunar, “Weber’in Tarihsel Şehir Sosyolojisi: Modern Toplumun Temeli Olarak Şehir”, *Istanbul University Journal of Sociology*, 3, No.22 (2011): 427).

these settlements ought to serve as centres where diverse economic pursuits take place, except agricultural activities which predominate in rural areas.⁸⁶

Providing another definition Louis Wirth argues a city is a “relatively large, dense, and permanent settlement of heterogeneous individuals”.⁸⁷ Additionally, according to Robert E. Park, despite being man-made settings that dazzle people with their opulent avenues and structures, cities are reflections of their inhabitants, an outward representation of their inner selves. Every resident in the city leaves their distinct fingerprints to the urban settings, thus culminating in an intricate yet striking tapestry.⁸⁸

The development and ongoing existence of cities are greatly impacted by the areas around them whilst these areas also have effects on them. This dynamic and interactive relationship highlights how cities and the territories that encircle them share special bonds. Hence, cities and their surroundings are mutually in interaction with each other. In this respect, it can be assumed these areas are also catalysts for changes within each others' borders. While it is true that every city has its own distinctive features in essence, these urban environments exhibit similarities in terms of the structures they have and their purposes as well as the services and facilities they offer to their residents.⁸⁹

Similarly, Peter Roberts states cities represent constructed environments that undergo continuous evolution. It is futile to oppose changes within these environments, as urban centres frequently serve as the primary wellspring for innovative transformations. Political, economic, and social systems-all of which are subject to alterations- produce new needs and demands and because of that change becomes inescapable. Although the word "change" could be a frightening term for some individuals, cities can reap advantages from it because new opportunities may arise as

⁸⁶ Lütü Sunar, “Weber'in Tarihsel Şehir Sosyolojisi: Modern Toplumun Temeli Olarak Şehir”, *Istanbul University Journal of Sociology*, 3, No.22 (2011): 427.

⁸⁷ Louis Wirth, “Urbanism as a Way of Life”, *American Journal of Sociology*, 44, No. 1 (1938): 8.

⁸⁸ Robert E. Park, “The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the City Environment”, *American Journal of Sociology*, 20, No. 5 (Mar., 1915): 578.

⁸⁹ Chauncy D. Harris, and Edward L. Ullman. “The Nature of Cities”, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 242 (1945): 7.

consequences of these innovations. In this situation, change should be viewed positively.⁹⁰

2.4.2. The Urbanisation Trend

The past two decades have witnessed an exponential population increase in urban areas. This rising global urbanisation trend will continue to accelerate in the upcoming years and remain one of the defining characteristics of the 21st century. While cities are habitats of more than half of the global population today, it is estimated that this rate will hit 70% by 2050.⁹¹

In the 21st century, the architecture and infrastructure of cities ranging from elite business districts and luxurious neighbourhoods to slums also change. Urban terrains expand both vertically and horizontally containing street level, roofs, sewers and tunnels, airspace, and cyberspace. Therefore, it becomes difficult to plan the expansion of cities. Managing rapid urbanization is a challenge for cities in the Global South in particular, despite developed countries having better control over their urban growth. It is believed that the number of informal settings may continue to increase and there might be an enlargement of boundaries of peri-urban areas in underdeveloped regions of the world and this growth may be worrying.⁹²

Peri-urban areas and informal settings have different names around the globe such as *favelas* in Brazilia or *gecekondu* in Türkiye. However, despite different names, their essence is the same. All of these districts provide shelter to the most vulnerable and poorest individuals within the society. According to the United Nations, the number of people who are inhabitants of slums which is a general indication term used for referring to informal settings reached one billion. A considerable proportion- %90 to be concrete- of these slums are in the Third World. Therefore, today, the term ‘urbanization’ goes hand in hand with ‘slum growth’.⁹³

⁹⁰ Peter Roberts, “The Evolution, Definition and Purpose of Urban Regeneration”, *Urban Regeneration A Handbook*, ed. Peter Roberts and Hugh Sykes (London: SAGE Publications, 2000), 11.

⁹¹ “Governing Cities”, OECD, OECD Web Archive [Accessed: 5.06.2023].

⁹² David Kilcullen and Gordon Pendleton, “Future Urban Conflict, Technology, and the Protection of Civilians”, <https://www.stimson.org/2021/future-urban-conflict-technology-and-the-protection-of-civilians/> [Accessed: 10. 12.2022].

⁹³ Raimond Duijsens, “Humanitarian challenges of urbanization”, *International Review of The Red Cross*, 92, No. 878 (2010): 354. doi:10.1017/S181638311000041X

In this context, the significant occurrence of slum growth is analysed in detail by Mike Davis as this trend should also be analysed rigorously. Davis highlights that in various regions in the world such as in Asia and Africa, the rate of squatting is extremely high. For instance, authorities in India express concerns that if this trend cannot be forestalled, cities may be overtaken by slums.⁹⁴ Consequently, Davis posits that the cities people dream of for the future may not be modern, pristine urban settings with skyscrapers and stunning architecture. Instead, he suggests that grimy and polluted cities marred by towering heaps of garbage may become the habitat for many people across the globe. In future, cities can be human settlements which are dystopic rather than utopic.⁹⁵

Slums not only allure poorer citizens of the country dreaming of having higher life standards but also immigrants and refugees. These places are home to people who have different ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds. According to data released by The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR), half of the refugees are not living in the camps mandated by the organization but in slums and shanty towns in the cities. A high number of refugees are not registered to the government system to not being deported. As overpopulation puts pressure on public services such as health and prices soar due to high demand, friction between local and refugee populations may occur in these areas.⁹⁶

As a result, these frictions among the residents of slums have the potential to lead to polarization and fragmentation of society. Moreover, while this situation may cause the emergence of violent incidents, policing the slums and implementing the rule of law is challenging, especially for the poorer countries. In districts with extreme violence, disturbances and unrest may peak and evolve into paramilitary or guerrilla conflict.⁹⁷

In a similar vein, The European Strategy and Policy Analysis System report illustrates wealth gap between individuals grows with urbanisation. As grievances among society

⁹⁴ Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (New York: Verso, 2006), 17-18.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 19.

⁹⁶ "Media Advisory: Half of the world's refugees now live in cities", UNCHR, <https://www.unhcr.org/ie/news/news-releases/media-advisory-half-worlds-refugees-now-live-cities> [Accessed: 13.12.2022].

⁹⁷ Duijsens, *ibid*, 361.

may fuel civil wars, this pattern is concerning for governments that struggle to keep pace with the rapid expansion of urban areas.⁹⁸

By 2035, many cities where the majority of the people in the globe live will be located on or near the coast.⁹⁹ As climate change is also another crucial trend in the metropolitan century many people living in littoral cities may suffer from natural resource scarcity putting the government under excessive pressure. In the context of urban warfare, the urbanization of coasts is concerning, because littoral cities tend to amplify the complexity of the urban combat. These battlespaces demand more sophisticated tactics due to their location.¹⁰⁰

Accordingly, rising sea levels will be another concern for cities situated on or near the coasts in the future. It is estimated that the map of coastlines can dramatically change by 2050. In the next 30 years, several cities can be underwater. The risk of being erased by floods especially concerning for 340 million people residing in China, Bangladesh, India, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Thailand.¹⁰¹ The disappearance of these areas may have serious consequences for the rest of the world, both domestic and global economy may suffer, or the world may face a serious immigration crisis as millions of people will be displaced and turn into environmental refugees.^{102 103}

In addition, transmission of diseases would affect a wide range of people residing in densely populated and interconnected areas. The likelihood of the emergence of pandemics and the spread of viruses may correlate with urbanization. Moreover, as the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated fighting against outbreaks of diseases is not an easy task in crowded cities because inadequacy in medications and available beds in the hospitals may cause the government to fall short in treating its citizens which in

⁹⁸ESPAS, *Global Trends to 2030: Challenges and Choices for Europe*, (2019), 13. ESPAS_Report2019.pdf (europa.eu) [Accessed: 16.10.2023].

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ministry of Defense, *Strategic Trends Programme Future Operating Environment 2035* (2014), 25.

¹⁰¹ Natalie Wolfe, "Rising seas could 'erase' three times more cities by 2050 than previously thought", <https://www.news.com.au/technology/environment/climate-change/rising-seas-could-erase-three-times-more-cities-by-2050-than-previously-thought/news-story/590fca66ae9bd8494b6707e67f565356> [Accessed: 16. 12.2022].

¹⁰² Rachel Pannett, "Rising seas risk climate migration on 'biblical scale,' says U.N. chief", *The Washington Post*, February 15, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2023/02/15/un-sea-levels-rising-climate-migration/> [Accessed: 16.10.2023].

¹⁰³ Megan Sever, "Economic costs of rising seas will be steeper than we thought, unless we prepare", <https://www.sciencenews.org/article/climate-economic-costs-rising-seas-will-be-steeper-than-thought> [Accessed: 16.10.2023].

turn disrupt livelihoods, exacerbate preexisting inequalities, and claim more lives than armed conflicts.¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, with an extreme degree of urbanization, the world has witnessed the emergence of ‘megacities’ that have a population of over 10 million. While New York and Tokyo were the only places described as megacities in the past, projections illustrated that megacities’ number will soar to 41 to 53 by 2030.¹⁰⁵

Since the global urbanization trend establishes significant ties between both local and global levels, developments occurring in megacities could have an impact on the world. In this respect, it can be said that the rise of megacities will deepen the issues that uncontrolled urbanization brought as these areas are and will be the places where have the densest population. In addition, megacities may change the political portrait of the world. As cities and metropolitan areas are the heart of the economy and where wealth and prosperity accumulate their political power may continue to grow and establish bilateral and multilateral ties with each other. As the power of influence that the urban population holds is likely to increase, it can be expected to witness interesting discussions on the diffusion of power between the state and the city. The trend of urbanization may put the Westphalian state system under question. In this century, cities might become political actors that have a say in world politics.¹⁰⁶

2.4.3. The Strategic and Symbolic Value of Urban Areas

While examining urban warfare, one can come across the statement that many wars broke out in built-up terrain. Although this indication is accurate and will be further analyzed in the upcoming historical background section, it becomes necessary to explain why urban settings are the places where armed conflicts frequently take place. The simple answer to this question is that these areas have always possessed strategic, symbolic, and economic significance. Therefore, especially from the 17th century, armies sought to seize control of the cities because as well as being the centre of the

¹⁰⁴“How has our urban world made pandemics more likely?”, Gavi, <https://www.gavi.org/vaccineswork/topics/history> [Accessed: 16. 12.2022].

¹⁰⁵ “Megacities and Complexity”, Grayline, <https://graylinegroup.com/megacities-and-complexity/> [Accessed: 16. 12.2022].

¹⁰⁶ Peter Engelke, *Foreign Policy for an Urban World: Global Governance and the Rise of Cities* (Washington DC: Atlantic Council’s Brent Scowcroft Center on International Security, 2015), 5-7, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/20151008_Urbanization_IB.pdf [Accessed: 17. 12.2022].

spirit of defiance they were and still are financial and, commercial hubs.¹⁰⁷ From ancient times to today, economic activities have always contributed to and increased the importance of cities. According to recent data, it is anticipated that 80 per cent of economic growth is created in cities.¹⁰⁸

Along with being catalysts for economic development, metropolitan cities, as well as smaller and less developed urban areas, serve as the cornerstone of the logistical and operational activities. Roads and railways connect urban areas like a spider web made of iron and asphalt. These areas provide a hub for the seamless transportation of goods and services which is essential for all aspects of military operations.¹⁰⁹

Nevertheless, not only land transportation but waterways and airways are also crucial in urban areas. Urban areas are often established around or near big inland waterways. These waterways may fragment the urban area making crossing to the other side impossible without using a bridge. Thus, bridges can be a vital critical target to be seized. Likewise, seaports and airports may be also key in urban warfare as they provide logistical support. The presence of vital resources and features such as seaports or airports, and strategically or operationally important urban infrastructure to be captured may draw soldiers of opposing sides to the cities. However, an assault on such structures may give no option but to protect the terrain to the defending forces since these specific features would be a critical factor which enables the defenders in the urban area to sustain the war.^{110 111}

In addition, urban areas are frequently found on land that controls a region or an approach route. Supposing that this is the case, these areas are tools not goals as attacking forces seize certain regions to secure a path to a different purpose. Thus, taking an urban area would serve as a milestone facilitating and permitting forces to achieve their ultimate aim.¹¹² Moreover, an urban area itself can be a colossal obstacle

¹⁰⁷ Williamson Murray, *War and Urban Terrain in the Twenty-First Century* (Virginia, Institute for Defense Analyses, 2000), 3, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA388446.pdf> [Accessed: 15. 03.2023].

¹⁰⁸ “Increasing importance of cities”, European Commission, https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/foresight/topic/continuing-urbanisation/increasing-importance-cities_en [Accessed: 15. 03.2023].

¹⁰⁹ Murray, *ibid.*, 6-7.

¹¹⁰ Michael G. Anderson, “Decided among the Cities The Past, Present, and Future of War in Urban Environments”, *Military Review*, (2023): 27.

¹¹¹ Headquarters Department of The Army, *Urban Operations Field Manual No. 3-06* (Washington, DC, 2006), 1-5 <https://irp.fas.org/doddir/army/fm3-06.pdf> [Accessed: 15. 03.2023].

¹¹² *Ibid.*

standing between the military and its objective. In some instances, if bypassing or encircling the urban area is not possible armed forces may be obliged to enter the urban area and engage in urban combat.¹¹³

On the other hand, in addition to strategic values, cities particularly capitals such as Berlin or Paris harbor significant symbolic values. These cities are treated as “strategic centres of gravity” of the countries where they are located.¹¹⁴ In particular, capital cities have political and symbolic significance that makes them desirable for parties involved in armed conflict, as seizing control of the capital is frequently a primary goal.¹¹⁵ Therefore, invading these cities can have a decisive effect on the ending of the conflict.¹¹⁶ Being the reflection of national identity and symbol of the existence of the citizens of the nations adds value to the existence of cities making them something more than a concrete jungle.¹¹⁷

2.4.4. The Physical and Social Dimensions of Urban Areas

The urban environment has two dimensions, which are physical and social respectively. These dimensions constantly interact with each other and shape urban areas. By pinpointing key components of these dimensions that are significant, one can assess the probability of the emergence of various dangers and have the ability to implement effective measures to prevent or mitigate their impact. Although armed forces avoid fighting in cities, in some cases urban battles can be a reality that cannot be escaped.¹¹⁸

As an urban area is a mixture of built-up and human terrain, both environments hold equal significance. Failing to appreciate the importance of either of these dimensions can be disastrous for an army. While conquering the built-up environment and the territory is essential for the armies in the first phase of the urban operation, a successful and total invasion of the human terrain is also vital since the minds of people are

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Emma Elfversson, Kristine Hoglund, “Are armed conflicts becoming more urban?”, *Cities*, 119 (2021): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2021.103356>.

¹¹⁶ Headquarters Department of The Army, *ibid*, 1-5.

¹¹⁷ Murray, *ibid*, 7.

¹¹⁸ Max Neiman, “Urban Operations: Social Meaning, The Urban Built Form, And Economic Function”, *Soldiers In Cities: Military Operations On Urban Terrain*, ed. Michael C. Desch (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2001), 142.

psychological centres. Thus, armies in the twenty-first century should be aware that invading only the territorial space is not sufficient. Rather, they had to go beyond the physical dimension of cities and expand their military campaigns to the cognitive dimension as failure in establishing control in this terrain would result in facing national resistance.¹¹⁹ Therefore, a closer look at both dimensions and unfolding the layers of an urban environment are imperative to conduct urban warfare.

2.4.4.1. The Physical Dimension of Urban Areas

The term urban terrain encompasses the physical landscape, the man-made structures above and below it, as well as the infrastructure that runs through it. The nature of the structures in question will dictate the number of military personnel necessary for a mission, as well as the tools and resources required. However, assessing the attributes of each feature in isolation would be inadequate since the number of features per unit area and the degree of complexity within these features play a crucial role in determining the size and makeup of the selected military force for a given operation.¹²⁰

Firstly, the physical dimension of an urban terrain refers to a built-up area comprising a collection of buildings, facilities, and infrastructures.¹²¹ As it was mentioned in the previous section, the urbanization trend is shoulder-to-shoulder with the expansion of built-up areas and various data show this pattern will remain unchanged. Like floodwater, built-up areas will engulf the countryside and rural areas. Once transportation infrastructure such as highways, waterways, and railways established the connection between the residents of urban areas, industrial strip areas emerged along with these vital transportation links.¹²²

The main physical element of built-up areas are buildings including high-rise apartments, skyscrapers, offices, malls, warehouses, factories and tin or wooden barracks in shanty towns. These structures by themselves affect the course of combat

¹¹⁹ Murray, *ibid*, 3.

¹²⁰ Jamison Jo Medby, Russell W. Glenn, *Street Smart: Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield for Urban Operations* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2002), 42.

¹²¹ Headquarters Department of The Army, *An Infantryman's Guide To Combat In Built-Up Areas Field Manual Headquarters No. 90-10-1* (Washington, DC, 1993), 1-1.
<https://www.bits.de/NRANEU/others/amd-us-archive/FM90-10-1C1%2895%29.pdf> [Accessed: 21.03.2023].

¹²² *Ibid*, 1-3.

as they provide “concealment and cover”.¹²³ Moreover, their heights can be exploited by the actors fighting the urban environments. Tall buildings can be valuable objectives to be seized or retained as these high-rise structures, their roofs in particular, may give sniper shooters extensive fields of fire enabling them to have a better angle of view. Fire controllers and observers can also station themselves on these buildings. In addition, the upper levels of these structures along with their top floor can be used as positions for establishing dominance over a district.¹²⁴

The kind of materials like cement, concrete, wood, and wires used in the construction of the buildings can also have certain impacts on the forces on the ground. The buildings constructed using concrete and steel may impede armies from breaching the walls and restrict communication.¹²⁵ A multi-storey house, on the other hand, which consists of a cellar and is built with thick bricks can easily be turned into a defensive structure like a citadel by the urban fighters.¹²⁶

Furthermore, buildings constructed with thinner and cheaper materials such as manufacturing complexes or workplaces may only offer some advantages in terms of concealment. While most of these buildings are the product of modern architecture and urban planning, they are ineffective in protecting against bullets or shelling. Because of the fact that their walls would not serve as shields during an urban operation, counting on these structures would be a catastrophic mistake.¹²⁷

Streets with buildings on one or both sides are utilized as pathways to reach destinations and these spaces are “avenues of approach” of the military. Nonetheless, travelling along streets can be hindered by various structures, leaving little room for alternative routes. Consequently, barriers on urban streets tend to be more impactful than those on open fields due to their greater difficulty even in some cases impossibility to circumvent which would especially put armoured vehicles in difficult positions.¹²⁸

¹²³ Ibid, 1-4.

¹²⁴ Alexandre Vautravers, “Military operations in urban areas”, *International Review of The Red Cross*, 92, No. 878 (2010): 441, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1816383110000366>.

¹²⁵ Headquarters Department of The Army, 1993, *ibid*, 2-1.

¹²⁶ Vautravers, *ibid*, 441.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 441.

¹²⁸ Headquarters Department of The Army, 1993, 1-4.

Unlike other elements in the urban environments underground networks that exist within populated areas may go unnoticed. Yet, they can significantly impact the success of operations. These systems encompass subway lines, sewer systems, underground storage areas, and utility tunnels.¹²⁹ The war in the cities can be fought both above and below the surface.

Considering these, it can be said that the urban area consists of myriads of artificial and natural components and the sum of these creates a very complex and intertwined structure. Thus, the defining characteristic of urban areas and what makes them the most complex battlespace is “density”.¹³⁰ Although changes occur at a quite slow pace in other environments, alterations in built-up environments tend to emerge faster. Thanks to advanced engineering techniques, buildings soar high almost touching the sky whereas subterranean constructions delve deep beneath the earth's surface. Today, there are gigantic skyscrapers with more than a hundred floors, apartment complexes as big as villages, and modern underground cities in various locations in the world. This efficient use of every dimension of built-up settings has made it possible for more people to live in more confined spaces. For instance, high-rise apartments which provide shelter to many residents are now located in areas where there were only tiny houses in previous centuries and this ushers an era of unprecedented urban density.¹³¹

The effect of this density can be seen everywhere in the physical dimension. Skyscrapers or underground networks can be nests of thousands of enemies. Avenues of approach may extend beyond the surface, floors or interior parts of the buildings whilst tunnels can also offer routes to both the defender and the attacker. Bullets fired from small arms or shells can come from unidentified sources. Even cars once facilitated people's lives can become an obstacle and preclude movement. In urban areas in the twenty-first century, from a tiny room in a house to a sector, there are countless potential micro-battlespaces that can be the places where many combatants breathed their last.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 1-4.

¹³⁰ Russell W. Glenn, *Heavy Matter: Urban Operations' Density of Challenges* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2000), 2.

¹³¹ Ibid, 4-5.

2.4.4.2. The Social Dimension of Urban Areas

Although the social dimension cannot be seen, one should bear in mind that the physical dimension would be meaningless without the people living within the urban area. This invisible dimension may create an even greater challenge to the military. Each individual in a built-up setting composes the soul of the urban environment, adding their values and ideas to these unique spaces. Urban settings are artificially made by humans; thus, it can be said that the physical dimension owes its existence to the people. The distinctiveness of urban environments derives from the human element.¹³²

Even though the physical dimension of an urban area has been the key area of focus of the military for a long time, in contemporary warfare social dimension drew the attention it deserves. It was recognized that understanding the population is the path to success and it is indispensable to regard the human terrain as a determining element in urban warfare. As a consequence, “intelligence, civil affairs and host-nation counterparts, regional experts, reach-back capabilities” gained more significance.¹³³

In the contemporary world, controlling the population will be at the core of the wars and the key determinant of the outcome of the conflicts. Therefore, armies should go beyond the “hearts-and-minds” strategy and take advantage of “political, religious, and psychological dynamics” within the society.¹³⁴ According to statements made by scholars, urban areas are centres of gravity. However, this statement can be contested with the argument that the actual centre of gravity is not the city itself or certain buildings located on it. It is not made of iron and steel but “flesh and blood”.^{135 136}

Moreover, the role of social identity cannot be underestimated when it comes to conflicts as the identity of the inhabitants of the city provides valuable insight into the urban fabric. It is worth noting that weapons do not function on their own but are wielded by combatants who take part in warfare. In the end, it is the individuals who

¹³² András Mezö, “Multi-Domain Operations in An Urban Environment”, *The Three Swords*, 38, (2022): 39.

¹³³ Richard Wolfe, Amy Richmond, and Jason Ridgeway, “Dense Urban Environments The Crucible of Multi-Domain Operations”, *Military Review*, (2021): 27.

¹³⁴ Roberto J. González, “‘Human terrain’ Past, present and future applications”, *Anthropology Today*, 24, No.1 (2008): 22.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 23.

¹³⁶ Ralph Peters, “The Human Terrain of Urban Operations”, *Parameters*, 30, No. 1 (2000): 4, doi:10.55540/0031-1723.1962.

pull the trigger or detonate a grenade. The growing significance of human dynamics and their interplay greatly affect ground operations taking place in “offensive, defensive, and stability operations” forms. As most of the decisive fighting occurs on the ground, ground forces play a pivotal role in urban warfare. Thus, this dimension holds particular importance in this type of warfare.¹³⁷

The social dimension pertains to the people, their qualities, and their relationships within a defined space. It covers numerous factors, including population size, density, and diversity, as well as levels of cooperation or discord among social factions such as “religion”, “ethnicity”, “economy”, and “race”. Additionally, it encompasses territorial clustering or segregation, education levels, important legal characteristics, power structures, and political systems.¹³⁸

Built-up terrain is the mirror of people who embody different religions, and social attitudes. Furthermore, although all people and urban areas are distinctive, some cities that possess unique religious or historical importance can have a distinct impact on individuals' behaviour involved in conflicts compared to cities without such deeply ingrained symbolic or patriotic significance. Motivated by the sentimental value of the area, the population in these cities might protect the city at all costs, which can cause unexpected outcomes.¹³⁹

Another important factor in human terrain is whether peace or disturbances within the society are present because while living in harmony increases the cohesiveness of the locals and makes them more compliant against hostile parties, tensions rooted in religious or ethnic differences can further entangle both the combat mission and post-conflict process as it was seen in cities such as Beirut.¹⁴⁰

Moreover, residents of the city can generate intangible borders and districts based on the religion, ethnicity and socioeconomic status of inhabitants living in a particular area. The members of the society, then are not only able to create a concrete city but also an abstract city. Although the armed forces seemingly enter only a city, it is

¹³⁷ Paul Scharre, *UNCERTAIN GROUND: Emerging Challenges in Land Warfare* (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security (CNAS), 2015), 7, CNAS-Report_Uncertain-Ground_151203-v02.pdf (s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com) [Accessed: 21. 03.2023].

¹³⁸ Neiman, *ibid*, 142.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, 143.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 143-144.

possible that areas inhabited by city dwellers with diverse cultures and identities may have a different composition and physical structures than the rest of the built-up setting shaped and constructed by their residents. Consequently, the reactions of the people in these areas are likely to be different from those living in other districts. While the armed forces possess topographical maps, having the map of the social dimension could be a game changer.¹⁴¹

Therefore, taking into account the social norms and customs of a city is a principal factor in carrying out urban operations. Ignoring or violating the social rules of a particular population can quickly damage the legitimacy of an operation. To form a general opinion about the inhabitants of the city, information about their “age, wealth, gender, ethnicity, and religion” is necessary. While this information can permit the military to conduct demographic analysis, having cultural intelligence may also allow forces to operate in the urban terrain with less difficulty.¹⁴²

Urban areas are in constant flow like a river, and they are shaped by the diverse activities of their inhabitants. This social and material order is essential for a city to function effectively, and this interaction creates “urban cohesion”. Urban cohesion has always been essential during conflicts. Due to cities’ ability to oppose the adversary, soldiers have encountered many difficulties when striving to take them over. However, as cities are predominantly made up of people who are inherently fragile, the essence that makes them stronger can simultaneously render them weaker as well. By killing the entire or significant part of the population, cities can literally be destroyed as once people are killed, there would be nobody to defend the area.¹⁴³

2.4.5. Definition of Urban Warfare

Given the information above, urban warfare refers to combat taking place in a built-up environment that consists dense population. Although there are some considerations that urban warfare comes in numerous varieties, “from insurgency or terrorism operations to gang violence or public protests” many incidents fall under the

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 144.

¹⁴² Medby and Glenn, *ibid*, 54-55.

¹⁴³ Roger J. Spiller, *Sharp Corners: Urban Operations At Century's End* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Press, 2001), 6.

umbrella of the concept,¹⁴⁴ this thesis deals with the combats conducted by armed forces in an urban environment of some significant size and have some degree of density based on population.¹⁴⁵

2.4.6. Literature on Urban Warfare

Urban areas have served as human habitats for centuries and these built-up settings consistently became conflict zones. Consequently, the concept of urban warfare has garnered significant scholarly interest, prompting extensive research on the topic. This section aims to analyse key literature on urban warfare in order to enhance comprehension of this subject.

General Charles C. Krulak appreciates that rapid urban growth and the accumulation of the majority of the world population in coastal cities can be challenging for the military. In his paper, he introduces a fictional mission to paint a picture of future conflicts in which Marines would be deployed and claims that instability in the world mainly driven by ethnic, nationalist, and economic issues will worsen.¹⁴⁶

According to Dorn and Varey, Krulak argues that asymmetry will dominate the conflicts and they will be fought in urban areas. In an environment where all parties are in possession of advanced weaponry and ready to use them against each other without any hesitation and belligerents are indiscernible from civilians, the military would need to carry out multiple activities simultaneously in such narrow areas. Tasked with providing food to those in need and conducting peacekeeping operations, the military can suddenly find themselves in the middle of a fight. All of these incidents may occur on the same day and within three city blocks. Within this framework, Krulak defines these conflicts with the term “three-block war”.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ “Urban Warfare”, RAND, <https://www.rand.org/topics/urban-warfare.html#:~:text=Urban%20warfare%20can%20take%20many,or%20defined%20theater%20of%20operations.> [Accessed: 22.03.2023].

¹⁴⁵ “Urban Warfare”, Oxford Bibliographies, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780190922481/obo-9780190922481-0046.xml> [Accessed: 23.03.2023].

¹⁴⁶ Charles C. Krulak, “The strategic corporal: Leadership in the three-block war”, *Marine Corps Gazette & Leatherneck Magazine of the Marines*, 82, No.1 (1999): 16.

¹⁴⁷ Charles Krulak, “The Three Block War: Fighting in Urban Areas”, *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 64, No. 5 (15 December 1997): 139-141 and Charles Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War”, *Marine Corps Gazette*, 83, No.1 (January 1999):18-23 (Quoted in A. Walter Dorn and Michael Varey, “The Rise and Demise of the “Three Block War,” *Canadian Military Journal*, 10, No. 1 (2009): 38-39).

Robert Scales admits fighting in cities can be devastating. Giving the examples of the Second World War and Vietnam, Scales states that urban warfare causing high fatalities continues its existence.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, he argues that both high-income and low-income groups will cohabit in the future urban centres. In such an environment where inequalities exist, a bolt from the blue may flame diverse kinds of urban violence.¹⁴⁹ Therefore, thinking that cities will not be theatres of battles is nothing but self-delusion.¹⁵⁰ As there is no escape from fighting in urban terrain, he proposes an “indirect approach” to reduce the cost of war as far as possible.¹⁵¹

In 2003, Richard Norton tackled urban warfare from a different perspective. Bearing in mind that the phenomenon of failing states has been a popular research topic, he questions what the state and military would face if ‘failed cities’ appear and introduces the term “feral city” because he believes failed states would be an outdated concept that emerged in the twentieth century. Although these states will not cease to exist, feral cities will be on the rise in the twenty-first century.¹⁵²

According to Norton’s definition, with a population of more than a million people, a “feral city” is indeed a metropolis. The government is unable to maintain the rule of law in these areas, but it is capable of functioning as an actor in the international system. In this respect, although the state lost its control at the domestic level it has some degree of power at the international level. In addition, the residents of feral cities cannot access basic social services and the state does not provide any security assistance. As state power is void, the city is divided into various zones controlled by criminals, armed resistance groups, and terrorists.¹⁵³

Feral cities can be perfect attraction points for terrorist organisations. Moreover, modern technology may enable these groups to pursue their activities remotely and without facing any difficulty. The conurbation is a defining characteristic of a feral city. The immense number of structures provides unlimited places to hide from

¹⁴⁸ Robert H. Scales, *The Indirect: Approach How US Military Forces Can Avoid The Pitfalls of Future Urban Warfare* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: 2002), 1, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA399275.pdf> [Accessed: 03. 04.20223].

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 2-3.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 3.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 5.

¹⁵² Richard J. Norton, “Feral Cities”, *Naval War College Review*, 56, No. 4 (Autumn 2003): 97-98.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 98.

satellites or sensors. In this dystopic environment, networks can be extended, and new members can be found effortlessly.¹⁵⁴

Betz and Stanford-Tuck state despite the widely held belief, that the challenges of urban combat do not differ from other kinds of warfare, all battle environments are equally burdensome. The scholars assert that the same difficulties apply in all types of environments. Hence, the combat environment in urban warfare is not exceptional, like all other environments, it is defined as “neutral” by these scholars. However, they add that urban warfare is expected to become increasingly common in the years to come. For this reason, the military should be proficient in fighting in built-up terrain.¹⁵⁵

Alice Hills claims that the essentials of fighting in the cities remain unchanged. The past 60 years have seen a striking consistency in the features and tactical limitations of urban operations.¹⁵⁶ However, demographic trends, globalization and non-state actors getting more powerful day by day necessitates careful analysis of urban warfare as cities will be a vital part of future conflicts.¹⁵⁷

Moreover, some scholars pay attention to demography since it is seen as an essential reason for the increasing trend in urban warfare. It is claimed that as cities have millions of residents, expansion of conflicts to the urban areas was inevitable. Given that, Russell Glenn notes that due to “demographics” future battles will take place in the cities despite the reluctance of armed forces to combat in such environments.¹⁵⁸ On the other hand, similar statements echoed in Ralph Peters’ *Our Soldiers, Their Cities*. Peters states urban deployments are unpreventable in the upcoming century due to the urbanization of the world. Furthermore, the significance of rural areas, excluding those that are resource-rich, attenuated, while the acquisition of control over urban centres

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 99.

¹⁵⁵ David Betz, Hugo Stanford-Tuck, “The City is Neutral: On Urban Warfare In The 21st Century”, *Texas National Security Review*, 2, No.4 (August 2019): 61.

¹⁵⁶ Alice Hills, *Future War In Cities Rethinking a Liberal Dilemma*, 1st Ed. (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2004), 243.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 242.

¹⁵⁸ Russell Glenn, *Combat in Hell: A Consideration of Constrained Urban Warfare* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Arroya Centre, 1996), 2.

maintained its importance. Therefore, he argues, the era of “new siege warfare” might be coming.¹⁵⁹

Wahlmann argues the growth of cities has increased their military significance and presents four factors which amplify their prominence. Firstly, as cities’ size and their number have increased, urban areas cover larger land masses around the globe. Secondly, cities harbor manpower and resources which are needed for making a war. Thirdly, cities offer a wide range of sophisticated transportation options. Lastly, urban terrain neutralizes some of the most potent military technologies.¹⁶⁰

On the other hand, Anthony King examines urban insurgencies and seeks to shed light on the relationship between state forces’ size and urban insurgency prevalence. He argues that because the army shrank to a smaller size, the number of urban insurgencies increased. In the last century, armies had the ability to establish strict control over the cities. Yet, as the military’s size reduced drastically, they were forced to rely on less manpower, and it often became more difficult to maintain control over cities which in turn gave breathing room to urban insurgents. In the twenty-first century, the downsizing of armed forces stagnated whereas cities kept growing.¹⁶¹

Moreover, in another paper, Anthony King reconfirms that cities will be the main arenas of war, but he goes further and asks another question regarding the likelihood of the emergence of inter-state conflicts in cities since most of the research conducted is on intrastate wars and insurgencies. According to King, it is also likely that states will fight against each other in the cities. However, he writes that demography or asymmetry alone are insufficient to explain why states would fight in urban terrain. Downsizing of armies will be another cardinal factor for the state armed forces to be drawn into a conflict in cities.¹⁶²

In his book, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla*, David Kilcullen argues rural insurgencies will be replaced by urban insurgencies. The future he imagines is urban which will be shaped by “population growth, urbanization,

¹⁵⁹ Ralph Peters, “Our soldiers, their cities”, *Parameters*, 26, No.1 (1996): 43. doi:10.55540/0031-1723.1768.

¹⁶⁰ Alec Wahlman, *Storming The City* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2015), 1.

¹⁶¹ Anthony King, “Urban insurgency in the twenty-first century: smaller militaries and increased conflict in cities,” *International Affairs*, 98, No. 2 (2022): 610, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iia007>

¹⁶² King, *Will inter-state war take place in cities?*, 70.

littoralization and connectedness”.¹⁶³ Likewise, Sampaio discusses urban warfare and considers both increases in population and the aggressive behaviours of non-state armed organizations are primary drivers of urban conflicts.¹⁶⁴ In his paper, he touches upon “conflict economies.” The wheel of conflict economy spins in the cities where non-state armed groups generate their revenue to fund their operations. As built-up areas offer more opportunities to generate revenue and maintain illegal financial activities, these groups adapt urban environment.¹⁶⁵

On the other hand, Stephen Graham represented the concept of ‘new military urbanism’ which involves a significant change in perspective, wherein the infrastructure, civilian population, and both the private and public areas of cities are all seen as possible targets and dangers.¹⁶⁶

In addition, urban warfare literature introduced another interesting term ‘urbicide’ which gained popularity during the Bosnian War 1992-1995.¹⁶⁷ According to Martin Coward, the term refers to the “widespread and deliberate destruction of the urban environment”. Without a doubt, human life is more important than buildings, but the term deserves attention because tearing down the structure can be considered as attacking the soul of the city. By destroying the city, the aggressor also disrupts the urban fabric and the community inhabiting the city. It is an attempt to erase the memories, identities, and history of society. Moreover, the destruction of the building also put the lives of citizens in danger as some of them are vital for their survival.¹⁶⁸

While the term evokes genocide and these concepts seem related and interconnected with each other, these are two different concepts since the targets of urbicide are structures such as bridges or towers in the city. However, it should be noted that

¹⁶³ David Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla* (London: Hurst&Company, 2015), 28.

¹⁶⁴ Antonio Sampaio, “Before and after urban warfare: Conflict prevention and transitions in cities,” *International Review of the Red Cross*, 98, No.1 (2016):72, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1816383117000145>.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 73.

¹⁶⁶ Stephen Graham, *Cities under siege: the new military urbanism* (London: Verso, 2011), XIII.

¹⁶⁷ “Urbicide: The politics of urban destruction,” The University of Manchester, <https://research.manchester.ac.uk/en/publications/urbicide-the-politics-of-urban-destruction> [Accessed: 20. 06.2023].

¹⁶⁸ Martin Coward, *Urbicide The politics of urban destruction* (Milton: Routledge, 2009), 13.

genocide and urbicide may be committed in the same conflict.¹⁶⁹ As Shaw argues urbicide may be a part of genocidal war.¹⁷⁰

On the other hand, Evans addresses the rise of megacities and acknowledges the potential for certain urban areas to become significant battlegrounds in the twenty-first century. Yet, according to Evans, it is early to assume that megacities will be the primary theatres of war where advanced military forces engage in urban combat as this premise requires further evidence to be confirmed. Furthermore, portraying these densely populated areas as an entirely new operational environment would be an overstatement. The megacities can indeed be sites of future conflicts but saying that they will be the main metropolitan places in which American troops will engage in urban combat could be assertive. Additionally, these urban environments home to millions of people are not a recently developed military phenomenon. Moreover, the emergence of megacities does not diminish the relevance of smaller and medium-sized built-up areas because it is highly likely that these settings continue to be battlegrounds where hostile parties fight against each other.¹⁷¹

Williams and Selle contradict Evans, asserting that the size of the cities would have a significant impact on the course of the fighting. For this reason, they insist that although the key principles of strategy which will be followed during an urban operation will not change, the scale of a city should not be ignored. Furthermore, being prepared for fighting in a massive environment would enable the armed forces to tackle a war in smaller cities. Therefore, the military should develop different capabilities and skills that could be used in both larger and smaller cities. The military should hope for the best but prepare for the worst kinds of operational environments.¹⁷²

The antiquity of urban warfare and the likelihood of its permanence in the 21st century is echoes in Louis A DiMarco's book *Concrete Hell: Urban Warfare From Stalingrad to Iraq*. In his book, DiMarco indicates he believes the future is a reflection of the past,

¹⁶⁹Ibid, 53.

¹⁷⁰ Martin Shaw, "New Wars of the City: Relationships of "Urbicide" and "Genocide", *Cities, War, and Terrorism: Towards an Urban Geopolitics*, ed. Stephen Graham (New Jersey: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 148.

¹⁷¹ Michael Evans, "The Case against Megacities", *Parameters*, 45, No. 1 (Spring 2015): 33-34, doi:10.55540/0031-1723.2800

¹⁷² Phil Williams and Werner Selle, *Military Contingencies in Megacities and Sub-Megacities* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Press, 2016), 7.

thus, he analyses key city battles since the Second World War on a case-by-case basis aiming to hold a mirror to the upcoming conflicts in built-up environments.¹⁷³

2.4.7. Historical Background of Urban Warfare

As emphasized by many scholars, the concept of urban warfare is not novel. Throughout history, war in cities has claimed countless lives. Moreover, there are also many statements made on the unchanged nature of urban warfare. Thus, it is seen necessary to provide the historical background of the concept in order to develop some sort of readiness for future conflicts that will outbreak in urban areas. According to DiMarco, urban areas are the places where critical political decision-making processes take place and leaders inhabit. For this reason, there is nothing more natural than cities constituting a centre of gravity. Once this centre of gravity is assaulted and successfully seized, it would lead to a collapse in morale. Consequently, the defending forces would be incompetent to continue to fight because it would lose its political, economic, and cultural centre.¹⁷⁴ Thus, it can be said that occupying and taking control of a city is a dagger to the heart of the defender.

The first footprints of urban warfare were discovered in Hamoukar, a city located in northeastern Syria. The findings of archaeologists illustrated crumbling walls made of mud bricks that had been severely bombarded and then set on fire. In addition, above 1,200 oval-shaped "bullets" were found in the field and evaluated as proof of an ancient urban battle.¹⁷⁵ It is estimated that this ancient battle emerged around 3500 BC and put an end to the settlement's existence.¹⁷⁶ Ironically, Hamoukar, where burned to the ground and earthed up due to a violent conflict, five millennia later has suffered another brutal war but this time, the conflict was conducted with helicopters and grenades instead of primitive weapons.¹⁷⁷

From 900 BCE to 600 BCE, the Assyrian Empire which was a major regional power

¹⁷³ Louis A. DiMarco, *Concrete Hell: Urban Warfare From Stalingrad to Iraq* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2012), 25.

¹⁷⁴ DiMarco, *Concrete Hell: Urban Warfare From Stalingrad to Iraq*, 14.

¹⁷⁵ John Noble Wilford, "Archaeologists Unearth a War Zone 5,500 Years Old", *The New York Times*, 16 December 2005, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/16/world/middleeast/archaeologists-unearth-a-war-zone-5500-years-old.html> [Accessed: 07. 08.2023].

¹⁷⁶ William Harms, "Evidence of battle at Hamoukar points to early urban development", <https://chronicle.uchicago.edu/070118/hamoukar.shtml> [Accessed: 08. 08.2023].

¹⁷⁷ Owen Jarus, "Site of Earliest Known Urban Warfare Threatened by Syrian War", *Site of Earliest Known Urban Warfare Threatened by Syrian War* (nbcnews.com) [Accessed: 08. 08.2023].

in Mesopotamia and consisted of united city-states had the reputation of being the world's most ancient empires.¹⁷⁸ The Assyrian empire expanded to dominate the ancient world from Egypt in the south, through the Levant and Mesopotamia, and all the way to Asia Minor, with their professional standing army, which was the world's earliest active force. With the inventory full of iron weapons, they produced, advanced engineering, and tactical skills, they had the greatest military power.¹⁷⁹

The Assyrian Army was the first army that blended combat and engineering skills. Its engineers created siege engines, constructed tunnels and bridges, and enhanced supply and communication networks. Thus, the army owed its success in achieving military objectives and victorious conquests to siege warfare which was an aspect of urban warfare. Moreover, the pieces of evidence of urban warfare are not limited to the equipment they used during sieges. There are also statements made by the king indicating that he flattened the cities and towns where inhabitants chose to fight but not surrender.¹⁸⁰

Jericho, one of the ancient cities in the world and once home to 2,000 residents also supports the argument that urban warfare is as old as human history itself. The archaeological findings illustrate it is a walled city which was surrounded by a tower and ditch. The existence of such a defence system and artwork depicting warriors arranged in a column are interpreted as the city came under organized attacks.¹⁸¹

In ancient times siege operations were widely used by military forces to capture cities. Specialized types of equipment and tactics were indispensable parts of siege warfare since they provided advantages and enabled armies to conduct operations against their enemies. Therefore, engineering and engineers are of tremendous importance because they were one of the main actors who devised strategies regarding urban fighting. Perhaps, it was because the systems they developed enabled armies to outflank their enemies and conquer the cities with less difficulty. Professional engineers were vital both for designing protective structures such as walls and for attacking the enemy to

¹⁷⁸ "Assyrian Empire", National Geographic, Assyrian Empire (nationalgeographic.org) <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/assyrian-empire/> [Accessed: 09. 08.2023].

¹⁷⁹ Joshua J. Mark, "Assyrian Warfare", Assyrian Warfare - World History Encyclopedia [Accessed: 10. 08.2023].

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Arthur O' Sullivan, "The First Cities", *A Companion to Urban Economics*, ed. Richard J. Arnott, Daniel P. McMillen (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006), 41-42.

find the weaknesses of its defence and develop equipment like battering rams or throwing machines.¹⁸²

In the Middle Ages, capturing cities maintained its importance for the armies but there was not any apparent change in the technique of the attacks, similar strategies were applied during combats.¹⁸³ Later, The Renaissance had a serious impact on conducting warfare. With the invention of gunpowder and cannons, the design of the cities changed; high and vertical walls were replaced by lower and broader walls. However, engineering and mining continued to play a crucial role on the battlefield.¹⁸⁴

Starting from the end of the 17th century, fortresses lost their effectiveness due to the rapid growth of urban populations and the expansion of cities beyond their walls. Additionally, the evolution of artillery and small arms technology brought about changes in infantry tactics. The units with few combatants armed with lightweight weapons, gained the ability to transform individual buildings into their fortified strongholds. As a result, fortified cities have started to gradually vanish.¹⁸⁵

Although, city and state were considered as a single unit and city-states were the main actors in ancient times, the relationship between cities and states transformed with modernization. City-states were replaced by nation-states. The city was not the "nation" itself but a part of the nation.¹⁸⁶ Between the 18th century to the early part of the 20th century, siege operations remained prevalent, but cities ceased to become the main theatres of war. During this period, rural areas were fundamental battlefields where firepower and manoeuvre played a decisive role in winning a victory over the opposing side.¹⁸⁷

On the other hand, the Industrial Revolution planted the seed of urbanization. With industrialization, small towns and villages transformed into cities whilst existing urban areas started to expand their borders.¹⁸⁸ In this way, industrial cities were born. The

¹⁸² DiMarco, Concrete Hell: Urban Warfare From Stalingrad to Iraq, 18.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 19.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 20.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 22-23.

¹⁸⁶ Martin Shaw, "New wars of the city: 'urbicide' and 'genocide'", <https://users.sussex.ac.uk/~hafa3/city.htm> [Accessed: 12. 08.2023].

¹⁸⁷ DiMarco, Concrete Hell: Urban Warfare From Stalingrad to Iraq, 22.

¹⁸⁸ Elizabeth Yuko, "How the Industrial Revolution Fueled the Growth of Cities", <https://www.history.com/news/industrial-revolution-cities> [Accessed: 10. 12.2022].

arrival of the Industrial Age was of great importance, especially because it coincided with population growth and urbanization. Before this period, urban warfare mostly involved overcoming fortifications by using siege crafts, and crossing the city walls was the ultimate aim as it would generally result in the fall of the city. However, the Industrialization Age made external walls irrelevant.¹⁸⁹

Cities started to be considered significant battlespaces by European socialist rebels in the 19th and 20th centuries. Cities were the most suitable places to spark revolutions. For this reason, the military was obliged to oppose revolutionists in the streets of the city to suppress them preventing small sparks from setting the whole city on fire. Within this context, French colonial forces published the first 'urban military operations', 1847 street-fighting manual, written by Bugeaud. The manual "*La Guerre des rues*" (The War of the Streets) demonstrated the French military tactics developed to tackle Abd el-Kader who led the struggle against colonialism in Algiers. Allegedly, these principles were claimed to be applied by the French army in the capital city of France in the 19th century while quelling the uprisings.¹⁹⁰

In the 20th century, during the First World War, the development of tanks and warplanes was unveiled. Although the war was fought mainly in trenches and in rural areas, it was evident that these new killing machines were promising, harbouring the enormous potential to destroy human-made environment. In the upcoming years, during World War II (WWII), both tank and military aircraft fulfilled their potential and satisfied expectations, taking thousands of lives without any discrimination.¹⁹¹

While vast open fields and rural areas stretching as far as the eye could see had traditionally been the primary battlegrounds, with the outbreak of the Second World War, rooms within buildings transformed into crucial fronts and valuable targets to be seized. After that point, war became a concept that could even occur and be fought between four walls. The war was conducted between industrial giants across the globe such as the United States, Germany, and the United Kingdom. The materials and goods

¹⁸⁹ Michael Evans, "War and the City in the New Urban Century", War and the City in the New Urban Century - Quadrant Online, <https://quadrant.org.au/magazine/2009/01-02/war-and-the-city-in-the-new-urban-century/> [Accessed: 10. 12.2022].

¹⁹⁰ Abdalrahman, Kittana. "City Resilience amid Modern Urban Warfare: the case of Nablus, Palestine". In Carola Hein (ed.) International Planning History Society Proceedings, 17th IPHS Conference, History-Urbanism-Resilience, TU Delft (2016): 424.

¹⁹¹ Shaw, New wars of the city: 'urbicide' and 'genocide', *ibid*.

manufactured in these countries' industrial hubs such as Osaka, Krasnoyarsk, and Essen kept the war going. WWII is considered the first war in which urban areas and civilians were intentionally targeted by hostile parties. The mass killing of innocents and the destruction of built-up settings were not tragic haphazards but deliberate actions taken by the armed forces. Developments in technology, tactics, and strategies that emerged during these dark years added a new dimension to wars in the cities.¹⁹²

Furthermore, it is anticipated that man-made terrains were theatres of forty per cent of the fighting that occurred during WWII. During this period, from large cities to small towns, numerous urban areas were victims of the terror of war. Although urban warfare has its roots in ancient times and became an integral part of history with the emergence of cities, it is considered that WWII formed the basis of modern urban combat. As countless intense battles took place in cities, there were a lot of lessons taken from the military.¹⁹³

During WWII, death also came from the sky, bombs rained down on Dresden, Hamburg, and Tokyo. The strategic bombings of cities created urban carnage and revealed how deadly wars in cities can become. In the last phases of the war, the dropping of atomic bombs cemented the dreadfulness of urban warfare by instantly destroying entire metropolitan areas of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and their inhabitants.¹⁹⁴ Due to the destruction of cities by air raids, the Holocaust, and the atomic bombings of two Japanese cities, WWII was a war that caused the most devastation and suffering in history and ended with a death toll of more than 50 million.¹⁹⁵

While many cities suffered from the terror of war in World War II, The Battle of Stalingrad erupted on August 23, 1942, and concluded on February 2, 1943, is widely regarded as one of the most intense urban combats in history. Stalingrad was worth capturing because seizing the city would grant the German Army access to oil-rich

¹⁹² Simo Laakkonen, "Urban resilience and warfare: How did the Second World War affect the urban environment?", *City and Environment Interactions*, 5 (2020): 1. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cacint.2020.100035>

¹⁹³ Paul Latawski, "The Evolution of Urban Warfare", *SMALL ARMIES, BIG CITIES: Rethinking Urban Warfare*, ed. Louise A. Tumchewics (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 2022), 41.

¹⁹⁴ Shaw, *ibid*.

¹⁹⁵ "World War Two - The most destructive global conflict in human history", BBC, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/world-war-two-the-most-destructive-global-conflict-in-human-history/z6q8bdm> [Accessed: 12. 08.2023].

regions of the Caucasus and was a major industrial centre feeding the war machine of the Soviets by manufacturing vital war-related goods such as 50% of T-34s, artillery and the T60 light tank.¹⁹⁶ The city held significant psychological value for Hitler's propaganda campaign as it was named after Josef Stalin.¹⁹⁷ From train stations to rooms in the apartments, every inch of the city was a front in the battle. Soldiers of both sides frequently occupied the same buildings, the only boundary separating them from each other were hallways. There were also patterns of close and hand-to-hand combat fought by using hand grenades, machine guns, or simply knives.¹⁹⁸

The battle was a case in point as it highlighted the significance of the ability to resupply and use combined arms for both sides. After the Battle of Stalingrad, it has been recognized that combating enemies in underground environments is of equal significance to those on the surface. It has also been observed that the greater the intensity of the fighting on the streets, the greater the likelihood of combatting underground.¹⁹⁹ In Stalingrad, empty tunnels, sewers, and holes that were previously deserted were full of soldiers shooting at each other. As the rage of war in the tunnel no less than the city streets, the underground battles were called *rattenkreig* (rat war). The short distance and close combats between Germans and Soviets and the streets of Stalingrad nullified the tactics of Blitzkrieg. Consequently, snipers spread more death and fear than tanks. Each room in the city was the enemy base, the city even witnessed some cases in which the kitchen in a house was occupied by Germans while the living room was in the hands of Soviets.²⁰⁰ With casualties estimated at approximately two million, it was one of the deadliest battles in human history.²⁰¹

Likewise, the Cold War Era witnessed various conflicts in cities although their

¹⁹⁶ Matt Whittaker, "When Was the Battle of Stalingrad?", <https://www.thecollector.com/when-was-the-battle-of-stalingrad/> [Accessed: 14. 08.2023].

¹⁹⁷ "Battle of Stalingrad", History, <https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/battle-of-stalingrad> [Accessed: 19. 08.2023].

¹⁹⁸ Tony Paterson, "Revealed: The forgotten secrets of Stalingrad" <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/world-history/revealed-the-forgotten-secrets-of-stalingrad-8282751.html> [Accessed: 19. 08.2023].

¹⁹⁹ John Spencer and Jayson Geroux, "Urban Warfare Project Case Study Series Case Study #1 - Stalingrad", <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/urban-warfare-project-case-study-1-battle-of-stalingrad/> [Accessed: 23. 08.2023].

²⁰⁰ "Preparing for an assault on a warehouse in Stalingrad, 1942", Rare Historical Photos, Preparing for an assault on a warehouse in Stalingrad, 1942 - Rare Historical Photos [Accessed: 24. 08.2023].

²⁰¹ Benginür İkbāl Akgül, "Zafer uğruna yerle bir oldular: Kanlı şehir savaşları", <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/zafer-ugruna-yerle-bir-oldular-kanli-sehir-savaslari-769404.html> [Accessed: 02. 09.2023].

intensity never reached the urban wars experienced in the Second World War. Nations striving for independence and freedom stigmatized the Cold War Era. Despite Europe being seen as the main centre of a newly emerged bipolar world established by two superpowers, The Soviet Union and the United States of America (USA), anti-colonial resistance movements flamed insurgencies. As a result, urban warfare took unexpected turns. With the emergence of liberation movements, war knocked on the doors of the cities in Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. While the main adversaries were irregular insurgents, there were also cases where fighting parties blended with regular and irregular forces as seen in the Battle of Hue.²⁰² In addition, “the integration with air and naval forces and coalition partners”, was observed in coastal areas as a part of urban warfare.²⁰³

Therefore, the Battle of Hue which was a part of the Tet Offensive broke out on January 31, 1968 and ended on March 2, 1968, in South Vietnam was an illustrative case to understand the characteristics of urban combat that took place during this era. The Battle of Hue was also profound since it left its mark in the minds of U.S. citizens for being the most relentless battle in the history of their country.²⁰⁴

Although the primary arenas of fighting were jungles and open rice fields in Vietnam, the battle was moved to the streets of Hue which was an ancient city and has cultural importance, when countless “North Vietnamese regulars, Viet Cong guerrillas and local Communist militias” struck U.S. military bases and urban areas in South Vietnam with over 100 synchronized attacks. Migration of the war to the cities was unexpected for the forces of the United States, thus US troops were deprived of essential equipment crucial for such terrain. In addition, some soldiers also lacked training which is crucial for engaging in urban combat. As American forces were unprepared to fight in the urban terrain of Hue, the remedy they found for combatting in Hue was benefiting from the experience of the Second World War by studying training

²⁰² Latawski, *ibid*, 46-47.

²⁰³ *Ibid*, 48.

²⁰⁴ Christopher Woody, “52 years ago, the bloodiest battle of Vietnam ended, and it changed forever how Americans felt about the war”, <https://www.businessinsider.com/anniversary-of-the-battle-of-hue-during-the-vietnam-war-2020-1> [Accessed: 20. 11.2023]

manuals.²⁰⁵

Leaving 80 per cent of the city ravaged and thousands of dead bodies including combatants from all parties and civilians, the battle illustrated avoiding urban warfare is often not possible for both political and military leaders, thus, being ready and well-prepared to be deployed in the city streets is necessary.²⁰⁶ Although American forces' arsenal included heavy weapons, deployment of these weapons, artillery, and close air support were at their disposal, rules of engagement prevented them from exerting their superior military power and paralyzed them from acting even when they detected where the enemies were located. In the later phases of the battle, the restrictions were lifted as too many soldiers' lives were lost and it was understood that Americans had no option but to use heavy weapons even if it would mean destroying the city.²⁰⁷

Cutting the enemy's line of supply and blocking enemy reinforcements to avoid fighting in a prolonged war were key takeaways for the fighting parties and armed forces of other countries that would engage in urban combat in the future.²⁰⁸ Moreover, the necessity of having combined arms troops with "armour, infantry, engineers," and firepower that can breach densely defended lines and massive concrete barriers was observed. It was also understood that to defeat the enemy in urban warfare, "land, sea, and air forces" must cooperate under a single command and leadership.²⁰⁹

Moreover, the British experience in Northern Ireland has supported comments on the migration of insurgents from the mountains to the cities. In the Cold War Era, Northern Ireland saw another type of urban warfare. In August 1969, the grievances between Catholic Ireland and Protestant England growing for centuries fueled the eruption of violent upheavals in Londonderry, and eventually, riots spilt over seven cities including Belfast. When the upheavals went to extreme the "Battle of the Bogside" broke out. During the three-day battle, rioters barricaded the streets, threw Molotov

²⁰⁵ Bob Drogen, "Mark Bowden's searing 'Hue 1968' finds miscalculations in the bloodiest battle of the Vietnam War", *Los Angeles Times*, August 31, 2017, <https://www.latimes.com/books/jacketcopy/la-ca-jc-bowden-hue-1968-20170831-story.html> [Accessed: 07. 12.2023].

²⁰⁶ Olga Dror, "Learning From the Hue Massacre", *The New York Times*, 20 February 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/20/opinion/hue-massacre-vietnam-war.html> [Accessed: 13. 12.2023].

²⁰⁷ John Spencer and Jayson Geroux, "Urban Warfare Project Case Study Series Case Study#3:Hue", <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/urban-warfare-project-case-study-3-battle-of-hue/> [Accessed: 13. 12.2023].

²⁰⁸ Ibid

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

cocktails, and stones, at each other and set more than a thousand houses on fire. Lacking the ability to quell the uprisings, the prime minister of Northern Ireland requested the British to send their troops.^{210 211}

Although both sides estimated that public order would be restored within a few days, this was not the story because the rage in the streets was so high that things did not go as planned. On the contrary, the three days of violence lit the fuse of thirty-eight years of British military presence in Northern Ireland making it the most ever-lasting military operation that began in 1969 and ended in 2007.²¹² During the period of “Operation Banner”, hundreds of lives were lost. Furthermore, 300,000 members of the armed forces were deployed.²¹³

In Northern Ireland, The British army learned that overreacting to the incidents that occurred in the country where they were sent should be avoided because public opinion towards the military is shaped in the first days of events. As perception of the population is crucial during urban deployments, using proportional force is necessary.²¹⁴ Moreover, the battle showed brushing aside red flags among the members of society is not a solution to maintaining the peace in an area as ignoring something does not mean that it does not exist. In order to prevent the escalation of tensions in society, particularly those that occur in urban areas, all branches of government must act rigorously to address the underlying causes of significant disturbances in society.²¹⁵

With the end of the Cold War period, the era of new wars arrived. The importance of cities in wars increased, from urban services to public and private spheres, everything became a part of a new battlespace. In this respect, The Siege of Sarajevo was imposed

²¹⁰ Dave Roos, “How the Troubles Began in Northern Ireland”, <https://www.history.com/news/the-troubles-northern-ireland> [Accessed: 15. 12.2023].

²¹¹ Gülsüm Alan, “İngiliz askerlerinin Kuzey İrlanda'ya müdahalesinin 50. yıl dönümü”, <https://tr.euronews.com/2019/08/12/ingiliz-askerlerinin-kuzey-irlanda-ya-mudahalesinin-50-yildonumu> [Accessed: 15. 12.2023].

²¹² Julian O'Neill, “The Troubles: How 1969 violence led to Army's longest campaign - BBC News”, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-49250284> [Accessed: 16. 12.2023].

²¹³ Matthew, Weaver, James Sturcke, and agencies, “British army ends Northern Ireland operation”, *The Guardian*, July 31, 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2007/jul/31/northernireland.military> [Accessed: 17. 12.2023].

²¹⁴ *Modern Urban Operations Lessons Learned from Urban Operations from 1980 to the Present* (Maryland: Asymmetric Warfare Group, November 2016), 4. *ModernUrbanWarfareLessonsLearned_U_AWG_20161123.pdf* (westpoint.edu) [Accessed: 18. 12.2023].

²¹⁵ *Ibid*, 5.

on 5 April 1992 and finally lifted on 29 February 1996 reflecting both features of urban warfare and new wars. Sarajevo was besieged by Army of Republika Srpska supported by Belgrade. During the siege, approximately 500,000 residents were entrapped in Sarajevo and had to live under Serbian attacks for 1,425 days. The duration of the siege is especially worth attention as it remained in effect three times longer than the Battle of Stalingrad, an event still giving goosebumps to those who experienced it. Although providing a concrete number is not possible the siege cost 14,000 lives consisting of at least 5,400 civilians.²¹⁶

In this besieged capital, snipers were heavily employed. Surrounded by countless snipers, the streets of Sarajevo turned into an open-air polygon. The inhabitants of the city were shot down as if they were not innocent civilians but living target boards. To portray the prevalent presence of snipers, even an area in the city was named “Sniper Alley”. People were trying to walk in this alley while hoping not to be killed.²¹⁷

Moreover, buildings as well as the inhabitants of Sarajevo were victims of war. The city's infrastructure was subjected to an average of 329 artillery shellings each day. On 22 July 1993, the city experienced the most devastating attack, with a record of 3,777 artillery shells being fired at Sarajevo. As a result, approximately 35,000 buildings including hospitals, media centres, businesses, and the National Library where the national archive was stored went to rack and ruin.²¹⁸ The structures that have cultural, religious, and historical value such as churches and mosques symbolizing the peaceful environment where all religions and ethnic backgrounds are respected were also destroyed. There was no word but ‘urbicide’ to refer to the level of destruction that the city suffered.²¹⁹

Moreover, with ‘urbicide,’ the concept of ‘memoricide’ which indicates the killing of the memory that a particular space contains introduced as a result of this war. As it is known that buildings were not simply structures made of steel or stone but something that represented ethnic and religious identities and their history, in Sarajevo, it was

²¹⁶Ivan Fisher, “Bosnian capital marks 30th anniversary of Siege of Sarajevo”, <https://brusselsmorning.com/bosnian-capital-marks-30th-anniversary-of-siege-of-sarajevo/23277/> [Accessed: 26. 12.2023].

²¹⁷ Mirjana Ristic, “Sniper Alley’: The Politics of Urban Violence in the Besieged Sarajevo”, *Built Environment* (1978-), 40, No. 3 (2014): 349.

²¹⁸ Fisher, *ibid*.

²¹⁹ Ristic, *ibid*, 344.

aimed to wipe out the memory of ‘others’ and purify the population of the city. Along with these concepts, ‘warchitecture’ was also an interesting term that came into existence to express that damaging particular buildings is in fact actually indirectly attacking the collective identity of a group. The real target was not the structure itself but certain groups.²²⁰ Although the Bosnian War ended on 14 December 1995 when the Dayton Agreement was officially signed and the siege was lifted, more than 100,000 people lost their lives while above 2 million people had to leave their homes and cities and towns turned into rubble. Once again Europe experienced ethnic cleansing after World War II.²²¹

While the wounds of Bosnia were still unhealed, another conflict in the Balkan region in Kosovo, a province in southern Serbia broke out. Constituting the majority of the population Albanians, demanded independence from the Yugoslav government as it increased its pressure on the people. However, their demand was not welcomed by Serbia. Considering Kosovo as an inseparable part of Serbia because of having close historical relations for years, Serbians were unwilling to grant Albanians independence and they were not hesitant to use armed force to defend the Serbian minority residing in Kosovo.²²²

In 1998, a conflict between Serbian military and police forces and Kosovar Albanian forces which claimed more than 1,500 Kosovar Albanians' lives and caused 400,000 individuals to flee from their residences emerged. Day by day the intensity of the conflict worsened. Therefore, the international community were afraid that the conflict would have a spillover effect in the region. Moreover, the conflict in Kosovo was also concerning because the Bosnian War which was experienced recently has already shown how much blood can be shed due to ethnic grievances. While militant Kosovar Albanian forces also raised worries because they further tangled the situation in the area, the search for a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Kosovo remained

²²⁰ Ibid, 345.

²²¹ David Walsh, “Dayton Agreement 25 years on: Bosnia and Herzegovina's future still hangs in the balance”, <https://www.euronews.com/2020/11/20/dayton-agreement-25-years-on-bosnia-and-herzegovina-s-future-still-hangs-in-the-balance> [Accessed: 28. 12.2023].

²²² Payton Davis, “The Kosovo War, explained”, <https://www.deseret.com/2023/2/25/23590279/kosovo-war-anniversary-what-happened> [Accessed: 28. 12.2023].

inconclusive.²²³

President Milosovic continued to pursue its ethnic cleansing policy, turning Kosovars into refugees, and creating a massive displacement issue. On 20 March 1999, Serbs intending to drive out people who were not Serbian from Kosovo began their “Operation Horseshoe” which is known as being an extremely brutal campaign. The existing humanitarian crisis became more severe due to this campaign as 100,000 people disappeared, and an estimated 863,000 people became refugees. In addition, the number of internally displaced people was estimated to be as high as 590,000.²²⁴

Four days later, on 24 March 1999, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) commenced Operation Allied Force, an air campaign aiming to put an end to the suffering of the people of Kosovo which took 78 days and ended on 10 June 1999. During the operation, NATO aircraft flew “more than 38,000 sorties – 10,484 of them strike sorties” without any casualties.²²⁵ Moreover, it should be noted that despite the operation being known as an air campaign, the initial wave of strikes at the beginning, only involved the firing of cruise missiles which hit fundamental commercial and military airfield located near Batajnica.²²⁶ After the launch of the cruise missile attack, fixed-wing air strikes started and ensued during the night, mostly targeting air defence targets such as SAM batteries, radar, and military communications centres. One of the targets of that night was a radar facility located in Montenegro's capital city of Podgorica. Furthermore, NATO aircraft struck airfields in Serbia, Kosovo, and Montenegro. Electricity power plants, companies that manufacture weapons, barracks for the armed forces and police, and command and control centres, some of which are situated north of Belgrade were also targeted by aircraft, but targets assaulted during the operation were not limited with these spots as many more locations were also struck.²²⁷

²²³ “Conflict Background”, NATO, <https://jfcnaples.nato.int/kfor/about-us/history/conflict-background> [Accessed: 28. 12.2023].

²²⁴ Eric V. Larson, and Savych Bogdan, *Misfortunes of War: Press and Public Reactions to Civilian Deaths in Wartime*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2006), 63.

²²⁵ “Kosovo Air Campaign (March-June 1999)”, NATO, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49602.htm [Accessed: 02. 01.2024].

²²⁶ Benjamin S. Lambeth, *NATO's Air War for Kosovo: A Strategic and Operational Assessment* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2001), 20-21.

https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1365/RAND_MR1365.pdf [Accessed: 03.01.2024].

²²⁷ Ibid, 21.

In Kosovo, fighting was essentially rural. However, with the bombardment of NATO striking targets in the cities constantly, it gained an urban dimension as well. During the air campaign, it was stated that NATO followed a sensitive approach and comply international law of armed conflict by avoiding and minimizing civilian deaths and injuries. In addition, it was alleged that nothing could be struck without the consent of President Clinton because he did not want to risk civilians' lives and well-being. Due to the President's sensitiveness, targets were meticulously and cautiously hit.²²⁸

However, contrary to what has been claimed, Kosovar Albanian refugees and Serbian civilians died due to miscalculations during air attacks. Moreover, the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade was hit and this caused the death of three Chinese journalists and escalated diplomatic tensions between the USA and China.²²⁹ Even though, NATO stated it was not intentional, instead an accident, bombings in the upcoming days damaged the residences of diplomatic missions of Swedish, Spanish, Swiss, Libyan, and Norwegian. Furthermore, four people were killed in a hospital as a bomb dropped on the building.²³⁰ Bridges, industrial complexes, and oil refineries in Yugoslavia's second-largest and historically important city, Novi Sad, were also hit by NATO.²³¹

As a result of intense bombardments Serbian economy and especially critical infrastructures such as the electric grid were heavily damaged, and Serbia was forced to remove its troops consenting to stop fighting. Although the intervention of NATO received criticism because of civilian casualties, and inflicted harm on historical and cultural properties, its air campaign was particularly important since it demonstrated that air power can be decisive during urban operations. It was also understood that fighting in urban environments can be less costly in terms of human life if air power is deployed effectively as there was not any casualty on NATO's side. While sending troops to the urban areas to engage with the enemy directly has a potential risk of high military mortalities, it was confirmed that conducting urban warfare was also possible

²²⁸ Larson and Savych, *ibid*, 64.

²²⁹ Andrew Glass, "NATO begins bombing Serbia, March 24, 1999", <https://www.politico.com/story/2019/03/24/this-day-in-politics-march-24-1231269> [Accessed: 04. 01.2024].

²³⁰ Steven Pearlstein, "NATO Bomb Said to Hit Belgrade Hospital", *Washington Post*, May 21, 1999, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/balkans/stories/brussels052199.htm> [Accessed: 04. 01.2024].

²³¹ Michael Dobbs, "Repeated Attacks By NATO Puzzle City of Novi Sad Government Building Is Latest Casualty", *The Washington Post*, April 19, 1999, Repeated Attacks By NATO Puzzle City of Novi Sad - The Washington Post [Accessed: 07. 01.2024].

without having boots on the ground.²³²

Moreover, in the twenty-first century, urban spaces remained to constitute a preliminary part of warfare. Within this context, Operation Olive Branch launched by the Turkish Armed Forces and concluded successfully after 57 days of campaign by neutralizing 6,370 terrorists is a recent example of urban warfare. Aiming to oust Democratic Union Party (PYD) / Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and al-Dawla al-Islamiya fil Iraq wa al-Sham (DAESH) from Afrin located in northwest Syria, destroy the terror corridor that wanted to be created, safeguard and save the people living in the region from persecution and brutality of terrorist organizations while also establishing security and stability throughout the region and along Türkiye's borders, Operation Olive Branch started with air attacks conducted by 72 Turkish jets commemorating seventy-two comrades who were martyred in previously carried out Operation Euphrates Shield.²³³ During these air campaigns, Turkish Air Forces struck 108 sites that were utilised as “shelters, hideouts, and ammunition dumps by terrorist groups PKK/ Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK) /PYD- The People's Protection Units (YPG) and DAESH” in seven districts.²³⁴

Within the framework of the operation, according to Can Kasapoğlu, the extensive use of air power might have stemmed from the purpose of disrupting the enemy's capacity to conduct subterranean warfare and destroying the tunnel networks at the very beginning of the operation. In addition, conducting aerial campaigns provides benefits in the context of asymmetric and psychological warfare since the terrorist organizations are unable to counter the effective use of air power which in turn has put immense pressure on YPG/PKK and instilled fear in terrorist organizations. Resorting on air power can be highly effective in both destroying concrete, “kinetic” targets such as weapon storages of terrorist organizations and the morale of non-state armed groups as the terrorist groups lack the capacity to respond to such strikes conducted by

²³² Louis Hénault, “The Kosovo Crisis: Toward A New Conception Of Aerial Warfare”, <http://www.journal.forces.gc.ca/vol10/no2/11-henault-eng.asp#edn11> [Accessed: 08. 01.2024].

²³³ “Zeytin Dalı Harekâtı”, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Millî Savunma Bakanlığı, <https://www.msb.gov.tr/ZeytinDaliHarekati> [Accessed: 08.01.2024].

²³⁴ Sarp Ozer, “72 Turkish jets for Turkey's 72 martyrs”, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/todays-headlines/72-turkish-jets-for-turkeys-72-martyrs/1041181> [Accessed: 09. 01.2024].

states.²³⁵

The air power was also used to drop leaflets, to inform the people about the operation since "utmost care" was taken to ensure the safety and security of the civilian population. In addition, text messages to the mobile phones of the civilians residing in the region were sent and radio and television broadcasts kept people informed. On the other hand, as air campaigns provided the necessary conditions to launch a ground offensive, troops crossed the border.²³⁶

In the days that followed, members of special forces from police and gendarmerie who played a key role during the counter-terrorism operations in 2016 in Silopi, Cizre, İdil, Yüksekova, Nusaybin, and Şırnak which are cities where located in the southern part of Türkiye by conducting successful urban fighting and were dispatched to Afrin with the purpose of freeing the city from terrorist organizations.²³⁷ Cooperating with special forces and commando units, snipers supported the troops' urban operations contributing significantly to ensuring both the safety of the Turkish military participating in the operation and civilians residing in the region.²³⁸

On March 13, 2018, in a written statement made by Turkish General Staff, it was stated that Afrin, where terrorist organisation YPG/PKK largely concentrated their weapons and defence lines in its centre and consists of several districts namely Mabatli, Jinderes, Shaykh al-Hadid, Rajo, Bulbul and Sharan, has been surrounded from March 12, 2018, and Turkish armed forces-maintained control over all the districts except Mabatli. Moreover, in the southern part of the city, a safe corridor was opened to provide a secure passage for civilians who wished to leave the area.²³⁹

Prioritizing the safety of locals in the operation zone Türkiye diligently fulfilled the basic humanitarian needs including health services and initially assisted civilians in going back to their homes after ensuring the security of the liberated areas.

²³⁵ Can Kasapoğlu, "Zeytin Dalı harekatı: Jeostratejik durum ve tespitler", <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz-haber/zeytin-dali-harekatı-jeostratejik-durum-ve-tespitler/1058602> [Accessed: 11. 01.2024].

²³⁶ Sarp Ozer, "Zeytin Dalı Harekatı bir yaşında", Zeytin Dalı Harekatı bir yaşında (aa.com.tr) [Accessed: 13. 01.2024].

²³⁷ Sorwar Alam, "Turkish police, gendarmerie forces join Afrin operation", Turkish police, gendarmerie forces join Afrin operation (aa.com.tr) [Accessed: 13. 01.2024].

²³⁸ Soner Kılınç, "TSK'nın keskin nişancıları Afrin'de", TSK'nın keskin nişancıları Afrin'de (aa.com.tr) [Accessed: 13. 01.2024].

²³⁹ "Afrin kent merkezi kuşatıldı", Anadolu Ajansı, Afrin kent merkezi kuşatıldı (aa.com.tr) [Accessed: 13. 01.2024].

Humanitarian aid operations were also carried out by Kizilay (The Turkish Red Crescent) and The Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) concurrently.²⁴⁰

On the other hand, according to footage recorded by an unmanned aerial vehicle belonging to the Turkish Armed Forces, YPG/PKK, the terrorist organization, threatened and attempted to prevent civilians including, women, children, and babies from escaping from the city centre as they aimed to use them as human shields. In addition, the terrorists forced the population residing in towns to go to the city centre to better conceal themselves among the civilians.²⁴¹ The terrorist organization also planted bombs on the roads to preclude civilians from leaving which killed a three-month-old baby and 2 children.²⁴²

Moreover, The PKK/YPG terror group started a black propaganda campaign against Türkiye. Aiming to discredit Türkiye, the terrorists shared photographs from irrelevant incidents such as a photograph of a tank seen ablaze which was from Yemen alleging that they destroyed the Turkish tanks.²⁴³ While these claims were immediately denied by Turkish officials, these smear campaigns illustrated that in the twenty-first century, terrorist groups may strive to weaponize social media by using fake information and photographs to manipulate public opinion.

On March 18, 2018, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced that Türkiye took entire control of Afrin city centre. After purifying the city from terrorist elements more than 1,500 handmade explosives and approximately 300 mines were defused. Attack helicopters and utility helicopters, combat aircraft, artillery, multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS), and other fire support vehicles, were deployed. Moreover, domestic, and national unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and unmanned combat aerial

²⁴⁰ Sinan Uslu and Nilay Kar, “Turkish army: Afrin city center surrounded”, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/turkish-army-afrin-city-center-surrounded/1087213> [Accessed: 14.01.2024].

²⁴¹ Levent Tok, “Afrin'den çıkmak isteyen sivilleri tehditle durdurdular”, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/afrinden-cikmak-isteyen-sivilleri-tehditle-durdurdular/1086593> [Accessed: 14.01.2024].

²⁴² Eşref Musa, Burak Karacaoğlu, Selen Temizer, Adham Kako, “Afrin'de teröristlerin sivilleri katlettiği tuzaklama anları görüntülendi”, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/afrinde-teroristlerin-sivilleri-katlettiği-tuzaklama-anları-görüntülendi/1083613> [Accessed: 14.01.2024].

²⁴³ Fatma Esmâ Arslan, S. Ahmet Aytac, “PYD/PKK's social media propaganda: 4 photos, 4 lies”, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/pyd-pkks-social-media-propaganda-4-photos-4-lies/1038463> [Accessed: 14.01.2024].

vehicles (UCAVs) played a key role in reconnaissance, surveillance, and fire support.²⁴⁴

Additionally, and most importantly, as it was reiterated many times, the operation was conducted within “the framework of Türkiye’s rights based on international law, UN Security Council resolutions, and its right to self-defence under the UN charter's Article 51 and respect for Syria's territorial integrity”.²⁴⁵ Türkiye’s full compliance with international law and sensitive approach to civilians were illustrated in a post, shared by Turkish Armed Forces on Twitter (the former name of the social media platform “X”). While it was written that, “Civilian/innocent people, environment, historical, religious and cultural buildings are all inviolable for Turkish Armed Forces,” the post and the pictures attached to it clearly demonstrated that civilians and civilian buildings remained untouched. The armed forces also shared photos of Raqqa, Mosul, Aleppo and Eastern Ghouta, cities that were left in ruins and hundreds of civilians died as a result of urban operations conducted by other countries and actors and made a comparison between these urban areas and Afrin.²⁴⁶ As the presence of civilians is considered the greatest challenge of urban warfare, the efforts of Turkish armed forces in Operation Olive Branch proved and showed that urban operations can be conducted without harming any civilians and leaving any bullet holes or traces on the buildings.

2.4.8. Key Characteristics and Challenges of Urban Warfare

As illustrated above, many cities across the globe have been scenes of bloodshed and desperation. The brutality and lethality of urban warfare made no exception claiming both the lives of combatants and non-combatants. Beyond a doubt, each urban area embodies atypical features. However, after examining various historical cases it cannot be denied that several key characteristics and challenges of urban warfare that the militaries experience during urban combat contribute to the uniqueness and

²⁴⁴Sarp Ozer, “Zeytin Dalı Harekatı bir yaşında”, *ibid.*

²⁴⁵ Seyit Ahmet Aytaç, “Turkey's Operation Olive Branch: 10 questions answered”, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/turkeys-operation-olive-branch-10-questions-answered/1043667> [Accessed: 14.01.2024].

²⁴⁶ Satuk Bugra Kutlugun, “‘Civilians, cultural sites inviolable for Turkish army’”, [https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/civilians-cultural-sites-inviolable-for-turkish-army-/1093583#:~:text=Turkish%20military%20on%20Monday%20said,a.m.%20local%20time%20\(GMT%200530\).](https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/civilians-cultural-sites-inviolable-for-turkish-army-/1093583#:~:text=Turkish%20military%20on%20Monday%20said,a.m.%20local%20time%20(GMT%200530).) [Accessed: 16.01.2024].

complexity of urban warfare are common.

Concordantly, it would not be wrong to argue that the civilian population is one of the most important defining characteristics and challenges posed to the armed forces. In urban areas, military and civilian objectives can be mixed and the mixture of these elements can cause legal and moral issues for the parties engaged in urban hostilities.²⁴⁷ Several structures in built-up settings can be both military and civilian objects at the same time. For instance, at first glance, a flat in an ordinary building can seem like an office for commercial purposes where civilians work but it might turn out that it is the headquarters of the commander of a military unit or a power plant in an urban area can be the fundamental energy supplier of properties of civilians and military bases.²⁴⁸

Moreover, the critical infrastructures are directly related to the presence of the civilian population. These government-deemed vital infrastructures are necessary for well functioning of civil and commercial life in urban areas, thus, these webs of systems merit extra protection for the sake of national security. These collections of networks are also dependent on each other and fragile. In urban warfare by damaging a particular critical infrastructure such as electric grids, it could be possible to create a domino effect and throw the entire urban area into chaos.²⁴⁹

In Gaza for instance, the destruction of a power plant by an Israeli air strike in 2014 had a direct effect on the water supply, treatment of sewage systems and medical services.²⁵⁰ Nine years later, in 2023, the return of the violent conflict to the Gaza Strip confirmed the vitality and interconnectedness of critical infrastructure. Due to the Israeli blockade, plants that are used for the desalination of seawater to provide the great majority of clean drinking water have been mostly dysfunctional because of the scarcity of fuel and inadequate supply of electricity. In this sense, the humanitarian crisis in Gaza uplighted the indirect harm to the civilian population and the

²⁴⁷ ICRC, *International Humanitarian Law And The Challenges Of Contemporary Armed Conflicts Recommitting To Protection In Armed Conflict On The 70 Th Anniversary Of The Geneva Conventions*, (Geneva, 2019), 16. <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/icrc-report-ihl-and-challenges-contemporary-armed-conflicts> [Accessed: 10. 03.2024].

²⁴⁸ Ibid, 19.

²⁴⁹ Ibid, 18.

²⁵⁰ Harriet Sherwood, "Gaza's only power plant destroyed in Israel's most intense air strike yet", <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/29/gaza-power-plant-destroyed-israeli-airstrike-100-palestinians-dead> [Accessed: 10. 03.2024].

reverberating impacts of urban warfare as people who survived air strikes had to drink salty water which could also have serious consequences of people's health. In addition, Gazans lacked the necessary conditions to maintain their hygiene which eventually triggered the emergence of severe health and sanitation problems. As it was stated by the UN special rapporteur, civilians who lost their lives during the bombardments accounted for conflict-related deaths. However, those who died due to drinking unhealthy water or diseases were not included in these tools. As these civilians are not considered casualties, it can be said that the presented data on mortalities does not reflect the entire reality.²⁵¹

Accordingly, the extensive use of explosive weapons is a distinguishing characteristic of urban warfare which is closely linked to the presence of non-belligerents. Although explosives can also be employed in open fields, the level of grave humanitarian harm that occurred in urban areas cannot be compared to the damage that rural areas faced. Referring to conventional weapons that cause blasts and fragmentation when a high-explosive material detonates, explosive weapons comprise, "aircraft bombs, mortars, rocket and missile warheads, artillery rounds, and improvised explosive devices (IEDs)."²⁵²

Owing to their ability to affect a wide range of areas in urban and populated settings, these weapons can kill and hurt many civilians. While physical injuries and maiming are the first things that come to mind when thinking about the devastating impacts of explosives, these weapons can also cause deep wounds in the souls of people by creating mental and psychological issues. Furthermore, buildings and infrastructure can be destroyed because of blasts. Although the employment of these weapons and the destruction of such structures can be a blink in the eye, its impacts could be long-term.²⁵³

Thus, the utilization of powerful explosive weaponry in densely populated areas yields not only direct destruction but also leads to secondary consequences that harm vital civilian infrastructure. These consequences can be equally catastrophic and affect a

²⁵¹ Alyssa Mcmurtry, "UN expert warns of 'catastrophic' lack of clean drinking water in Gaza", <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/un-expert-warns-of-catastrophic-lack-of-clean-drinking-water-in-gaza/3043736> [Accessed: 10. 03.2024].

²⁵² "Gendered Impacts of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas", UNIDIR, <https://unidir.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/UNIDIR-Factsheet-Gendered-Impacts-of-Explosive-Weapons-in-Populated-Areas.pdf> [Accessed: 10. 03.2024].

²⁵³ Ibid.

greater populace than those situated in the immediate vicinity of the detonation. Furthermore, these consequences may persist over extended periods and distances, which highlights the gravity of the issue. For instance, an air strike targeting a hospital would instantly kill the patients in the buildings but as the medical service is seriously disrupted, it would no longer be possible to treat other patients who were not harmed or managed to survive. The lack of ability to access treatment, then, can put public health at risk, patients in a critical condition may die or certain diseases may outbreak. In a similar vein, the destruction of educational buildings can weaken the education system, cause the loss of educational opportunities, and pose a significant threat to a country's development. Under such conditions, civilians living in these areas often find no option but to leave their residences since basic essential services are disrupted. Consequently, when large number of people abandon where they inhabit, a massive displacement issue may occur.²⁵⁴

Having said that, the recent data unfolds the devastating effects of the use of explosive weapons revealing a startling soar in explosive weapon usage and non-combatant deaths worldwide. According to the report, in 2023, there has been a 122% increase in civilian fatalities over the previous year, 2022. The report also found out 67% of civilian deaths are caused by air bombardments while 90% of people injured by explosive weapons in towns and cities were again non-belligerents. While Operation Swords of Iron launched in October 2023 by Israeli forces was the primary contributor to this rise, accounting for 37% of all non-combatant deaths across the globe, what is more concerning was that 2023 has been the year that the number of civilian harms reached a peak since 2010.²⁵⁵

Furthermore, explosive weapons that did not detonate due to various reasons and were abandoned in the conflict zone by the belligerents after the hostilities ended, present a danger to the civilians. Also known as “explosive remnants of war” (ERW) and legacy of the hostilities these failed weapons have their own unique risks and potential to bring back the bitter memories of war as the detonation of these explosive ordnances might cause many people's deaths and injuries living in the post-conflict zone. While

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ “122% rise in global civilian fatalities from explosive weapons in 2023: a year of harm reviewed”, reliefweb, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/122-rise-global-civilian-fatalities-explosive-weapons-2023-year-harm-reviewed> [Accessed: 10. 03.2024].

the majority of the victims of the ERWs and landmines are children, these weapons disrupt essential services, hamper reconstruction processes, obstruct agriculture and trade efforts, and prolong to find a permanent solution for displacement issues. ERWs could cause all the efforts to revive and construct post-conflict zones to be wasted and everything to go back to square one.²⁵⁶

To paint a clear picture of the presence of civilians during urban warfare and the harm inflicted on the non-belligerents, the recent data presented by the UN in 2022 can be analysed. According to the UN, widespread civilian deaths due to conflicts endured and this was especially true in the areas where the population is highly dense. The casualties occurring as a result of the use of explosive weapons are 90 per cent of civilians. On the other hand, in other areas where these ordnances were not deployed the ratio is 10 per cent which is significantly lower.²⁵⁷

Furthermore, in countries like Syria and Afghanistan, homemade explosives, land mines, and unexploded ordnances, that are left behind by the fighting parties continue to kill and inflict harm to people. In Yemen, schools, medical facilities, and vehicles faced destruction while in 2021, a minimum number of 900 schools in Afghanistan were obliterated or seriously damaged. In Ethiopia, the situation was even worse as thousands of schools were almost blasted to smithereens. Although the data lacks information on whether any infant or adolescent was killed or injured due to these attacks, the destruction of schools is concerning as children and youngsters deprived of education are often recruited by armed groups operating in the conflict zone.²⁵⁸ Here, data presented by ICRC is also germane and supports the malignity of urban warfare as it uncovered that five times more civilians lost their lives due to urban battles in comparison to other types of battles.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁶ “Five things to know about the deadly legacy of explosive remnants of war”, ICRC, <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/five-things-to-know-about-deadly-legacy-explosive-remnants-war> [Accessed: 10. 03.2024].

²⁵⁷ “Ninety Per Cent of War-Time Casualties Are Civilians, Speakers Stress, Pressing Security Council to Fulfil Responsibility, Protect Innocent People in Conflicts”, United Nations, <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc14904.doc.htm> [Accessed: 10. 03.2024].

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ “Iraq, Syria and Yemen: Five Times More Civilians Die in City Offensives, New Report Finds”, ICRC, <https://blogs.icrc.org/new-delhi/2017/06/18/iraq-syria-yemen-five-times-civilians-die-city-offensives-new-report-finds/#:~:text=A%20new%20ICRC%20report%20reveals,focus%20countries%20of%20the%20report> [Accessed: 10. 03.2024].

Despite the provided data presenting a dire situation caused by urban warfare, avoiding, or at least mitigating non-combatant casualties is feasible. The death of innocents and undesired injury of non-belligerents can be avoided or minimized by complying with the rules of engagement prohibiting the use of certain types of equipments and tactics.²⁶⁰ Furthermore, civilians living in the urban area can be warned in advance. By alerting the residents, the military can give the population a chance to leave the area. However, some criteria must be satisfied by the armed forces to evacuate the conflict zone and issue warnings effectively.²⁶¹

In this respect, various channels of communication such as radio and television broadcasts, mobile phones, and flyers must be employed to warn and inform the people about the operation. Moreover, the specific time and location of the attack should be indicated and enough time for people to act for evacuation should be provided. Yet, providing advance notice should not jeopardize the troops or reveal their plan of attack as an element of surprise is a game changer in urban combat.²⁶²

The harm inflicted on the civilian population in dense urban environments can also restrict the armed forces from continuing to fight in this challenging environment as a high-death toll of civilians can be heavily criticized by the public. As a result, it could put pressure on the government whilst making decisions and devising a strategy. Thus, it can have both political and strategic consequences.²⁶³

On the other hand, there is no doubt that civilians are the ones who suffer from the conflicts in urban environments the most but taking the lives of innocents or witnessing their deaths may cause various psychological or moral traumas and mental disorders in soldiers who took an active role in conducting hostilities.²⁶⁴

Providing important advantages to the defender is another key characteristic and challenge of urban warfare. With thousands of structures ranging from apartments to factories, urban areas enable inferior parties of the conflicts, non-state actors in

²⁶⁰William G. Rosenau, ““Every room is a new battle”: The lessons of modern urban warfare”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 20, No. 4 (1997): 389. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576109708436047> .

²⁶¹ Nathalie Durhin, “Protecting civilians in urban areas: A military perspective on the application of international humanitarian law”, *International Review of the Red Cross*, 98, No.1 (2016): 192. War in cities doi:10.1017/S1816383117000029

²⁶² Ibid, 192.

²⁶³ Andrew M. Bell, “Civilians, Urban Warfare, and US Doctrine”, *The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters*, 50, No.4 (2020): 36. doi:10.55540/0031-1723.2686.

²⁶⁴ Ibid, 40.

particular, to play a violent and bloody never-ending hide and seek. Inferior adversaries having better knowledge regarding the city than the superior party may exploit every dimension of the area and set the rules of the fight. Since they are familiar with the terrain, they can use buildings as their bases and fortresses. The tunnels can be a dark maze for an attacker but a perfect place for the defender to move through without getting detected. Every street, shop, building, or even vehicle can be a deadly playground of the inferior.²⁶⁵ In this sense, the defender resembles the home side in sports games coming out to the pitch in his city, acquainted with both home conditions and the people, playing the match without experiencing travel fatigue.

Moreover, as it was mentioned in the previous pages, buildings can offer cover and concealment but collapsed buildings can also provide benefits on their own, especially for the inferior parties. The rubble can block the streets that once pulsated with inhabitants of the city and restrain the movement of forces or the mountains of debris can be infested with booby traps. The defender can also dig tunnels beneath the collapsed buildings and create alternative hideaway roads for itself. In such circumstances, the other party of the conflict trying to clear the way to sustain its campaign may find itself being lured into a death trap and in the middle of hell.²⁶⁶

The numerical superiority would not necessarily bring victory or have a significant impact on the course of combat as the enemy can resist the attacker for months and the attacker can suffer from a high number of combatant casualties. Using mainly deception, elements of surprise, and ambush tactics, the defender can conduct not only urban warfare but also asymmetric warfare, nullifying the technological and numerical superiority of its adversary by exploiting the complexity of the urban terrain. Thus, it is said that the element of asymmetry often lies in the heart of urban warfare. In this sense, built-up areas may force parties of the conflict to fight under more equal terms.²⁶⁷

On the other hand, the social and physical dimensions and their characteristics make a lethal cocktail for adversaries combatting in urban terrain. Due to this deadly mixture, the fog of war is thicker in the cities, forcing urban fighters to wrestle on shaky ground.

²⁶⁵ Randall Bagwell, "Preparing for the inevitability of urban warfare", *The Military Law and the Law of War Review*, 58, No. 2 (2020): 142.

²⁶⁶ Ibid, 143.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, 143.

Cities obfuscate the course of operation as adversaries may seek to use more creative methods and act more flexibly in this environment. Based on this, intelligence is vital in urban warfare since it supports the military to disambiguate urban terrain by enabling them to distinguish between friends and foes, in other words, be aware of the wolves in sheep's clothing, facilitating them to make a decision, and degrading confusion. Yet, it should be noted that collecting information about these dimensions could be challenging as some cities which are labelled "cosmopolitan" provide shelter to millions of people sharing different religious or ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, it would not be surprising that the perspectives and reactions of these urban residents may differ, and this variety of perceptions makes the population more unpredictable. Although the physical dimension of the city might seem easier to understand, in many cases buildings are being destroyed during the urban combat and their collapse changes the landscape of the area suddenly. For instance, a street that offers a perfect avenue of approach where tanks were rolling a few seconds ago can be barricaded by the wreckage of buildings and become unserviceable. Nevertheless, as it has always been, information is and will be the most powerful weapon that strengthens fighters' hand in every kind of warfare.²⁶⁸

Encircled by structures made of steel and cement and winding streets, the enemies in the urban settings are frequently required to interact at close quarters. Research on urban fighting illustrates this fact by stating that 90% of targets are engaged at distances of 50 metres or less, whereas just 5% of targets appear at a distance of more than 100 metres. In addition, the usual range for acquiring human targets is 35 metres or less.²⁶⁹ Engaging in the enemy at short distances, being always on guard, carrying out operations with a group of few soldiers and overstress may produce "battle fatigue". While every battle is exhausting and requires an immense amount of effort, urban warfare may drain the energy of fighters more rapidly.²⁷⁰ Additionally, due to

²⁶⁸ Umer Khan, "Intelligence-Based Urban Operations: Intelligence Preparation of Battlefield Methodology in Urban Settings", <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Wild-Blue-Yonder/Article-Display/Article/2094688/intelligence-based-urban-operations-intelligence-preparation-of-battlefield-met/> [Accessed: 10. 03.2024].

²⁶⁹ Gareth B.S. Neilsen, *Taking it to the Streets: Exploding Urban Myths About Australian Air Power* (Royal Australian Air Force Air Power Development Centre, 2008), 9. <https://airpower.airforce.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-03/WP23-Taking-it-to-the-Streets-Exploding-Urban-Myths-About-Australian-Air-Power.pdf> [Accessed: 11. 03.2024].

²⁷⁰ Micheal Evans, "Lethal Genes: The Urban Military Imperative and Western Strategy in the Early Twenty-First Century", *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 32, No. 4 (2009): 523. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390902986949> [Accessed: 10. 03.2024].

the proximity of adversaries, fratricide may unintentionally threaten and inflict harm to the forces on the ground.²⁷¹

In relation to this, receiving effective fire and air support is often difficult because structures in the built-up environment restrict “command, control, communications and intelligence (C3I)”. Although the military has a global positioning system (GPS), and other navigation systems buildings can hamper establishing contact with satellites and forbid them from finding the right direction. Likewise, urban terrain also limits the ability to communicate with radio which produces further challenges posed to the troops on the terrain.²⁷²

In this context, especially high-rise buildings are mainly responsible for hindering and in some cases cutting off communication entirely but interior parts of the buildings can also make the use of certain systems futile.²⁷³ The components in the built-up settings even the smaller elements such as single-storey houses or cars can have a great effect on urban operations by impeding sight.²⁷⁴ Therefore, the adversary equipped with numerous technological devices may act as if they are blind and deaf, lacking the ability to see its surroundings, determine its location and pass information to its superior.²⁷⁵

Urban environment fragments the ground forces into sub-grounds making them more exposed and vulnerable to threats posed by the enemy. In the urbanised terrain, the soldiers not only fall apart in outer space such as streets and avenues but also inside the buildings. In addition, some units may go into subterranean areas. However, either way, the fragmentation of armed forces leads to the deprivation of adequate support, a decrease in power, and the interception of effective fighting against the adversary.²⁷⁶

Furthermore, whilst engaging with the urban enemy, solo fighters separated from the group run the risk of being ambushed by the defenders. This danger can be mitigated

²⁷¹Daryl G. Press (1999), “URBAN WARFARE: OPTIONS, PROBLEMS AND THE FUTURE” (Conference summary paper, MIT Security Studies Program Officer's Club, Hanscom Air Force Base, Bedford, Massachusetts, May 20, 1998). https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/92711/Urban_Warfare.pdf

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid

²⁷⁴ Timothy L. Saffold, *The Role of Airpower in Urban Warfare An Airman's Perspective* (Alabama, Air Command and Staff College Wright Flyer Paper No. 6, 1998), 8. /tardir/tiffs/a405880.tiff (dtic.mil) [Accessed: 10. 03.2024].

²⁷⁵ Press, *ibid.*

²⁷⁶ Charles Knight, “Urban Warfare Capability: A Background to the Challenges and a Call for Professional Debate”, *Australian Army Journal*, 15, No.1 (2019): 13.

by the use of explosives as a preventative measure for allowing themselves to advance steadily with minimum casualties.²⁷⁷ However, the risk of causing collateral damage can prevent the usage of these weapons. Nonetheless, the dispersion of teams might muddle the in-depth analysis process of the urban operation. Therefore, decentralization of forces places a premium on leaders of small units.²⁷⁸ In such an environment, it is not surprising that some of the closest friends of the fighters are small arms and light weapons.²⁷⁹

Tanks, if their movement is not constrained by the narrowness of streets or hampered by certain barricades can be a good supporter of ground forces. These steel war machines can enable troops to gain psychological superiority against the enemy, carry soldiers in the city and decrease the collateral damage. Yet, the relationship between the members of the military and tanks should be mutual as they need the protection of infantry against certain types of weapons and systems.²⁸⁰

Similarly, fighter aircraft can also take part in conflicts in urban areas by dominating the air domain. However, although it is often thought that it bears less risks and responsibilities for policymakers and the armies to use air forces rather than ground forces during urban warfare relying solely on air power for conducting urban operations would be a delusional solution. Instead, a combination of land and air power is necessary to effectively navigate the complexities of urban warfare. While air power remains a valuable asset for conducting surgical strikes, there are various factors that can impede the deployment of aircraft in urban warfare. For instance, the presence of tall buildings, utility lines, and antennas can pose a threat to flight safety, and even small arms have the potential to bring down an aircraft. Furthermore, the proximity of buildings and overhead transmission cables can limit the manoeuvrability of these flying machines.²⁸¹

The necessity to have a vast number of resources is another characteristic and challenge of urban warfare. The attacker in particular needs to be prepared to devote its “time, manpower, special types of equipment and supplies”. For this reason, victory

²⁷⁷ Ibid, 13-14.

²⁷⁸ Rosenau, ibid, 386.

²⁷⁹ Rosenau, ibid, 388.

²⁸⁰ Rosenau, ibid, 386.

²⁸¹ Hills, ibid, 75.

often comes at great costs in terms of material, time, and human life. Additionally, given that wars in cities are often long, each day bears the risk of losing more men, supplies, and ammunition.²⁸²

Despite, the urban environment can create problems in using technological devices, technology can still be seen as a loyal ally of the troops on the city streets. Radars, for example, can permit military personnel to uncover disguised dangers behind walls, which would give them a chance to take precautionary measures, increase their readiness, eliminate the hidden spots of the adversary, and avoid being hunted down by the enemy. Similarly, sensors can provide an accurate location of de-centralised troops that have spread out across different districts of the city, allowing them to stay connected and keep their superiors informed.²⁸³

In addition, drones and swarms, the eyes in the sky, can play an active role in aerial surveillance, collecting valuable intelligence by moving freely without being hindered by obstacles on the ground. Meanwhile, robotic systems can offer great companionship to ground troops in dangerous missions and can be used for patrolling both above and below street level and neutralizing threats. The physical features of the city can change rapidly, but technology may assist soldiers in adapting to these shifts by providing real-time data and enabling them to devise alternative plans and strategies accordingly. Additionally, technology can increase the precision and accuracy of weapons minimizing collateral damage, protecting lives and saving time.²⁸⁴

On the other hand, in the twenty-first century, urban areas may be vulnerable to hybrid warfare. While traditional military forces have historically engaged in battle in cities, both state and non-state actors may abandon old methods and tactics of war and opt for carrying out hybrid operations. In this form of warfare, a combination of kinetic and non-kinetic tactics can be utilized in the urban battlespace. With the employment of “intrusions, special operations, sanctions, and subversions including the use of masked soldiers, cyberattacks, sabotage, and proxies”, the fighting in the streets may

²⁸² Lou DiMarco, “Attacking the Heart and Guts: Urban Operations Through Ages”, *Block by block: the challenges of urban operations*, ed. William G. Robertson, Lawrence A. Yates (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command, and General Staff College Press, 2003), 7.

²⁸³ Philippe Michel-Kleisbauer, *SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE (STC) Sub-Committee on Technological Trends and Security (STCTTS) URBAN WARFARE Draft Report* (NATO, 5 June 2020), 6, <https://www.nato-pa.int/download-file?filename=sites/default/files/2020-06/040%20STCTTS%2020%20E%20-%20URBAN%20WARFARE.pdf> [Accessed: 12 03.2024].

²⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 6-8.

fall into the grey zone and one would be able to talk about the hybridization of urban warfare.²⁸⁵

In the future, news coverage of urban warfare may not depict the typical scenes of destruction that the general public has come to expect; the images of dead bodies lying on the dust-blown and bloody streets or ruined buildings struck by missiles may slowly fade. Since hybrid wars and grey zone conflicts have no beginning and end, tanks surrounding a city and armed forces besieging the area may lost in the dusty pages of history. Instead, the world can see cities that appear unscathed, but in reality, infrastructure or residents of the urban area have been gravely affected by cyber-attacks. Due to the absence of blood and tear, these wars may reveal images that the public is not used to encountering and do not answer the description of traditional conflicts, they can be equally devastating and induce the desired outcomes for the perpetrator.

Media may play an active role in wars being fought in urban areas whether it be tactical or strategic as it can cross the boundaries of the countries and have the ability to visit millions of households in the world. As public opinion is of immense importance, the media can both initiate and terminate an urban operation. In this respect, a photograph of a child holding a teddy bear crying in fear, and shock, covered in dust and blood standing in the middle of a street surrounded by destroyed buildings can exert greater influence on the course and outcome of the conflict in comparison to a troop equipped with the most advanced weaponry.²⁸⁶

Likewise, in the world of the Internet of Things social media surpassed traditional media in terms of reach. In the twenty-first century, a hashtag holds the power to open fronts in the cyber world and start fierce battles on various platforms such as X, YouTube and Facebook. In this context, the users and members of these platforms can be victims of a “battle of narratives”, their perceptions can be manipulated or shaped. Moreover, every individual who carries a smartphone in their pocket and has access to the internet can act like a war correspondent; take, and share pictures from the conflict

²⁸⁵ Mikael Weissmann, “Urban Warfare: Challenges of Military Operations on Tomorrow’s Battlefield”, *Advanced Land Warfare: Tactics and Operations*, ed. Mikael Weissmann, Niklas Nilsson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 136-137.

²⁸⁶ Zdzislaw Sliwa, “Facing the Complex Battleground: Urbanized Terrain”, *Baltic Security & Defense Review*, 11, No. 2 (2009): 134.

zones, live stream the incidents taking place during the war or spread false news. As urban areas are often the most developed places in a country and have dense populations, it can be anticipated that most of the city residents are active users of social media, thus, assuming control over the flow of information would be a key in urban battles.²⁸⁷

Consequently, the growing importance of social media, digitalization and hybridization of conflict will make conducting MDO (Multi-Domain Operations) vital for emerging triumphant in urban warfare, because urban areas will be the intersection and junction point of all five domains – “land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace”²⁸⁸ - and information dimension. In forthcoming conflicts, the cyber and information domains will continue to prove paramount. In addition to this, the violence of wars will manifest itself within the information environment and all five dimensions. In the twenty-first century, maintaining control of every building or room will not be sufficient, to capture a city, the digital realm must also be seized.²⁸⁹

All of these characteristics and challenges lead to another aspect and difficulty of urban warfare. War in cities takes longer than other types of warfare, meaning that fighting in urbanised terrain is time-consuming. Historical records demonstrate that operations carried out in urban areas frequently experience substantial delays and challenges, which can significantly exceed initial expectations. This can be exemplified by the prolonged and challenging battles that outset in cities such as Stalingrad.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁷ Michel-Kleisbauer, *ibid*, 6.

²⁸⁸ Weissmann, *ibid*, 130.

²⁸⁹ Weissmann, *ibid*, 138.

²⁹⁰ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 3-06 Joint Urban Operations* (2009), I-5. JP 3-06, Joint Urban Operations (jcs.mil) [Accessed: 13. 03.2024].

3. CASE STUDY: WAR IN UKRAINE – URBAN WARFARE IN MARIUPOL

Although 24 February 2022 is seen as the commencement date of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, it is possible to trace the war in Ukraine back to 2014, the illegal annexation of Crimea. In this context, the occupation of the peninsula can be evaluated as the starting point of the war as by taking this particular territory Russia has set off a fatal chain of events that culminated in the emergence of a severe crisis in Donbas and the escalation in tensions in Kerch Strait. These incidents eventually turned into a violent conflict. Even though this thesis seeks to analyze urban warfare in Ukraine by focusing on the port city Mariupol, it is important to provide background knowledge on the events that sparked the war to understand how cities in Ukraine transformed into battlespaces. Therefore, in this section, firstly, the annexation of Crimea will be presented. Secondly, the separationist movement in Donbas will be addressed. This particular crisis in Ukrainian soil will be followed by the subject of the Kerch Strait incident. Lastly, the urban warfare in Ukraine will be examined by illustrating the urban fighting in the city of Mariupol.

3.1. The Annexation of Crimea

In the aftermath of the decision to postpone signing the European Union (EU) Agreement which was made by pro-Russian President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich, protests began in the country on November 21, 2013.²⁹¹ Ukrainians took to the streets and filled the squares in Kyiv to express their dissatisfaction. While police responded to the protests with violent tools to scatter demonstrators, people did not take a step back and remained in the field. In December, the streets of the Ukrainian capital were occupied by innumerable protestors.²⁹²

In February 2014, the ruthless intervention of the police to crush the protests which were also considered revolutions going by the name "Maidan Revolution" or "Revolution of Dignity" altered the march of events. From 18th February 2014 to 21st February 2014, several people were murdered and many of them lost their lives due to

²⁹¹ "9 years pass since annexation of Crimea by Russia", Anadolu Ajansı, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/9-years-pass-since-annexation-of-crimea-by-russia/2847249> [Accessed: 14 03.2024].

²⁹² Mihhail Salenkov, "Maidan Square: 'A rather modest Ukrainian protest turned revolution'", <https://www.euronews.com/2023/12/01/maidan-square-a-rather-modest-ukrainian-protest-turned-revolution> [Accessed: 14 03.2024].

sniper shootings from the police. As a result, protesters took control of government buildings and Yanukovych abandoned the country.²⁹³

As President Yanukovych left his office, an interim president was appointed to take over his duties and grabbed the power in the government with his supporters backed by the West and not feeling sympathy with Russia.²⁹⁴ In this context, the fled of Yanukovych and the appointment of a new president raised concerns in Russia as the absence of a pro-Russian leader in Ukraine, might put the interests of Moscow in peril. Although the turmoil in Ukraine was particularly threatening to the presence of the Black Sea fleet of Russia anchored in Crimea, the mayhem in the country stacked the odds in Russia's favour as the Kremlin determined to exploit this chaotic climate to invade the peninsula.²⁹⁵

Within this framework, it is important to understand what factors have driven the government in Moscow to make Crimea part of Russia. Historically, it is no secret that Russia has an irresistible desire to gain access to warm water ports. Therefore, annexing Crimea was vital for Russia, especially because Sevastopol, the warm water port city in the Crimean peninsula where Black Sea Fleet ships harboured, is home to Russia's naval base. The port city was also crucial since it consists of substantial facilities and taps Russia into a wide range of areas such as to Mediterranean, South Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Moreover, Sevastopol holds emblematic value in terms of reflecting the fortitude and grandeur of the navy, bestowing Russia to initiate and sustain its operations successfully and effectively.²⁹⁶

Furthermore, Russia might have had the fear of being encircled by Western forces as a result of NATO's expansion because the country might have the belief that Ukraine might ultimately desire membership in the Alliance based on the new political leaders in Kyiv's propensity to forge strong relations with the West. For this reason, the invasion of the peninsula can be viewed as a preventive action taken by the Russians to stop NATO from expanding. In addition, the Ukrainian decision-makers could have

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Anton Bebler, "Crimea and the Ukrainian-Russian conflict", *"Frozen conflicts" in Europe*, ed. Anton Bebler (Leverkusen: Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2015), 195.

²⁹⁵ Anna Dolya, "The annexation of Crimea: lessons for European security", The annexation of Crimea: lessons for European security (robert-schuman.eu) [Accessed: 14 03.2024].

²⁹⁶ "Crimea's Strategic Value to Russia", Center for Strategic and International Studies, <https://www.csis.org/blogs/post-soviet-post/crimeas-strategic-value-russia> [Accessed: 14 03.2024].

forced Russia to relocate its fleet stationed in the Black Sea. On the other hand, it is suggested that grabbing the Crimean land was an attempt to revive the past glory of the Soviet Union and annexation of this particular territory is a critical part of the neo-imperialist policies of Russia. In this respect, Crimea might be the first piece of land unified with Russia but will not be the last as the country would seek to expand its borders.²⁹⁷ Another potential underlying reason for the aggressive behaviour of the Kremlin was that the only region of Ukraine where the main population is ethnic Russian was the peninsula and during the 1990s, there were a lot of secessionist movements seeking to gain independence and join Russia.²⁹⁸

With these aims in mind, on February 27, 2014, Russian special forces were sent to Crimea to seize key buildings, as well as the Crimean Autonomous Republic Parliament. In addition, they managed to establish complete control over both civil and military infrastructure which have significant strategic importance and averted any potential response that the military of Ukraine would give. Russia caught Ukrainian commanders in Crimea off guard which allowed events to unfold rapidly. For an effective and successful response, Ukrainians needed additional support from forces stationed in the mainland. However, as many lives were lost during the anti-government protests in the last months, Ukraine did not venture to fight against Russia and backup forces remained in their barracks on the mainland.²⁹⁹

On the other hand, the members of special forces drew the attention of the public residing in the peninsula since their uniforms were not crafted with any badge, patch or symbol making them completely anonymous and impossible to identify. As their uniforms were quite different than other military personnel and unmarked, they earned the moniker "the little green men". Their mysterious uniform impeded authorities from confirming their country of origin. This facilitated denying their presence in the region and involvement in incidents occurring in Crimea.³⁰⁰ Russia, living in a glass house due to its deployment of armed groups in the peninsula presented the presence of Russians, and Russia's duty to protect its people as legitimate grounds for its

²⁹⁷ Daniel Treisman, "Why Putin Took Crimea: The Gambler in the Kremlin", *Foreign Affairs*, 95, No. 3 (May/June 2016): 47.

²⁹⁸ Alissa de Carbonnel, "INSIGHT-How the separatists delivered Crimea to Moscow", INSIGHT-How the separatists delivered Crimea to Moscow | Reuters [Accessed: 14 03.2024].

²⁹⁹ Dolya, *ibid.* [Accessed: 14 03.2024].

³⁰⁰ Dolya, *ibid.* [Accessed: 14 03.2024].

intervention in Crimea.³⁰¹

On March 6, 2014, the parliament of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea convened and resolved to hold a referendum on the future of Crimea and the peninsula's incorporation into Russia while armed green men whose identity remained puzzled were prowling around deputies. Although the Crimean Tatars opposed holding a referendum and opted to boycott it, the government announced that March 16, 2014, would be the date when the people of Crimea would be voting for the unification of the peninsula with Russia.³⁰²

During this three-week operation, Russian authorities did not encounter any opposition or resistance. Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that Russians did not put much effort into making the peninsula a part of their country. This cheap victory of Moscow can be based on assorted reasons. For instance, a substantial proportion of locals in Crimea did not stand against the aggressive actions of the country, instead, they took kindly to Russian forces and welcomed them. Moreover, as the Russian navy already had a powerful presence in Sevastopol, they were able to initiate the operation immediately without losing any time. The Russian forces also made their preparations covertly which overclouded Ukrainians to guard against their actions. The proximity of vital points such as Simferopol International Airport enabled Russia to exploit the air dimension and send its special forces to the ground. As Ukraine decided not to resist, the Ukrainian soldiers laid down their arms. In addition, even though this action was indeed an invasion regardless of how bloodless it was, a military occupational regime over Crimea was not created by Russia. The date of the referendum was also planned so early. This scheduling can be viewed as a deliberate step taken by Russians to make the annexation of Crimea fait accompli as the lack of sufficient time prevented the population from discussing such a significant matter thoroughly and in a meaningful way to comprehend the severity of the issue. Before fully understanding events happening on their soil, people went to the ballot boxes and cast their votes.³⁰³

On the referendum day, 16 March 2014, although there was not any violent or bloody

³⁰¹ Zofia Studzińska, "How Russia, Step by Step, Wants to Regain an Imperial Role in the Global and European Security", *Connections*, 14, No. 4 (Fall 2015): 31.

³⁰² "Rusya'nın Kırım'ı yasa dışı ilhakının üzerinden 8 yıl geçti", Anadolu Ajansı, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/rusyanin-kirimi-yasa-disi-ilhakinin-uzerinden-8-yil-gecti/2541117> [Accessed: 14 03.2024].

³⁰³ Bebler, *ibid*, 196-197.

event, the voting process took place while armed groups and men were patrolling in streets and standing in public spaces which might have put pressure on people as just the appearance of the militia was sufficient to scare people, compel them to have second thoughts regarding their vote and can be perceived as a menace.³⁰⁴ Moreover, while locals determined their future under the barrels of masked soldiers, Crimean Tatars did not go to the polls and complied with the boycott decision they had taken previously. Ukrainians also followed the same suit but the will that emerged from the ballot box was to secede from Ukraine and incorporate into Russia which was manifested by voters through an overwhelming 96.7 per cent of votes saying “yes” to joining Russia.³⁰⁵

Following the announcement of the results, there was not anything to stop the Crimean parliament from applying to become a part of Russia. As a result of these developments, the Ukrainian parliament declared partial mobilization and called 40.000 reserve soldiers to arms while the Crimean parliament indicated that Ukrainian soldiers serving in the peninsula would be disbanded. However, the spokesperson of the parliament, Vladimir Konstantinov, stated that disbanded members of the armed forces of Ukraine are free to stay and continue to live in Crimea as civilians if they wish to do so.³⁰⁶

On the other hand, according to Ukraine, there was no word but ‘unlawful’ to define the referendum held on 16 March as it violated the Constitution of the country by all odds. Therefore, the result of the referendum was invalid and would go unrecognized indefinitely. On the contrary side, Russia argued people of the Crimea used their right to self-determination to break away from Ukraine and voted with their free will.³⁰⁷

On March 18, 2014, the draft bill regarding absorbing Crimea to Russia was sent to the parliament by the Russian President. On the same day, the leader said that “Crimea has always been an integral part of Russia in the depths of people’s hearts” and asked

³⁰⁴ Bebler, *ibid*, 197.

³⁰⁵ “Ukrayna’dan 40 bin yedek askere çağrı”, NTV, https://www.ntv.com.tr/galeri/dunya/ukraynadan-40-bin-yedek-askere-cagri,VK2re2Fzt02aJlv1R7u45w/bsnuj1eQOEWcvDhCNqzz5A_ [Accessed: 15.03.2024].

³⁰⁶ *Ibid*.

³⁰⁷ “United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission Deployed to Crimea amid Crisis between Russian Federation, Ukraine, Security Council Told”, United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, <https://press.un.org/en/2014/sc11328.doc.htm> [Accessed: 15.03.2024].

deputies not to refrain from their support for the unification of Crimea with Russia. Vladimir Putin who also recognized Crimea as a sovereign state indicated that a historic unfairness was redressed with the incorporation of the peninsula.³⁰⁸ Three days later, on 21st March 2014, when all legal procedures were completed for the “reunification of Crimea with Russia” a ceremony took place in Moscow. In the ceremony, President Vladimir Putin signed the laws for making Crimea and Sevastopol a part of the Russian land.³⁰⁹ With his signature, the peninsula and the port city were officially annexed and connected with Russia even though many countries including the Republic of Türkiye did not recognize this illegal land grab.³¹⁰

3.2. The Crisis in the Donbas Region

The illegal taking of Crimea triggered the eruption of the separatist movement in Donbas. The region holds a significant value for both Russia and Ukraine mainly because of two factors. Firstly, Donbass, a basin that encompasses Donetsk and Luhansk which are eastern regions of Ukraine and where its portion extends to western Russia along the Don River is mostly known for its 100 million tons of coal reserves ranking fourth in Europe in terms of coal mining. Moreover, the region is a significant industrial hub where a high number of factory districts and manufacturing quarters produce vast amounts of goods. While Ukraine derives economic income from the basin, Russia also has strong ties with the region because Donbas is not only home to a considerable number of industrial complexes but also an immense number of Russians who constitute the majority of the population.³¹¹

Although the people of Donbas demanded independence from time to time, the toppling of Yanukovych invigorated secessionist ideas in the region. The annexation of Crimea, in this context, established a precedent and inspired pro-Russian supporters to mobilize. On 6 April 2014, when separatists started an armed struggle and stormed

³⁰⁸ “Putin: Kırım hep Rusya'nın parçası oldu”, BBC News Türkçe, https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2014/03/140318_putin_kirim [Accessed: 15.03.2024].

³⁰⁹ “Ceremony signing the laws on admitting Crimea and Sevastopol to the Russian Federation”, President of Russia, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/page/613> [Accessed: 15.03.2024].

³¹⁰ “Kırım'ın yasa dışı ilhakının üzerinden 5. yıl geçti”, Anadolu Ajansı, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/kirimin-yasa-disi-ilhakinin-uzerinden-5-yil-gecti/1424745> [Accessed: 15.03.2024].

³¹¹ Selami Kökçam, “Ukrayna'da krizin son perdesi: Donbas”, <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/dunya/ukraynada-krizin-son-perdesi-donbas-568312.html> [Accessed: 15.03.2024].

into the government buildings to take hold of their control which were the same tactics used in Crimea, the situation in the region warmed up and turned into a hot conflict which spread over all cities located in the Donetsk Basin affecting a wide range of area. While accusations about Russia's military assistance to rebels were flying around, the armed forces of Ukraine failed to respond timely to the occurrences.³¹²

On the following day, on 7 April, Russia-backed rebels, proclaimed a "people's republic" in Donetsk unilaterally to isolate themselves from Ukraine and expressed their purpose to organize a referendum to break away from Kyiv until May 11, all of which were defined by interim president Turchynov as the beginning of the second phase of Russian aggressive actions against the country aiming to undermine the sovereignty of the state. Here, as the climate in Donbas was harsher than in Crimea, it is necessary to add that, along with the population of ethnic Russians, a large number of Ukrainian speakers who were more respectful of the territorial integrity of Ukraine and sympathetic to the unity of their state were also residing in the region. This pro-Kyiv population counterbalanced the domination of separationists. Therefore, it can be said that the presence of more citizens who were loyal to Ukraine intensified the skirmishes as there was more opposition in the region in comparison to the Crimean peninsula. This fact increased the willingness of the Ukrainian government to intervene in ongoing occurrences in Donbas. As a result, despite the government in Ukraine adopting a passive attitude towards the developments in Crimea, it followed a different path in Donbas in terms of resorting to military force.³¹³

As the clashes in the streets persisted, another declaration was made regarding the creation of "Kharkiv People's Republic". The control of Slovyansk, Kramatorsk, and Druzhkivka changed hands as these cities were invaded by Russian occupation forces.³¹⁴ A few days later, on April 10, the so-called "Republic of Donetsk" carried a step forward by opting to build an army. On April 14, nine cities in the region including

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ "Ukraine crisis: Protesters declare Donetsk 'republic'", BBC News, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26919928> [Accessed: 16.03.2024].

³¹⁴ "HOW LONG DOES RUSSIA'S AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE REALLY LAST?", Ukraine.ua, <https://war.ukraine.ua/the-history-of-russian-aggression-in-ukraine/> [Accessed: 16.03.2024].

Kharkov and Odesa were in the stages of skirmishes.³¹⁵

Day by day, ferocity spread like wildfire across the region, the number of government buildings seized by pro-Russian separatists surged and a police station in Horlivka became one of the recent targets of occupiers. With no intention to retreat, the armed groups were determined to keep the control of buildings in their hands. Hence, the Ukrainian president gave rebels a deadline to surrender and warned them that in case they refused to vacate government facilities, the capital would launch a large-scale counter-terrorism operation to clear these areas by using force. Further, he expressed his reluctance to meet the demands of secessionist groups who seek to expand their rights and hold a regional referendum to join the Russian Federation. However, the president stated that he does not oppose the idea of conducting a national referendum in which he firmly believed that the majority of Ukrainian people would vote in favour of maintaining the unity and integrity of their country.³¹⁶

As the deadline passed without the withdrawal of rebels, the president of Ukraine pushed the button to start an ‘anti-terror operation’ before the events reached a point of no return.³¹⁷ Moreover, Turchynov referred to the rebels as “terrorists” and he underscored the operation's objective was safeguarding Ukrainians and preserving the indivisible unity of the country, while simultaneously putting an end to the rampant criminal and terrorist activities that have been plaguing the region. As a response to the announcement of an anti-terrorist operation, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergei Lavrov exuded that Ukraine should make a choice between employing military force against its citizens and partaking in negotiations.³¹⁸ However, the images unveiled by NATO displaying that Russia concentrated its forces by massing “40,000 troops, tanks and fighter jets” that are capable of occupying the country in less than a day created question marks regarding the real intentions of Russia since the country denied her involvement in incidents in Donbas and accused

³¹⁵ Cristián Faundes, “An analysis of the crisis in Ukraine, and its three conflicts (21 of november 2013, through 23 of may 2014)”, *Revista de Relaciones Internacionales, Estrategia y Seguridad*, 11, No.2 (2016): 151. DOI:10.18359/ries.1874 [Accessed: 16.03.2024].

³¹⁶“Ukrayna: Rusya yanlıları Horlivka'da karakol işgal etti”, BBC NEWS TÜRKÇE, https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2014/04/140414_ukrayna_isgal[Accessed: 16.03.2024].

³¹⁷ Faundes, *ibid*, 151.

³¹⁸“Ukraine says Donetsk 'anti-terror operation' under way”, BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27035196> [Accessed: 17.03.2024].

Ukraine for fuelling tensions.³¹⁹

Although the operation began on April 15, it cannot be said that the outcome met the expectations as approximately 100 Ukrainian soldiers and several vehicles were seized by the secessionists. In addition, on April 17, the Geneva Accord which was ratified with the purpose of bringing back security and safety to the region was also ill-fated because of the rejection of rebels to leave the buildings they occupied and surrender arms. Consequently, tensions did not de-escalate, on the contrary, they spiked. By the end of the month, a minimum number of ten cities as well as towns were under the control of pro-Russians, and members of European armed forces were abducted even though it was claimed that they were bystanders.³²⁰

On May 2, 2014, the level of violence surged in Odesa when a fire erupted after the clashes between two opposite sides in the region and claimed at least thirty-six lives. As the development of events was unclear, there was an evident infollution on the tragic incident. However, it was reported that rebels locked themselves inside the building and threw petrol bombs at each other. During the fire, some people died due to smoke inhalation whilst others lost their lives after desperately jumping from the windows hoping to survive.³²¹ On May 11, Ukrainian soil witnessed another unlawful referendum, this time in Donbas. The results of the referendum in the so-called “Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR)” reflected the strong desire of 89 per cent of inhabitants to establish an independent federation in the region. With 75 per cent of citizens who voted expressed their wish to gain independence and autonomy, the outcome was par for the course in Luhansk. In addition, it was declared that the “Republic of Luhansk”, a free region thanks to the results of the referendum, was founded.³²² These two so-called republics announced that the “Federal State of

³¹⁹Dan Bloom, “Satellite photos expose 40,000 Russian troops, tanks and fighter jets massed near Ukraine's borders as Nato warns Kremlin could order invasion within 12 HOURS”, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2602132/U-S-troops-sent-Eastern-Europe-NATO-countries-feeling-threatened-Russia-Ukraine-conflict.html> [Accessed: 17.03.2024].

³²⁰Faundes, *ibid*, 151.

³²¹“Odesa'da çatışmalar: 31 ölü”, BBC News Türkçe, https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2014/05/140502_odessa_yangin [Accessed: 17.03.2024].

³²²Ömür Melih Üzelce, Bahtiyar Abdurkerimov, Bahadır Vanlı, Veli Gürgah, “Ukrayna'da ayrılıkçıların istediği oldu”, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/ukraynada-ayrılıkcilarin-istedigi-oldu/160222> [Accessed: 18.03.2024].

Novorossia” was created on May 24 by signing a declaration.³²³ A day later, in the capital city of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko was elected as a new president.³²⁴

At the end of the month, the conflict migrated to Donetsk Airport. As the airport was captured by the rebels, the Ukrainian army started an operation supported by attack helicopters and warplanes to set the place free. Meanwhile, the recently elected president pledged to defeat the terrorists in hours.³²⁵ While the army managed to seize control of the airport, the same place experienced a brutal clash once more in 2015 and became a valuable symbol of the conflict.³²⁶

In June 2014, Ukrainian armed forces ended up in victory in the port city of Mariupol by clearing the city from militias. Ukrainian forces continued to advance and win back several cities but the shot down of a Malaysia Airlines plane causing the death of 298 innocent people put the conflict in Ukraine under the spotlight. Although there were mysteries to be unfolded regarding the incident and concrete pieces of evidence were absent in the first days, pro-Russian groups were accused of downing the plane. As authorities from the United States said that their radars detected surface-to-air missile systems and signs of heat, it was forecasted that the plane crashed after being struck by a missile. On the other hand, it was known that Ukraine and Russia had the systems that might hit the flight in their inventory. Therefore, even though Kyiv indicated that Ukrainians were not the ones to be blamed, both parties were potential suspects. Further to that, there were also allegations of Russia pouring ammunition comprising advanced weaponry into the region to assist insurgents. When taking into consideration that supporters of Russia had downing both government and military aircraft in their criminal record, the armed members of the separationist movement were considered

³²³ Lugansk Halk Cumhuriyeti nerede? Lugansk bağımsız mı? İşte Rusya-Ukrayna geriliminde gündem olan Lugansk'in tarihi”, Hürriyetcom.tr, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/galeri-lugansk-halk-cumhuriyeti-nerede-lugansk-halk-cumhuriyeti-bagimsiz-mi-lugansk-halk-cumhuriyetinin-konumu-ve-tarihi-42008644/1> [Accessed: 18.03.2024].

³²⁴ Nick Thompson, “Ukraine: Everything you need to know about how we got here”, <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/02/10/europe/ukraine-war-how-we-got-here/index.html> [Accessed: 18.03.2024].

³²⁵ “Ukrayna: Ordu Donetsk Havalimanını 'geri aldı’”, BBC NEWS TÜRKÇE, https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2014/05/140527_ukrayna_catisma [Accessed: 18.03.2024].

³²⁶ Zeki Saatci, “Donetsk havaalanı iç savaşın sembolü oldu”, <https://tr.euronews.com/2015/01/18/donetsk-havaalani-ic-savasin-sembolu-oldu> [Accessed: 18.03.2024].

the perpetrators of the tragedy.³²⁷

A few years later, in 2022, when the conflict turned into a large-scale invasion, the suspicions of the international community were confirmed once Igor Girkin who worked for the internal security services of Russia and became a defence minister of the so-called “DPR”³²⁸, Sergey Dubinskiy, head of intelligence of separatist region, and a Ukrainian, Leonid Kharchenko were found guilty of downing the plane and killing all passengers as well as the crew members by the court investigating and dealing with the case to deliver justice. In addition, during the trial, it was emphasized that Russia had the reins of rebels in the region and the missiles came from a military base in Russian territory which implicitly held the government in Moscow responsible.³²⁹

After the downing of the plane, Ukrainian forces increased their effort and regained territories occupied by separatists. On July 19, an announcement indicating that combat operations aiming to encircle Donetsk and Luhansk and oust rebels from the region was made by the Ukrainian government. In the days that followed, government forces operating in two different directions had succeeded in striking a blow at the spots of militias supported by Russia by claiming back the control of Debaltsevo and seizing the primary route that links Luhansk with Donetsk.³³⁰

However, the considerable advancements achieved by government forces put the possibility of both rebel republics being besieged by Ukrainian government forces on the table. Consequently, alarm bells started to ring for separatists and this emerging threat led them to appeal for help from Russia.³³¹ Harkening to their call, Moscow decided to intervene in the region more overtly by providing a wide range of military

³²⁷Tom Cohen, “Malaysian plane shot down in Ukraine: What happened?”, CNN World, <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/07/18/world/europe/ukraine-malaysia-plane-questions/index.html> [Accessed: 18.03.2024].

³²⁸Rob Picheta, Sebastian Shukla and Anna Chernova, “Pro-war Putin critic Igor Girkin sentenced to four years in Russian prison on extremism charges”, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/01/25/europe/igor-girkin-russia-trial-verdict-intl/index.html> [Accessed: 18.03.2024].

³²⁹Jennifer Rankin, “Three men found guilty of murdering 298 people in shooting down of MH17”, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/17/three-men-found-guilty-of-murdering-298-people-in-flight-mh17-bombing> [Accessed: 19.03.2024].

³³⁰Andrzej Wilk, Wojciech Konończuk, “Ukrainian-Russian war under the banner of anti-terrorist operation”, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2014-08-06/ukrainian-russian-war-under-banner-anti-terrorist-operation> [Accessed: 19.03.2024].

³³¹“Ukrainian army closes in on Donetsk as rebel fighters call on Russia for help”, The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/03/ukraine-army-advance-donetsk-russia-rebels> [Accessed: 19.03.2024].

assistance from sending ammunition to well-trained military personnel to directly involve in the conflict. The separatists have shifted their tactics towards protecting Donetsk and Luhansk, enabling them to concentrate their forces in the primary urban areas. Meanwhile, the Ukrainian military's advances have been stymied by increasing Russian involvement, resulting in formidable and well-structured opposition. Furthermore, the Ukrainian battalions had face declining conditions due to the “supply route” becoming lengthy and a “lack of troop rotation”. In addition, the offensive of Ukrainians had been hampered by insufficient intelligence which had prevented them from making projections of the activities of pro-Russians.³³²

Although Russia’s policy of denying both direct and indirect involvement of its military forces in conflict in Donbas prevailed during the fighting, the leader of the separationist movement in Donetsk, Zakharchenko, made a confessional statement by saying that 1,200 rebels received training for “four months” in Russian soil. The leader also added that their inventory comprises 150 units of military equipment including tanks, infantry fighting vehicles and armoured personnel carriers but he emphasized that all of these hardware are indeed remnants of Kyiv not supplied by Russia. Furthermore, he added that their men warring in the region are not professional soldiers, rather, they are combatants who voluntarily take part in conflict.³³³ Yet, during an interview, he also said that thousands of serving Russian soldiers who are on vacation and off duty battling shoulder-to-shoulder with them against Kyiv. Hence, his words were interpreted as a hint given by the leader about Russian support.³³⁴

With the allegations that armoured vehicles crossed the border and Russian troops were sent to the region which weakened the impetus of government forces and deployment of an armoured column toward the coastal city Mariupol, Ukrainians

³³²Piotr Żochowski, Rafał Sadowski, Marek Menkiszak, “The Russian military intervention in eastern Ukraine”, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2014-09-03/russian-military-intervention-eastern-ukraine> [Accessed: 19.03.2024].

³³³“Ukraine crisis: Rebel fighters 'trained in Russia'”, BBC NEWS, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-28817347> [Accessed: 19.03.2024].

³³⁴“Serving Russian soldiers on leave fighting Ukrainian troops alongside rebels, pro-Russian separatist leader says”, *The Telegraph*, 28 August 2014, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/germany/angela-merkel/11060559/Serving-Russian-soldiers-on-leave-fighting-Ukrainian-troops-alongside-rebels-pro-Russian-separatist-leader-says.html> [Accessed: 19.03.2024].

started to believe that a silent occupation had begun.³³⁵

3.3. The Kerch Strait Incident

In the aftermath of 2014, the guns on the ground were never silenced and the chaos never left the region for years. In November 2018, the crisis broke out in the Kerch Strait, boiled the waters of the Sea of Azov and the violence expanded to the maritime domain. According to the news, the incident occurred when Russian warships interdicted the three naval ships of Ukraine heading from Odesa to Mariupol on the grounds that the territorial waters of Russia were violated.³³⁶ During the naval interception, the Russian navy opened fire, resulting in wounds sustained by six crew members and the detainment of twenty-three others. After that, two Russian fighter jets and helicopters were dispatched to the area.³³⁷

The intervention of the naval forces of Russia met with great anger since the Kerch Strait and the Sea of Azov are joint maritime waters according to the 2003 agreement signed between Moscow and Kyiv. Additionally, the seizure of ships was interpreted as an “armed attack” by Ukraine because as they argued Russians were informed in advance that vessels of the Ukrainian navy were directed to Mariupol.³³⁸

On the other hand, there was already a dispute over the area regarding the construction of Kerch Bridge which was built by Russians after the illegal annexation of Crimea to create a link between the peninsula and the mainland, despite controversies,. Although Russia has been conducting inspections over all maritime vessels travelling to Ukrainian ports, this event is particularly significant because while the hostilities in the ongoing conflict were being conducted between proxies backed by Russians and Ukrainian forces, the crisis in Kerch Strait caused armed forces of both countries to directly confront with each other for the first time in years.³³⁹

³³⁵Andrew E. Kramer, Michael R. Gordon, “Ukraine Reports Russian Invasion on a New Front”, *The New York Times*, 27 August 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/28/world/europe/ukraine-russia-novoazovsk-crimea.html> [Accessed: 19.03.2024].

³³⁶Hüseyin Koyuncu, AA, “Rusya ile Ukrayna'yı savaşın eşiğine getiren 'Kerç Boğazı krizi' nedir, nasıl başladı?”, <https://tr.euronews.com/2018/11/29/rusya-ile-ukrayna-arasinda-cikan-kerc-bogazi-krizi-hakkinda-bilmeniz-gerekenler> [Accessed: 19.03.2024].

³³⁷“Rusya-Ukrayna krizi: Neler yaşandı?”, BBC NEWS TÜRKÇE, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-46342877> [Accessed: 19.03.2024].

³³⁸Ibid.

³³⁹Ibid.

As a response to the incident, the president of Ukraine imposed martial law for a period of a month by stating that this would not mean that the country was waging war against Russia since they did not have any hostile intentions. Yet, as he argued, taking this action was still necessary to increase the country's defence capabilities. The area of application of martial law was limited to territorial waters of the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov and border regions with Russia such as the provinces of Zaporizhia, Luhansk, Donetsk, Odesa, Vinnytsia.³⁴⁰ Furthermore, the Ukrainian government introduced a travel ban which would be in force for the duration of martial law to prohibit male Russian citizens between the ages of sixteen to sixty from travelling to the country to prevent the formation of “private armies” in the country.³⁴¹

3.4. The Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine

Within this framework, the conflict claiming 14,000 lives in Ukraine persisted. The attempts of the international community to reach a ceasefire in the region failed and the Minsk Agreements aiming to bring peace back to the area went deadlocked. Eight years after the outset of the conflict, in February 2022, the recognition of the independence of the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk regions by Russia obnubilated the process of finding a peaceful solution.³⁴²

Moreover, after recognising both separatist republics, Russians’ decision to send peacekeeper troops to Donbas raised worries both at domestic and international levels as this action might herald an impending military operation. However, there were also other signs that Russia would take an aggressive step towards Ukraine since in November 2021, there had been speculations that Russia was amassing its troops near the Ukrainian border. On February 24, 2022, when Russian President Vladimir Putin announced the start of a special military operation in the region and soldiers crossed the border, it became evident that these concerns were not baseless. Ukraine saw Russia's aggressive behaviour as a full-scale invasion rather than a military operation and the crossing of the Russian army into the country's territory added a new layer of

³⁴⁰Sonat Kerem, “ Ukrayna’da sıkıyönetim ilanı ne anlama geliyor?”, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-46353266> [Accessed: 19.03.2024].

³⁴¹“Ukrayna, Rus erkeklerin ülkeye girişini neden yasakladı?”, BBC News Türkçe, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-46398526> [Accessed: 19.03.2024].

³⁴²“Explainer: What to know about Ukraine’s Donetsk and Luhansk regions”, TRT World, Explainer: What to know about Ukraine’s Donetsk and Luhansk regions (trtworld.com) [Accessed: 19.03.2024].

complexity to the conflict.³⁴³ On the other hand, the objective of starting a "special military operation" against Ukraine was to "demilitarise" the country and its "denazification".³⁴⁴

With missiles raining down on the cities and tanks roaming in the streets, the people of Ukraine became victims of the most violent conflict that broke out in the European Continent since the Second World War.³⁴⁵ Russia's declaration of war sparked global concern, prompting Western nations, particularly the EU, to take action in unison with other countries and impose sanctions. The imposition of sanctions was a clear message that this aggressive behaviour would not be tolerated while pushing for a shift in Russia's policies. The economic sanctions, in particular, had the objective of stopping Russia's war machine by damaging its economy. It was hoped that this would result in a reduction in violence in Ukraine.³⁴⁶

Moreover, with the war unleashed by the Russian Federation, the military expenditure of Ukraine skyrocketed and increased by 640 per cent in 2022 in comparison to 2021. In 2022, the economic burden of sustaining the war for Ukraine was 44 billion dollars while there was also approximately a 9.2 per cent increase in the Russian Federation's military budget which was about 86.4 billion dollars.³⁴⁷

Although the occupation of Ukrainian soil was identified as 'war' from the very first day of the conflict by the West, it is important to note that Russia insisted for years that the choice of word of the Western world is problematic as the government in Moscow has always gone by the term "special military operation" while referring to the situation in Ukraine. Therefore, even though, the reality on the ground was showing every aspect of war, the persistence of two parties in using different terms created

³⁴³"Rusya-Ukrayna krizi nasıl savaşa dönüştü, bugüne nasıl gelindi?", BBC News Türkçe, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-60477870> [Accessed: 19.03.2024].

³⁴⁴ Elena Teslova, "Russia wants to demilitarize Ukraine, let Ukrainians decide their future: Lavrov", <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/russia-ukraine-crisis/russia-wants-to-demilitarize-ukraine-let-ukrainians-decide-their-future-lavrov/2521771> [Accessed: 19.03.2024].

³⁴⁵"Russia invades Ukraine on multiple fronts in 'brutal act of war'", PBS, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/russia-invades-ukraine-on-multiple-fronts-in-brutal-act-of-war> [Accessed: 19.03.2024].

³⁴⁶ Ana Carina da Costa, Silva Martins Esteves, "The Russia-Ukraine Conflict - The Impact of Economic Sanctions on Russia - A Narrative Literature Review", *Revista de Ciências Militares*, 11, No.2 (2023): 108-109.

³⁴⁷ "World military expenditure reaches new record high as European spending surges", Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2023/world-military-expenditure-reaches-new-record-high-european-spending-surges> [Accessed: 19.03.2024].

conceptual confusion. However, in March 2024, during an interview, Russia expressed that the country indeed launched a special military operation in February 2022 but after the involvement of the West in the situation in Ukraine, the conflict transformed into a “war”, acknowledging that the country is “in a state of war” with its neighbour, Ukraine.³⁴⁸

3.4.1. Urban Warfare In Mariupol

The littoral city of Mariupol razed in 2022, after Russian forces besieged and forced the city to fall. However, the port city was no stranger to urban warfare. Even though the level of violence cannot be compared to the destruction that the urban centre saw in 2022, Mariupol got its share of the violent separatist movements in Donbas in 2014. Although violence and unrest have calmed down or flared from time to time, these notions have become a part of daily life in Mariupol since 2014, after the illegal annexation of Crimea. For this reason, the question naturally arises: Why was Mariupol not just a dot on the map like many other cities but a key target of Russians and separatists attempting to capture it many times?

First of all, Mariupol is a port city that lies on the coast of the Sea of Azov and is sandwiched between Crimea, an illegally annexed peninsula by the Russians, and the separatist Donbas region. The port city is an enormous artificial barrier separating Russian forces wishing to move to the northeast to establish a link between rebels in the Donbas region which is located in eastern Ukraine. In this context, taking control of the city should not be considered as merely occupying an urban area, because, with the capture of the city, it would be possible for Russian forces to create a land corridor between Crimea and the Russian Federation. By seizing the city, more than 80 per cent of the Black Sea coastline would be under Russian control which would mean confining Ukraine to its own land, further isolating it from the rest of the world and cutting its maritime trade. As the occupation of Mariupol would enable Russian forces to dominate, access and control a much larger area, it can be said that claiming control of the city resembled completing the missing pieces of a puzzle. Therefore, Mariupol

³⁴⁸“ For the first time, Russia admits it's "in a state of war" with Ukraine”, CBS News, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/for-the-first-time-since-russias-invasion-of-ukraine-the-kremlin-says-it-is-at-war/> [Accessed: 27. 03.2024].

was a gem holding high strategic value.³⁴⁹

Secondly, as emphasized numerous times, Mariupol is a city located on the coast of the Sea of Azov. The breakaway of Crimea had been quite costly for Ukraine as along with the peninsula, five vital ports of the country were also captured by Russia, and this takeover strengthened her presence in the sea. However, Odesa, Chornomorsk, and Yuzhny on the northwestern shore of the Black Sea; and Mariupol in the Sea of Azov, five vital harbours in total, were still under the control of Ukraine. All of these commercial ports were critical for boosting Ukraine's economy. In this context, it would not be wrong to say that all of these harbours together with Mariupol, exporting products including "machinery, grain, coal, steel, and fertilizers" were the main arteries that feed the Ukrainian economy.³⁵⁰

Prior to Crimea being annexed illegally by Russia, the bustling maritime port of Mariupol, situated on the Sea of Azov, was responsible for generating approximately one-third of manufactured goods in the Donetsk region. Additionally, 70 per cent of the steel manufacture in the area was also taking place in Mariupol.³⁵¹ With the manufacture of heavy machinery, iron, and steel as well as ship repairs carried out in its shipyards, Mariupol was the heart of metallurgy. Additionally, the biggest steel facilities in Ukraine, which belonged to Metinvest, the top metallurgical business in the nation were in Mariupol. Therefore, grabbing control of the city would be a big economic win for Russia. However, for Ukraine, the loss of urban littoral centres would hit the economy of the country like a sledgehammer.³⁵²

Moreover, the capture of Mariupol was important for Russia in terms of propaganda opportunities. Because of the fact that Russian government claimed that the reason for launching a special military operation was to purge Ukraine of Nazis, it was not surprising that Mariupol was one of Russia's first targets, as this city is known as the home of the "Azov Regiment," which formed by radical right-wing Neo-Nazis and is a paramilitary unit. In this context, the defeat of the "Azov Regiment", which was

³⁴⁹ Frank Gardner, "Mariupol'ü ele geçirmek Rusya için neden önemli?", <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-60835078> [Accessed: 05.04.2024].

³⁵⁰ Deborah Sanders, "Rebuilding The Ukrainian Navy", *Naval War College Review*, 70, No. 4 (Autumn 2017): 63.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Bernmet Talant, "Why is Mariupol so important to Russian forces?", *The Guardian*, 22 March 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/22/mariupol-important-russian-forces-moscow-port-city> [Accessed: 05.04.2024].

shown as one of the main reasons and aims of the operation, was required for Russia to demonstrate its success in achieving its goal. Moreover, a victory against the paramilitary unit Azov would also damage the prestige of Kyiv.³⁵³

Because the paramilitary unit was one of the main actors on the battlespace both in the Donbas crisis and in the urban warfare in 2022 in Mariupol, it would be appropriate to open a short parenthesis about it. During the crisis in Donbas, the Ukrainian army was plagued by numerous challenges such as “corruption” and “demoralization”. For these reasons, the first battalions comprised of volunteers were being formed to bolster the army and one of these volunteer units was the Azov group. On April 13, 2014, the Interior Minister of Ukraine authorized the establishment of paramilitary forces consisting maximum number of 12,000 individuals and set the stage for the creation of the Azov unit. As tensions escalated in May 2014, the paramilitary unit was given a formal status as a volunteer force and began to receive its first supply of ammunition and training from foreigners.³⁵⁴

When Mariupol fell under rebels’ authority in May 2014, the paramilitary unit directed its attention to the littoral city and on June 13, 2014, it seized control of Mariupol. After the control of Mariupol was regained, the tasks of the unit were fundamentally guarding the city and monitoring the coast of the Azov Sea to disallow Russian weapons from entering Ukrainian territory which would end up in separatists’ hands. The unit was also engaged in combat to defend Mariupol against rebels between August and September 2014. Thereafter, in 2014, the paramilitary unit was incorporated into The National Guard of Ukraine and its status was updated as a regiment.³⁵⁵

However, the paramilitary unit Azov was linked to neo-Nazi philosophy and symbols, as well as white supremacists even though its members were considered heroes in Ukraine because of the role it played during the confrontations in the crisis in Ukraine

³⁵³Yasin Sofuoğlu, “4 maddede Mariupol: Liman şehri savaşta Rusya için neden önemli?”, <https://www.indyturk.com/node/487896/d%C3%BCnya/4-maddede-mariupol-liman-%C5%9Fehri-sava%C5%9Fta-rusya-i%C3%A7in-neden-%C3%B6nemli> [Accessed: 05.04.2024].

³⁵⁴ Federico Borgonovo, “Azov Battalion: Extreme Right-Wing Militarization and Hybrid Warfare”, *Sicurezza, terrorismo e società*, 1, No.15 (2022): 54-55.

³⁵⁵ Ibid, 55.

as its members fought for reclaiming the control of Mariupol in 2014.³⁵⁶ Furthermore, the unit maintains an emblem, which resembles the Nazi Wolfsangel, but, its members claim it is actually the letters N and I crossing over to symbolize the "national idea", thus, it cannot be evaluated as an indication that the members of the unit are sympathisers of Nazi ideology.³⁵⁷ The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has levied allegations against the paramilitary unit for committing acts of war crimes, including "torture, looting, and unlawful detention". Furthermore, the unit has been accused of agonizing minority groups. Due to its contentious nature, the paramilitary unit has been a topic of widespread debate and controversy. The ideologies upheld by the members of the unit have severely tarnished Ukraine's reputation and standing.³⁵⁸ It should also be noted that with members less than 1,000, the paramilitary unit constituted a small part of the Ukrainian forces and many of its members' mother tongue is Russian.³⁵⁹

Returning back to the importance of Mariupol, it is believed that the city is traditionally included in Russian soil which was conquered from the Ottoman Empire in the 18th century. The idea of being a part of Russia is referred Novorossiia and this belief increased Mariupol's symbolic value in the eyes of Moscow.³⁶⁰ Mariupol is also symbolically important as it was declared temporary capital in 2014.³⁶¹

Another reason that made Mariupol an important target is the idea that the capture of the city would raise the morale of Russian soldiers and strengthen their motivations. Seeing that their efforts had borne fruit with the capture of the city, Russian soldiers might have been more willing to fight. However, from a military, economic, and psychological standpoint, the loss of Mariupol would be devastating for the Ukrainian

³⁵⁶ Tara John, Tim Lister, "A far-right battalion has a key role in Ukraine's resistance. Its neo-Nazi history has been exploited by Putin", <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/03/29/europe/ukraine-azov-movement-far-right-intl-cmd/index.html> [Accessed: 05.04.2024].

³⁵⁷ Shaun Walker, "Azov fighters are Ukraine's greatest weapon and may be its greatest threat", *The Guardian*, 10 September 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/10/azov-far-right-fighters-ukraine-neo-nazis> [Accessed: 05.04.2024].

³⁵⁸ Joe Sommerlad, "Who are Ukraine's neo-Nazi Azov Battalion?", *Independent UK Edition*, 24 March 2022, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/ukraine-azov-battalion-mariupol-neo-nazis-b2043022.html> [Accessed: 05.04.2024].

³⁵⁹ "Azak Tugayı nedir?", BBC News Türkçe, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/live/haberler-dunya-60472680> [Accessed: 05.04.2024].

³⁶⁰ Alison Killing, Polina Ivanova, Peter Andringa, Chris Campbell, Sam Joiner, Caroline Nevitt, "Inside Mariupol: Russia's new Potemkin village", <https://ig.ft.com/mariupol/> [Accessed: 05.04.2024].

³⁶¹ Sanders, *ibid*, 63.

people and mean a collapse of morale because the city symbolizes standing against an enemy even if the situation in the battle is unfair.³⁶²

As this thesis deals with urban warfare it is necessary to have a look at the urbanisation rate and urban population of Ukraine. Before the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine approximately two-thirds of the population of Ukraine which was 44 million, were residents of cities.³⁶³ According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), more than 28 million citizens were inhabitants of cities in Ukraine.³⁶⁴ Additionally, the urban population which was approximately 70 percent was predominantly accumulated around Kyiv and the separatist region, Donetsk.³⁶⁵

Before the full-scale invasion, over 430,000 residents inhabited in Mariupol and the city ranked tenth among the largest cities in Ukraine.³⁶⁶ In addition, BBC revealed that, in a survey which was conducted just before the elections, it was found out that, nearly half of the Mariupol's population identified themselves as "Russian". However, interestingly, 80 per cent of the city dwellers also said they were "Ukrainian" while more than 50 per cent of the participants said they defined themselves as "Soviet".³⁶⁷ Furthermore, the mother tongue of 90 per cent of city residents was Russian. These data were important as the Russian Federation aimed to justify its "special military operation" by presenting itself as a "liberator" rather than an "aggressor" or "invader" and claimed it was protecting the rights of the Russian-speaking population.³⁶⁸

In May 2014, rebels, a terrorist armed group consisting of approximately sixty men carrying automatic weapons assaulted the police station and sparked skirmishes

³⁶² "Why Russia wants to capture the Ukrainian city of Mariupol", *The Strait Times*, 18 April 2022, <https://www.straitstimes.com/world/europe/why-russia-wants-to-capture-the-ukrainian-city-of-mariupol> [Accessed: 05.04.2024].

³⁶³ Damien Cave, Vjosa Isai, "The State of Fighting in Ukraine's Besieged Cities", *The New York Times*, 24 March 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/article/ukraine-cities.html> [Accessed: 05.04.2024].

³⁶⁴ "Urban development and post war recovery for Ukrainian cities", UNDP Ukraine, <https://www.undp.org/ukraine/blog/urban-development-and-post-war-recovery-ukrainian-cities> [Accessed: 05.04.2024].

³⁶⁵ "Towards inclusive and resilient urban recovery in Ukraine", UN-Habitat, <https://unhabitat.org/join-us/calls/towards-inclusive-and-resilient-urban-recovery-in-ukraine> [Accessed: 05.04.2024].

³⁶⁶ Dylan Stableford, "Photos: Mariupol before the war", <https://sg.news.yahoo.com/photos-mariupol-before-the-war-183153935.html> [Accessed: 05.04.2024].

³⁶⁷ Paul Adams, Hugo Bachega, "Mariupol: The 80 days that left a flourishing city in ruins (bbc.com)" [Accessed: 05.04.2024].

³⁶⁸ Laura Navarro, Javier Galán, "After months of bombing, Russia starts rebuilding Mariupol", *El País*, 13 January 2023, <https://english.elpais.com/international/2023-01-13/after-months-of-bombing-russia-starts-rebuilding-mariupol.html> [Accessed: 05.04.2024].

between government and anti-government forces and the people of Mariupol met with urban violence. According to Minister of Interior, Avakov, the confrontation between the two parties resulted in the neutralisation of twenty attackers, the arrest of four terrorist members and the escape of others.³⁶⁹

In the following days, the security forces of Ukraine abandoned the city centre and pulled back to the periphery. With their withdrawal, chaos prevailed in Mariupol; the streets were barricaded, armoured vehicles were set on fire, and shutters of shops were taken down since looting incidents started to occur whilst some locals lost their access to electricity and drinkable water.³⁷⁰

As the situation in the city streets further deteriorated, Rinat Akhmetov who is a billionaire and owner of mining and steel company Metinvest, police, administrators of industrial units and leaders of the community came forward to reach an agreement to restore order in the city. Steelworkers who work in the factories of Akhmetov took sides with police in patrolling the streets to bring security and safety back to Mariupol. They also removed the remains of clashes like detritus and tyres.³⁷¹

The steelworkers voluntarily attended patrolling activities in the city and helped security forces. They also distributed duties among themselves. For instance, labourers working at Azovstal Iron and Steel Works and the Ilyich factory monitored different parts of the urban area. According to the news published in the New York Times in May 2014, in Eastern Ukraine, 280,000 labourers were working under the umbrella of Metinvest and DTEK, the metals and mining divisions of System Capital Management, the business owned by Mr. Akhmetov. As they were able to mobilise quickly they had the capacity to turn into a game-changing power in the area. On the other hand, in Mariupol, 50,000 individuals were working in the steel industry and 18,000 of them were enrolled to take part in guarding activities in the city. By looking at these data, it can be said that the steelworkers in Mariupol also hold the potential to

³⁶⁹“Ukraine forces and pro-Russian rebels in deadly clashes”, France24, <https://www.france24.com/en/20140509-ukraine-pro-russian-separatists-killed-mariupol> [Accessed: 06.04.2024].

³⁷⁰David Blair, “Ukraine: Security forces abandon Mariupol ahead of referendum”, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/ukraine/10822396/Ukraine-Security-forces-abandon-Mariupol-ahead-of-referendum.html> [Accessed: 06.04.2024].

³⁷¹ Yuras Karmanau, “Volunteers fight back against east Ukraine's pro-Russian rebels”, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/world/volunteers-fight-back-against-east-ukraine-s-pro-russian-rebels-1.1824478?cache=yesclipId10406200text%2Fhtml%3Bcharset%3Dutf-80404%2F7.519971> [Accessed: 06.04.2024].

affect the course of the hostilities in the city and create a significant portion of manpower required for the defence of the littoral urban centre.³⁷²

On June 13, 2014, the Minister of Interior of Ukraine made an announcement regarding the launch of the operation which aimed to gain back control of Mariupol and after that Ukrainian authorities pushed the button for the liberation of the city. During the fighting, it was told that the paramilitary unit Azov took part in the operation by assaulting the positions of separatists.³⁷³ Moreover, another volunteer unit, Dnepr, was also on the battleground along with the Azov unit.³⁷⁴ While the flag of Ukraine was flapping on the wind in the port city again after a month of break, the insurgents occupied Novoazovsk, a town, not far away from Mariupol in August. The Ukrainian forces facing the peril of losing the key urban centre once more, were on knife-edge.³⁷⁵ In addition, the movement of a group of tanks and armoured vehicles belonging to Russia heading towards Mariupol contributed to the fear of the Ukrainian government on being attacked as it was highly likely that the purpose of these vehicles was to assess the weaknesses and strengths of the Ukrainian military stationed in the coast city.³⁷⁶

As strong shreds of evidence and clear indicators signalled the possibility of being assaulted by the rebels, inhabitants of the city who were willing to defend Mariupol against invaders underwent training which taught them self-defence tactics and was given by the paramilitary unit Azov in September 2014.³⁷⁷ In the following days, sounds of explosions echoed in the urban centre and it was reported that the city was shelled by pro-Russian forces. Although the forces of Ukraine responded to this attack and combatants who voluntarily took part in the defence of the city raced to the scene,

³⁷² Andrew E. Kramer, "Workers Seize City in Eastern Ukraine From Separatists", *The New York Times*, 15 May 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/16/world/europe/ukraine-workers-take-to-streets-to-calm-Mariupol.html> [Accessed: 06.04.2024].

³⁷³ "Mariupol 'militia' loses five men in combat", *Kyiv Post*, <https://www.kyivpost.com/post/10009>

³⁷⁴ "Ukraine crisis: Kiev forces win back Mariupol", *BBC NEWS*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27829773> [Accessed: 06.04.2024].

³⁷⁵ "Ukraine crisis: 'Thousands of Russians' fighting in east," *BBC*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-28963044> [Accessed: 06.04.2024].

³⁷⁶ "Ukraine says Russian tanks move toward key port", *mailonline*, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-2743696/Ukraine-says-Russian-tanks-key-port.html> [Accessed: 06.04.2024].

³⁷⁷ Kostyantyn Chernichkin, "Azov Battalion trains Mariupol residents in self-defense tactics", <https://archive.kyivpost.com/multimedia/photo/trainng-mariupol-self-defence-by-azov-battalion-volunteers-363548> [Accessed: 06.04.2024].

the shellings of rebels devastated the checkpoint of the Ukrainian government.³⁷⁸ Later, Ukraine indicated that the government forces also deployed their artillery against insurgents to thwart their attempts to seize the city.³⁷⁹

In January 2015, shells falling on the littoral urban centre claimed thirty civilians' lives and wounded approximately a hundred residents. While Russia held Kyiv responsible for the incident, the Organisation for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE) claimed that the rockets originated from the Donetsk People's Republic-controlled territories.³⁸⁰

Given the information provided above, it can be said that the year 2022 was not the first time that the port city saw bullets flying over its streets or shellings which damaged buildings and killed the inhabitants of the city. With rockets fired and combatants fighting in the city for its control, incidents that occurred in Mariupol in previous years can be considered a rehearsal of the invasion of the city in February 2022 which was unleashed by Russia. When the invasion of Ukraine began, Mariupol was one of the first cities hit hard by the waves of war.³⁸¹ On the day the occupation started, on 24 February 2022, with hundreds of explosions reverberating on the city's periphery and barrages striking a district in Mariupol, the war was getting closer to the port city.³⁸²

On 25 February 2022, Pavlopil a village only 15 kilometres away from the city of heavy industry and one of the old scenes of the separatist skirmishes in 2014, saw another fight.³⁸³ The mayor of Mariupol, Vadym Boychenko stated that fighting was ongoing in every single direction and because Russian forces were not able to capture

³⁷⁸ "Ukraine crisis: Shelling near Mariupol threatens truce", BBC NEWS, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-29097836> [Accessed: 06.04.2024].

³⁷⁹ "Ukraine shells separatists ahead of ceasefire talks", France24, <https://www.france24.com/en/20140905-ukraine-fighting-mariupol-ceasefire-talks-separatists-russia> [Accessed: 06.04.2024].

³⁸⁰ Tom Parfitt, "Ukraine rebels launch new assaults after Mariupol bloodbath", <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/ukraine/11368747/Ukraine-rebels-launch-new-assaults-after-Mariupol-bloodbath.html> [Accessed: 06.04.2024].

³⁸¹ Clara Preve, "Mariupol 'barely recognisable' two years into Russian invasion of Ukraine: HRW report", <https://www.euronews.com/2024/02/08/mariupol-barely-recognisable-two-years-into-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-hrw-report> Accessed: 06.04.2024].

³⁸² "Port city of Mariupol comes under fire after Russia invades Ukraine", *The Strait Times*, 26 February 2022, <https://www.straitstimes.com/world/europe/port-city-of-mariupol-comes-under-fire-after-russia-invades-ukraine> [Accessed: 06.04.2024].

³⁸³ Neil Hauer, "In port city of Mariupol, Ukrainians see few signs of government preparing for Russian invasion", <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/eastern-ukraine-russia-military-1.6352342> [Accessed: 07. 04.2024].

the city, they dropped bombs on Mariupol whilst tanks were getting closer to Mariupol. While the combat did not stop in the area, the mayor indicated that they were not only defending their city, Mariupol, but also the whole country and Europe.³⁸⁴ Thus, from his perspective, the occupation of the city was only the beginning and Mariupol was not a terminus but one of the first stops of Russian forces. In case the city falls, the Russian army will continue to fight, and it is not certain where they will put an end to their invasion.

While the Russian forces on land were approaching the city day by day, according to news published on 25 February 2022, the Pentagon reported that amphibious assault on the Sea of Azov shoreline was initiated by Russia. As it was stated, the attack had focused on the western region of Mariupol and involved the landing of ‘thousands of naval infantry troops’. Even though the Russian forces did not put too much use of its naval power on the first day of the invasion, given the proximity of Mariupol to the areas where Russian forces were located, the possibility of Ukrainian territory facing a threat rising from the sea in the days to come emerged.³⁸⁵

On 27 February 2022, the mayor of the port city indicated that the 10th Assault Brigade and the 36th Naval Infantry Brigade destroyed an enemy tank with the help of the paramilitary unit Azov. He also stated that the Russians were verging on the city step by step and that an air strike was conducted against the troops on the ground, but the Ukrainian soldiers did not give a passage to the enemy. There was also a ship on the sea which hoisted anchor for unknown reason. Although the battleship did not moor on the coast of Mariupol, Boychenko said they planted mines to the seawaters illustrating that the authorities were aware of the fact that the city was potentially at the risk of being attacked by the Russian navy.³⁸⁶ On the night of the same day, as both Ukrainians and Russians were determined to fight for control of the city, the

³⁸⁴Igor Kossov, Daryna Shevchenko “Where Russia is attacking Ukraine today (Feb. 25)”, <https://kyivindependent.com/where-russia-is-attacking-ukraine-today-feb-25/> [Accessed: 07. 04.2024].

³⁸⁵“Russian Navy Carries Out Amphibious Assault Near Mariupol”, The Maritime Executive, <https://maritime-executive.com/article/russian-navy-carries-out-amphibious-assault-near-mariupol> [Accessed: 08. 04.2024].

³⁸⁶Roman Romaniuk, “MAYOR: Russian tanks advanced to Mariupol but were stopped. A battleship was approaching”, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2022/02/27/7326429/> [Accessed: 08. 04.2024].

situation remained unchanged.³⁸⁷

On 28 February 2022, TASS Russian News Agency announced that Mariupol was almost fully surrounded by army formations of the proclaimed DPR. While these developments were taking place, the Russian Ministry of Defense assured that there was no need to worry about non-combatant casualties as the focal points of strikes carried out by Russian forces were not the Ukrainian cities as a whole, but the military infrastructure of the Ukrainian army located in these cities.³⁸⁸

Although all attention was on Mariupol, Volnovakha sitting on the north of the port city found itself on the list of desired targets of Russian forces as it was on the road leading to the industrial city and a critical transportation hub.³⁸⁹ On March 1, Denis Pushilin who was the leader of the pro-claimed DPR, said the encirclement of Volnovakha was almost done and they were tasked with encircling Mariupol. In addition, Deputy Defense Minister and Defense Spokesman of the so-called DPR militia command Eduard Basurin stated humanitarian corridors would be opened to evacuate residents of Mariupol who were willing to flee from the city.³⁹⁰

By looking at the statements made by two ‘officials’ from the so-called DPR, it can be said that while the armed forces of Russia were always in denial of cooperating with the rebels for eight years, in 2022, the country showed no intentions to hide their affiliation with them and did not hesitate to stand side by side on the battlefield with members of DPR.

On the other hand, Vadym Boychenko gave the information that districts where inhabitants of the city reside were hit by barrages, missiles and airstrikes. He added the city was left without heat and electricity as critical infrastructure was destroyed, and numerous people were harmed whilst some of them lost their lives. Appreciating the residents of the urban coastal centre who were doing their best to protect their city

³⁸⁷“Fighting around Ukraine's Mariupol throughout the night - regional governor”, yahoo!news, <https://au.news.yahoo.com/fighting-around-ukraines-mariupol-throughout-082104414.html> [Accessed: 08. 04.2024].

³⁸⁸“DPR forces completing encircling Mariupol — Russian defense ministry”, TASS Russian News Agency, <https://tass.com/politics/1413295> [Accessed: 08. 04.2024].

³⁸⁹Illia Ponomarenko, “Illia Ponomarenko: How Russia killed 3 cities of my life”, <https://kyivindependent.com/illia-ponomarenko-how-russia-killed-3-cities-of-my-life/> [Accessed: 08. 04.2024].

³⁹⁰ Tim Lister, Olya Voitovych, “Russian-backed separatist leader expects his forces to surround Mariupol on Tuesday”, https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-putin-news-03-01-22/h_d839bed2974aeb2e7d18a65436c21201 [Accessed: 08. 04.2024].

from the invaders, he also stated that, “we are fighting to [the] last bullet,” implying that the resistance of the people of Mariupol will endure until the end.³⁹¹

Furthermore, on the same day, school and residential buildings sustained damage. The City Administration of Mariupol quoted the words of the mayor on its Telegram account which was describing the invasion as ‘genocide’ and stated that the Russian forces’ invasion of Ukraine is exactly the same as the Nazi occupations. The words of the mayor were thought-provoking and completely contradicted Russian claims because of the fact that Russia set forth ‘de-Nazification’ and preventing genocide as reasons for initiating its military operation and heading to Mariupol.³⁹² Additionally, on a TV channel, the mayor also said the air strike resulted in the destruction of vital infrastructure.³⁹³

On March 2, the bombardment of Mariupol, and the blockade of the city had commenced.³⁹⁴ From this date, Mariupol was under the grip of the Russian troops which were only a few kilometres away from the urban centre and surrounded the city on all sides. The city was subject to non-stop shelling for fifteen hours which brought the industrial hub to the brink of humanitarian disaster. According to Serhiy Orlov, the deputy mayor of Mariupol, the Russian military deployed a wide range of weaponry including artillery, several rocket launchers, aircraft, and tactical rockets. As waterworks and power distribution units were hit, vital services such as water and electricity were disrupted. In several districts of Mariupol, food became scarce whilst settlements of the city residents almost faced total destruction.³⁹⁵ While the city was being pounded so-called commander of DPR said the people of the city would pay the price for not giving up resistance with the bombs raining down on them.³⁹⁶ In Mariupol, the total number of fifteen fundamental electricity lines had collapsed

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Yevhen Kızılov, “Mariupol under Russian fire: residential buildings and a school damaged”, Mariupol under Russian fire: residential buildings and a school damaged | Ukrainska Pravda [Accessed: 08. 04.2024].

³⁹³ Olena Roshchina, “Mariupol remains practically without electricity - the mayor”, Mariupol remains practically without electricity - the mayor | Ukrainska Pravda [Accessed: 08. 04.2024].

³⁹⁴ “The siege of Mariupol”, France24, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220421-the-siege-of-mariupol> [Accessed: 08. 04.2024].

³⁹⁵ Joel Gunter, “Ukrainian city of Mariupol ‘near to humanitarian catastrophe’ after bombardment”, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60585603> [Accessed: 08. 04.2024]

³⁹⁶ “Pro-Russian separatists threaten Ukraine’s Mariupol with strikes”, Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/pro-russian-separatists-threaten-ukraines-mariupol-with-strikes-2022-03-03/> [Accessed: 08. 04.2024].

without any exception.³⁹⁷

As one of the first tactics that Russian forces relied on was imposing a siege on Mariupol some information regarding this tactic can form a solid base for better understanding. According to Nils Hägerdal, the tactics employed during siege warfare may vary depending on the objective of seizing a particular built-up area. The forces laying siege on their adversary may choose to conduct aerial bombardments, shell the area, or fire missiles without any concern for the principle of discrimination. While states carrying out indiscriminate attacks may come under fire, these attacks can avail the forces imposing the siege on the urban territory. By pounding the urban area, it is possible for the forces to deploy fewer troops in the area they wish to capture, reduce military casualties that are likely to occur during urban combat, and avoid some extent of fighting in the streets. Furthermore, cities and towns fall rather swiftly with this technique because it does not require a significant number of units to enter the urban area and battle urban foes. Therefore, this tactic can enable besieging forces to save time, manpower and decrease the costs of urban warfare in terms of military casualties.³⁹⁸

However, everything has pros and cons, and this tactic is no exception. The disadvantage is the necessity of having a vast amount of firepower and munitions. Moreover, significant parts of the urban area may come into ruins due to these attacks, challenging the forces that lay siege on the area. As the objective of the forces is to seize a particular spot, they must rebuild the structures they destroyed, incurring both time and a significant amount of money. Additionally, destruction generates piles of rubble hindering mobility and creating obstacles blocking roads and streets. If the adversary in the city refuses to surrender and cannot be defeated, the besieging forces might not choose but to engage in urban combat in the streets, and debris can be barricades that were built by the forces that conduct indiscriminate attacks. The starvation tactic can also be a strategy employed by the besieging forces. Rather than shelling the area, the besieging forces remain more passive until the starved adversary lays down their arms. In comparison to bombing the area fiercely, starvation does not

³⁹⁷Joel Gunter, "Mariupol under siege: 'We are being completely cut off'", <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60601235> [Accessed: 08. 04.2024].

³⁹⁸Nils Hägerdal, "Starvation as Siege Tactics: Urban Warfare in Syria", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2020): 7, DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2020.1816682

consume large amounts of resources, and equipment or weapon systems are not needed as its essence is waiting patiently. However, if the forces under the grip of the besieging forces' food stock is full or sufficient, the duration of the siege could be prolonged, and it could tie up besieging forces in the area since surrender would not come until their adversary ran out of food. In addition, both indiscriminate attacks and starvation methods can be mixed by the forces. Such a strategy would cause more deaths and suffering, but it would boost the efficiency and success of the operation, bringing victory by applying the greatest amount of hardship to the forces.³⁹⁹ In the context of the battle in Mariupol, it can be asserted that the Russian recipe for capturing the city was not complicated at all. Using only two main ingredients- indiscriminate attacks and the manipulation of hunger – and blending them, the Russian forces had triumphed over Ukrainians.⁴⁰⁰

On the other hand, concerning the emerging humanitarian crisis Petro Andryushchenko, the assistant of the mayor of the city said since the power system was destroyed water systems stopped working because pumps could not operate without electricity. The scarcity of water forced people to drink rainwater or gather snow. Although drinking the water of rain or snow could have been a solution to slake people's thirst, there was a risk of spreading diseases that are contracted by drinking tainted water. Inadequate fluid intake may lead to dehydration, a condition that can cause grave health implications, especially among vulnerable populations such as the elderly, infants, and expectant women. These groups are at a higher risk of experiencing debilitating health complications, and in some severe cases, even death. Along with water scarcity, the cold weather also worsened the dire situation. The temperature level in Mariupol was below zero deteriorated the horrible living conditions of civilians and posed an additional threat to their health since the freezing weather can lead to hypothermia and frostbite.^{401 402}

³⁹⁹ Ibid, 7-8.

⁴⁰⁰ Kristin Ljungkvist, "A New Horizon in Urban Warfare in Ukraine?", *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies*, 5, No.1 (2022): 95-96, DOI: 10.31374/sjms.165.

⁴⁰¹ "Ukraine: Mariupol Residents Trapped by Russian Assault", Human Rights Watch, Ukraine: Mariupol Residents Trapped by Russian Assault | Human Rights Watch (hrw.org) [Accessed: 08. 04.2024]

⁴⁰² "Frostbite and Hypothermia", Connecticut State Department of Public Health, <https://portal.ct.gov/dph/communications/crisis-and-emergency-risk-communication/frostbite-and-hypothermia#:~:text=Hypothermia%20is%20more%20serious%20than,or%20abnormally%20low%20body%20temperature.> [Accessed: 08. 04.2024].

Within this context, it can be said that Mariupol joined the list of cities where suffered from indirect harms occurred as a result of attacks on critical infrastructure. While the basic needs were still inaccessible in the city, the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy stated an infant lost his/her life due to dehydration, confirming the lethal effect of indirect harm.⁴⁰³

As the shelling of the city wore on and many people lost their lives Deputy Mayor Orlov stated defenders of Mariupol were fighting chivalrously against their enemy. However, the number of Russian combatants surpassed the Ukrainians, thus, it can be said that the armed forces of Russia held numerical superiority over Ukraine's. In this context, urban warfare in Mariupol was asymmetric at least in terms of manpower. Additionally, on his Telegram account, Boychenko made another statement by saying that railroads, the chain of supplies and bridges suffered damage and the mending of damaged critical infrastructure seemed impossible because their attempts were hindered by their adversaries.⁴⁰⁴

On the other hand, The Russian Ministry of Defence spokesperson, Major General Igor Konashenkov elucidated that the circle around the port city was tightening as armed members of DPR continued their advance towards Mariupol by claiming control of built-up areas, Vinogradnoye, Sartaka, and Vodyanoye. Moreover, he sketched an escape route from Mariupol for non-belligerents who had the desire to leave the city and emphasized that Russians do not aim their weapons at populated areas where civilians inhabit albeit the officials from Mariupol asserted otherwise.⁴⁰⁵

The announcement of the ceasefire came after a few but very long days of the suffering of the civilian population in the city which would enable people to flee from the surrounded Mariupol and the town of Volnovakha. However, the ceasefire was breached and attempts to create safe passages for the residents to exit the area failed because of ongoing shellings.⁴⁰⁶ Regarding the violation of the ceasefire, an urban

⁴⁰³ "Ukraine president says the child died from dehydration in besieged Mariupol", euronews, <https://www.euronews.com/2022/03/09/us-ukraine-crisis-mariupol-dehydration> [Accessed: 08. 04.2024].

⁴⁰⁴ Tim Lister, Olga Voitovych, Laura Smith-Spark, "Russia squeezes southern Ukraine amid warning 'worst is yet to come'", <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/03/03/europe/ukraine-mariupol-besieged-russia-intl/index.html> [Accessed: 08. 04.2024].

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ "Russia's War In Ukraine: Latest Developments (March 5, 17:00 Kyiv time)", KyivPost, <https://archive.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics-2/russias-war-in-ukraine-latest-developments-march-5-1700-kyiv-time.html> [Accessed: 08. 04.2024].

resident said bombardments occurred “every three to five minutes” while another city dweller provided images displaying the smoke originating from blasts close to the centre and said plumes were coming from the highway leading to Zaporizhzhia which was supposed to be a way for the evacuation of citizens. Although the authorities of Mariupol blamed the Russians and suspended their plans to send the citizens to a safe place, the Russian side claimed the evacuation corridor was not used by the citizens and Ukraine was the obstacle standing in front of people who wished to flee. Consequently, the inhabitants of Mariupol remained entrapped within the city.⁴⁰⁷

On 6 March, the faith of the second ceasefire was the same as the first one. Once again, both sides were unable to create green zones to allow people to escape and continued to accuse each other of the collapse of the ceasefire.⁴⁰⁸ On the next day, March 7, at the dawn of failed attempts and humanitarian crisis, Colonel General Mikhail Mizintsev the Head of the National Centre for State Defence Control of the Russian Federation gave a speech regarding the failure of opening humanitarian corridors and projected perspective of his country. According to Mizintsev, Ukraine did not meet any requirements for the establishment of humanitarian corridors. While Russia used control techniques which are impartial like deploying unmanned aerial vehicles, Ukraine did not take any steps to prepare humanitarian convoys, and nobody showed up at the safe passages that were established. Furthermore, he claimed the barrages never subsided and within only three hours, there were 172 registered shellings fired by Ukrainians on all six humanitarian corridors designated by the Russian Armed Forces. As he claimed the efforts of locals and citizens of foreign countries to travel toward the locations where humanitarian convoys congregate in Mariupol were quashed by Ukraine, and incidents even came to the point of using lethal force He continued his claims by adding that the people in the city were not informed that they had a chance to escape from the area by using these passages. Moreover, misleading, false news was spread by the Ukrainians and the impression that Russia does not open exit routes was created. Mizintsev also alleged that a school building in Mariupol was turned into a fortress by nationalists by stationing sniper squads on the top floor and

⁴⁰⁷ Joel Gunter, “Siege of Mariupol: Fresh Russian attacks throw evacuation into chaos”, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60629851> [Accessed: 08. 04.2024].

⁴⁰⁸ “Ukraine war: Mariupol evacuation halted again as Russia 'regroups forces'”, Skynews, <https://news.sky.com/story/ukraine-invasion-second-attempt-to-evacuate-mariupol-to-begin-as-temporary-ceasefire-announced-12559009> [Accessed: 08. 04.2024].

heavy weaponry on the ground level. Concurrently “the militants” used the non-combatants living in the houses closest to the building as a human shield by not allowing them to leave.⁴⁰⁹

On the other hand, from the beginning of the war, media towers and broadband companies were under the attacks of not only soldiers but also hackers. With the system outage, live coverage of incidents was halted. The communication system in Mariupol was not spared by attacking forces, phones and televisions were nothing but non-functional devices due to lack of electricity and intense shellings. The loss of connectivity made the city vulnerable to disinformation campaigns.⁴¹⁰

The residents of Mariupol were left dark and did not have the faintest idea of the incidents taking place both in the city and the rest of the world. Without the flow of information, it was extremely challenging for civilians to find a secure way to escape from the city. Therefore, lack of communication put the evacuation process in peril. In addition, there were claims that city dwellers were not given any advance warning through communication lines which would have enabled them to take cover before attacks. They were also deprived of any information regarding humanitarian aid and escape routes.⁴¹¹

On March 9, the aerial bombing of a maternity and children's hospital became one of the most memorable moments of the urban warfare in the city, which was heavily condemned by the international community. While the Russian authorities were accused of committing war crimes, Russia claimed that neither medical staff nor patients were present at the health facility because these people were forced to leave the hospital by the members of the paramilitary unit Azov. According to Russia, the building was invaded by the Azov Regiment, and it was a base of nationalists.⁴¹² However, various news agencies, from the West contradicted these claims reporting that the hospital was operating and treating the civilians and even the delivery room

⁴⁰⁹“Meeting of the Joint Coordination Headquarters for Humanitarian Response in Ukraine”, Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, https://eng.mil.ru/en/special_operation/news/more.htm?id=12412041 [Accessed: 08. 04.2024].

⁴¹⁰ Matt Burgess, “The Last Cell Tower in Mariupol”, <https://www.wired.com/story/mariupol-ukraine-war/> [Accessed: 09. 04.2024].

⁴¹¹“Ukraine: Ensure Safe Passage, Aid for Mariupol Civilians”, reliefweb, Ukraine: Ensure Safe Passage, Aid for Mariupol Civilians - Ukraine | ReliefWeb [Accessed: 09. 04.2024].

⁴¹²“Ukrainian nationalists in Mariupol used maternity hospital as their base — Lavrov”, TASS Russian News Agency, <https://tass.com/politics/1419791> [Accessed: 09. 04.2024].

was moved to the basement. Moreover, after the airstrike, a photo of a heavily pregnant woman trying to leave the site was taken and spread through the media which became one of the most famous and striking photos reflecting the brutality of urban warfare in Mariupol. However, it was claimed by Russia that the photo of the pregnant woman was “fake”. With the airstrike, the maternity ward was at the centre of a disinformation campaign as both sides told their own version of the story.⁴¹³

In relation to the disinformation campaign and the collapse of the communication systems, the statements of Evgeniy Maloletka, the journalist who took the photo of the pregnant lady in the maternity ward and illustrated the terror of war in Mariupol through his camera’s lenses are significant. Revealing the important role that the media plays in urban warfare in the twenty-first century, Maloletka indicated that electricity, water and food supply routes were hit by Russian forces in the initial phase and afterwards, cell phone, radio, and television towers were struck and damaged. By destroying these vital communication infrastructures, Russian forces extended the scope of their siege, after that point, the information was also under the total blockade of Russians. According to the journalist, by cutting the flow of information, Russian forces aimed to create chaos in the city since the lack of information cause panic within the society.⁴¹⁴

In addition, because making contact with the outside world was impossible for the people in Mariupol, this information blackout in the port city gave Russians the freedom to act without being restricted by any rules or laws. In this context, like civilians, the photos of destroyed structures or children who were killed were also entrapped in Mariupol. Although Ukrainian television or radio signals could not be received in Mariupol, the city residents were able to hear spewing misinformation from Russia, claiming that Ukrainians were developing chemical weapons or taking the people in the city captive. What was more interesting was that some city residents appeared to believe this propaganda campaign of Russia even though they witnessed every incident. On the basis of this, it can be said that Russia reached success to some

⁴¹³“Twitter, Rusya Büyükelçiliği’nin bombalanan çocuk hastanesiyle ilgili paylaşımlarını kaldırdı”, T24, <https://t24.com.tr/haber/twitter-rusya-buyukelciligi-nin-bombalanan-cocuk-hastanesiyle-ilgili-paylasimlarini-kaldirdi,1020317> [Accessed: 09. 04.2024].

⁴¹⁴ “Mariupol cehenneminde 20 gün! Ruslar onların peşindeydi, o iki gazeteci anlattı: "Etrafımız sarılmıştı", Hurriyetcom.tr, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/dondurucu-cehennemde-20-gun-ruslar-onlari-peşindeydi-o-iki-gazeteci-anlatti-etrafimiz-sarilmisti-42027918> [Accessed: 09. 04.2024].

extent in winning the war against the minds of the people in Mariupol.⁴¹⁵

Three days later, it was reported that combatants of Russia had gained control of surrounding districts in the east of the city. However, despite their territorial gain, the attacking force was still bombarding the city most probably because it aimed to push Mariupol to concede its defeat more swiftly.⁴¹⁶ On March 14, attempts to create exit routes gave their fruit for the first time and approximately 20,000 innocents left the besieged city.⁴¹⁷ However, the food and water stocks in the city were draining whilst the attack on civilian properties and infrastructure persisted. The power, mobile services and heating were still unavailable.⁴¹⁸

On the following day, the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine released operational information on the ongoing war on its website. According to the information shared by the authorities, Russian forces were still determined to take control of the city, but Ukrainians thwarted their actions. The information provided by the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine also shed light on what was happening at the sea and pointed out that any indications of preparations for “naval landing operations” both in the Black Sea and Sea of Azov operational zones were lacking.⁴¹⁹ On the same date, in another post on the website, Ukraine stated that the paramilitary unit Azov vanquished one of the 22nd Special Brigade units of the Russian Federation's Armed Forces while the battle to free Mariupol's surroundings was still ongoing.⁴²⁰

On the following day, the Mariupol drama theatre, which housed between 1,000 to 1,200 civilians a group including mostly children and mourners seeking shelter, was struck. In addition, satellite imagery revealed that the word "children" was prominently displayed in capital letters in Russian in the theatre's garden as a precautionary measure

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ Mason Clark, George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, “RUSSIAN OFFENSIVE CAMPAIGN ASSESSMENT, MARCH 12, <https://www.understandingwar.org/background/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-12> [Accessed: 10. 04.2024].

⁴¹⁷ “The bloody battle for Mariupol”, France24, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20230519-the-bloody-battle-for-mariupol> [Accessed: 10. 04.2024].

⁴¹⁸ “Ukraine's Mariupol says city's last reserves of food and water are running out”, euronews, <https://www.euronews.com/2022/03/14/us-ukraine-crisis-mariupol-russia> [Accessed: 10. 04.2024]

⁴¹⁹ “Operational information on 06.00, 15.03.2022 regarding the Russian invasion”, Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, Operational information on 06.00, 15.03.2022 regarding the russian invasion | Міноборони (mil.gov.ua) [Accessed: 10. 04.2024].

⁴²⁰ “Operational information on 18.00, 15.03.2022 regarding the russian invasion”, Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, Operational information on 18.00, 15.03.2022 regarding the russian invasion | Міноборони (mil.gov.ua) [Accessed: 10. 04.2024].

and advance warning against potential air attacks which would be launched by Russian forces. Despite these findings, Russia denied any involvement in the alleged air strike and did not assume responsibility for the devastating attack.⁴²¹

The Russian Federation stated the theatre was destroyed by the paramilitary unit Azov. Furthermore, the Russian authorities claimed that the attack was staged by “nationalists” to give Ukraine the chance to request further weaponry from the West and that fourteen dead bodies were discovered in the theatre and the majority of those who died were members of the “Azov” battalion. As it was added by Russia, there was not a single piece of an airdropped bomb, thus, there was no evidence to accuse the country. In the statement of Russia, it was also expressed that the cause of the destruction of the buildings was a detonation of “Azov” ammunition that was being kept inside the theatre and nearly all innocents were able to abandon the buildings prior to the blast.⁴²²

Yet, Zelenskyy, the Ukrainian President called Russian citizens in his address by asking, “How is your blockade of Mariupol different from the blockade of Leningrad during World War II?”.⁴²³ This question can be considered denotative because the siege of Leningrad which took almost 900 days shared similar patterns with urban warfare in Mariupol. Leningrad besieged by Nazis was also an industrial hub and hit by an apocalyptic humanitarian crisis. Almost a million city residents died due to cold, starvation, dehydration and shelling. The starving people in the city were so desperate that they had to eat their maquillage and companion animals.⁴²⁴

After decades, in the twenty-first century, people losing their lives in the same but tragic way in an urban battle in Mariupol had confirmed the argument that some

⁴²¹ Hugo Bachega, “Rusya, Ukrayna'da sivillerin sığınak olarak kullandığı tiyatroyu bombaladı”, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-60778810> [Accessed: 11. 04.2024].

⁴²² “Statement by the Russian Federation on the false allegations against the Russian Federation made by Ukraine to cover-up its own violations of international law and military crimes against the civilian population of Donbass as well as Kharkov, Kherson and Zaporozhye regions”, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1831500/#_edn10 [Accessed: 11. 04.2024].

⁴²³ “The world must officially recognize that Russia has become a terrorist state - address by the President of Ukraine”, Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, The world must officially recognize that Russia has become a terrorist state - address by the President of Ukraine | Міноборони (mil.gov.ua) [Accessed: 11. 04.2024].

⁴²⁴ “‘An unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe’: The siege of Leningrad, 80 years on”, France24, <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20210908-an-unprecedented-humanitarian-catastrophe-the-siege-of-leningrad-80-years-on> [Accessed: 11. 04.2024].

fundamental characteristics of urban warfare never change. The residents of Mariupol had neither food nor water, the weather was freezing, and the thirst had already claimed the life of a child. On the other hand, in this war, Russia did not play the “defender” but the “invader” and used the same tactics in Mariupol which were used by the Nazi regime to destroy their motherland. However, because Russians claimed that its “special military operation” was necessary to get rid of Nazism it can be argued that Zelenskyy indirectly put his finger on the irony created by Russian forces when they began their occupation.

While individuals buried beneath the wreckage of the damaged theatre building awaited to be pulled from the rubble and rescue operations came to the stopping point due to the bombs falling on the city, on March 18, it was reported that the Russian forces managed to enter Mariupol and the urban combat was now being conducted at the core of Mariupol, in its city centre. The Ministry of Defence of Russia stated the grip of their forces was being tightened around the city and the city centre became the latest battlespace where they were combatting “nationalists”. The mayor, Boychenko, confirmed the urban fight raged in the heart of the city, and said the area where their enemy set foot cannot be referred to as a city centre as every structure in there had the scars of war.⁴²⁵

Boychenko also stated that "there are tanks... and artillery shelling, and all kinds of weapons fired in the area".⁴²⁶ By looking at what the mayor said it can be concluded that Russian forces chose to send tanks into the city centre, despite it was highly likely that the manoeuvre capabilities of tanks could have been limited as many buildings collapsed due to bombardments. Additionally, since the mayor said “all kinds of weapons” were used in the urban area, it can be thought that the Russian forces might have conducted indiscriminate attacks as some types of weapons mainly explosives can cause destruction on a large scale.⁴²⁷ Furthermore, it was also stated by him that the Russian forces outnumbered them despite their best efforts to maintain their positions within Mariupol. Thus, one can reach the conclusion that numerical

⁴²⁵ Daniel Boffey, Lorenzo Tondo, “Fighting reaches central Mariupol as shelling hinders rescue attempts”, *The Guardian*, 18 March 2022. Fighting reaches central Mariupol as shelling hinders rescue attempts | Ukraine | The Guardian [Accessed: 11. 04.2024].

⁴²⁶ Hugo Bachega, “Ukraine war: 'Tanks in streets' as fighting hits Mariupol centre”, *Ukraine war: 'Tanks in streets' as fighting hits Mariupol centre (bbc.com)* [Accessed: 11. 04.2024].

⁴²⁷ “Urban warfare and violence”, ICRC, <https://www.icrc.org/en/law-and-policy/urban-warfare-and-violence> [Accessed: 11. 04.2024].

asymmetry remained one of the features of the war in the port city.⁴²⁸

At this point of the urban warfare in Mariupol, launching air strikes on the port city had become a daily routine for Russian forces as the City Council of Mariupol shared a post on Telegram, stating that each day between fifty and a hundred air bombs are dropped over Mariupol by the invaders. Eighty to ninety per cent of the city was smashed to smithereens while it was estimated that the death toll surpassed 2,300. However, as a high number of people were awaiting to be salvaged from the remains of the theatre, there could have been more civilians who lost their lives.⁴²⁹

According to the Institute for the Study of War's Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment March 19, with the 8th Combined Arms Army to the east and the Russian forces in Crimea to the west, Russian forces placed a significant amount of fighting strength around Mariupol. Russians would have had a chance to shift adequate battle force westward towards Mariupol by conquering the city swiftly or with not many casualties and this quick and less costly victory would have enabled them to pose a danger to Zaporizhiya and Dnipro where are also valuable targets. Still, as the siege of Mariupol was prolonged and the city did not fall quickly, the power of Russian forces was severely undermined along that front. In the assessment, it was also written that urban combat in the city costs Russian forces "time, initiative, and combat power". This was an important statement as one of the most defining characteristics of urban warfare is that consuming too much time, and power and being resource intensive. Based on this, it might be safe to assume that the Russian forces started to suffer from the demanding nature of urban battlespace.⁴³⁰

Another hit was made on an art school where 400 civilians were thought to be seeking safety from bombings on March 20.⁴³¹ On the same day, the Azovstal steel plant which was well-known not only for steel production but also for contributing to efforts to maintain order in the city since 2014 was infected with the urban battle. When fighting

⁴²⁸ Bachega, "Ukraine war: 'Tanks in streets' as fighting hits Mariupol centre", *ibid*.

⁴²⁹ Anastasiia Kalatur, "Russians drop 50 to 100 bombs on Mariupol every day", *Russians drop 50 to 100 bombs on Mariupol every day | Ukrainska Pravda* [Accessed: 12.04.2024].

⁴³⁰ Frederick W. Kagan, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko, "Institute for the Study of War's the Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment March 19", *Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 19 | Institute for the Study of War (understandingwar.org)* [Accessed: 12.04.2024].

⁴³¹ "Mariupol'da bu kez okul bombalandı", *Hurriyetcom.tr*, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/mariupolda-bu-kez-okul-bombalandi-42026499> [Accessed: 12.04.2024].

jumped on the giant complex, it came under the threat of destruction. Metinvest supplied 45% of the crude steel produced in Ukraine in 2021, making it the nation's 12th-largest steel manufacturer globally. As reported by steelmaking analytics company GMK Center, the country lost 0.7 per cent of its yearly output of steel in less than a week after the war's outset. On the other hand, the plant was prepared for war as there were bomb shelters in the complex which were built in 2015 to provide safety and security to workers. There were also people residing in the shelters whose number was above 4,000. These people had food, water and satellite phones which would help them to survive.⁴³²

While four warships of the Russian Navy shelled the port city making the urban warfare in Mariupol more discernible in land, maritime and air domains and the battle in the streets was being fought intensely, “the patrol boat Raptor and electronic warfare complex Leer-3” were annihilated by Ukrainians on the next day, as the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine shared on its official website.⁴³³ Additionally, Oleksii Reznikov, The Defence Minister of Ukraine praised the defenders of Mariupol on March 21 by saying that they had been instrumental in thwarting the enemy's schemes and the unwavering commitment and extraordinary bravery of fighters saved countless lives in the country. In addition, he said, “today Mariupol is saving Kyiv, Dnipro and Odesa” which were words that laid stress on the strategic importance of the city. Mariupol, in the context of Reznikov’s address, was a significant buffer and giant obstacle that prevented Russian forces from advancing on other vital cities with its determined defenders. Mariupol did not resist only for itself but for all.⁴³⁴

Moreover, on the same date, Ukraine ignored the ultimatum of the Russian Federation and rejected to give up fighting. However, the humanitarian situation in the port city was still calamitous. A member of parliament from Mariupol named Dmytro Gurin claimed that by starving the inhabitants of the city Russia was attempting to compel

⁴³² Courtney Vinopal, “One of Europe’s biggest iron and steel plants was damaged during Russia’s Mariupol siege”, <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/one-europe-biggest-iron-steel-151125530.html> [Accessed: 12.04.2024].

⁴³³“Operational information on 24.00, 21.03.2022 regarding the russian invasion”, Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, Operational information on 24.00, 21.03.2022 regarding the russian invasion | Міноборони (mil.gov.ua) [Accessed: 12.04.2024].

⁴³⁴ “The position of our army is very clear: all invaders will get a harsh rebuff, regardless of who they are or where they come from – Oleksii Reznikov”, Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, The position of our army is very clear: all invaders will get a harsh rebuff, regardless of who they are or where they come from – Oleksii Reznikov | Міноборони (mil.gov.ua) [Accessed: 12.04.2024].

them into submission. According to Gurin, Russia was not opening humanitarian corridors and disallowing the entry of humanitarian convoys into the city. Therefore, it was evident to the members of parliament that the purpose of Russian forces was to start starving the inhabitants of the city in order to bolster their diplomatic standing. From this aspect, in Mariupol, hunger was employed as a weapon to kill people.⁴³⁵ The indication of Gurin also makes Nils Hägerdal's approach to siege tactics relevant as at the first phase Russian forces laid siege on Mariupol and it was followed by heavy shellings, air strikes and starving people. In this sense, the battle in Mariupol depicts that siege an "ancient" tactic is still used by modern armies.⁴³⁶

The speech of President Zelenskyy on March 26 underlined some important points regarding urban warfare in Mariupol. In his speech, he said that in order to break the siege of Mariupol, Ukraine needed an adequate number of tanks, various armoured vehicles and aircraft. During the war in the city and its aftermath, neither the Ukrainian nor the Russian side provided any concrete and transparent information on how many troops, what kind of weapons, and what units and forces they deployed in the battleground in Mariupol. All of the information regarding the force ratios was based on the estimation of experts and collected from various sources to draw a clear picture of the situation in the port city. However, as the Ukrainian President stressed they needed additional military hardware, it can be assumed that Ukraine was in an inferior position in terms of military equipment or even the country had a sufficient amount of military hardware at the beginning they lost or consumed a significant proportion of them as urban battles tend to demand materiel and resources.⁴³⁷

The President of Ukraine also said, "...by the way, we talked today with our military in Mariupol, with our heroes who defend this city, in Russian". He continued by adding that there has never been an obstacle to speaking any language in Ukraine. Without any problem, Russian like Ukrainian has been spoken in the eastern part of the country

⁴³⁵ "Ukrayna'dan Rusya'nın 'Mariupol'ü teslim edin' talebine ret", BBC News Türkçe, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-60817486> [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

⁴³⁶ Valerie Hopkins, Ben Hubbard and Gina Kolata, "How Russia Is Using Ukrainians' Hunger as a Weapon of War", *The New York Times*, 30 March 2022, Mariupol Residents Describe How Russian Forces Deprived Them of Food and Water - The New York Times (nytimes.com) [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

⁴³⁷ "Russian troops are destroying everything that makes us a nation, but they will be held accountable for that - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy", President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy, <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/rosijski-vijska-znishuyut-use-sho-robit-nas-narodom-ale-za-c-73873> [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

where once home to harmonious cities but now was flattened by the forces of the Russian Federation.⁴³⁸ Because President Zelenskyy explicitly indicated what language they used to communicate with the Ukrainian forces, it can be thought that this fact was intentionally underlined by him. Mariupol was a Russian-speaking territory, and it was asserted by Russia that the city was historically part of its land.

In this context, Russia might have had the idea that since the population of the city is Russian-speaking, they would not face large-scale resistance that could hamper their advance. However, as in the case of the Mariupol, although the defending forces including the paramilitary unit Azov consisted of Russian speakers, they had stood against the attacking side. Thus, in the context of urban warfare making the assumption that the locals who speak the same language as the attacker would side with them or even if they do not offer overt support to the invaders at least the majority would stay neutral to the war would be deceptive. In his other address, the President of Ukraine again had touched upon the reaction of the citizens of Ukraine to the invasion of their country stating that the Russian forces were not greeted by the citizens with bouquets in their hands but with guns pointed at them.⁴³⁹ These points clearly displayed the importance of the human dimension of cities. Since humans are complicated beings and their actions can be shaped and determined by many diverse variables, sharing some common characteristics with the local population would not be enough to gain their support and sympathy.

In the forthcoming days, the Ukrainian General Staff announced that their forces are maintaining a “circular defence” around Mariupol. The mayor of the city stated the escape routes were now mostly under the control of Russian soldiers. He also said they are “in the hands of the occupiers today”, pointing out the severity of the course of urban combat. Boychenko also shared estimated figures regarding the remaining population in Mariupol and said nearly 160,000 residents were still living under inhabitable conditions. All of the people residing in the city were unable to meet their

⁴³⁸Ibid.

⁴³⁹Cara Anna, “Russia demands Mariupol lay down arms but Ukraine says no”, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-zelenskyy-kyiv-business-europe-7d2f30478f5fb2d80ba6c38fef38129a> [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

basic needs and had to be evacuated.⁴⁴⁰

Meanwhile, there was a meeting between the leader of the so-called DPR Denis Pushilin and Ramzan Kadyrov the leader of the Chechnya Republic where they talked about strategies for the city's continued "liberation". On his Telegram account, Pushilin indicated that he told Kadyrov how grateful he was to the fighters who came from Chechnya Republic for struggling against the Ukraine and took sides with their "defenders". He also said schemes for further collaboration which were not limited to the period of street fighting and could include the post-conflict period were on the agenda of their meetings. As it was published on TASS on 28 March 2022, Kadyrov came to the port city for two reasons: to bolster the morale of the combatants and to provide more equipment.⁴⁴¹ As both high morale and being in the possession of large quantities of ammunition are crucial for urban combat, this information is worthy of note. It is also denotative that from the point of Pushilin's view, they were the "defenders" not "attackers". His reality was very different from the Ukrainian forces.

In addition, according to news published on March 15, 2022, on the website of the Associated Press, the Chechen leader said that Chechen combatants are at the forefront and playing a leading role in assaulting Mariupol. Ramzan Kadyrov said on Telegram that prior to stopping their assault as darkness set, Chechen combatants had advanced 1.5 kilometres into the Azov Sea and Adam Delimkhanov, a close acquaintance of Kadyrov, was in charge of these combatants in Mariupol.⁴⁴² Another news published by Cumhuriyet on 27 March 2022 gave another clue that Chechens were also actors in the urban warfare in the port city. It was written on the news published on the website of Cumhuriyet, that Kadyrov announced they seized the city's administrative building but this claim was not confirmed. Nonetheless, Kadyrov posted videos of Chechen combatants in Mariupol on his social media page and claimed that they were purging "the territory of the Nazis," repeating and employing phrases that were specifically

⁴⁴⁰ Nathan Hodge, Julia Presniakova, "Mariupol evacuation corridors 'in the hands of the occupiers' as mayor tells everyone to leave", Mariupol evacuation corridors 'in the hands of the occupiers' as mayor tells everyone to leave | CNN [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

⁴⁴¹ "DPR and Chechnya heads meet in Mariupol, discuss plans for further liberation of city", TASS Russian News Agency, DPR and Chechnya heads meet in Mariupol, discuss plans for further liberation of city - World - TASS [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

⁴⁴² "Live updates: UN chief warns war is hurting poor countries", AP, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-live-updates-560b945c4edc21311d96ee6035d7e849> [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

used by the President of the Russian Federation and Russian press to justify the invasion of Ukraine. Chechen fighters were shown in the video, which went viral as soon as it was posted, shooting heavy weapons into Mariupol's buildings while chanting "takbir" and displaying off the apartment complexes that had been demolished.⁴⁴³

While these news are important because they hinted the presence of fighters from Chechnya, as Pushilin and Kadyrov were considering collaborating with each other, it can be concluded that the Russian forces in Mariupol were blended with the armed forces of the Russian Federation and irregular forces such as Chechens and separatists which illustrates another characteristic of modern urban warfare. In the port city, the traditional army of the Russian state sought to combine its forces with other armed actors in its block-by-block fighting.

In urban warfare in Mariupol, while Russia mainly relied on laying siege, Ukrainians used “guerrilla tactics” against their adversary. As the Russian forces continued to advance in the city, in the northern parts of Mariupol, it was seen in footage that fighters from the Somali battalion, a military unit of the so-called DPR which has the official name of “1st Separate Tank Battalion Somalia”, planted a flag in the municipal building showing that they were successful in reaching to that far in Mariupol. Another video recorded a similar action. A major in the North Battalion of the Chechen Republic raised a flag over another building and contributed to the propaganda campaign of Russia. Although the misperception that Mariupol has fallen was created by Russia with disinformation and propaganda campaigns, the city has not been taken yet. ⁴⁴⁴As it was apparent that various communication channels were exploited by Russian forces during the battle to spread false news, build the narrative that it gets rid of Nazism in Ukraine and achieve its propaganda purposes, it can be argued that not only conventional weapons but also hybrid tools were used in the battlespace and the utilisation of these tools hybridised the battle of Mariupol. Moreover, with its members using social media efficiently and sharing footage from the battleground, the

⁴⁴³“Çeçen lider Kadirov, Ukrayna'daki Çeçen askerlerini paylaştı”, Cumhuriyet, https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/dunya/cecen-lider-kadirov-ukraynadaki-cecen-askerlerini-paylasti-1919820#google_vignette [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

⁴⁴⁴ Robert Mendick, James Kilner, Benedict Smith, “Devastated Mariupol teeters on the brink, but Ukrainian troops refuse to abandon the fallen”, *The Telegraph*, 26 March 2022, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2022/03/28/devastated-mariupol-teeters-brink-ukrainian-troops-refuse-abandon/> [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

paramilitary unit Azov was also an active player in the digital domain as well. The urban combat was also taking place in the virtual world.⁴⁴⁵

On the other hand, the Russian forces could not soften the resistance in the city and they were tired due to urban combat and were low on supplies. This fact proved that urban warfare indeed creates battle fatigue and demands a high amount of supplies. The situation of the Ukrainians was not any better than the Russians, if not worse. A member of the paramilitary unit Azov spoke through social media and confirmed that Russian forces were inside the city. However, they did not make any significant gains. He added that Ukrainians fight in each street, for each home and it happens each day, reflecting another aspect of the war in cities which is that from avenues to tiny rooms urban warfare spreads everywhere like a metastatic cancer. In addition, the food of Ukrainians was also scarce but he said they would continue to resist since he thought the food of the enemy and its ammunition would be scarce at some point as well. Therefore, it seemed like the urban warfare in the city was also turned into a war of attrition.⁴⁴⁶

On 29 March 2022, Pushilin who deeply believed he and his fellows were the “defenders” not the opposite said the so-called DPR “army” continued to “clear” the central regions of Mariupol. According to Pushilin, they “liberated” 135 settlements which was actually occupation. Furthermore, he indicated, that multi-storey buildings were located in these settlements and as he claimed these buildings were the spots where Ukrainians were stationed themselves to maximize their combat power. If his statements reflected the truth, then, one could say the Russian side used building and room-clearing techniques in order to take control while Ukrainian forces sought to turn buildings into fortresses.⁴⁴⁷

While these developments were taking place in the city, The Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation announced that their forces fulfilled their essential duties in the Kyiv and Chernihiv sectors. The objective of the Russian forces’ regrouping was to step up operations in the priority areas and, most importantly, to finish their

⁴⁴⁵“The Azov Battalion: How Putin built a false premise for a war against “Nazis” in Ukraine”, CBS NEWS, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ukraine-russia-war-azov-battalion-putin-premise-war-vs-nazis/> [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷“Пушилин: армия ДНР продолжает зачистку центральных районов Мариуполя”, Radio Sputnik, <https://radiosputnik.ru/20220329/pushilin-1780648568.html> [Accessed: 13.04.2024]

“operation” to fully “liberate” Donbas.⁴⁴⁸ Within this framework, because Mariupol was and still is a key city in the region, this declaration could be seen as a warning implying the fact that Mariupol might face more merciless and intense assaults since Russian forces utterly concentrated their focus on this particular area.

On April 1st, Eduard Basurin made a statement on Mariupol claiming that there are 4,000 Ukrainian troops in the port city. These troops were split up into three groups: the majority of the Ukrainian forces were in Azovstal, some members were stationed in Mariupol's core, and others were at the port. In this context, resistance in Mariupol had three centres.⁴⁴⁹ As all of these centres were of great importance, it seemed like the Ukrainians had shared three key strategic locations in the city among themselves to defend.

Furthermore, according to RIA Novosti, Basurin also stated the military of Ukraine did not control the city. However, he also did not clearly indicate that they claimed full control of Mariupol. Hence, the conclusion drawn from this statement was that Mariupol was still fighting for its freedom. Even though it can be concluded that the Ukrainians lost at least some degree of control over the urban area, they were still mobile and they could travel from home to home through underground networks and continue to hold on but these were rare instances.⁴⁵⁰ Here, it should be added there were no counter-arguments or news which contradicted Basurin's statements, so, if his statements were accepted as correct, then, the exploitation of underground passages illustrated the multi-dimensional aspect of urban warfare, not only the surface of Mariupol but also its subterranean areas were used in the city during the war.

April 5, 2022, was a day when the effects of urban warfare were visible on the sea. As claimed by Igor Konashenkov, the spokesman for the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation an attempt by Ukraine to evacuate the leaders of the paramilitary unit Azov was foiled near Mariupol early in the morning. According to Konashenkov, two Ukrainian Mi-8 helicopters that were aiming to enter the city from the sea were

⁴⁴⁸Елена Рощина, “В России снова делают вид, что сосредоточатся на боях за восток Украины”, В России снова делают вид, что сосредоточатся на боях за восток Украины | Украинская правда (pravda.com.ua) [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

⁴⁴⁹“Басурин: в Мариуполе остается около четырех тысяч украинских боевиков”, РИА Новости, <https://ria.ru/20220401/mariupol-1781259734.html> [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

⁴⁵⁰ “Украинские военные не контролируют Мариуполь, заявил Басурин”, РИА Новости, <https://ria.ru/20220401/mariupol-1781276681.html> [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

shot down.⁴⁵¹ Meanwhile, a dry cargo ship named Azburg, flagged by the Dominican Republic and anchored in the port of Mariupol was hit by a missile and began to sink after being targeted. The perpetrator of this strike remained unclear as Ukraine blamed the Russian army for the incident whilst the so-called DPR authorities claimed that the Ukrainian military struck the vessel.⁴⁵²

On April 6, Konstantin Ivashchenko was appointed as head of Mariupol by Pushilin which demonstrated that DPR strongly believed that they would take control of the city sooner or later.⁴⁵³ The announcement came from Basurin supported this belief as he said that despite there being ongoing fighting in the port and industrial area Azovstal, the main battles in the city centre have ended.⁴⁵⁴ On the other hand, the humanitarian situation in the city was so dire that a city dweller said food and water were worth of gold which was a claim reported by RIA Novosti.⁴⁵⁵

On April 7, a large supermarket located on the periphery of the city was turned into a humanitarian aid distribution centre by Russian forces. The humanitarian aid consisting of food packages, drinking water and sanitation supplies was distributed by Russians to over 3,000 people.⁴⁵⁶ In a way, this event can be seen as an illustrative example of the three-block war theory of Krulak. Although the theory was developed especially for U.S. Marines to warn them about the potential future operational environment they could be sent, it is possible to suggest that what Krulak stated had reflections in Mariupol. Because, while some members of the Russian forces were taking part in urban operations in certain districts in the city where confrontations were still active, others were providing aid packs in a parking lot of a supermarket.

⁴⁵¹ “Возле Мариуполя сбили еще два украинских Ми-8”, РИА Новости, Возле Мариуполя сбили еще два украинских Ми-8 - РИА Новости, 06.04.2022 (ria.ru) [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

⁴⁵² Dmitri Chirciu, “Ukrayna'nın Mariupol kentinde limanda demirli bir gemi vuruldu”, Ukrayna'nın Mariupol kentinde limanda demirli bir gemi vuruldu (aa.com.tr) [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

⁴⁵³ “Пушилин назначил Константина Иващенко главой Мариуполя”, РИА Новости, Пушилин назначил Константина Иващенко главой Мариуполя - РИА Новости, 06.04.2022 (ria.ru) [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

⁴⁵⁴ “Основные бои в центральной части Мариуполя завершились”, РИА Новости, Основные бои в центральной части Мариуполя завершились - РИА Новости, 07.04.2022 (ria.ru) [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

⁴⁵⁵ “Журналист рассказал о критической ситуации в Мариуполе”, РИА Новости, Журналист рассказал о критической ситуации в Мариуполе - РИА Новости, 07.04.2022 (ria.ru) [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

⁴⁵⁶ “Жителям Мариуполя раздадут гуманитарную помощь”, РИА Новости, Жителям Мариуполя раздадут гуманитарную помощь - РИА Новости, 07.04.2022 (ria.ru) [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

On the following day, Chechen leader Kadyrov claimed, 98 per cent of Mariupol was “liberated”. Ukrainian forces were continuing their resistance in separate locations such as the Azovstal factory which was fortified by the paramilitary unit Azov.⁴⁵⁷ Regarding the urban warfare worn in Mariupol, Igor Konashenkov asserted that the fighters in Mariupol were not limited to the members of the paramilitary unit Azov and Ukrainian armed forces. According to his claims, by intercepting radio conversations of Ukrainians, Russians found out that apart from Russian and Ukrainian these conversations were being carried out in six languages that were predominantly European. As Konashenkov stated the different languages spoken in Mariupol were evidence of the presence of a substantial amount of “foreign mercenaries” in the area.⁴⁵⁸

Furthermore, Victor Zvantsev and Andrey Kots, RIA Novosti correspondents shared pictures from an abandoned base which was claimed to belong to the Azov unit. According to Zvantsev and Kots, a poster with a nationalist slogan was hung on a door and manuals such as “Fundamentals of a Combined Arms Operation in a Populated Area” providing combat tactics some of which were written in Russian were discovered. Additionally, colouring books, and comics on the history of the “Azov Regiment” were also found in the buildings and as they claimed these findings unfolded the reality that there were not only fighters but also children in the building.⁴⁵⁹

According to correspondents, soldiers from Russia and fighters from DPR were stationed in the courtyards in Mariupol and members of SOBR (Spetsial’nyy Otryad Bystrogo Reagirovaniya)⁴⁶⁰ were also present standing a little further than the other Russian forces which gave a glimpse of the involvement of an elite unit into the urban combat in Mariupol. On the other hand, journalists wrote that Ukrainian forces were only a few hundred meters away from the Russian forces. Furthermore, it was stated

⁴⁵⁷“Mariupol’s liberation to be finalized after mop-up operation at industrialized sites — DPR”, TASS Russian News Agency, <https://com/society/1434913> [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

⁴⁵⁸“В Мариуполе ведут бои европейские наемники”, РИА Новости, В Мариуполе ведут бои европейские наемники - РИА Новости, 08.04.2022 (ria.ru) [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

⁴⁵⁹ Виктор Званцев, Андрей Коц, “Последнее логово нацистов. Что происходит у стен “Азовстали”, Последнее логово нацистов. Что происходит у стен “Азовстали” - РИА Новости, 21.04.2022 (ria.ru) [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

⁴⁶⁰ Charlie Gao, “Meet the SOBR: Russia’s Killer Super Special Forces Unit”, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/reboot/meet-sobr-russias-killer-super-special-forces-unit-176619> [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

that Meotida Boulevard has been the hottest spot where a lot of intense exchange of fire took place and the distance from the boulevard to Azovstal was only 1.5 kilometres. In this area, as they indicated, the tactics used by Russian forces were not complicated. The first step Russian troops took was shelling the buildings that were “seized” by the Ukrainians. Later, assault groups entered the buildings, and SOBR officers carried out clearing operations. Finally, sappers checked the places.⁴⁶¹

On Azovstal, it was stated that along with tunnels and concrete walls, there were many high-rise buildings which could serve as guard towers or offer perfect places for urban snipers. Moreover, the remaining artillery of Ukrainian forces was stationed closer to the coast and factory buildings. These structures provided protection to these weapon systems and made it difficult for Russian forces to destroy them.⁴⁶²

Moreover, to capture Azovstal Russian forces would have to fight for the control of each workshop and hallways which would require a lot of effort and resources. However, the primary challenge lied in the fact that the majority of Azovstal's premises offered concealment for the Ukrainian troops, and they could not be detected by the air reconnaissance systems. Moreover, Ukrainians had a good knowledge of the terrain and seemed to be well-prepared both tactically and physically. Based on these claims, it can be said that Ukrainian forces were using the defenders' advantages in Mariupol.⁴⁶³

Similarly, a fighter from the 107th Regiment of the so-called DPR army told RIA Novosti how they fought in the city. The combatant said that they were among the first units that entered the port city. Mikhail Yaresko who was a “commander of the third battalion” of the regiment said that they arrived at Taganrogsкая Street, on March 10 and their mission was to seize nine-storey buildings in the area. However, an attack coming from the upper floors and being carried out by a group of 14 Ukrainian fighters with grenade launchers killed five of the fighters and injured four of them. The fighter stated that Ukrainian forces were well prepared for the fighting and successful at inflicting harm on Russian forces. However, when Russian artillery, aircraft, marines as well as Chechen fighters stepped into the combat, the situation

⁴⁶¹ Zvantsev, Kots, *ibid.*

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*

changed. On the other hand, according to the news agency, these fighters were miners, mechanics or students before they took part in the war. In fact, as it was reported, the interviewee was one of the few fighters with combat experience as he fought in Donbas in 2015-2016.⁴⁶⁴

As the absence of combat experience and training was also touched upon by one of the fighters from Russian forces, the subject needs a closer look. There were a lot of conscripts sent to the battleground by Russia but their ability to have a significant impact on the course of hostilities was absent. Thus, some argued that the Russian conscripts were impotent and their morale was low.⁴⁶⁵ However, as urban combat requires sophisticated training and skills without such expertise, it is difficult to achieve success and sustain the fight. Moreover, combatants who were deployed in urban terrain must be mentally strong to overcome the challenges that the artificial man-made environment poses. Therefore, Russia's decision to deploy conscripts in urban warfare was not a rational decision at all.

On the Ukrainian side, it was stated by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine that their forces put up a fight against 10,000 Russian invaders and if Ukrainians succeeded in defying the attackers, they could stop the Russian advance.⁴⁶⁶ Based on what Zelenskyy said, one can attest it was reiterated that Mariupol was the defender of all the Ukrainian territory and a city that shouldered most of the responsibility for the defence of the country.

On April 11, Basurin claimed their forces managed to capture 80 per cent of the port but the Ukrainian soldiers still held out against them and it is likely that they will retreat to Azovstal.⁴⁶⁷ At the same time, RIA Novosti shared photos from Mariupol on its website with the statement that the last stage of the "operation" has begun and housing neighbourhoods have been almost completely cleared of the Ukrainian forces. In

⁴⁶⁴ Андрей Коц, "Их называют "стальные каски", <https://ria.ru/20220526/boytsy-1790593377.html> [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

⁴⁶⁵ Seth G. Jones, *Russia's Ill-Fated Invasion of Ukraine: Lessons in Modern Warfare* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2022), 6, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep41867.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3Abaf3b09825e9cda6b339662561506cb0&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1 [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

⁴⁶⁶ Iryna Balachuk, "Zelenskyy: Mariupol defenders holding back 10,000 Russian occupiers", <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2022/04/9/7338410/> [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

⁴⁶⁷ "Порт в Мариуполе освободили на 80 процентов", РИА Новости, <https://ria.ru/20220411/port-1782844687.html> [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

addition, it was claimed that the hot spots of the confrontations were industrial areas, Azovstal and Azovmash plants, where the Russian forces were tasked to impose total blockade and destroy weapons.⁴⁶⁸

Meanwhile, it was reported that the ammunition of the 36th Independent Marine Brigade of the Ukrainian Armed Forces in the port city was “running out”. All of the resources of the brigade were consumed, and the infantry was killed while those who survived were the gunners, anti-aircraft gunners, signallers, drivers, cooks and orchestra. These individuals replaced the infantry and took part in the urban combat and were not hesitant to sacrifice their lives. Because it is unrealistic to presume that chefs or musicians possess any urban combat experience or skills, it can be concluded that the Ukrainian forces were also suffering from the issue of lack of training. As a matter of fact, it has been said that these people were losing their lives and they were gradually getting closer to the end. They came to a point in urban warfare in Mariupol where they would carry out “hand-to-hand” combat. In addition, due to the fact that they lacked ammunition, they were repelled to the Azovstal plant where they were besieged by Russian forces and under the risk of being wiped out by their enemy. This statement is significant because it confirms the Russian side’s claim of driving away the Ukrainian forces to the industrial zone. Although, they were given, “some next-generation light anti-tank weaponry, 20 mines, and one lot of 50,122 shells”, and a “Starlink terminal” which probably enabled them to communicate with each other and state authorities as communication systems were paralysed by Russians, all of these resources were exhausted. The running out of resources and equipment was not surprising as urban warfare demands four times more ammunition.⁴⁶⁹⁴⁷⁰

Although the situation of the 36th Independent Marine Brigade did not look promising, on April 12, *Ukrainska Pravda* reported that a division of the brigade consisting of hundreds of marines had the ability to unite with the “Azov Regiment” and escape

⁴⁶⁸ “Мариуполь: освобожденные районы и их жители”, РИА Новости, <https://ria.ru/20220411/mariupol-1782881429.html> [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

⁴⁶⁹ Iryna Balachuk, “Marines defending Mariupol are running out of ammunition: “Only hand-to-hand combat from here on.”, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2022/04/11/7338838/> [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

⁴⁷⁰ Margaret Williams, Max Cheng, “The Future Of Urban Warfare”, <https://irregularwarfare.org/articles/the-future-of-urban-warfare/> [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

from the siege of their enemy thanks to an operation.⁴⁷¹ On the following day, the unification of marines from the brigade with the Azov unit which amplified the defence of the Mariupol was confirmed.⁴⁷²

On the following day, however, it was claimed that the entire control of the port was taken from the paramilitary unit Azov by Russian forces and forces of Ukraine were fully encircled and there was no escape from this Russian siege.⁴⁷³ Nevertheless, Sviatoslav Palomar who was the paramilitary unit Azov's "Deputy Commander" said they still had faith in winning the war and that the siege laid on the city could be broken. Their morale was still high which is as important as having sufficient ammunition in urban warfare.⁴⁷⁴

Meanwhile, Petro Andriushchenko shared a post on Telegram stating that civilians were being forced to put white ribbons on them by Russian forces. The white ribbon was a mark of Russian forces and people who supported them. Within this context, by forcing the city residents to wear white ribbons which was associated with the invaders and similar to the obligation imposed by the Nazis on Jews to wear yellow patches, it had been claimed that Russian forces intended to make city residents target materials and deceive Ukrainian snipers stationed in the area.⁴⁷⁵

While the Russian forces were declaring their achievements in seizing control of various spots in the city, the president of Ukraine said that "Mariupol is the heart of this war today" likening the port city to one of the most important organs in the human body. Thanks to the resistance in Mariupol, the heart of war was still beating. However, the fall of the city would cause Ukraine to have cardiac arrest because the President also had stated the loss of Mariupol would put Ukraine in a "weaker position". According to Zelenskyy, the more solid the Ukrainian position in Mariupol was, the more leverage they would have in the negotiations with the Russian

⁴⁷¹ Kateryna Tyshchenko, "Marines encircled in Mariupol establish contact with "Azov" Regiment", <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2022/04/12/7339144/> [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

⁴⁷² Svitlana Kızılova, "Mariupol: Presidential Office confirms 36th Brigade Marines have broken through cordon", <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2022/04/13/7339257/> [Accessed: 13.04.2024].

⁴⁷³ "Mariupol commercial seaport fully liberated from Azov regiment's Nazi fighters", TASS Russian News Agency, <https://tass.com/economy/1437337> [Accessed: 14.04.2024].

⁴⁷⁴ Iryna Balachuk, "Azov Regiment believes it is possible to break the siege of Mariupol", <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2022/04/14/7339632/> [Accessed: 14.04.2024].

⁴⁷⁵ Valentyna Romanenko, "Russians turn Mariupol into a ghetto for Ukrainians just like Nazis - adviser to the mayor", Russians turn Mariupol into a ghetto for Ukrainians just like Nazis - adviser to the mayor | Ukrainska Pravda [Accessed: 14.04.2024].

Federation. Should Ukraine's circumstances deteriorate, the negotiations would be put on a shelf by Russia and Russian troops would take actions that would result in the reoccupation of the cities where Ukrainian forces have already liberated. As it is seen, Mariupol was a valuable trump card that strengthened Ukraine's hand at the negotiation table. Nonetheless, at the time when Zelenskyy made these statements, although its rhythm was slow as defenders of the city were surrounded by the invaders, the heart of the war kept beating.⁴⁷⁶

The Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation asserted the Russian forces mopped up the entire urban districts of the city without leaving any Ukrainian forces in these areas. It was also asserted that above 4,000 Ukrainian soldiers lost their lives whilst approximately 1,500 troops chose to surrender but these numbers needed confirmation.⁴⁷⁷ On April 15, 2022, it was claimed that the Russian forces seized Illich Iron and Steel Works.⁴⁷⁸

In Mariupol where the lethality of battle never decreased, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Dmytro Kuleba said 95 per cent of the industrial city was in ruins due to bombardments and the city was wiped out from the map almost entirely. Additionally, Boychenko stated a minimum number of 21,000 people died due to hostilities in the port city where streets were covered with dead bodies. As the communication system collapsed, the exact death toll was uncertain and those who were alive were trying to survive without medicine, power, food and water.⁴⁷⁹

As few remaining Ukrainian forces was being choked in the industrial plant and the centre of the urban warfare became Azovstal, Yan Gagin, who was an adviser to the self-declared DPR government explained the structure of the area. As he argued, despite the Azovstal being a huge industrial complex, there was an invisible city

⁴⁷⁶ Nick Schiffrin, Tommy Walters, "Russian forces enter Mariupol as outgunned Ukrainians prepare for renewed assault", Russian forces enter Mariupol as outgunned Ukrainians prepare for renewed assault | PBS NewsHour, [Accessed: 14.04.2024].

⁴⁷⁷ Anna Kaplan, "Ukrainian Troops Have Been Cleared Out Of Urban Areas Of Mariupol, Russia Claims", Ukrainian Troops Have Been Cleared Out Of Urban Areas Of Mariupol, Russia Claims (forbes.com) [Accessed: 14.04.2024].

⁴⁷⁸ "Металлургический комбинат имени Ильича в Мариуполе освободили от нацбатов", РИА Новости, 15.04.2022 (ria.ru) [Accessed: 14.04.2024].

⁴⁷⁹ Holly Ellyatt, "Mariupol hasn't surrendered to Russia, PM says; at least 5 dead, 20 injured in Kharkiv attacks", <https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/17/russia-ukraine-live-updates.html> [Accessed: 14.04.2024].

beneath the surface that was as large as another city. The plant was constructed in the Soviet era with the potential dangers of bombings and sieges in mind. Some spots in the complex were even engineered to withstand a nuclear attack and now this structure was a hub of the thousands of defenders of Mariupol those who repelled to the area to continue their resistance. The defenders in Mariupol were waiting with a full arsenal of weaponry as well as a large number of ammunition and armoured vehicles slowing down the assaults of their forces. Therefore, since they did not want to put their troops in jeopardy instead of storming the plant with all the manpower they had, Russian forces preferred to shell the area with artillery fire.⁴⁸⁰

Furthermore, Gagin re-emphasized the Russian side's belief regarding the impossibility of breaking the siege of the area. This belief was based on their claims that even the closest Ukrainian forces that could provide support to the defenders in Mariupol were approximately hundreds of kilometres away from the port city. Moreover, the places lying between where Mariupol's defenders were stationed and other Ukrainian forces located were open fields. Thus, in case Ukrainian troops wanted to offer their support to Mariupol, they could have been all exposed and vulnerable to the threats posed by Russian forces. Additionally, Gagin also claimed they established their dominance in the sky. On the basis of what he said, it can be argued that Ukrainian forces attempting to get closer to Mariupol could have faced aerial assaults launched by Russians.⁴⁸¹

Meanwhile, the condition of forces inside Azovstal was deemed severe because there were nearly 500 injured fighters and treating them was exceedingly challenging. While "burns", shrapnel and crush injuries account for the majority of wounds sustained during confrontations in urban areas, this fact unpacked another difficulty of urban warfare which is extracting wounded.⁴⁸² In Azovstal, the fighters were lack of medicine and it was not clear if they had the ability to provide medical assistance to those who were wounded. Moreover, as the fighters were in an industrial complex,

⁴⁸⁰ "В ДНР рассказали о подземном городе, мешающем штурму завода "Азовсталь", РИА Новости, В ДНР рассказали о подземном городе, мешающем штурму завода "Азовсталь" - РИА Новости, 16.04.2022 (ria.ru) [Accessed: 14.04.2024].

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² Lester W. Grau, Charles J. Gbur, "Mars and Hippocrates in Megapolis: urban combat and medical support", *U.S. Army Medical Department Journal*, (2003): 21.

there could have been also issues regarding sanitation and hygiene which would also create risks for the injured.

On 20 April, according to *Ukrainska Pravda*, Andriushchenko claimed the white ribbon tactics aiming to expose the locations of Ukrainian forces were not left by the attackers. Moreover, he touched upon a disinformation campaign initiated by Russia which spread false information that inhabitants of Mariupol who continued to stay in the city would be enemies in the eyes of Ukraine and would be sent to prison. He also informed the citizens by saying that the internet connection in Mariupol came back but the control of primary social media accounts of the city was in the hands of Russians. The last warning was especially significant as under normal circumstances official accounts are the most trusted ones, and people tend to believe what they share without questioning. By taking control of the digital realm, Russian forces would have reached citizens who gained access to the internet and continued and intensified their disinformation operations which would eventually create confusion.⁴⁸³

On 21 April, The President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin met with Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu. In the meeting, the defense minister stated DPR forces, and The Armed Forces of the Russian Federation “liberated” Mariupol. Shoigu added that the city's streets saw the deployment of “heavy artillery, tanks, and missile complexes, including the Tochka-U system”, which has an impressive 120-kilometre range. In preparation for prolonged conflict, the city was stocked with munitions, fuel, and food, while mines were planted, and a blockade was imposed on important infrastructure like the seaport and waterway.⁴⁸⁴

The presence of armoured vehicles was also notable in Mariupol, with nearly 180 tanks and armoured fighting vehicles, along with 170 guns and mortars, including the Smerch and Uragan multiple rocket launcher systems. At the time of the city's siege on March 11, over 8,100 troops from the Ukrainian Armed Forces, “nationalist units” which was a word used to refer to members of the paramilitary unit Azov, and “foreign mercenaries” were present. During the course of the operation, more than 4,000 were neutralised, while 1,478 laid down their arms, and a remaining group of over 2,000

⁴⁸³ Olena Roshchina, “Russian troops threaten to open fire if Mariupol residents have no white ribbons”, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2022/04/20/7340861/> [Accessed: 14.04.2024].

⁴⁸⁴ “Meeting with Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu”, President of Russia, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/page/150> [Accessed: 14.04.2024].

were stalemated in Azovstal.⁴⁸⁵ Although these statements provided information on the Ukrainian forces and their inventory, official information from Ukraine is required to reach a conclusion on the force ratio in Mariupol.⁴⁸⁶

Furthermore, Shoigu informed the Russian President regarding the siege of the Azovstal. Putin, aware of the fact that the industrial plant was encircled told that storming to the complex would be “inadvisable”, so, the order must be cancelled. Instead of breaking into the plant, Vladimir Putin told to isolate the area entirely. According to Putin, their utmost focus in this scenario was to safeguard the well-being and security of their forces. In other words, protecting the lives of the Russian forces was a top priority. In this respect, it could have been because Vladimir Putin might want to avoid casualties and political costs that would occur due to the death toll of soldiers. However, it should be noted that there is no official data regarding the number of Russian casualties in Mariupol, thus, it would be wrong to say that Russian forces have lost a high number of soldiers.⁴⁸⁷

On the other hand, it was stated that while protecting the lives of soldiers remains their foremost objective at all times, President Putin also indicated it was particularly vital in this circumstance. This could have been because he anticipated that the fighting in the industrial city would be multi-dimensional meaning that the battle would take place in the underground, in a Soviet-made endless labyrinth. For this very reason, by saying that venturing into the catacombs or navigating through the industrial premises would be unnecessary, the President of the Russian Federation demonstrated that he took the likelihood of the emergence of subterranean warfare into account. In this context, laying siege on the industrial area was a better and less risky option.⁴⁸⁸

With this meeting, it became crystal clear that Azovstal would be the last battleground in the city. The industrial plant was not only the last fortress of the defenders of Mariupol but also a place where approximately 1,000 civilians sought sanctuary. While Chechen leader, Kadyrov, said, that “before or after lunchtime” their forces would seize Azovstal his expectations did not come true. The defending forces in Mariupol determined to fight until the end proved the point that wars in urban areas

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

often took longer than expected. As the Russian forces continued to squeeze the forces in the plant, Serhiy Volny marine commander from Ukrainian forces said the next battle could be their last. According to him, the forces of Russia outnumbered them by dozens. With artillery, equipment and tanks they were in possession of, Russians had superiority on the ground and in the air. Ukrainians were fighting in an asymmetric urban war in which they were the inferior party.⁴⁸⁹

The order of Vladimir Putin regarding imposing a siege on Azovstal so tightly that “not a fly gets through” rather than simply attacking the area drew the attention of many. According to Paul Adams, there might be several underlying reasons for blockading the industrial complex. First of all, the fact that Russian troops were stuck in the urban warfare in Mariupol might have caused impatience in Russia. The urban warfare in the city hindered the Russian campaign in the Donbas. Mariupol turned into quicksand for Russian units that could have been deployed to achieve further objectives and depleted crucial supplies. Moreover, surrounding the plant which was divided from Mariupol's heart by the Kalmius River would not be difficult but as Russia aimed a total blockade it would have required an important amount of manpower and disallowed Russia to send its troops to another front to continue their offences. In this respect, the decision to besiege Azovstal was a double-edged sword for the Russian authorities. However, in the end, the final call was to seal off the area instead of attacking it immediately and this could also be because Russia wanted to maintain the diplomatic process. In addition, the plant was the largest steel manufacturer and exporter in Europe. An assault would have damaged the complex and if the structure suffered too much harm and became inoperable, the Russians would be deprived of the chance to generate huge economic revenue. Therefore, another reason for encircling Azovstal could be economic.⁴⁹⁰

On the other hand, several causes drew the Ukrainian forces to the industrial complex. Azovstal once full of steelworkers working hard to earn a living but now being headquarters of combatants preparing for their last stand, was a four-square-mile plant

⁴⁸⁹“ Putin’s Chechen warlord declares Mariupol will fall ‘by lunchtime’ with final Ukrainian marines in his men’s sights – as Zelensky renews vows to put invading Russian forces on trial saying there can be ‘no peace without justice’”, MailOnline, Kadyrov says Mariupol will fall ‘by lunchtime’ as Zelensky vows to put Russian forces on trial | Daily Mail Online [Accessed: 14.04.2024]

⁴⁹⁰ Toby Luckhurst, “Mariupol steelworks: ‘Block it so a fly can’t pass,’ Putin orders”, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61175675> [Accessed: 15.04.2024].

and had port facilities on the Azov Sea. The subterranean passageways and chambers, which were initially built to move equipment between buildings, became crucial for besieged troops' and citizens' lives. Furthermore, the complex was comprised of an intricate network of rail lines, storage facilities, workshops, and blast furnaces, constructed primarily out of reinforced concrete that can endure intense heat. All of these structures had a great potential to be exploited by the Ukrainian forces. Had the Russian forces occupied the complex, the nearby port and rail network would be accessible for them which would be a great achievement for Russia. In addition, it was a well-known fact that industrial plants covering such a large area provided undeniable advantages to the defenders while posing challenges to the attackers. Therefore, the Russian forces decided to not enter the complex and not to confront the enemy in the first phase. Instead, the plant was under the grip of Russians, was indiscriminately hit by airstrikes and mortar rounds and was shelled by Russian warships on the Sea of Azov.⁴⁹¹

On 21 April, *Ukrainska Pravda* also reported that Russian bombs were raining down on Azovstal where civilians took shelter. Andriushchenko the adviser to Boychenko said the plant was under the Russian forces' bombardments. Simultaneously, combat between fighting forces was being conducted near a tram depot, which was not close to the industrial plant. Because the fighting and attacks endangered civilians' lives, the adviser said the intervention of international partners and their guarantee for safe and secure evacuation was the only way to spare people who were in a tight corner.⁴⁹² On the other hand, As Russia's complete siege of Azovstal continued President Zelenskyy re-emphasized the importance of the port city by stating that Mariupol is one of the cities that seal the fate of the war and the future of Ukraine.⁴⁹³

⁴⁹¹Michael Schwartz, Cora Engelbrecht and Andrew E. Kramer, "Despair in Mariupol's last stronghold: 'They're bombing us with everything'", *The New York Times*, 19 April 2022, Huge Steel Plant in Mariupol Is a Fortress for Ukrainian Holdouts - The New York Times (nytimes.com) [Accessed: 15.04.2024].

⁴⁹² Denys Karlovskyi, "Mariupol: Russian occupying forces bomb and shell "Azovstal", <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2022/04/21/7341180/> [Accessed: 15.04.2024].

⁴⁹³ "Armed Forces of Ukraine are the foundation on which the fortress of our national unity should stand - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy", Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, Armed Forces of Ukraine are the foundation on which the fortress of our national unity should stand - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy | Міноборони (mil.gov.ua) [Accessed: 15.04.2024].

According to The Guardian, Russia dropped heavy bombs on the industrial complex because destroying the workshops in the area from the air was not possible.⁴⁹⁴ Furthermore, in the news released by Radio Sputnik, the ineffectiveness of air power in attacking Azovstal was confirmed by members of Russian forces. As it was stated, there were up to eight floors under the plant which were made of strong Soviet concrete. Such a structure cannot be destroyed by every kind of bomb. Not being able to inflict serious harm on Ukrainian troops from the sky created difficulties for the Russians. Although Russian forces destroyed most of the city with their air force, it became apparent that the same method would not produce the same effect in Azovstal.⁴⁹⁵

In this context, by surrounding the Azovstal, Russian forces made the plant one of the most recently besieged areas in the urban warfare in Ukraine. Here, Anthony King's "micro-siege" concept can be relevant as Azovstal was a particular location that was blockaded by the Russian forces and the fighting was concentrated in the area. According to King, the siege of a certain spot is a "micro-siege". As it was mentioned in the previous sections, King emphasised that there is a reduction in the size of the armed forces of states in comparison to the forces in previous centuries and it affects the conduct of urban combat. As the number of soldiers in the militaries decreased fighting forces cannot spread all over the urban territory. Because of that, not the entire parts of the cities but certain locations such as streets or buildings became fronts in urban warfare. Therefore, King asserts, sieges became localized. Put differently, narrower areas began to be besieged.⁴⁹⁶

Further to that, King underscores that in today's urban battlespace, sieges have more shifting characteristics because the fighting party that imposes a blockade on its adversary does not wait until the opposite force surrenders rather they also conduct strikes and assaults against its adversary. Therefore, while the encirclement of an area is still a used tactic in the twenty-first century, these new kinds of localized sieges

⁴⁹⁴ "'Fortress in a city': steel plant becomes Ukrainian hold-out in Mariupol", *The Guardian*, 15 April 2022, 'Fortress in a city': steel plant becomes Ukrainian hold-out in Mariupol | Ukraine | The Guardian [Accessed: 16.04.2024].

⁴⁹⁵ "Военнослужащие рассказали о подземных бункерах под "Азовсталью", Radio Sputnik, "Восемь этажей советского бетона": военнослужащий о подземных бункерах под "Азовсталью" (radiosputnik.ru) [Accessed: 16.04.2024].

⁴⁹⁶ Anthony King, *Urban Warfare in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2021), 16.

involve violent confrontations.⁴⁹⁷ In the case of Mariupol, it can be said that Russian forces laid both siege and micro-sieges as in the first stage, they besieged the entire city and used hunger as a weapon against the civilian population but in the upcoming days they isolated the industrial complex which can be seen as an example of “micro-siege”.⁴⁹⁸

In addition, King presents the case of Mosul to provide a better understanding of these area-specific sieges. As he states in Mosul, “conventional, hybrid, irregular” forces fought on the ground whilst the use of air power was also noticeable in the sky, While the urban battle took place in particular districts, and the small fronts in the city constituted the whole of the urban battle, with social media this local conflict became global. All these statements can also be valid for the urban warfare in Mariupol. The fighting forces of both sides consisted of different elements, the air strikes of Russia flattened the city, Azovstal was surrounded by the Russian forces as Russian troops were ordered to besiege the area and the complex was subject to heavy shellings. Moreover, social media and information channels were effectively used by both non-combatants and combatants. Consequently, the war devastated Mariupol while the entire world was watching.⁴⁹⁹

On 24 April, the Ukrainian troops which stood against intense shellings from all dimensions, land, sea and air did not allow Russian soldiers to set foot in the plant, stated that if guarantees of safe passage for themselves and people who were non-belligerents were provided, they are ready to exit from the factory and flee Mariupol. In Azovstal the fundamental fighting force was the paramilitary unit Azov which was stationed in the plant since March 1 and accompanied by “national guard units, regular army, volunteer battalions and police”. These forces needed evacuation because their food, water and ammunition were being meagre. However, although they expressed their willingness to stop fighting and thought that they could escape from the industrial plant by sea, the conduct of a rescue operation which must be initiated and carried out

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid, 16-17.

⁴⁹⁸ Benoît Verbrueck, Gregory Teulingkx, “From the (dis)illusion of combined arms manoeuvre to the war of attrition: the deficiencies of the Russian Battalion Tactical Group in urban operations”, *Belgisch Militair Tijdschrift/Revue Militaire Belge*, No.25 (2023): 81.

⁴⁹⁹ King, 2021, 17.

by the Ukrainian government was unlikely because breaking the siege was not possible.⁵⁰⁰

The fighters retreated to the plant because although they put their full effort into defending the city, there was a power asymmetry between Ukrainian and Russian forces, as a soldier stated he had to stand against a massive column of Russian tanks, accompanied by fighter jets with a “machine gun”. It was not a fair fight that Ukrainians found themselves in. Therefore, the forces from various units unified with each other in the plant and Azovstal became a place where the command centre of the battle was located. Yet, civilians in the complex complicated the situation, since they can be harmed during the fighting or killed. In addition, the amount of food and water was reducing each day and they were unable to re-supply their stocks. Without any rescue operation on the horizon, as both the land and the sea were blockaded, the industrial plant turned into a huge cage for both civilians and combatants where none of them had a key to open the cage’s door.⁵⁰¹

In relation to this, Richemond-Barak and Voiculescu-Holvad highlighted significant points regarding subterranean warfare in Azovstal. Although the tunnels might have provided both tactical and strategic advantages to Ukraine, a long-term strategy was absent in Azovstal. As scholars argued, the underground structures alone do not offer a magical solution for the success of an operation. Hence, fighters need to consider various aspects including sustainability, outcomes and effects of their operation, its contribution to their aims and escape plans. Food, water, sanitary and healthcare equipment, internet for communication, power as well as presence of civilians are points to take into account in tunnel warfare. In this context, short-range plans saved the day for the Ukrainian forces and enabled them to hold on for longer but did not bring victory.⁵⁰²

⁵⁰⁰Michael Schwartz, “Ukrainians in Mariupol’s steel mill are holding on, despite intensifying attacks, a commander tells *The Times*.”, *The New York Times*, 24 April 2022, [https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/24/world/europe/ukrainian-forces-mariupol-steel-plant.html#:~:text=Ukrainians%20in%20Mariupol's%20steel%20mill,if%20they%20could%20leave%20safely](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/24/world/europe/ukrainian-forces-mariupol-steel-plant.html#:~:text=Ukrainians%20in%20Mariupol's%20steel%20mill,if%20they%20could%20leave%20safely.). [Accessed: 16.04.2024].

⁵⁰¹Michael Schwartz, “Last Stand at Azovstal: Inside the Siege That Shaped the Ukraine War”, *The New York Times*, 24 July 2022, Last Stand at Azovstal: Inside the Siege That Shaped the Ukraine War - The New York Times (nytimes.com) [Accessed: 16.04.2024].

⁵⁰²Daphné Richemond-Barak, Stefan Voiculescu-Holvad, “The Rise of Tunnel Warfare as a Tactical, Operational, and Strategic Issue”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, (2023):10, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2023.2244191>.

While evacuation and rescue of all civilians and combatants in Azovstal did not appear probable, according to Kyrylo Budanov, the Chief of the Intelligence Directorate, sixteen Mi-8 military helicopters were deployed to Azovstal on seven separate occasions. Deploying helicopters was the only option as the sea and land were under the blockade of Russian forces. While these helicopters also transported seventy-two members of the paramilitary unit Azov, the missions being carried out during nighttime aimed to provide essential supplies such as food, water, ammunition and medicine and evacuate the injured. These night flights to the industrial city were conducted at extremely low altitudes to evade being detected by the anti-aircraft equipment of Russian forces. However, the mission cost several helicopters of Ukraine with a helicopter downed during the fifth flight, and another one crashing during the seventh. Even though a helicopter was dispatched to save the individuals in the downed aircraft, that rescue attempt ended in failure since it was destroyed by Man-Portable Air-Defence Systems (MANPADS). Moreover, flying a helicopter at a low altitude required caution as there were power lines which would create issues for the aircraft. This fact also displays that urban terrain not only limits the movement of ground vehicles but also flying aircraft. Meanwhile, the downing of a helicopter by MANPADS demonstrated the vulnerability of these vehicles.⁵⁰³

On 28 April CNN reported that with the seven aircraft carrying out over fifty airstrikes the plant suffered from the most intense aerial bombing, whilst Ukrainian forces were still in Azovstal. Ukrainian forces suspected that the pictures taken in the area and shared with the public exposed their location and this enabled Russian forces to conduct these extremely precise and intensive aerial attacks.⁵⁰⁴

On the other hand, RIA Novosti shared a video from Azovstal filmed by a drone stating that a tiny plume of black smoke rose from a building, but no signs of any ongoing combat.⁵⁰⁵ On the same day, the Russian News Agency conducted an interview with a

⁵⁰³ Roman Romaniuk, “An Island of Hope: How the Azovstal defenders got out and where they are now”, An Island of Hope: How the Azovstal defenders got out and where they are now | Ukrainska Pravda [Accessed: 18.04.2024].

⁵⁰⁴ Tim Lister and Olga Voitoivych, “Mariupol steel plant suffers “heaviest airstrikes so far,” Ukrainian official says”, https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/russia-ukraine-war-news-04-28-22/h_dd62bedc8e546d2ac1e63fe1f9c5c89e [Accessed: 18.04.2024].

⁵⁰⁵ “Опубликованы кадры, снятые с беспилотника над “Азовсталю”, ”, РИА Новости, Опубликовано кадры, снятые с беспилотника над “Азовсталю” - РИА Новости, 30.04.2022 (ria.ru) [Accessed: 18.04.2024].

sniper from the so-called DPR army who said that competition between them and Ukrainian forces is high as Ukrainians know every pitch in the area. The Ukrainians exploiting these holes clearly demonstrated the defenders' advantages and the use of snipers in urban warfare.⁵⁰⁶

Again, on the same date, on April 28, another interview came from the Ukrainian side conducted with Captain Sviatoslav Palamar, a deputy commander of Ukraine's paramilitary unit Azov. In contrast to Russian statements that there were no fightings in the area, Palamar stated that Azovstal was under non-stop bombardments and that a column of tanks, armoured vehicles, and infantry were deployed against them; nevertheless, they were ravaged by the Ukrainian forces. Furthermore, it was added by Palamar that Russian tactics were kaleidoscopic as at the time the interview was given the invaders were not trying to get inside the industrial plant with a sizeable force: they were launching aerial bombardments instead. During the interview, the leader of the paramilitary unit did not turn his camera on as a precautionary measure as footage from his surroundings might provide intelligence to Russian forces regarding their conditions and location.⁵⁰⁷ This action indeed illustrated that in urban warfare in the 21st century, fighters can benefit from and exploit open-source intelligence.

The use of open-source intelligence was visible in Mariupol; therefore, it deserves attention. Although Russian forces paralysed the communication systems in the city, an investigation conducted by Human Rights Watch, SITU Research And Truth Hounds showed that both city residents who managed to connect internet and political leaders shared pictures and videos displaying the devastation of Mariupol and attacks of Russian forces on various social media platforms and documented the sufferings of the city.⁵⁰⁸

Likewise, with the aim of identifying members of Russian forces who allegedly committed war crimes in Mariupol and bringing those responsible to justice, the same organisations reviewed and analysed social media posts of Russians, death notices of

⁵⁰⁶ “У снайперов на "Азовстали" американские тепловизоры, рассказал боец ДНР”, РИА Новости, У снайперов на "Азовстали" американские тепловизоры, рассказал боец ДНР - РИА Новости, 30.04.2022 (ria.ru) [Accessed: 18.04.2024].

⁵⁰⁷ Tom Balmforth, Margaryta Chornokondratenko, “Exclusive: 'We'll fight as long as we have to,' Ukrainian fighter says from Mariupol”, Exclusive: 'We'll fight as long as we have to,' Ukrainian fighter says from Mariupol | Reuters [Accessed: 18.04.2024].

⁵⁰⁸ “Beneath the Rubble Documenting Devastation and Loss in Mariupol”, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/feature/russia-ukraine-war-mariupol> [Accessed: 18.04.2024].

Russian personnel, statements made by Russian authorities and armed forces and pictures and videos released by or featuring specific units deployed in the port city. As a result, it was claimed by the organisation that, they were able to count seventeen units of Russian and Russia-affiliated forces deployed in Mariupol such as “The 8th Combined Arms Army, ground force units from the Black Sea Fleet, The 150th Motorized Rifle Division, Special Operations Units including 22nd and 346th Separate Special Purpose Brigade” and locate these troops locations.⁵⁰⁹ Based on this, it can be said that although the purpose of these organisations to analyse this data was different, an intelligence officer can conduct this type of research with military aims. By analysing various open sources in the digital realm and establishing links between the information they collected, fighting forces can gain an insight into the adversary on their land. The information gathered from the cyberspace can also be a weapon in urban warfare in the twenty-first century.⁵¹⁰

In addition, an analysis made by David Zurawik indicated that reporting what was happening in Mariupol was challenging for CNN, as its teams could not operate on the ground due to severely damaged communication infrastructure and difficulties in reaching the people in the city. While the situation in Mariupol disabled traditional media from covering the war, the media’s sources of information had been “social media posts”, videos that needed to be verified, “audio intercepts, government statements” and “satellite and drone imagery and videos”. Therefore, news agencies also had to draw information from social media, but this method also created another challenge which was verifying the accuracy of the posted information. In order to overcome this difficulty in confirming the origin and accuracy of the information, the news agency had to find the locations of sources.⁵¹¹

These statements proved that in urban battles in the 21st century, ordinary citizens can take the role of traditional media. However, most importantly, they demonstrated that

⁵⁰⁹“Who’s Responsible”, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/feature/russia-ukraine-war-mariupol/whos-responsible> [Accessed: 20.04.2024].

⁵¹⁰Benjamin Phocas and Jayson Geroux, “The School Of Street Fighting: Tactical Urban Lessons From Ukraine”, <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/the-school-of-street-fighting-tactical-urban-lessons-from-ukraine/> [Accessed: 20.04.2024].

⁵¹¹ David Zurawik, “Finding the right tools to cover Mariupol without reporters on the ground”, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/04/21/media/mariupol-news-coverage/index.html> [Accessed: 20.04.2024].

finding the origin of the information is possible by using geolocation tools.⁵¹² Like media agencies and non-governmental organisations, the armed forces of states or parties who were involved in urban combat can make use of open-source intelligence and in some cases gain serious advantages from such information. Furthermore, a post on social media could be an invitation to soldiers' deaths. The combatants must be aware of the fact that the internet and social media can be their enemies created by themselves.⁵¹³

In the upcoming days, there was no significant report on active combats but on 1 May 2022, it was announced that with the aim of allowing non-combatants to exit from the industrial complex UN and ICRC were carrying out an evacuation operation.⁵¹⁴ On May 4, Russian forces attempted to break into the industrial complex with a sizeable force and this attack was supported by armored vehicles and tanks. On Telegram, Sviatoslav Palamar stated that the Russian navy shelled the complex and warplanes launched strikes against the plant which claimed two women's lives and hurt ten civilians.⁵¹⁵ Later, another claim was made by Anton Gerashchenko who was an adviser to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine. According to his claim, Russian forces were successful in entering the plant thanks to an electrician who led them to underground passageways. However, Russians were in denial of breaking into Azovstal.⁵¹⁶

On 7 May, Ukraine declared that the evacuation of all women, children and elderly people waiting to leave Azovstal was completed. In the following days, the announcement of the end of the combat operation in Mariupol was made.⁵¹⁷ On 20 May based on Konashenkov's statement, Anadolu Ajansi reported that the complex was entirely evacuated, and Russia seized total control of the underground facilities of Azovstal. Moreover, it was indicated that since May 16, a total number of 2,439

⁵¹² Ibid.

⁵¹³ Benjamin Phocas and Jayson Geroux, *ibid.*

⁵¹⁴ "Ukraine: UN-Red Cross operation underway to evacuate civilians from stricken Mariupol plant", United Nations, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/05/1117342> [Accessed: 20.04.2024]

⁵¹⁵ "Russian forces storm Mariupol steel plant to attack last Ukrainian defenders", PBS, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/russian-forces-storm-mariupol-steel-plant> [Accessed: 20.04.2024].

⁵¹⁶ Jon Gambrell, Cara Anna 'Seemed like goodbye': Mariupol defenders make their stand', 'Seemed like goodbye': Mariupol defenders make their stand | AP News [Accessed: 20.04.2024].

⁵¹⁷ Valerie Hopkins, Ivan Nechepurenko, Marc Santora, "The Ukrainian authorities declare an end to the combat mission in Mariupol after weeks of Russian siege.", *The New York Times*, 16 May 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/16/world/europe/azovstal-mariupol.html> [Accessed: 21.04.2024].

Ukrainian soldiers consisting of fighters from the Azov unit and officers from the Ukrainian Armed Forces surrendered.⁵¹⁸

3.4.2. The Consequences of Urban Warfare in Mariupol

As Ukrainian fighters laid down their arms and surrendered, Mykhailo Podolyak, an advisor to Ukraine's president, stated that the defence of the city which lasted 83 days will be remembered as “Thermopylae of the 21st century” referring to an ancient battle between 300 Spartans standing against much powerful Persian army. From this perspective, although the Ukrainian forces had to admit their defeat, the defenders of Mariupol wrote a modern epic battle story in the port city and became heroes in the eyes of the citizens of Ukraine.⁵¹⁹

In June 2022 after Mariupol was captured by Russia, Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that Mariupol where death stalked innocent civilians for the period starting from February until the end of April was probably the most dangerous place on Ukrainian soil. According to Bachelet, the recent data confirmed by The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has presented that 1,348 civilians have lost their lives directly because of aerial bombardments, tank and artillery shellings as well as small- and light weapons deployed during the urban warfare. While the casualty rate also included 70 children as well, it was also indicated that there were probably thousands more civilian deaths as a result of urban fighting erupted in the city. In Mariupol where explosive weapons had left their tragic mark on it, it was forecasted that as much as 90 per cent of residential buildings as well as up to 60 per cent of individual dwellings, have been subjected to damage or in ruins. Approximately 350,000 inhabitants left Mariupol due to the urban fighting.⁵²⁰

On the other hand, the civilian fatalities and number of injured people were also significantly high in the war in Ukraine in general. As most of the fighting took place

⁵¹⁸ Ali Cura, “Rusya Savunma Bakanlığı: Mariupol'de Azovstal Fabrikası tamamen boşaltıldı”, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/rusya-savunma-bakanligi-mariupolde-azovstal-fabrikasi-tamamen-bosaltildi/2593670> [Accessed: 21.04.2024].

⁵¹⁹ “Ruined Mariupol now forever etched in Ukraine’s history”, The Associated Press, Ruined Mariupol now forever etched in Ukraine's history | AP News [Accessed: 22.04.2024].

⁵²⁰ “High Commissioner updates the Human Rights Council on Mariupol, Ukraine”, United Nations Human Rights Office Of The High Commissioner, High Commissioner updates the Human Rights Council on Mariupol, Ukraine | OHCHR [Accessed: 23.04.2024].

in cities, the total number deserves a further look. On 22 February 2024, a report published on the United Nations website and issued by OHCHR revealed that from 24 February 2022, the war claimed a minimum number of 10,582 civilians' lives and wounded 19,875. Therefore, it was estimated that the overall number of civilian casualties is 30,457 but it was noted that there is the possibility that the figures can be far greater. The report unfolded that the use of explosives has been responsible for 91% of civilian deaths and injuries, whilst mines and ERW constituted 3.7% of these casualties. Additionally, the remaining percentage came from the usage of other weapons and occurrences.⁵²¹

Due to the war in Ukraine, an estimated 3.7 million people are currently thought to be internally displaced since they were compelled to flee from their residences and an additional 6.5 million have gone to seek safety in other countries. Moreover, in 2024, 14.6 million people are expected to require aid.⁵²² On the other hand, the President of Ukraine announced on February 25, 2024, that Ukraine had lost approximately 31,000 soldiers since the beginning of the war.⁵²³

On the other hand, on 24 February 2024, the UN released recent data regarding the cost of reconstruction of Ukraine. According to a study backed by the UN, it was estimated that Ukraine which has a high urbanisation rate and most of the battles emerged in urban areas would need 486 billion dollars over the upcoming ten years to rebuild the country.⁵²⁴

In an interview given to El País in March 2023, the exiled mayor Boychenko, also confirmed that 90 per cent of the infrastructure of the port city was damaged and added that approximately 14.5 billion dollars will be required to rebuild the city. On the other hand, he said the number of civilian casualties was 22,000. With regards to the urban

⁵²¹ "Two-year update. Protection of civilians: impact of hostilities on civilians since 24 February 2022", Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/two-year-update-protection-civilians-impact-hostilities-civilians-24.pdf> [Accessed: 23.04.2024].

⁵²² "UKRAINE EMERGENCY", USA for UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency, <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/ukraine/> [Accessed: 23.04.2024].

⁵²³ Carlotta Gall, Constant Méheut, "31,000 Ukrainian Soldiers Killed in Two Years of War, Zelensky Says", *The New York Times*, 25 February 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/25/world/europe/ukraine-war-toll-zelensky.html> [Accessed: 23.04.2024].

⁵²⁴ "Ukraine recovery and reconstruction: \$486 billion over the next decade", United Nations, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/02/1146562> [Accessed: 23.04.2024].

warfare in Mariupol, Boychenko said that they concentrated all military resources in the eastern part of the city to defend Mariupol against the Russian forces because they had the expectation that an attack of Russian forces would come from that direction. However, despite these expectations, the Russian troops attacked Mariupol from the western part of the city catching them off-guard. Therefore, it is possible to say that the city was not adequately prepared for the attack of Russian forces and remained defenceless against the invaders. Mariupol's limited combat readiness made it vulnerable to the siege laid by Russian forces.⁵²⁵

Despite the tremendous price that Mariupol paid during the urban warfare, the resistance in the city demonstrated that the Russian forces were not unbeatable. The sacrifice that Mariupol made was not in vain. As Russia could not free its forces due to ongoing fighting in Mariupol, other cities and the Ukrainian army gained time to make preparations for the war.⁵²⁶

As stated by Boychenko, the population of the city dropped to 90,000 with the majority of the remaining residents being elderly. However, he estimated that the population reached up to 150,000 of which about 20,000 were members of the resistance network and these members' existence in the city would be of great importance for collecting intelligence and offering assistance from inside Mariupol to the Ukrainian forces if Ukraine initiated counter-offensive operations to claim back control of the city. In this context, this statement of Boychenko can be considered a clear message sent to the world announcing that Ukrainians had no intention to give up on Mariupol.⁵²⁷

In a similar vein, an interview conducted by The Guardian also revealed whether a spirit of resistance existed in Mariupol and whether the citizens who remained in the city had faith in their liberation. In the article, it was stated that prior to the outset of the war, while half of the population had their support on the capital, the other half tended to side with Russia. Furthermore, approximately 120,000 residents of the city

⁵²⁵ Luis De Vega, "Mayor of Mariupol Vadym Boychenko: 'We should have done more. We didn't ask Kyiv for help'", *El País*, 06 March 2023, Ukraine: Mayor of Mariupol Vadym Boychenko: 'We should have done more. We didn't ask Kyiv for help' | International | EL PAÍS English (elpais.com) [Accessed: 23.04.2024].

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

⁵²⁷ Ibid.

continued to live in Mariupol and 20 per cent of this remaining population had pro-Ukraine feelings.⁵²⁸

On the other hand, half of the people in the remaining 80 percentile, chose to stay neutral whereas the other half backed Russia and the newly installed government in Mariupol. Although each individual had been confident previously regarding the victory of Russian forces, some began to consider the prospect that the Russians might face a defeat. Thus, it was said that people backing Russia were terrified of a potential counteroffensive carried out by Ukraine. This anxiety might lead to changes in the proportion of pro-Russian individuals in the near future.⁵²⁹

In the aftermath of the war, 50,000 Russians from other towns and regions settled in the port city, and these people watching programs that propagate misinformation were unaware of the events that took place in Mariupol. They believed that the city had been purged from Neo-Nazis. This situation can be interpreted as evidence that Russian propaganda was successful in persuading its own population and stifling dissenting views.⁵³⁰ It is possible to consider the Russian residents who started arriving in the city as a component of the Russian Federation's demographic engineering project which would gradually change the urban fabric of the city.

The cultural properties in Mariupol were also affected by the urban warfare. Seizing, demolishing, and intentionally causing harm to establishments devoted to religion, almsgiving, education, the arts, and sciences, as well as historical sites and artistic and scientific creations, is forbidden by international humanitarian law. In addition, stealing and looting cultural properties are also prohibited.⁵³¹ However, according to confirmation made by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 351 sites were damaged from 24 February 2022 up until 10 April 2024 and several structures in Mariupol also got their share from these damages such as “the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Monument to V.G.

⁵²⁸ Luke Harding, “‘It’s like the USSR’: residents on life in Mariupol a year since Russian occupation”, *The Guardian*, 18 May 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/may/18/its-like-the-ussr-residents-on-life-in-mariupol-a-year-since-russian-occupation> [Accessed: 23.04.2024].

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

⁵³⁰ Ibid.

⁵³¹ “Rule 40. Respect for Cultural Property”, IHL Databases International Humanitarian Law Databases ICRC, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule40#:~:text=All%20seizure%20of%20or%20destruction,art%20and%20science%20is%20prohibited.> [Accessed: 23.04.2024].

Korolenko, Central City Library V.G.Korolenko”.⁵³² Furthermore, Mariupol City Council claimed above 2,000 artworks were stolen by Russian invaders and taken away to Donetsk.⁵³³

Furthermore, the demolition of buildings by Russia and the replacement of Ukrainian street names with Soviet ones can be interpreted as attempts to wipe out Ukrainian identity and history and actions reflecting the signs of urbicide. Additionally, as it was reported by the Associated Press, the Russian government removed the Holodomor Memorial in the city, which was remembering those who perished as a result of the famine that the Soviet Union unleashed and artificially caused. It has also been alleged that two murals honouring those who suffered from assaults carried out by Russia eight years ago were covered with paint.⁵³⁴

While the city lost most of its population and the soul of Mariupol was at risk of being eradicated, significant economic damage was brought about by the urban warfare in Mariupol and the Russians' eventual takeover of the city. In 2021, the port of Mariupol was responsible for handling 5.4 per cent of all cargo passing through Ukrainian seaports but it is known that the sea was blockaded by the Russian navy and sea mines were planted on the waterways. Additionally, during the fighting, Azovstal and Ilyich Iron and Steel Works incurred substantial damage. 40 per cent of Ukraine's crude steel came from two Mariupol steel mills and as it was written in previous pages until the war, steel production and its export in the city were significant contributors to Ukraine's GDP. However, as a result of the demolition of the industrial plant and the city, it was projected that Ukraine would lose two per cent of its GDP. Thus, by destroying the city Russia was also able to affect the country's economy.⁵³⁵

⁵³²“Damaged cultural sites in Ukraine verified by UNESCO”, UNESCO, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/damaged-cultural-sites-ukraine-verified-unesco> [Accessed: 23.04.2024].

⁵³³ Pjotr Sauer, “Ukraine accuses Russian forces of seizing 2,000 artworks in Mariupol”, *The Guardian*, 29 April 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/29/ukraine-accuses-russian-forces-of-seizing-2000-artworks-in-mariupol> [Accessed: 23.04.2024].

⁵³⁴ Lori Hinnant, Vasilisa Stepanenko, Sarah El Deeb, Elizaveta Tilna, “Russia scrubs Mariupol's Ukraine identity, builds on death”, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-erasing-mariupol-499dceae43ed77f2ebfe750ea99b9ad9> [Accessed: 24.04.2024].

⁵³⁵ Andrii Tarasenko, “Ukraine loosed 2% of GDP because of Mariupol's destruction”, Ukraine loosed 2% of GDP because of Mariupol's destruction — News — GMK Center [Accessed: 24.04.2024].

In the year 2021, Ukraine's export industry reached a staggering 70 billion dollars, with agricultural and metal sectors leading the way. The production of steel accounted for 7 per cent of the country's foreign exchange earnings. In this context, the port of Mariupol had a pivotal role in servicing these crucial industries and was a vital Ukrainian hub for both industrial and agricultural exports but the war in the city disrupted the trade process and crippled the economy of Ukraine.⁵³⁶

However, Ukraine's loss was Russia's gain. On 7 June 2022, according to Anadolu Ajansi, Sergei Shoigu, stated that the ports of Berdyansk and Mariupol are now operating as usual and from now on grain can be transported through these ports. Furthermore, the harbour of Mariupol was demined and has already welcomed its first cargo ship. While also underlining that Russia currently holds 57 per cent of Ukraine's metallurgical industrial capacity, the Minister of Defense announced that railway traffic between Ukraine, Donbas, Crimea, and Russia could resume in six regions thanks to favourable conditions that were created. Russia has begun to use the recently renovated 1,200-kilometer railway line to transport commodities to the cities of Mariupol, Berdyansk, and Kherson. Furthermore, the maintenance of transportation infrastructure and water supply in the controlled regions has facilitated agricultural development. As noted by Shoigu, these areas had the capacity to produce 10 million tons of grain and 4 million tons of vegetables.⁵³⁷

On the other hand, Sergey Lavrov stated that Russian forces fulfilled their operational tasks such as Mariupol and Azovstal with "minimal losses".⁵³⁸ In this context, from Lavrov's perspective, Russia did not have high casualty rates in Mariupol. Moreover, with the capture of Mariupol Russia created a land corridor to the Crimean peninsula and her dependence on the Kerch Strait Bridge ended. The Russian President said that the territorial gains that Russia made in the war which included Mariupol and

⁵³⁶ Amanda Macias, "An exiled mayor in Ukraine vows to rebuild his city after Russia's reign of destruction", <https://www.cnn.com/2023/05/20/ukraine-mariupol-mayor-vows-to-rebuild-city.html> [Accessed: 25.04.2024].

⁵³⁷ Ali Cura, "Rusya Savunma Bakanı Şoygu: Berdyansk ve Mariupol limanları tahıl sevkiyatına hazır", *Rusya Savunma Bakanı Şoygu: Berdyansk ve Mariupol limanları tahıl sevkiyatına hazır* (aa.com.tr) [Accessed: 25.04.2024].

⁵³⁸ "Russia completed all military tasks at Azovstal with minimal losses — Lavrov", TASS Russian News Agency, Russia completed all military tasks at Azovstal with minimal losses — Lavrov - Russian Politics & Diplomacy - TASS [Accessed: 25.04.2024].

Melitopol were important outcomes for the country which signals that he was pleased with Russian forces' achievement.⁵³⁹

Apart from land-based accomplishments, Russia also made significant gains at the sea by seizing Mariupol. With the occupation of Mariupol, as President Putin claimed, the Sea of Azov which is situated in the Kerch Strait turned into an inland sea of the Russian Federation. After capturing a significant portion of the Black Sea Coast and the Sea of Azov, the country increased its footprint in the maritime domain. As it was said by President Vladimir Putin, not even Russian Tsar Peter the Great accomplished this success.⁵⁴⁰

Yet, on 29 November 2023, Secretary General of NATO Jens Stoltenberg indicated that Russia paid a high price in Ukraine as it lost “hundreds of aircraft, thousands of tanks”. In addition, the figure of military casualties was above 300,000.⁵⁴¹ Furthermore, On 6 May 2024, Oryx released data on equipment losses of the Russian forces indicating that from the beginning of the war, Russia had lost more than 15,000 pieces of military equipment consisting of “2,856 tanks, 135 helicopters, 106 aircraft, 20 naval ships, and one submarine”.⁵⁴² However, these numbers need confirmation as Russia remained silent on its losses both in terms of equipment and military members.

⁵³⁹ Paul Kirby, “Has Putin's war failed and what does Russia want from Ukraine?”, Has Putin's war failed and what does Russia want from Ukraine? (bbc.com) [Accessed: 25.04.2024].

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ “Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the meetings of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs”, NATO, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_220665.htm [Accessed: 25.04.2024].

⁵⁴² Chris York, “Russian equipment losses in Ukraine surpass 15,000, says Oryx OSINT group”, <https://kyivindependent.com/russian-equipment-losses-in-ukraine-surpass-15-000-says-oryx-osint-group/> [Accessed: 25.04.2024].

4. CONCLUSION

This thesis sought to understand how urban warfare in the twenty-first century is being fought and how it would be conducted in upcoming years. In addition, the thesis aimed to explore the key challenges and characteristics of modern urban combat. The events that unfolded in Ukraine, particularly the urban warfare in Mariupol, brought to light the vulnerability of built-up settings to attacks from hostile parties due to their strategic, political, economic, or symbolic value. Throughout history, cities have always been a prime target for armies, and today, in the twenty-first century they remain under threat of occupation and destruction. Moreover, the likelihood of different states waging war against each other in the twenty-first century is considered low but Russia's invasion of Ukraine and intense street fighting in Mariupol highlighted that interstate wars are not a concept that would lose in the mists of time in the near future.

In the thesis, it was found that the most vital challenge and characteristic of urban warfare in the twenty-first century is the presence of civilians as in the previous centuries. Therefore, fighting in the cities remains a political obstacle for the armies. In the case of Mariupol and in the war in Ukraine, it was seen that urban warfare claimed the lives of thousands of civilians. While civilians suffered from a lack of medicine, food and water and had to live without access to basic needs and this difficult situation posed a threat to their well-being, the use of explosive weapons inflicted grave harm to people who were not the parties of the hostilities.

In Ukraine and Mariupol in particular, the civilian buildings such as the maternity ward became subjects of airstrikes and shellings. Such attacks not only caused much civilian suffering but also drew the attention of the international community. As a result, the warring party which carried out indiscriminate attacks and did not use proportionate force faced condemnation and sanctions although it was claimed that its forces conducted surgical strikes and targeted only military objectives. Thus, it was confirmed once again that civilian fatalities and injuries create political issues for the armed forces on the urban terrain. The warring parties which conduct urban combat without taking the civilian population residing in the city into account can experience difficulties in justifying their actions and can be isolated from the international arena.

Preventing and mitigating civilian casualties is feasible by taking several measures. For instance, establishing humanitarian corridors and allowing civilians to leave the combat zone can allow the armed forces to avoid and decrease civilian harm that might occur in urban warfare. However, as it was seen in Mariupol, creating safe passages and helping people to escape from these routes can be difficult. The warring parties can fail to agree, establish and implement humanitarian corridors and attempts to evacuate non-combatants can remain inconclusive. Due to failed attempts civilians might be forced to live in the combat zone where they were at risk of being killed or maimed due to fighting. Moreover, even if the corridors are established, the militaries and the politicians must ensure that the civilian population are well-informed and has knowledge regarding the precise location of these safe routes and the particular date and time that these corridors are opened and closed because the lack of information and misinformation can lead the emergence of confusion and chaos. Without accurate and sufficient information civilians can step into a combat zone and caught in a conflict.

Moreover, although it is undeniable that the defender has the advantage in the city, the civilian population is also a significant issue for the defending forces that stand against the attackers. In case any harm is inflicted on civilians by or because of the defenders, it would cause a fierce reaction. Besides, civilians in the urban areas are just strangers to the attackers, but it is likely that these people are family members, very close friends or neighbours of the defenders. Therefore, even though the structures in the cities are potential fortresses of the defending forces, these forces must not be deployed in or near civilian buildings, hide their military assets in these areas, turn these spots into targets, and must avoid using civilians as human shields.

Additionally, the number of military casualties tends to be great in urban warfare. As presented above, the number of military losses of both sides can be considered high but it should be reiterated that the numbers that Ukraine and Russia revealed contradict each other, thus, transparent and confirmed figures are required to reach a conclusion regarding combat losses in urban warfare in Ukraine.

In a similar vein, urban warfare leads to heavy military equipment losses. Yet, sufficient and verified data on destroyed military hardware is also absent. Therefore, the same issue applies here as well. At the time of writing the thesis, the war in Ukraine is still fierce, and both parties of the war are hesitant to release data regarding their

casualties. While both Ukraine and the Russian Federation go silent on their losses, both states make declarations regarding the other sides' losses. However, it is likely that these figures are being exaggerated by the fighting parties to boost the morale of their soldiers and citizens. Nonetheless, based on estimated numbers provided by various sources and experts as well as claims made by the fighters who took part in conducting urban combat in Mariupol, it can be assumed that armoured vehicles and tanks deployed in Ukraine were also vulnerable to attacks and their manoeuvre capabilities were constrained because of the narrowness of streets and piles of rubble. Moreover, the destruction of tanks and the downing of Ukraine's helicopters by Russian forces indicated that not only ground combat vehicles but also aircraft, are susceptible to ambushes in an urban setting. Cities and towns can be graveyards of both belligerents and civilians and junkyards of military equipment.

On the other hand, although the human costs of urban warfare are devastating and nothing is more valuable than a human's life, the economic costs of urban warfare can also be substantially high. The demanding nature of urban warfare is emphasised several times in the thesis and since sustaining an urbanised war necessitates the dedication of a vast amount of resources, it is a must for states to have a large defence budget to pursue their aims. In other words, urban warfare may coerce states to increase their military spending and come with a great economic burden. The seizure of Mariupol illustrated this fact as the occupation of the industrial hub was a major economic setback for Ukraine, but for Russia, it was a long-awaited victory dating back to the Donbas crisis eight years ago. Mariupol holding significant economic and commercial importance, became a valuable source of income for Russia.

Furthermore, reconstruction of the cities would require not only billions of dollars but also time. Urban areas can be leveled by armies instantly but recovering the devastated areas would necessitate investing an immense amount of money and time which is a point that both the attacker and the defender need to consider before engaging in urban combat. Although 'killing' a city might enable armies to achieve their objectives in the short-term whether it is strategic or economic, reviving the cities would be crucial for long-term achievements. Furthermore, urban warfare in Mariupol unfolded that the destruction of cities which are industrial and trade hubs can have detrimental effects on a country's economy. By damaging and controlling the critical spots in

urban areas such as industrial complexes, ports or power plants, the militaries may cut off the lifeblood of their adversaries.

Apart from the economic costs, it is also possible to say that flattening a city is not often a wise decision for the attacker due to the fact that destroyed buildings, burned vehicles and damaged roads greatly restrict the movement of the attacker. Moreover, as mentioned above, debris generated from collapsed structures can also offer a firing and defence position for the city's defenders or planted with explosives. As a result, the attackers can bring their own destruction.

Russia's strategic objectives were served by the urban warfare in Mariupol as well. The capture of Mariupol provided Russia the opportunity to establish a much-desired land bridge between herself and the Crimean peninsula and bolster its presence in the surrounding seas. Moreover, Russia's "special military operation" proved successful in accomplishing its objective of purifying Ukraine from Nazis as the paramilitary unit Azov ultimately surrendered.

On the other hand, it was witnessed that cultural properties and religious sites were hit by Russian forces whilst there were allegations that a high number of artworks were stolen from a museum in Mariupol. Parties of hostilities refrain from damaging and using such properties for military purposes because this action would turn the cultural, historical and religious properties into a military object. As some urban areas harbour significant historical, religious and cultural sites and have also symbolic value, protecting and avoiding harming these spots and objects are vital aspects of urban warfare as well.

Resource-intensive characteristics of urban warfare were also noticeable in Mariupol as the Ukrainian fighters indicated several times that their ammunition, food, water and medicine were running out. Without a sufficient amount of resources and the ability to re-supply their stocks, warring parties in urban terrain would be doomed to lose urban battles.

The fall of Mariupol was considered to be a morale booster for the Russian troops which would eventually break the fighting spirit of Ukrainian forces. However, on the contrary, the resistance of Mariupol became a symbol for Ukraine as the defenders of the city who were outgunned and outnumbered had the ability to withstand a far greater force than themselves. Although the Ukrainian forces had to surrender and the city was

occupied by Russian forces, according to Ukrainians a modern battle story was written in the port city giving hope and encouragement to the people in the rest of Ukraine.

On the other hand, although the overwhelming majority of the population in Mariupol consists of Russian speakers, the city could not be captured by Russian forces without resistance. In this context, the defenders of the city refusing to surrender have shown the significance of the human element of an urban environment. Mariupol illustrated the unpredictability of people's beliefs, motivations, ideas, actions and values. By looking at Mariupol, armies can draw a lesson that an in-depth analysis of the population is crucial before storming into a city. Superficial assumptions and miscalculations can lead soldiers to wedge in city streets where they would be surrounded by urban defenders. The armed forces of states encountering resistance are likely to carry out urban combat until softening the population. In such cases, the urban warfare can be prolonged, and the military can lose soldiers, time, and materiel. Therefore, the thesis supported the argument that the intricacy of urban warfare not only stems from the physical structures within the city but also from the inhabitants who reside in the urban area.

Succeeding in urban combat requires mastering its human and physical aspects. Given this, it is clear that the Russian forces accomplished seizing control of the physical dimension. However, with Ukrainian forces exhibiting great defiance, it was once again proved that capturing the social dimension is not facile. Furthermore, it was claimed that there are still city residents in Mariupol who are hostile to the Russian forces. Consequently, the Russian forces need to win the hearts and minds of the inhabitants of the city in order to achieve a total victory. This emphasizes that the most challenging and complex component to overcome in an urban setting is the human factor. Ultimately, the urban citizens are the ones who turn city buildings into fortresses, transform high-rise buildings into command centres, set up ambushes against the attackers, and move the urban combat in the city streets into the tunnels. While soldiers fighting in urban terrain can face challenges posed by the structures, human beings can create an even greater threat to them.

Moreover, with the siege of Mariupol, the argument that some characteristics and elements of urban warfare remain unchanged was confirmed. In urban warfare in the twenty-first century, ancient tactics can still be relevant and effective in taking control of a city. Using old tactics and state-of-the-art military equipment to capture the city,

Russian forces have painted a picture of how devastating urban warfare in the twenty-first century can be with this fatal recipe. In addition, the urban warfare in the port city highlighted that starvation, one of the oldest weapons in military history was still extremely effective. However, hunger kills relatively slowly while missiles cause sudden death.

The defender's advantage was also evident in urban warfare in Mariupol. The troops having better knowledge regarding the city were able to move between houses through underground networks, access other houses whilst avoiding fighting in the city streets, station in tall buildings, and prepare fire and observation positions. The defenders have greatly benefited from the advantages provided by high-rise structures, concrete buildings and underground systems. Before the attackers pour into their city's streets, the defenders have been able to set at least some of the rules of urban warfare.

Moreover, the encirclement of Azovstal served as a particularly vivid example of the difficulties presented by defeating urban foes who retreat underground to maintain their resistance. As the tunnel networks were also defined by Russian forces as mazes and the Russian President was not willing to send its troops to these dark tunnels, one can say that carrying out the fight beneath the surface amplifies the complexity and difficulty of urban warfare. Underground networks in Mariupol covered the defenders like a blanket made of cement and provided them with concealment. The attackers were deprived of the ability to detect Ukrainian forces' location and target them by using aerial reconnaissance systems. The attackers' eyes in the skies were enshrouded by tunnels.

In addition, subterranean structures in Azovstal provided at least some degree of protection from the bombardments and decreased the effectiveness of the air power of Russia confirming that the urban environment constraints the use of aircraft. Thus, urban terrain reduced the unfairness of fighting against a superior enemy. As a result, the urban warfare in Mariupol was deadlocked and Russian forces were behind their schedule in their war in Ukraine. Therefore, the fighting in Mariupol also underlined the multi-dimensional characteristics of urban warfare. From the upper floors of high-rise buildings to tunnels, urban combat can erupt in various dimensions. With rooftops as perfect sniper positions, and tunnels allowing combatants to use the privilege of freedom of movement and enabling them to stay out of sight of the attacker, urban terrain is a safe haven for the defender.

While Ukrainian forces remained captive in the industrial plants, Russian forces were also entrapped outside of the industrial complex as they could not free up their forces which could have been deployed on other fronts. This supported the claim that urban warfare generally lasts for a long time. Even if the attacker is superior in every aspect, victory does not always come quickly in wars that are being fought in the urban terrain as the structures in the city strengthen the hand of the defender. Moreover, although Ukrainian forces were defeated in Mariupol, it would be wrong to argue that their withstand was entirely unsuccessful, as by holding the Russian forces in the city, they enabled other cities to develop defensive strategies and prepare for the war.

In urban warfare, every corner of the immense built-up setting is a potential enemy zone. A bus, an elevator, or a kitchen in a house could be the defender's headquarters or weapons depots which requires urban clearance. The attacker must clear the city step by step, room by room, block by block. Yet, since it is not an easy task, the deployment of well-trained and skilled soldiers is vital. As it is stated that Russia relied on conscript soldiers it could be a lesson to take for militaries in the world as sending less sophisticated troops to the ground would surge military casualties which in turn would have serious political consequences as well. Yet, if the urban fight is inevitable, the militaries and politicians making the decision to storm into a city must be aware of the risk that even an iconic and famous avenue in the world's most glamorous city can immediately transform into an everglade.

With propaganda and disinformation campaigns carried out, elements of hybrid warfare were apparent in urban warfare in Mariupol. Moreover, the word choices of Russian forces during the occupation of the city were also significant as they presented themselves as liberators by using the term "liberated" once they seized control of a certain spot in the city and they constantly repeated the word during the battle. Fueling their propaganda campaign by claiming they were fighting against Neo-Nazis Russian forces attempted to shape people's thoughts and gain the support of the public with every statement they make. Therefore, the urban battle in Mariupol can also be considered a battle of narratives. By spreading false news, Russian forces aimed to create their own alternative reality which was that they were not invaders but saviours. As it was indicated that Russians who settled in Mariupol believe that their government indeed saved Mariupol from the cruelty of Neo-Nazis, it can be said that Russia was successful in convincing at least some of its citizens to its claims. This can be

interpreted as a state's ability to eliminate any negative effects that urban warfare may have on its own country through propaganda even though it is not successful in crushing the resistance in the targeted nation. The use of non-kinetic and invisible tools can cause at least as grave damage to cities as an aerial bombardment. Even if not a single window in the built-up area is broken, a strike against the minds of its inhabitants can have serious consequences.

While Russian forces taking control of Mariupol City Council's social media account is also another indication displaying the hybridisation of urban battle, given the importance of conquering the human dimension in urban warfare, these hybrid tools may be used frequently in the twenty-first century to break the resistance of the urban population. Moreover, armies can blend hybrid tactics with old tactics, and this would add a new dimension to urban warfare and decrease the economic costs and military mortalities occurring in urban battles due to the fact that hybrid tools are more affordable and enable militaries to fight without troops on the ground. Therefore, it is essential for the military of states in the twenty-first century to develop readiness against urban warfare that would also be conducted with hybrid tools.

Likewise, asymmetric characteristics of urban warfare were also evident in Mariupol. In the port city, there was a distinct power asymmetry between Russia and Ukraine. By outnumbering Ukrainian forces, Russian forces also maintained numerical superiority. Therefore, in the thesis, it was displayed that urban areas can be arenas of both hybrid and asymmetrical warfare.

In the twenty-first century, the role of media is significant in wars taking place in cities. However, during the Mariupol incident communication systems were paralysed by Russian forces, and it became too dangerous for journalists to cover the events in the city. Furthermore, the destruction of infrastructure at the very beginning of the battle rendered social media and traditional media ineffective. Nonetheless, those who were able to have internet access were still able to make their voices heard in the rest of the world. This has been particularly beneficial for traditional media outlets lacking access to the ground and wishing to inform their audiences. Social media was utilised by city residents, politicians and combatants during the urban warfare in the port city. In Mariupol, it was found that the use of social media by civilians can be instrumental in documenting war crimes and keeping the global community informed. Social media can also help politicians raise the morale of the public, provide access to accurate

information, influence public opinion, and counter disinformation campaigns. Yet, the opposite is also true as social media can be used for spreading false news and building narratives. On the other hand, the utilization of social media and internet can also be problematic for combatants. Urban fighters must be cautious when using social media as even inadvertent disclosures can provide valuable information to their enemies. In this context, in the twenty-first century, urban areas can serve as incubators of valuable information and open-source intelligence. Analysing this data can have the potential to change the course of urban warfare and open-source intelligence may play a significant role in capturing and defending the cities.

In the twenty-first century, cities are increasingly vulnerable to urban warfare, as demonstrated by the situation in Mariupol, built-up areas can be scenes of carnages. The twenty-first century has mostly witnessed urban battles fought between state forces and non-state actors and these actors had a bad reputation for disregarding international humanitarian law and breaching legal and ethical limits of conducting hostilities. However, Russia reducing urban areas into rubble by air strikes, artillery and naval shelling, denying access to humanitarian aid, and attacking non-military targets such as hospitals evidenced that some states may also show little concern regarding high casualties. Therefore, an urban fight against such states would be more costly and deadly. Engaging in combat in densely populated urban areas is not advisable for any state military due to both civilian and military casualties as well as the political and economic costs involved. Urbanised terrain can disrupt the offensive operations of the attackers depending on the resilience of the defending force. However, as this thesis illustrates, urban warfare is an inevitable reality. Therefore, states must equip elite soldiers with the necessary skills to conduct urban combat and prepare them for such scenarios.

In conclusion, war in Ukraine offers a glimpse of urban warfare in the twenty-first century. Although this thesis analysed fighting in the port city of Mariupol, several other built-up areas also suffered from assaults by Russian forces. Therefore, future researchers can gain valuable insights into the general characteristics and challenges of urban warfare by examining urban battles in Ukraine, particularly in Kherson and their analysis can serve as a foundation for a comprehensive understanding of urban warfare. Based on the acquired experience in Ukraine and the research conducted on the subject, the armed forces of states can develop military strategies.

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