

RIVISTA MILITARE



ESERCITO

Periodico fondato nel 1856

SELECTION
OF

2024



ENGLISH VERSION

EDITORIAL

Dear readers,
we are pleased to present the third annual edition of our magazine in English, featuring a selection of the best articles from 2024. This marks not only the passing of another year but also the growing consolidation of this special edition. Choosing which articles to include was no easy task, as all of them would have deserved translation. We therefore made a rigorous selection.

As a preview of the topics covered in this issue, I would like to highlight: the vision of the Chief of Staff of the Army, LtGen Carmine Masiello, which is rooted in technology, training, and values; AI on the battlefield, by LtGen Pietro Serino; a reflection on the battle of the Nassiriya bridges, by LtGen Gian Marco Chiarini; the Steadfast Defender 2024 exercise, by LtGen Guglielmo Luigi Miglietta; the battle of Mariupol and the siege of Azovstal, by Nicola Cristadoro; and the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, by Dario Citati—along with much more. Finally, don't miss our selection of podcasts, some of which are available in English.

Happy reading!

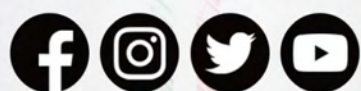


The Director,
Col. Giuseppe Cacciaguerra





ESERCITO



**RIVISTA
MILITARE**



MINISTRY
OF DEFENSE

SELECTION^{of} 2024

ENGLISH VERSION

Publisher
Difesa Servizi S.p.A. – C.F. 11345641002

ARMY GENERAL STAFF
General Affair Division

Managing director
Colonel Giuseppe Cacciaguerra

Editor in chief
Lieutenant Colonel Pierfrancesco Sampaolo

Coordination of publishing activities
And editorial staff

Rossella Borino Esposito, Pierluigi Bussi, Marcello Ciriminna,
Chiara Duri, Raimondo Fierro, Vincenzo Gebbia, Andrea Maria
Gradante, Mariangela La Licata, Annarita Laurenzi, Igor Piani,
Paola Pucci.

Secretariat and distribution

Claudio Angelini, Gaetano Chianese, Christian Faraone,
Ignazio Russo, Alessandro Serafini, Ciro Visconti.

Head Office

Via di San Marco, 8 – 00186 Roma
Tel. 06. 6796861

Administration

Difesa Servizi S.p.A.
Via Flaminia, 335 – 00196 Roma
Administrative Services
of the Army General Staff
Via Napoli, 42 – 00187 Roma

Printing

AGE s.r.l.
Via Donna Olimpia, 20
00152 Roma
Tel. 06/9162981

Registration in the Civil Court's Press-Register
of Rome n. 944 of 7 June 1949

ISSN 0035-6980

Copyright 2022 All rights reserved

The "Rivista Militare" is a training ground for thought aimed at disseminating and informing on what concerns military culture and all the issues and aspects which may refer to it. The "Rivista" focuses on the Army through debate and free and direct participation.

"The ground that science does not gain is inexorably conquered by ignorance". (L. Mezzacapo)

The ideas expressed in the articles are personal to the authors and have no reference to official guidelines. All personal data provided is treated following current privacy protection regulations. The publisher declares he is ready to regularise any copyright due to the reproduced images of which it has been impossible to find the source or legitimate owner.



Translations by the interpreters'team,
Protocol and External Relations Branch, IT-Army General Staff.

SELECTION OF

RM
1

Pierfrancesco Sampaolo

Theremin

pag. 4

Dario Citati

Information and psychological warfare

pag. 8

Giuseppe Cacciaguerra

Women and the Rivista Militare

pag. 12

RM
2

Anna Maria Isastia

Ester Danesi Traversari

pag. 16

Fabrizio Luperto

Waltz with Bashir

pag. 20

Pierfrancesco Sampaolo

The cells of Via Tasso speak again

pag. 22

RM
3

Carmine Masiello

Technology, training and values

pag. 26

Gian Marco Chiarini

The "battle of the bridges" in Nassiriya

pag. 30

Guglielmo Luigi Miglietta

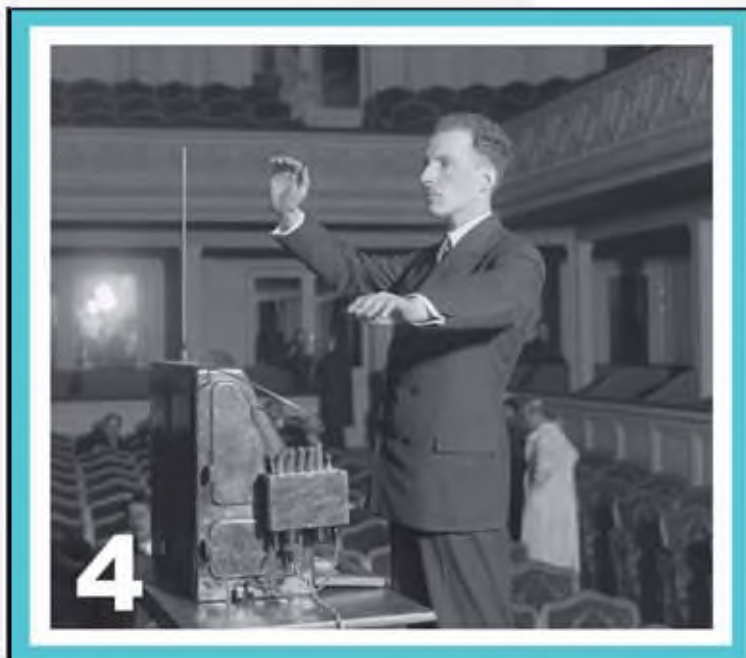
Adaptation is our strength

pag. 34



2024

ENGLISH VERSION



RM
4

Pier Luigi Bussi

Why the Red Sea?

pag. 38

Andrea Spada

*Anti-IDF militias' copied and recycled weapons
in Gaza*

pag. 40

Dario Citati

The case of Nagorno Karabakh

pag. 42

RM
5

Fabrizio Luperto

Leni Riefenstahl

pag. 46

Niccolò Bendini

The banality of evil and a man

pag. 48

Nicola Cristadoro

The nightmare of urban combat

pag. 50

RM
6

Pierluigi Bussi

Steel in Europe

pag. 54

Gianpaolo Cadalanu

Red Sea pirates

pag. 58

Pietro Serino

AI on the battlefield

pag. 62

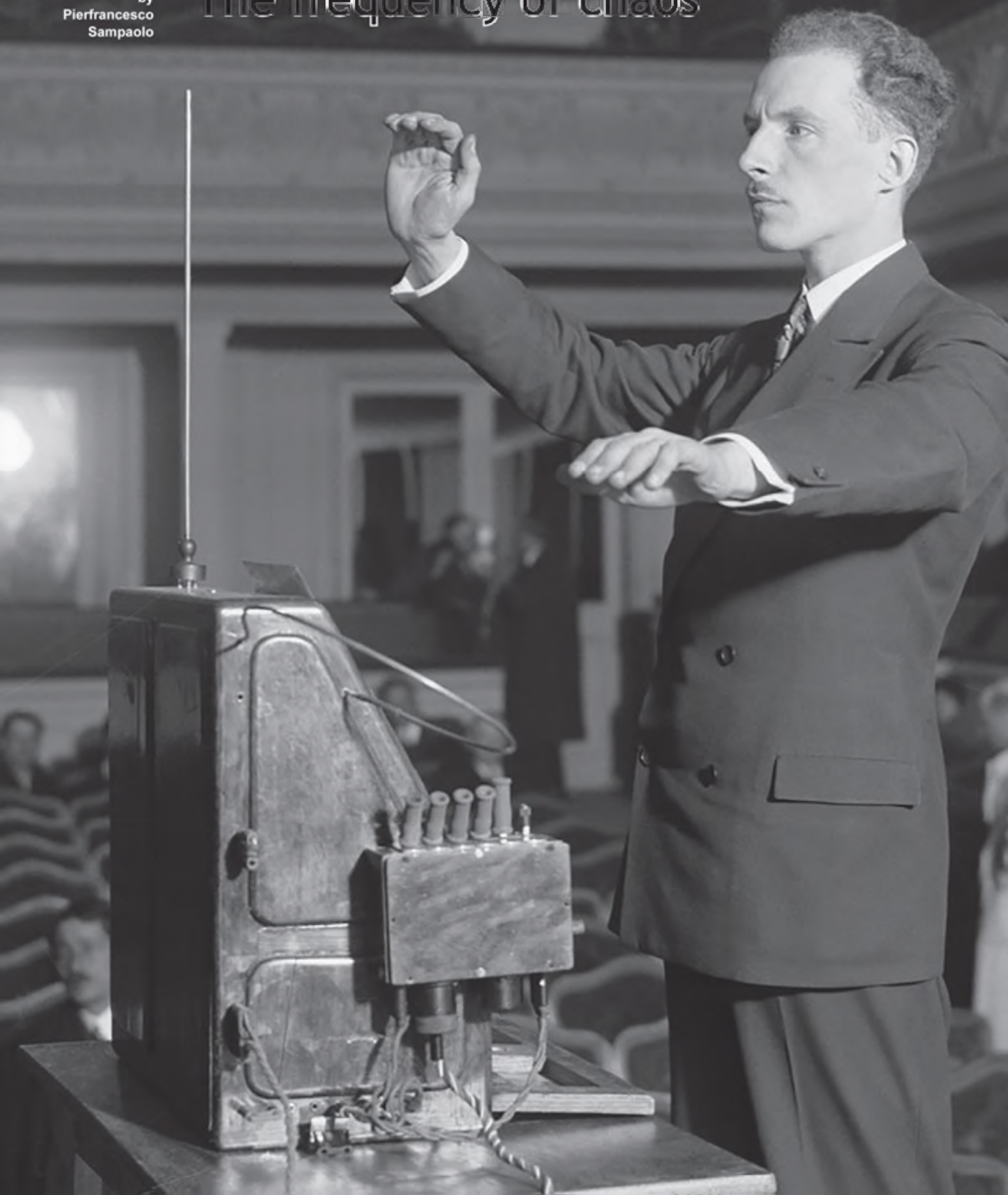





by
Pierfrancesco
Sampaolo

Theremin

The frequency of chaos





In 1920, something strange happened to a Russian scientist (and cellist) while he was researching electromagnetic waves for military purposes: he accidentally invented the first (and only) musical instrument that can be played without any physical contact. The scientist in question is Lev Sergeevič Termen, known to most as Leon Theremin, and the instrument is the etherphone, or more commonly, the Theremin.

To tell this story, it's probably best to first understand the sound we're talking about: imagine a Bela Lugosi film, in black and white, from the late 1940s, featuring vampires or werewolves. That melancholic, prolonged, and wavering sound-like a mechanical howl-was the Theremin. Or picture early science-fiction films, where spinning, steel-coloured flying saucers approach, emitting a drawn-out, haunting wail... that, too, was the Theremin.

Lev Termen was born in St. Petersburg in 1896 into an upper-middle-class family of French origin. He was immediately drawn to both scientific studies and music, enrolling at the Petersburg Conservatory and graduating as a cellist in 1916.

Even during his gymnasium years, he conducted his experiments in electrical engineering; this led him to enrol in the Faculty of Physics and, in 1919, began working at the university laboratory of the famous Soviet physicist Abram Lofe. Lev was a brilliant student, a fast learner, and had a broad perspective on physics and its applications. He did not serve in the First World War, but in 1916, he was drafted as an officer and sent on an advanced course for electrical engineers, which he completed in less than six months.

With the October Revolution, as a reserve officer in an electrician battalion, he was assigned to the most powerful Soviet radio station of the time, near St. Petersburg. However, it was in Lofe's laboratory between 1919 and 1920 that Termen, conducting experiments on proximity sound detectors-i.e. devices that emitted variable sounds through electromagnetic waves propagating within a gas,

depending on the proximity of an object- realised that one of these produced a melodic whistle, varying in frequency and intensity depending on the distance of a physical body from it. From this discovery, he developed the first prototype of the etherphone, or Theremin.

The instrument consisted (and still consists) of a case with oscillators and two antennas: one vertical, the other horizontal. Once connected to the electricity, two electromagnetic fields are created around the antennas: by bringing your left hand closer to the horizontal antenna, you control the intensity (or volume) of the sound, while with your right hand, on the vertical antenna, you control the frequencies and, therefore, the melody, by moving your hand closer or further away.

It is certainly not an easy instrument to play, but the discovery is ingenious. Through Lofe, it was presented to Lenin in 1922, who was thrilled and amazed.

Let's take a moment to imagine the impact that such an instrument might have had in those years, right after the Belle époque: it was played without being touched, with movements so ethereal that they seemed magical, and it emitted an almost mystical sound, somewhere between melancholy and unsettling. It must also be considered that science and progress were driving forces for society at the time, and with this new invention, they even touched upon almost spiritual dimensions.

The newly established Soviet Union thus sought to introduce the new sound discovered in Russia to the world, sending Termen and his etherphone on demonstration tours throughout the motherland, Europe, and the United States (in 1927, he performed at Carnegie Hall in New York). The success was global, so much so that Leon moved to New York in 1928 and founded his company, Teletouch, while still remaining a Soviet citizen.

In reality, Termen was an extremely versatile inventor. In addition to the etherphone, he patented several futuristic and efficient alarm and tracking systems, which earned him significant money and fame. For example, the prisons of Alcatraz and Sing Sing in the USA used these alarm systems. Between 1925 and 1926, he patented one of the world's first television systems, Dálnovidenie. His continuous research and inventions in the fields of science and music, as well as his entrepreneurial activities, which provided a basis in the USA for Soviet enterprises, made him extremely famous and influential. Notable figures like Albert Einstein, George Gershwin, Charlie Chaplin, J.D. Rockefeller, and Dwight Eisenhower approached him. In 1930, he conducted the first fully electronic orchestra in New York with A. Einstein (an amateur cellist). During his time in the US, he met violinist Clara Rockmore, a fellow Russian émigré, with whom he



Carolina Eyck plays the Theremin in the orchestra.



collaborated extensively. She became the greatest virtuoso of the Theremin. However, in 1938, Lev mysteriously left the United States and returned to Stalin's USSR. Some suggested it was because of his love affair with the African-American dancer of the time, Lavinia Williams, to whom he would always remain attached. Others claimed it was due to tax issues, while others, including his wife, believed he was abducted by the regime because of his skills and notoriety, which were likely deemed 'unacceptable'.

Back home, he was not welcomed as a hero, and his fame faded into the shadows of Stalin's USSR, to the point that, outside of Russia, people believed he was dead. After a period of imprisonment, he began, in 1940, a life of segregation in one of the Soviet regime's Gulags for scientists in Tupolev. There, together with his assistant Sergei Korolëv (later a renowned aerospace manufacturer), he invented futuristic surveillance equipment: the Buran, an infrared interception system that extracted

information from the vibrations of surfaces such as glass; the first passive bug, a 'James Bond'-style micro transceiver, which could be hidden in telephones or behind paintings; and the 'thing', a system that used the frequency bounce of surfaces to intercept communications in enclosed spaces. These inventions caused quite a few headaches for the US and UK embassies in Russia, which were intercepted by these systems for many years.

Finally, in the 1960s, Theremin was rehabilitated and began working again for the Moscow Conservatory, continuing his experiments. However, when a 1967 New York Times article mentioned his creations, he was expelled, and the dean ordered that his inventions be destroyed. Lev Termen then returned, not without difficulty, to the Physics Department at Moscow University and, despite everything, continued his studies until his death in 1993. In the 1970s, he taught the granddaughter of his first cousin, Lydia Kavina, to play the Theremin, and she became one of

the most famous musicians of the instrument, alongside Rockmore, one of its key promoters.

The Thereminvox has been used by artists such as the Rolling Stones, the Beach Boys, Led Zeppelin, George Gershwin, Vinicio Capossela, Baustelle, Afterhours, and Franco Battiato, as well as in numerous films. For those curious, issue 367 of the comic strip *Martin Mystère* is entirely dedicated to him: it is titled: 'The Frequency of Chaos'. In 1994, the documentary about Leon Theremin and his invention, 'Theremin: An Electronic Odyssey', by S. Martin, won the Sundance Film Festival.

The Theremin is still considered one of the most extraordinary inventions of all time. It is the forerunner of electronic instruments and synthesizers while remaining up-to-date. Even though technology has made great strides, despite algorithms and artificial intelligence, the Theremin still can enchant and astound people, just as its inventor did a century ago.



by
Dario Citati

Information and psychological warfare

Info and psy-ops in the Russia-Ukraine conflict

The Maskirovka in information warfare

The term maskirovka (meaning “camouflage” in Russian) encompasses a range of Soviet theories and techniques related to military deception. These strategies have been adapted for psychological and information warfare in the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Russia employs a systematic operational pattern in the information field, particularly at the strategic level, to obscure its intentions and present them as acceptable once implemented. This updated version of Soviet maskirovka can be synthesised into four key steps:

1. Denial: Initially, Russia denies any involvement in the offensive actions for which it is accused.
2. Shifting the Narrative: The focus is then redirected to the faults and provocations of Russia's enemies.
3. Appearing Cooperative: Russia proclaims its willingness to cooperate in all locations and sit at the negotiating table.
4. Justification of Actions: Finally, Russia claims its actions are defensive measures against external threats to protect its legitimate national interests and contribute to a more equitable international order.

This approach allows Russia to transition from one narrative to its opposite without appearing contradictory, thereby legitimising what was initially denied. To be effective, this form of maskirovka applied to the information space must avoid being perceived as blatant propaganda and falsification of events. Instead, it presents a nuanced blend of truth and falsehood, where real events intertwine with fabricated ones, and supported interpretations coexist with misleading evaluations.

A prime example of this strategic maskirovka in information warfare is the March 2014 Crimea referendum. The West considered it illegal due to the presence of Russian soldiers guarding the peninsula, wearing no signs of recognition. During the referendum and again in the following months, Moscow steadfastly denied that members of its Armed Forces had trespassed into Crimea (Step 1: Denial). Russian narrative then shifted to blaming Ukraine and the West for various faults, emphasising claims emerged throughout social media and mainstream channels of Ukrainian persecution of Russian-speaking minorities, the historical ties of Crimea to Russia, as well as accusations of Western ‘double standards’ regarding self-

determination (Step 2: Shifting Focus).

Although supporting the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Lugansk, Moscow sought to gain credit as an external mediator in the ongoing Donbas conflict (Step 3: Appearing Cooperative). On 11 June 2016, two years after the referendum, Russian authorities in Crimea officially unveiled a memorial in Simferopol dedicated to ‘the kind man’, a Russian soldier who wore an unmarked uniform and protected the Crimean territory during the referendum days. Moscow has thus admitted what it had initially denied, camouflaging its initial intent and conveying the message that Crimea is Russian. Its reunification with the motherland (prisoedinenie, a term officially used in the Russian language instead of ‘annexation’) is to rectify a historical injustice, safeguard Russia's national security and the right of Crimeans to be part of the state they wish (Step 4: Justification of Actions).

Even in the large-scale conflict, which began on 24 February 2022 and is still ongoing, Moscow sticks to this pattern. In the months leading up to the attack (autumn-winter 2021/2022), Russian troops were massively deployed along Ukraine's borders. U.S. intelligence warned of an imminent invasion, which Russia

dismissed as Western propaganda. Even after launching its ground attack, the term 'special military operation' instead of 'warfare' served Moscow as a rhetorical device to sustain the denial of accusations. Foreign Minister Lavrov, still in March, continued to state verbatim that 'Russia did not attack Ukraine' (Step 1). As Russia faced tactical challenges in the conflict, the Russian narrative then shifted to blame the enemy through a series of well-known arguments, affirming that the cause of the warfare is NATO's enlargement, alleged Ukrainian persecution of Russian-speaking minorities, and claiming that Ukraine is an artificial state created by the USSR (Step 2). Moscow's communication has gradually settled on a willingness to cooperate and negotiate, portraying itself as a reasonable actor seeking compromise in a conflict it did not want (Step 3). Should Russia achieve a partial victory, we may witness a reversal of the initial narrative. What was previously framed as a surgical "special operation" would be celebrated as a holy patriotic struggle against the West (Step 4).

Controlled Reaction and Psychological Warfare

In contrast to the broader concept of maskirovka, the idea of controlled reaction (refleksivnoe upravlenie in Russian) is more specific. Specialists consider this sophisticated theory of manipulation as the core element of Soviet psychological warfare theories. The controlled reaction should not be understood simply as the dissemination of false or misleading news intending to confuse the enemy or sway public opinion. Instead, it is a deliberate effort to elicit a specific response to a particular situation while acknowledging human behaviour's unpredictability.

In the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, Kyiv carried out one of the most successful controlled reaction operations at the tactical level during the summer of 2022. This involved a deception campaign





involved a deception campaign concerning an imminent Ukrainian counteroffensive towards Kherson in the South, which misled the Russian Armed Forces and facilitated a rapid Ukrainian counterattack in the Kharkiv region in the East of the country.

In June 2022, Ukrainian political and military authorities announced a massive counteroffensive towards Kherson while simultaneously

targeting Russian supply routes, prompting a redeployment of part of their troops (such as selected units of the 1st Guards Tank Army) from the East to the South to reinforce Kherson. On 29 August, the Ukrainian Southern Command reiterated its intent to attack Kherson. However, just a week later, on 6 September, a surprise offensive was launched to the East in the Kharkiv region. Within days,

Ukrainian forces broke through the enemy lines and captured the essential logistical node of Izjum, pushing Russian troops back to the Oskil River's right bank.

Why can this be considered a 'controlled reaction'? The Ukrainians did not simply simulate an attack from nowhere in the South and then pivot to the East; they skilfully exploited the enemy's expectations. They effectively



studied and manipulated their adversary by amplifying cognitive biases prevalent in the Russian information space. Prominent Russian military Telegram channels (such as 'Rybar', 'Colonel Cassad', etc.) and other media influencing the Russian General Staff's decisions focused on the Ukrainian kinetic effort to the South. Ukrainian political and military authorities bolstered this perception not only

by proclaiming the imminent attack but also by disseminating news and articles in Russian and Ukrainian language (e.g., in "Ukrains'ka Pravda", "Radio Svoboda" or BBC in the Ukrainian language) where they advocated and analysed the probability of success in the Kherson counteroffensive, which would only occur later in the fall, supporting its implementation. With few exceptions, the Russians

were already convinced that the southern route constituted the main effort of the Ukrainian counteroffensive. The Ukrainians understood these expectations, fuelling them with misinformation and strategic proclamations. They successfully orchestrated the controlled reaction they sought, leading to a significant tactical victory in Kharkiv that greatly impacted both Russian military morale and public opinion.

Women and the Rivista Militare

le donne con le stellette

Per l'attualità del tema, ed anche come partecipazione alle iniziative che celebreranno il 1975 come « Anno della donna », la Rivista Militare pubblica — senza peraltro entrare nel merito delle idee espresse dall'Autore e della soluzione del problema che, sul piano tecnico - ordinativo, egli vede come possibile — il presente articolo con il quale viene proposto ai lettori il problema dell'introduzione di un servizio militare femminile nell'ambito delle nostre Forze Armate.

Si ritiene comunque opportuno evidenziare, non a fini dialettici, ma come un argomento basilare di valutazione per chi intendesse concorrere ad un eventuale dibattito sugli aspetti del problema in ambito nazionale, la necessità di inquadrarlo nel contesto giuridico, economico e sociale caratteristico del nostro Paese.

Con ciò si vuole semplicemente sottolineare che, prima della soluzione puramente ordinativa e tecnica, va individuata quella ambientale o di costume, in un quadro di modernizzazione globale della « componente Forze Armate », del quale il servizio femminile deve costituire solo una, e non prioritaria, delle tante innovazioni necessarie.

LE INIZIATIVE PARLAMENTARI

E' da qualche anno, per la precisione dal settembre del 1970, che l'argomento « Istituzione del servizio militare femminile » viene proposto all'opinione pubblica italiana da membri dei due rami del Parlamento.

Fu, infatti, l'On. Sullo che, nel presentare una proposta di legge riguardante nuove norme sul servizio di leva obbligatorio, formulava, tra l'altro, l'istanza della creazione di « Corpi Ausiliari Femminili ».

Nel 1971, le Onorevoli Tina Anselmi e Maria Badaloni presentavano al Ministro della Difesa dell'epoca un'interrogazione per sapere se corrispondeva a verità che una commissione composta da cinque generali aveva ricevuto l'incarico di studiare possibilità e modalità di una specie di servizio militare riservato alla donna, in omaggio all'articolo 52 della Costituzione, e se non riteneva opportuno, in caso affermativo, che fossero chiamate a far parte di detta commissione donne dotate di particolare esperienza nei servizi civili, utilizzabili nel quadro di un servizio analogo a quello militare. La risposta fu che, nel quadro degli studi relativi alla ristrutturazione della ferma di leva nell'aspetto della sua du-

rata, era stata considerata, nelle linee generali, l'eventualità di istituire un corpo volontario femminile da impiegare in taluni limitati settori di attività militari.

Si era trattato di un primo accostamento al problema che, per la sua rilevanza, avrebbe necessitato di attento approfondimento sotto il profilo sia sociale sia militare e che, qualora si fossero avuti in materia sviluppi concreti, sarebbe stato tenuto nel dovuto conto il suggerimento di avvalersi dell'esperienza di donne particolarmente qualificate.

Più recentemente il Sen. Sporra ha presentato un disegno di legge in cui propone la istituzione di un servizio militare femminile. A premessa e giustificazione del provvedimento viene posta la situazione di carenza dell'organico del personale militare dovuta sia al minor gettito della leva ordinaria e volontaria sia alla necessità di istituire particolari agevolazioni nella chiamata alle armi per i capi famiglia. Il Sen. Sporra sostiene, inoltre, l'opportunità di non continuare ad ignorare la pressante e giustamente richiesta delle donne tendente ad ottenere una perfetta parità di diritti con i cittadini dell'altro sesso.



M. Genchi, "Women with stars", in Rivista Militare, 1975.

Today, the presence of women in the military is a well-established reality. We are proud to acknowledge that our magazine has actively contributed to the debate and proposals on this fundamental issue of equal rights, often ahead of its time. The journey to this point has been long and filled with obstacles. However, due to its vocation and history, Rivista Militare could not shy away from examining such a significant innovation with a clear and critical perspective. Demonstrating our commitment to the world of women, last May, Rivista Militare participated in the *èStoria International Festival* in Gorizia, now in its 19th edition. This year's theme was *Women*. We aimed to be more than just spectators and presented a lecture titled "Rivista Militare and Women: The History of an Entry." To retrace this long-debated entry, we encourage readers to flick through the historical pages of our Rivista and focus on those dedicated to women. From the year of its foundation in 1856, the first example is a 1911 article by Captain Rodolfo Corselli, titled: "Italian Women in


the National Risorgimento (1)". Capt. Rodolfo Corselli presents an interesting and engaging piece, although its style may seem pompous by today's standards, reflecting the writing norms of over a century ago. For example, he claims: *"No nation, no people in the world can boast such a rich and shining constellation of patriotic female figures!"* The author's precise aim is to honour the myriad ways women contributed to Italy's unification during the Risorgimento-categorising them as protectors, conspirators, martyrs, and fighters. We will focus on the category of martyrs to recount the *"sad and repulsive spectacle"* that took place in Milan's Piazza Castello on 23 August 1849.

The background is as follows: a washerwoman named Olivari, labelled as having *"bad morals"*, displayed an apron with an Austrian eagle in her window, provoking protests, i.e. whistles, from about thirty people. The protesters were arrested by the police and faced punishment in the form of beatings; as you can see, they did not waste time in those days. Among

them were two young women: Ernestina Galli, aged 20, and Maria Conti, aged 17. *"Denuded and tied to a pole, they suffered the shame of being beaten in front of soldiers and officers"*. Notably, Galli received 40 strokes, while Conti received 30 due to her youth. The epilogue says: *"The Government of Lombardy-Venetia then sent the Municipality of Milan the bill for the strokes, to be paid as compensation to the soldiers who executed them, and for the broken rods, totalling just over 22 florins. And the municipality paid"*. Overall, the article aims to exalt female heroism, particularly in war, but only when deemed necessary. *"If it is no longer essential for them to run to the walls with weapons in hand, they can still serve the Fatherland by providing their children with a healthy education"*. The honoured heroine was valued primarily in times of crises, only to be relegated back to domesticity once peace returned. This theme of emergency-where women are called upon and accepted as equals to men-emerges as a recurring point



Maria Rita Saulle, chairwoman of the Commission for Complaints on the Property of Refugees and Refugees with President Scalfaro, June 11, 1996.



IL PRINCIPIO DELLA NON- DISCRIMINAZIONE

Il servizio militare femminile, nonostante l'attenzione dedicatagli negli ultimi tempi dagli organi statali e dalla stampa nazionale, non ha ancora trovato in Italia una concreta attuazione e costituisce, accanto ad altri, un problema che le Forze Armate devono affrontare e risolvere, non tanto per soddisfare esigenze concrete dei soggetti interessati, donne da una parte e Stato dall'altra, quanto per realizzare un adeguamento della situazione italiana a quella della maggioranza degli altri Stati e per attuare in modo completo il precetto costituzionale concernente la parità tra uomo e donna. Precetto che ha già trovato parziale attuazione con l'emanazione della legge del 9 febbraio 1951 n. 66, di numerose norme in materia di diritto di famiglia (1), nonché con l'abrogazione di taluna norma in campo penale, ad esempio in materia di adulterio. Sulla base del medesimo precetto, attualmente una donna potrebbe essere, tra l'altro, eletta Presidente della Repubblica e perciò

(1) Legge 19 maggio 1950 n. 155.

il servizio * * * * *
militare * * * * *
femminile * * *
e le convenzioni
internazionali *

M.R. Saulle, "Women's military service and international conventions", in *Rivista Militare*, 1975.

that will persist in later discussions. The second article appeared in 1975, a symbolic year as the UN declared it the "International Year of Women." "Women with Stars (2)" is the title of this contribution, authored by Col. Manlio Genchi, a prominent publicist. This thorough, well-structured article stands out as one of the most courageous and innovative published in the 'Rivista'. Genchi advocates for women's military service in our Armed Forces. So ahead of its time was his argument that the magazine's editors felt the need to distance themselves from it in the couplet a concise summary. They stated: "*Without, however, entering into the merits of the author's ideas (...) the environmental or customary context must be identified before purely orderly and technical solutions*". In other words, while advocating for the modernisation of the Armed Forces, they asserted that female service "*should constitute only one of many necessary innovations, not the priority*". Essentially, Italy was not ready for such a change, although Genchi referenced constitutional articles that support gender equality, particularly Article 3, which states, "*All citizens have equal social dignity*", and Article 31, which affirms that "*All citizens of either sex may have access to all public offices [...]*". They do not prohibit the possibility of female military service. Just as the fundamental Law 66 of 9 February 1963, which in Article 1 states: "*Women may have access to all public offices, professions and employment (...)*". The enrolment of women in the Armed Forces and special corps is regulated by special laws'. Therefore, the legal framework did not prohibit women from wearing uniforms. Notably, by 1975, several countries around the world had already implemented women's military service. The article concludes with various proposals regarding recruitment methods, training, advancement, uniforms, and infrastructure. Thus, it is more than a mere article; it is an accurate working hypothesis. The third paper we will discuss is titled "Women's Military Service and Inter-

national Conventions (3)" by Prof. Maria Rita Saulle and published in 1981. Saulle, an internationally renowned jurist, was appointed a judge of the Constitutional Court in 2005 by President Ciampi. The article is a genuine scientific piece due to the author's authority. The opening statement is clear: "*Women's military service (...) is a problem that the Armed Forces must address and resolve*", not only because of the aspirations of those concerned but also to "*align the Italian situation with that of the majority of other states and to fully implement the constitutional precept concerning equality between men and women*". Equality is also broadly addressed in the UN Charter, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, both adopted by the UN General Assembly and entered into force in 1976.

In 1983, there was an article written by Lieutenant Colonel Fabio Mini titled "Soldier Joe and Soldier Jane.(4)" This piece revisited previous themes, stating there are no legislative prohibitions against female military service nor physical or intellectual limitations on women performing any tasks. Consequently, Mini proposed verifying whether "*Italian society, in general, and military society, in particular, can handle the problem of female military service in all its complexity*". To find answers, the author examined the U.S. experience, which has a longer history with this issue. However, even there, prejudices and difficulties remain. For Mini, the presence of women in the Armed Forces "*is a challenge that Italian society is preparing to face with great courage*".

We conclude this overview with two more articles: "Women's Military Service from a Military Perspective" by Gen. Goffredo Canino (5) and "Women's Military Service from a Military Perspective" by Gen. Francesco Cervoni (6) Both contributions share the same title and a positive outlook on women serving in the military. Gen. Canino succinctly summarises his stance: "*From a military point of view, the answer to the question of whether women should be part of the military is yes, but more so in wartime*

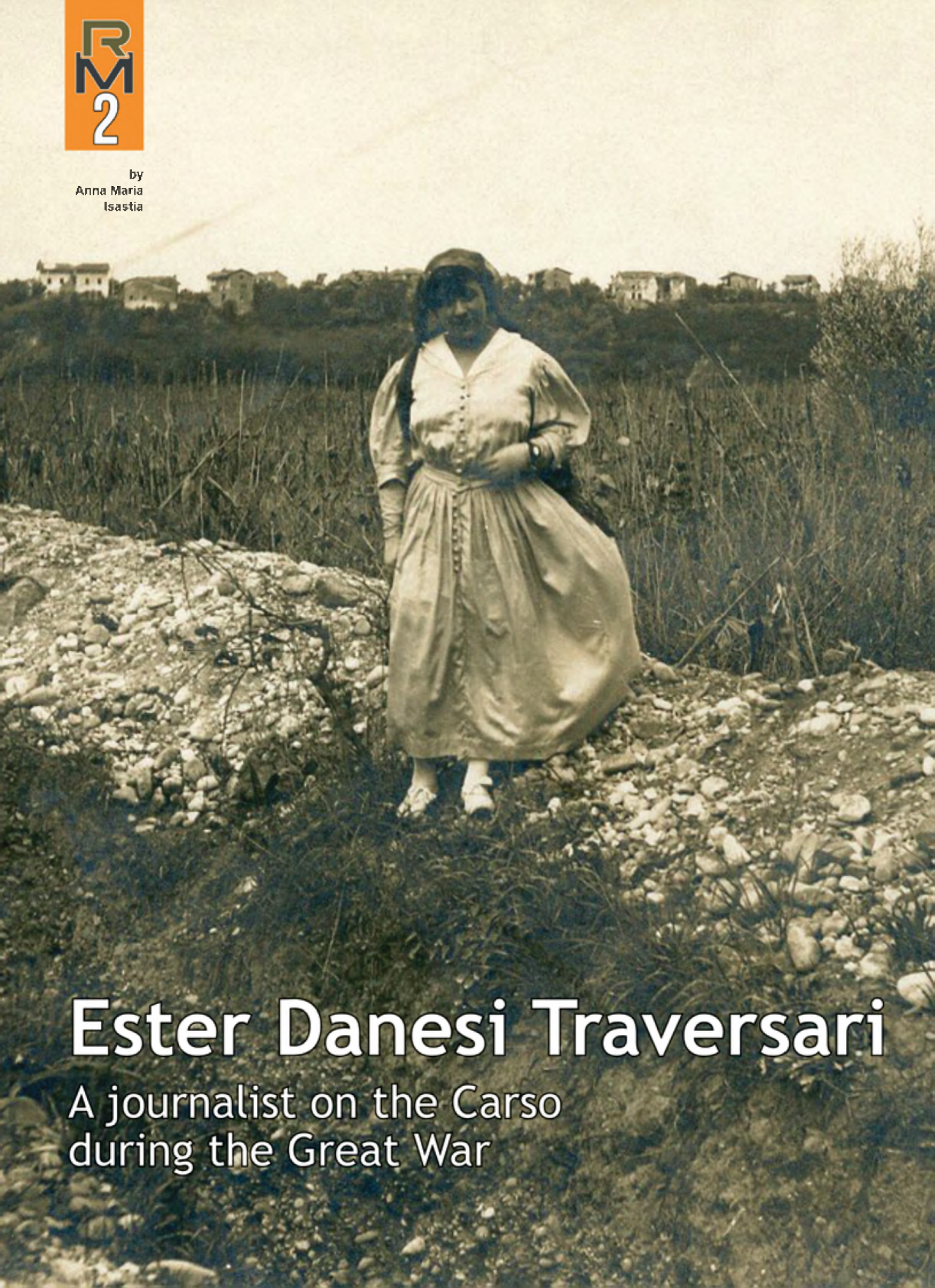
than in peacetime, due to the specific situation of a general emergency, albeit limited in time". These concerns stem from the challenge of balancing "*motherhood and the care of offspring with the burdens of continuous and repetitive peacetime duties*". Similarly, Gen. Cervoni addresses points made by Mini and Canino, affirming that "*it is certain that the Armed Forces, especially in wartime, have not been a field reserved for men alone for decades*". The question arises as to whether women can ensure their readiness for duty in peacetime, even if it sometimes means sacrificing family or personal interests.

We have observed that these recurring themes have persisted since the first article in the early 1900s. With the latest contribution, we can conclude that a significant period of analysis and discussion came to an end; the issue could no longer be postponed. Finally, it was not until 1999 that the long-awaited Law 380 was achieved, marking Italy as the last NATO country to admit women into military careers.

Notes

- (1) R. Corselli, *Le donne italiane nel Risorgimento nazionale*, in «Rivista Militare Italiana», Year LVI, Issue IX, Enrico Voghera Publisher, Rome, 1911.
- (2) M. Genchi, *Le donne con le stellette*, in «Rivista Militare», Year XCVIII, Issue No. 1, Tipografia regionale, Rome, 1975.
- (3) M.R. Saulle, *Il servizio militare femminile e le convenzioni internazionali*, in «Rivista Militare», Year CIV, Issue No. 3, Tipografia regionale, Rome, 1981.
- (4) F. Mini, *Soldato Joe e soldato Jane*, in «Rivista Militare», Issue No. 3, Tipografia regionale, Rome, 1983.
- (5) G. Canino, *Il servizio militare femminile nell'ottica del militare*, in «Rivista Militare», Issue No. 5, Istituto Geografico De AgWostini, Novara, 1987.
- (6) F. Cervoni, *Il servizio militare femminile nell'ottica dei militari*, in «Rivista Militare», Issue No. 2, Istituto Geografico De Agostini, Novara, 1989.

by
Anna Maria
Isastia



Ester Danesi Traversari

A journalist on the Carso
during the Great War



On 18 August 1916, the head of the Supreme Command's press office of the Italian Royal Army (Regio Esercito) authorised Ms Ester Danesi Traversari *"to travel from Udine to Gorizia, for professional reasons"*.

Two days later, she was issued safe-conduct pass no. 4345, granting her access to the war zone. On 10 September, the head of the Interior Ministry's press office granted her further authorisation *"to follow military operations at the front"* as a temporary correspondent for the Rome daily newspaper *"Il Messaggero"*.

The Sixth Battle of the Isonzo had just ended and was hailed across the country as Italy's first true victory of the war. After a year of fierce fighting, the Italian infantry captured Sabotino and San Michele, ultimately liberating Gorizia but at a heavy cost in blood. Who was this journalist who had applied to go to the front?

Ester Traversari was born in Rome on 30 September 1878. In 1901, she married Giulio Danesi, the owner of a prominent art printing house, with whom she had three daughters. A passionate writer from an early age and an advocate for women's emancipation, her work focused on the role and conditions of women within the family, the workplace, and society. Like many proponents of women's emancipation, she became a committed democratic interventionist at the outbreak of the First World War. She joined the National Women's Committee for Italian Intervention, founded in Rome in December 1914 and put her pen to the service of war propaganda.

She held conferences and wrote for the periodical *"La Donna (The Woman)"*, where she was editor-in-chief, as well as for the daily newspaper *"Il Messaggero"*, where she edited the column *"Cronache femminili di guerra (Women's War Chronicles)"*. In August 1914, she wrote that women should not merely be patriots but must be ready to take the place of men departing for the front, as was already happening in other warring nations. In 1915, she chronicled the new realities faced by women who had to leave their homes and go to work, the fears of mothers burdened



On the previous page:
Ester Danesi Traversari sul Carso.

with children, and the support that the better-informed women were providing to the many illiterate ones by explaining the subsidies the state would offer them in the absence of their husbands, now soldiers.

Her writings painted vivid portraits of daily life: a conversation between young soldiers in uniform, ready to leave, and mothers who encouraged them, but also scathing articles condemning those who, in the summer of 1915, went on holiday with no regard for the soldiers fighting and dying at the front.

Ester Danesi Traversari reported on the war from a modern woman's perspective, keenly aware of international developments-particularly in neighbouring France and attentive to the social changes unfolding in Italy. She spoke, wrote, engaged in propaganda, praised and criticised. She painted vivid pictures of cities crossed by trams filled with wounded soldiers, the many women working in Civil Organization Committees, and the anguish of families with loved ones fighting at the front.

As soon as Gorizia was liberated, Ester requested and obtained permission to visit the front. In her reports, she described the train journey, the crowded and chaotic stations, and the numerous Red Cross trains. She portrayed Udine as a city transformed into barracks, where everyone was either a soldier or working to support them and where one could breathe the spirit of honour and national glory.

In the pages of *"Il Messaggero"*, she conveyed the urgency she felt to witness the frontlines, lamenting her inability to *"contribute through physical sacrifice to the immense, virile endeavour of national defence"*. She wrote of *"the fascination of an hour spent up here, close to the clash of combatants, where every meter of land bears the scars of the struggle"*. She was captivated by the sight of this mass of individuals in uniform, who appeared to form a single immense body moving in unison *"as if obedient to an invisible, colossal force"*. She remarked that although women were physically absent here, the female national conscience was



actively working and assisting, for the war had awakened a new sense of civic and national awareness.

Ester visited the soldiers in the trenches to see their living conditions firsthand. She walked through the trenches, stopping to talk to them. Photographs capture her dressed in a soft, white midi dress, free of stays or corsets, paired with white stockings and shoes with a bow and a comfortable heel. Her head was covered by either a hat or a shawl. These photos accompanied the articles she authored and published. In some pictures, she appeared alongside other war correspondents; while in others, she appeared with officers or a military chaplain.

She spoke with admiration of the women of Friuli who had taken on roles as employees, teachers, and workers: *"One must remember that over eighty-one thousand refugees rushed here to Friuli before our war, without money, without homes, without jobs, uncertain about the present and the future. The work carried out by the authorities, supported by the government, was immense. Before anywhere else, the relief and assistance committees began their efforts here: public kitchens, shelters for children, and all kinds of charitable initiatives"*.

When the war broke out, women's activity expanded enormously alongside those of the Red Cross. *"From the Carnic Alps, the Isonzo, and the Carso come the long, heart-rending trains loaded with wounded soldiers"*, who were welcomed by women caring for them while waiting for trains to *"leave from Udine to reach a second-stage hospital"*. Alongside Red Cross nurses and volunteers, Ester described the work of one hundred and sixty ladies and young women *"who handled all the written and oral requests concerning our soldiers on a daily basis. The mechanism of this office was perfect, agile and incredibly rapid"* under the direction of Mrs Nimis and Mrs Fracassetti. Their delicate mission was to send and receive information about soldiers at the front, addressing the constant inquiries from their families. These

women also ran nurseries for refugees and soldiers' children, sewed thousands of garments and even started manufacturing Italian toys (*Le donne friulane nella loro opera civile*, *Il Messaggero*, 27 September 1916).

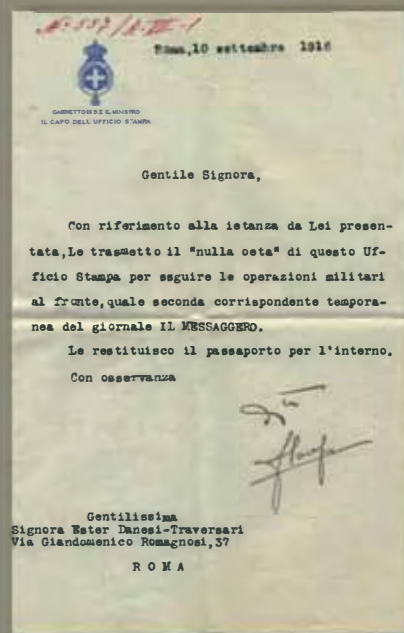
During her days at the front, Ester Danesi Traversari befriended soldiers and maintained regular correspondence with some of them upon her return to Rome.

On 27 March 1917, Lieutenant Pietro Assenza wrote to her: "*Were you not the first and only Italian woman to set foot in those still-smoking lands, almost throbbing with the battle fought just a few hours earlier? With angelic grace, you brought heartfelt hope to all of us who were on that walkway (do you remember?), far from ever expecting such a cherished and welcome visit. Didn't we meet on the battlefield itself?*"

On 20 September 1917, he wrote to her, mentioning that he had distributed the photos she had sent to the soldiers-photos with her portrait. The soldiers were moved to tears as they recalled her presence in the trenches. Like many Italian women, Ester corresponded with soldiers at the front. She wrote about this experience in "*Il Messaggero*" in an article entitled "*Letters to Soldiers*". In it, she reminded women of their duty to maintain a bond of affection and daily life with husbands, sons, and friends at the front but also with strangers in need of human connection.

She urged women not to complain in their letters but to write pleasant things that would be enjoyable to read, share details of their daily lives, make the soldiers feel part of the life that continued to flow in cities and countryside and reassure them.

The soul of an entire nation was contained in the dense correspondence that crisscrossed Italy during the war years letters from the front to families and from individuals to soldiers. Helping women understand the war through feminine eyes and sensitivity while making men aware of women's contributions to the collective effort: this, I believe, is the true meaning of "Women's War Chronicles" in "*Il Messaggero*".

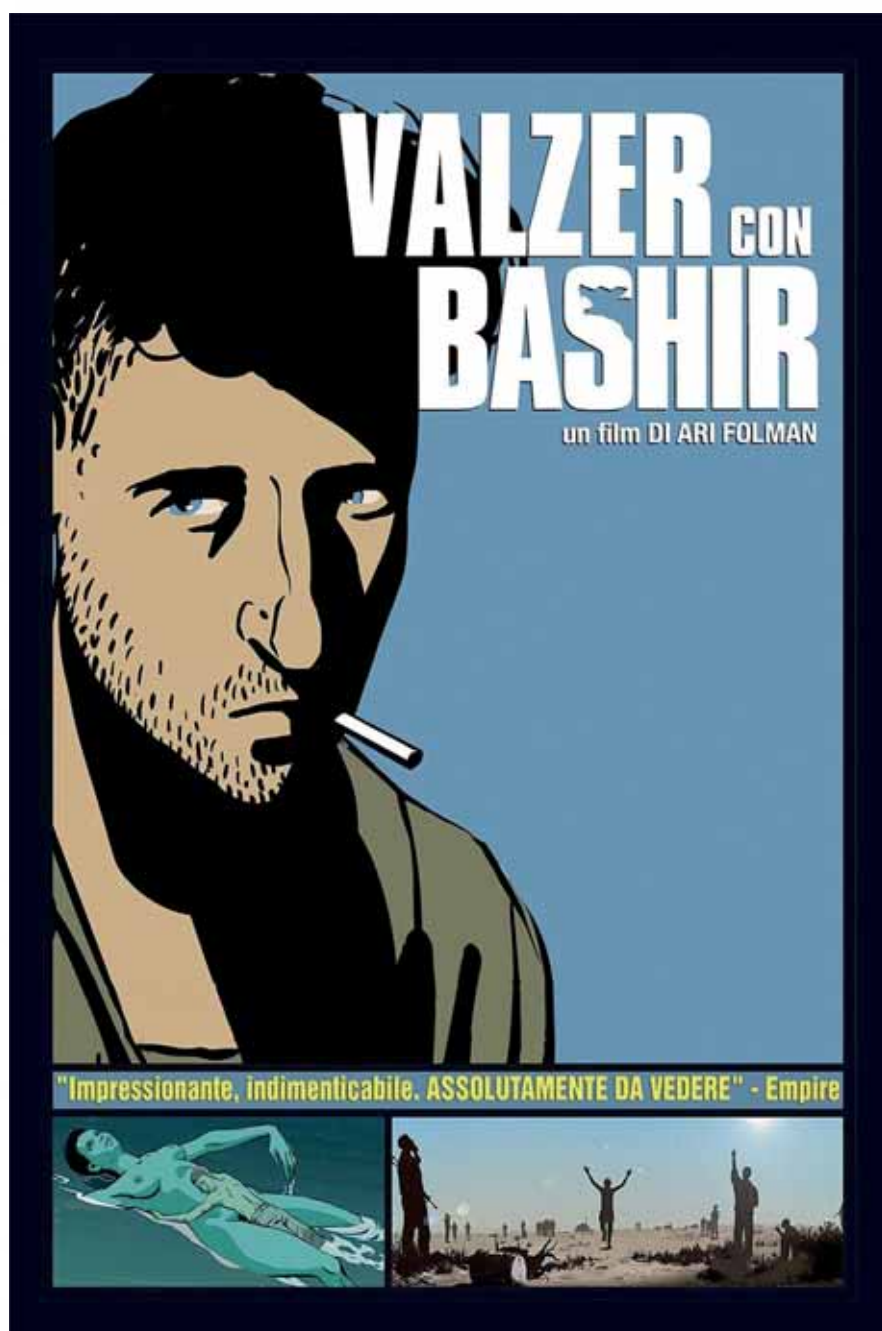


Anna Maria Isastia has taught History of the Risorgimento and Contemporary History at the Sapienza University of Rome. She was national president of Soroptimist International of Italy and is currently president of the Soroptimist Club of Rome Foundation. She is co-editor of the series 'La memoria e le fonti. Identity and sociality', honorary president of the Italian Society of Military History (Sism), national councillor of the ANRP (National Association of veterans of imprisonment, concentration camps and the war of liberation). A writer and lecturer, she has over 250 scientific publications including 16 monographs and 18 edited works. 'Military Volunteering in the Risorgimento. La partecipazione alla guerra del 1859', USSME, 1990; 'Soldati e cittadini. Cento anni di Forze armate in Italia', SMD, 2000; "L'Unità delle donne: il loro contributo nel Risorgimento 2011"; 'Donne in magistratura. The Italian Magistrate Women's Association', 2013; 'A network of women in the world. Soroptimist International, a century of history (1921- 2021)', 2021.



Waltz with Bashir

In the darkness of the mind



"*Waltz with Bashir*" tells the true story of Ari Folman, the film's director. Folman enlisted in the Israeli army at 19 and was deployed to Beirut. He became an unwitting participant in one of the most horrific chapters of the 1982 Lebanon War: the Sabra and Shatila massacre. Over three days, Christian phalangists avenging the assassination of Lebanese president Bashir Gemayel slaughtered about three thousand Palestinians with the tacit consent of the Israeli army stationed outside the camps (1).

Years later, Ari Folman had entirely repressed the memory of this incident. Only after turning forty, with the help of a psychiatrist and confrontation with former comrades some of whom struggled with similar memory gaps did Folman finally confront what had happened and come to terms with his sense of guilt. This painful journey took him four years to recount, requiring a complex creative and production process. He first filmed a kind of documentary in which he gathered his comrades' testimonies and his fragmented recollections. He then used his footage to create a storyboard that evolved into more than 2,300 drawings, bringing the story to life in film.

"*Waltz with Bashir*" is an animated documentary with an investigative structure. The decision to use animation works well, allowing Folman to fly very high right from the start, capturing at least three unforgettable sequences: the "*Goddess of the Sea*", evoking Fellini's influence; the rifle



that turns into a guitar in a soldier's hands; and the surfer, directly referencing Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*.

The gestures and dialogue are slow, almost sluggish, mirroring the slowness and effort as memories push through the thick fog of the mind. Above all, the image of the protagonist emerging from the water is a clear metaphor for resurfacing repressed memories. But is it truly possible to remember what the mind has chosen to erase? Trauma and horror have the power to alter or even completely obli-

terate past events, and reconstructing fractured memories inevitably brings pain. Conscious and unconscious realities merge seamlessly on screen and in the protagonist/director's mind as he attempts to assemble the scattered fragments of a puzzle that might reveal the truth. Both dreamlike and hallucinatory, painful and devastating, "*Waltz with Bashir*" is a haunting, visionary descent into the mind's and heart's darkness in a desperate quest for truth.

The film's ending is profoundly moving a piercing reminder that, tragi-

cally, what we witnessed on screen was not a cartoon but a sad and cruel reality. An excellent soundtrack accompanies the film, from OMD's "*Enola Gay*" to P.I.L. rendition of John Lydon's "*This is not a Love Song*". Folman's work was nominated for the 2009 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film—a rare gem and an unmissable masterpiece.

NOTES

(1) *Treccani encyclopaedia*.

The cells of Via Tasso speak again

Interview with Prof. Roberto Balzani, the new President of the Museum

President, why should people visit the Historical Museum of Liberation?

The museum is one of the most significant places of remembrance of our country's history. Between September 1943 and 4 June 1944, thousands of people passed through the cells of this relatively modern and unremarkable building in the Esquilino district, a stone's throw from Termini Station, where they were interrogated and tortured by the SS. The cells remain preserved today, with bricked-up windows and only a few narrow slits for ventilation, just as they were then. Graffiti, etched by prisoners on the walls, still bears witness to those dark days, along with the oppressive feeling one gets when crossing the threshold of the cold, cramped isolation spaces.

During those months, Lieutenant Colonel Kappler commanded a unit of a dozen 'specialists' charged with dismantling the anti-fascist network and capturing the Jews who had escaped the round-up of 16 October '43 and were hiding in the Capital. Similar sites, all bearing the scars of brutal Nazi repression, exist in many cities across Europe, each a reminder of this extreme violence, which can be read at different levels: urban, national, and international. The flats in Via Tasso, in particular, became a site of remembrance as early as 1955, and the Museum has preserved its historical authenticity over time. However, the Museum also plays a role as a research and documentation centre, organising surviving sources to reconstruct the lives and environments of individuals, groups and communities. This work connects the need to safeguard intergenerational memory with advancing historical research providing invaluable resources for citizens and institutions.

The clandestine Military Resistance Front, led by Col. Giuseppe Cordero di Montezemolo, played a key role in the Resistance in Rome. Many of its members were imprisoned in Via Tasso. How does the Museum keep their memories alive?

The Museum devotes significant attention to the soldiers of the clandestine Front, as the SS under Kappler considered this group particularly influential and dangerous. If we look at the flow of prison-ers, we can see their extensive presence, from the highest-ranking officers down to non-commissioned personnel and soldiers. On the other hand, the massive deployment of Royal Italian Army units around Rome during the armistice period also provided recruits for the Front. Following the rapid dissolution of the 'open city' misconception after the bloody clashes on Rome's outskirts on 8 September, Colonel Montezemolo was able to secretly assemble operational units capable of performing sabotage, gathering information and collaborating with the Allied intelligence services.

The period from January to February was challenging for the German command, which was focused on repelling Allied troops at Anzio. This intense organisational and logistic effort inevitably impacted the Roman area, which had become an immediate rear front due to its hubs - railways, roads, and de-pots. In the Capital, SS repression against anti-fascists grew increasingly severe, as secrecy around the offensive being prepared - and which ultimately failed - was essential for its success. According to sources, by March, conditions in the city had deteriorated, and survival became difficult, coinciding with the German forces' gradually weakening capacity to respond effectively. This also affected pris-oners at Via Tasso, including Colonel Montezemolo, many of whom, after the attack on Via Rasella, were executed at the Ardeatine Caves (Fosse Ardeatine) at the end of the month.



Roberto Balzani (Forlì, 1961), is Full Professor of Contemporary History at the Di-SCI of the University of Bologna. He graduated in 1985 in Florence, researcher at the EUI in Florence (1986-1989), and became researcher at the Faculty of Political Science in Florence in 1992. He moved to Unibo in 1995 and worked at the Department of Historical Disciplines and then at the Faculty of Conservation of Cultural Heritage, of which he was dean in 2008-09. He has directed the Unibo Museum System since 2015, the Historical Archives since 2017, and in 2017-20 was president of the Institute of Artistic, Cultural and Natural Heritage of Emilia-Romagna. In 2017-19 he was part of the ANVUR Working Group on "TM and Social Impact" and from 2020-2022 he was GEV VQR 2015-19, Interdisciplinary TM expert. Since 2020 he has been a member of the CS of the "Bruno Visentini" Foundation. From 2020 to 2023 he has been a member of the CS of the Institute for the History of the Italian Risorgimento. Since 2023 he has been a resident corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of Bologna Institute. Since January 2024 he has been President of the Historical Museum of Liberation.

After 8 September 1943, many accounts describe the German occupation of Rome as especially challenging, which angered Hitler. Can you speak about the impact of the Roman Resistance on the conflict in Italy?

The Roman Resistance (September 1943-June 1944) was highly relevant in shaping national history. It involved a wide range of actors, from military and monarchist-Badoglio units to the National Liberation Committee, the Red Flag ('Bandiera Rossa'), Patriotic Action Groups, and the Office of Strategic Services agents. Each group had its own goals, occasionally cooperating but often competing. This diversity was amplified by Rome's unique circumstances, including, on the one hand, the Vatican's presence and, on the other, the Jewish community's attempts to survive after the October round-up. This meant that Rome was an almost unique case in Italy. As the months went by, even more significant portions of the population offered their support to the Resistance. Of course, we must distinguish the characteristics of this 'impact'. In military terms, the Resistance supported Allied efforts, while politically and morally, it served as a transformative period. Many reached decisive conclusions, not only about the fascist regime but also about the inadequacy of the institutions that failed to manage the transition after Mussolini's fall. For some, these were long-standing convictions, while others took on new responsibilities. The journey of many Army officers into the Resistance - whether in the Front or other partisan formations - signaled a revival of the Risorgimento spirit, placing 'independence' and 'freedom' above all. If one looks at the graffiti in the Via Tasso cells, this patriotic spirit is palpable: 'Viva l'Italia (Long live Italy)' is a recurring inscription.

Rome is now decorated with a gold medal for military valour, with its citation explicitly mentioning the atrocities committed in the Via Tasso prison. What does this mean for the people of Rome, and beyond?

For several months, the perpetrators at Via Tasso used methods perfected elsewhere to provide 'security' for the military control of a country deemed unreliable. This approach aligned with a totalitarian ideological vision, which identifies certain 'irreducible' groups - the Jews, anti-fascists (often generalised as 'communists'), and uncooperative soldiers - as threats to be brutally eliminated. For many, this meant deportation to concentration camps; others, as part of the urban struggle, paid a high price in blood.

Of course, the SS worked alongside the repressive structures of the fascist republic, a partnership that, while small in numbers, was brutally effective. Eliminations continued unabated even when Rome's fate was effectively sealed for the Nazi-Fascists. It's tempting to view Kappler and his men as agents of absolute evil, importing systems of torture and abuse previously unseen in Rome. But these acts were not anomalies - they were manifestations of a specific vision of power and violence that deserve careful examination, despite the horror they inspire. The Via Tasso experience disrupts the supposed 'normality' of life under wartime occupation, with dynamics that align it with similar sites of repression in northern Italy and across Europe. It can be explored both within its specific Roman context and as part of a broader comparison with other locations marked by Nazi-orchestrated terror. At its core, it reveals the workings of a repressive and totalitarian apparatus, where extreme violence was systematically administered through a state that sanctioned brutality as policy. The public and bureaucratic nature of this violence often reflects the criminal intent of its enforcers. Indeed, the cells of Via Tasso still echo with these memories - and powerfully so!

What is the Museum's vision for the future?

The Museum relies on funding from the Ministry of Culture, contributions from the Latium Region and the Municipality of Rome, and a dedicated network of volunteers, which allows the Museum to remain open to the public free of charge. Prof. Parisella, who has managed the Museum for many years, has ensured its survival with great dedication and helped grow the number of visitors, especially since the drop due to COVID-19.

I believe that, with the support provided by the Ministry, additional essential areas could be used to organise a better exhibition itinerary that respects the site's memorial nature as a tribute to its history while updating its communication methods. There are

many models to take inspiration from, and many history museums, especially those dedicated to World War II, are in our country. Some are typically military, others are hybrids, and still others are linked to the genius loci: among these, the Risiera di S. Sabba in Trieste, the Fossoli concentration camp (Modena), or the Widespread Museum of Resistance in Turin, which is probably the most up-to-date attempt to interweave places, history, and memory. Via Tasso holds incredible potential; it will be a matter of studying how it fits into the already partly structured urban, national, and international framework and what targets it can set for its future. In any case, the emphasis on the military dimension, evident even in the museum's current lay-out, will continue to be a crucial feature.

Facing page: Raid in front of Palazzo Barberini in Rome, by German and fascist Republican troops, after the partisan attack on Via Rasella.

Below: Poster cell.







Technology, training and values

The vision
of the Italian Army Chief of Staff

In recent years, the Italian Army has showcased its unique and versatile capabilities across a wide range of intervention tools, providing essential support to civil society both domestically and during international missions and operations abroad. Italian soldiers have played a crucial role in resolving global crises, whether by supporting and restoring peace or upholding international law. The Italian soldier's ability to blend valour and courage with altruism, generosity, and empathy towards local communities of diverse cultures and faiths has bolstered the authority and prestige of our glorious Tricolore. Italy's leadership in numerous international missions stands as a tangible recognition of a successful operational model. This model is defined by professionalism, the ability to interact with diverse forces, and a talent for dialogue, mediation, and developing innovative methods of cooperation. These qualities make Italian soldiers exceptional in their performance within complex environments. Our tradition is to feel fulfilled through the simple rewards of gratitude—the

'thank you's', smiles, and handshakes from those we have helped. These moments reaffirm the value of our choices and perspectives, which inspire us to consistently invest a great deal, sometimes entirely, in the Army's human capital. We believe this investment is essential for achieving our institutional objectives and a crucial prerequisite for success. Ultimately, the soldier's value identifies with the Army's value. Times have changed. We are living in an era marked by profound and rapid transformation, facing increasingly complex challenges and more competitive security paradigms. The war in Ukraine and instability throughout the broader Mediterranean have regrettably marked the end of a long period of peace. The convergence of symmetric conflicts and hybrid confrontations foreshadows a future –and a present– laden with pressing challenges that compel us to reassess our approach. New dynamics have emerged in the field, prompting changing requirements. We are witnessing a return to confrontations between

mechanised and armoured units, the deployment of artillery, tanks, and specialised mobility and counter-mobility equipment. Additionally, there has been a resurgence of field fortifications and trenches.

At the same time, the massive use of drones and so-called 'smart' munitions has significantly changed modern warfare. This shift has been disruptive for us Europeans, who have spent over 20 years engaged in peacekeeping missions abroad.

In situations like the current one, the central theme is that security is expressed in having an Army equipped for a variety of scenarios. This ranges from conventional warfare to emerging challenges, such as space, cyber threats, and disinformation, which can be exploited to sway public opinion and affect combatants' morale. It is essential for the Army to work in synergy with the other Services and in collaboration with various State apparatuses and all relevant national actors.

As a result, we must intensify our efforts to train, equip, deploy, and protect our soldiers to the best of



our potential. Time is of the essence, as the future remains uncertain. While politics and diplomacy play their roles, we must focus on being prepared, hoping that we will never have to engage in combat.

The Army's capability to operate across various traditional, new, and emerging domains requires a renewal process. This process should focus not only on a comprehensive modernisation and procurement programme of new means, equipment, advanced weapon systems, and technologies but also on innovations in organisational structures, force deployment doctrine, and training. Currently, the Army's strength is inadequate. Lessons from recent conflicts demonstrate that forces can become exhausted and need to be restored. Therefore, increasing the actual strength and reserve forces is essential to ensure readiness for deployment when required.

Since I took office, my goal has been to find a fusion point between technology, training and values. This is the main framework for developing my mandate as Chief of the Army. I aim to establish a clear boundary to guide all conceptual and implementation efforts, not by prioritising one over the others but by considering them as part of a comprehensive project. This approach emphasises the indispensable complementarity of these elements and the urgency of their integration.

Training is a crucial competence that intersects with three key dimensions, supporting an increasingly integrated approach without prejudice to the peculiarities of every single Service. Training has to deal with technological evolution and the challenges thrown up by the digital environment.

Technology acts as a capability multiplier that can significantly enhance performance in confrontations. Similarly, training ensures safety and the ability to know how to operate effectively serving as our insurance policy. Ultimately, innovation is the essential factor in achieving the desired results.

While the recipe may seem simple, it can only be effectively implemented

with a clear vision that guides every choice and solution. We require a reformist approach fostering openness to divergent and lateral thinking, enhancing analytical and reasoning skills, cultivating intuition and sensitivity, encouraging creative capacity, and, above all, embracing pragmatism.

The requirements of today's world no longer permit relying on established positions. Everyone must get involved. Therefore, a significant all-round cultural change is essential within the Army. This transformation includes the ability to quickly adapt to technological developments and, above all, a set of rules that enables us to rapidly incorporate these innovations into the military. Acquisition procedures must be streamlined so we can keep pace with the speed of the evolving world. All the same, it is crucial for the defence industry –not only in Italy but across Europe– to recognise the particular moment we are in and to make the necessary investments to address emerging needs.

This cultural shift can only occur in an organisational environment capable of avoiding intellectual stagnation, encouraging flexibility, embracing confrontation, and valuing the ideas of every individual within the institution. It should foster a productive context where everyone feels empowered to suggest alternative ideas and solutions without the fear of facing any penalties.

I intend to concentrate on young people, who are open to using cutting-edge technology and are uniquely positioned to embrace and navigate change. They can effectively facilitate the necessary transfer and exchange of experience and knowledge with civil society. They have many ideas to spare and, in the Army, 'ideas wear no ranks'.

Regarding training, the primary duty of a soldier, the nature of each command echelon must be shaped by the physical, technical, moral and spiritual capabilities required by 'warfare'. Although it is a word we might prefer to avoid, it is essential for soldiers to confront the realities of war and evaluate their own human and

professional capabilities in light of it.

Training requires financial resources, adequate facilities and training areas, along with specific legislation to protect soldiers and commanders. Adjustments to the regulatory framework are essential for soldiers to fight on equal footing in complex and constantly evolving scenarios. Military specificity is not an outdated privilege; rather, it reflects a commitment to a choice of life and a mission that prioritises duties to the nation over individual rights.

While technology can go anywhere, the true value lies in human resources. Even the most advanced technology should always be seen as a tool, never as an end.

The Army must continually adapt itself based on its commanders' insights, authority, and maturity. Command, at every echelon, is a mission understood as a duty to serve the country and a commitment to support the men and women in uniform. This characteristic guides commanders throughout their lives, influencing every decision they make. At the same time, it represents their true strength and the certainty that they are never alone; they can rely on their fellow soldiers, who share the same passion and trust. This mutual trust is developed and strengthened over time as they face challenges and hardships together.

If this is not the case if self-interest prevails in a commander's priorities, leading to a situation where individual vanity overshadows the common good and duties are placed below personal rights then it is time for that commander to rethink their path, regardless of the direction they have chosen.

The Army needs commanders who prioritise the well-being of their soldiers and their families, prepare them for the worst, and accept their mistakes provided those mistakes are not a result of negligence or bad faith. Such leaders should encourage initiative and foster growth among their personnel. Commanders should be open to dialogue and confrontation, driven by passion and the courage to make decisions. They should possess the ability to take action, recover from setbacks, and identify opportunities

and advantages when others only see critical issues. Ultimately, effective commanders should be capable of uniting rather than disrupting, doing rather than criticising, building up rather than demolishing.

The Army needs men and women at every command echelon who are willing to give credit where credit is due, lead by example, and set high standards for their fellow soldiers without tolerating mediocrity, sloth, or shifting blame. The comrades we share our experiences with play a seminal role in our development as leaders and individuals. Their respect and trust in us as their commanders are invaluable.

The life of a soldier is unique, filled with surprises, and offers perspectives that are often unexpected and sudden. It is our responsibility to embrace this life with intelligence, awareness, determination, and a strong sense of duty. We all have a highly challenging legacy and task at a time when the commitment to national security and international stability

continues to grow. Confronting these challenges requires solid foundations, clarity, and unity of purpose without disregarding the traditions, experiences, ideals, and values that we believe in and share.

The values we hold require us to respect the sacredness of our Institutions and ensure that no one is left behind, as the Army has always done. These values do not allow for exceptions, hesitations, or second thoughts. The functional-ethical bonds that stem from the commonality of values keep us united and help us overcome all selfishness, individualism and personal prominence. They enable us to overcome our limitations, face defeats with dignity, and celebrate victories with simplicity and humility. Values are the essence of our duty, which we offer without prejudice, divisiveness, or compromise, always in the name of peace, justice, and freedom. Whether you agree or not, this is the essence of the military mission.

Faced with a past and a future that converge into a complex and

threatening present, the path forward requires us to remain 'young'—a mindset that transcends mere age.

The young are those who take risks, strive for improvement, and stay true to themselves while avoiding easy and convenient choices. They ensure that their talents grow over time through hard work, nurturing a continual desire to challenge themselves further. We honour our units, celebrate the glories of our banners, and remember the sacrifices made by our fallen and wounded in the line of duty.

Identity and the resulting sense of unity are priceless. The more genuine our commitment to our unity is, the richer the future of the Army will be, and the more opportunities our children and future generations will have.

I believe in every single soldier in our Army. I ask you not to let me down.

Happy reading!

The Chief of Staff of the Army,
Lieutenant General
Carmine Masiello.





820
CARTUCCE PER A
CAL. 5,56 mm

The “battle of the bridges” in Nassiriya



Gian Marco Chiarini, a Lieutenant General currently in auxiliary reserve, served as Commander of the IT JOINT TASK FORCE IRAQ during Operation "Ancient Babylon". Below is his 6 April 2004 report, the day of the "Battle of the Bridges" in Nasiriyah.

When I opened my eyes, the artificial light filtering through the gaps in the door and the noises coming from the corridor gave me the feeling that everyone was in full activity. It was four in the morning on 6 April 2004. I was in Nasiriyah, Iraq, about to face what would come to be known as the "Battle of the Bridges".

We had been stationed in Nasiriyah for several months. We carried out many activities to support the local population. These included rebuilding public infrastructure such as schools, police stations, healthcare facilities, and the electrical, water, and sewer networks. We distributed basic supplies, particularly medicine packages for outlying hospitals. My 10th Engineer Regiment spent a week reinforcing the Euphrates River banks to prevent a potentially catastrophic flood. This operation had a powerful moral impact on the people of Dhi Qar.

In early April, the situation became difficult throughout southern Iraq following the arrest by the Americans of Sheikh Yacoobi, a spokesman and lieutenant of the Shiite leader Muqtada al Sadr. Rebel forces of minority Islamic parties and criminal gangs began attacking coalition forces throughout central and southern Iraq. In our province, the main problems arose in Nasiriyah, where militiamen of the Mahadi Army, the armed wing of the OMS (Office of Martyr Sadr), under the leadership of Sheikh Haus al Kafagy, caused unrest in the city and placed armed checkpoints near the three bridges over the Euphrates.

Nasiriyah, the most important city in Dhi Qar province, was under our contingent's responsibility. Its urban area has about half a million inhabitants; it is not easy to control it. The three bridges over the Eu-

phrates, which we designated Alfa, Bravo and Charlie, connect Iraq's south and north. Therefore, Nasiriyah is the critical access between the two parts of the country. Near the Alfa Bridge, on each of the banks of the Euphrates, there were two MSU bases (made up of a Carabinieri regiment and a platoon of the Portuguese National Guard): the "Maestrale" base, the target of the attack on 12 November, and the "Libeccio" base, which until January had remained the headquarters of the MSU. The strategic significance of these three bridges was immense; their closure posed a severe danger to us because in the northern part of the city were the headquarters of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), the offices and homes of the Governor, Ms Contini, at the time, and the administrative staff.

On the evening of 2 April, armed militiamen blocked a patrol near the CPA returning from the northern sector of the province. A ni-

ght operation was necessary to extract our personnel, which we carried out successfully without engaging in combat. However, tensions continued to rise in the city. On the evening of 3 April, protests near the Libeccio base turned violent, with demonstrators throwing incendiary devices against MSU armoured vehicles parked inside the compound. On 4 April, there was an exchange of fire near the bridges: some of our patrols were targeted and fired back. In the afternoon, an MSU patrol was ambushed near Shuk al Shuyuk: seven of us, including five Portuguese colleagues, suffered minor injuries. In the meantime, sporadic attacks were conducted against Coalition forces in the rest of the province. The day passed with continuous threats and provocations against our personnel in the Libeccio base. On the same day, Sheikh Al Kafagy asked for a meeting with me, and I agreed.

In the room, the atmosphere was

very tense. The sheikh's spokesman presented a document outlining various demands. While some seemed reasonable, I made it clear that the document was a good basis for discussion, but the trade-off had to be the return of normality in the city. The sheikh was not satisfied and threatened war on Nasiriyah. I calmly replied, "...It does not scare us. We are soldiers; we know how to wage war!" At this statement, which perhaps the interpreter, gripped by fear, translated inappropriately, the OMS delegation left.

On 5 April, my division commander, General Stuart, ordered us to return to patrol the city, re-establish order and security in Nasiriyah, and regain control of the bridges over the Euphrates River.

In the afternoon, the Commander of the Romanian regiment, Col. Ciuka, came to me and said: "I have a national constraint, and I cannot enter Nasiriyah, what can I do?". I replied: "Make me a defensive flank towards Shuk al Shuyuk so



I can redeploy my men elsewhere". They did and had their first firefights since the Second World War.

On the morning of 6 April, when I went to the operations room, my Military Assistant, Capt. Caccia-guerra, and the Chief of Staff, Lt. Col. Monteduro, came to meet and inform me of the situation: the columns had already moved at 2 o'clock and had not encountered major problems. The situation became clear after an hour: the Alfa bridge had been taken swiftly on both banks while there had been fighting for the Bravo, but the two banks were in our hands. The plan was that, as soon as we captured the Alfa Bridge, a platoon would immediately head for the CPA headquarters in armoured vehicles and remain there to strengthen its defence. This part of the plan worked perfectly. By 5:30 a.m., we had gained control of the first two bridges on both sides; the third bridge had a tactical problem, as there were no commanding positions on our side

south of the city, but only swamps, and the bridge was extremely long. For this reason, I had infiltrated some special forces teams into the northern part of the city during the night. When we realised that we could not take the northern abutment by crossing the bridge due to the strong enemy reaction, our special forces approached the bridge from the north. Shortly thereafter, I received communication that our forces had women and children in front of them, being used as "human shields." I decided, therefore, that we did not need the second abutment of the bridge since, in any case, we had control of the transit on two bridges, and so, I withdrew the infiltrated forces.

The reaction of the militias was very violent and gave rise to an armed confrontation for the rest of the day (about 14 hours of fighting!). In addition to the fire of small arms and mortars, they launched about 400 anti-tank rockets at us, but my soldiers did not move from their positions.

On the afternoon of 6 April, thanks to the skilful mediation of the Governor and some talks we conducted with the local leaders, a two-day "ceasefire" agreement was reached. This agreement included the control of the southern part of the city and the bridges by the Italian Joint Task Force and the control of the northern part by the Iraqi police. This should have allowed the militiamen to collect the wounded and disarm and disperse. In the following two days, life resumed to normal in the southern part, under our control, with schools and shops operating, while in the northern part, life remained difficult. We saw militiamen at night trying to reinforce their positions along the river. When the agreement expired, the situation was still at a standstill, so we resumed our positions. The "ceasefire" had ended at midnight, but around that time, I received, from the Governor, the request to grant another hour of extension, and I agreed. Thanks to her, we managed to reach an agreement, so, at one in the morning, we saw

the militiamen abandon their weapons and flee. We had agreed not to intervene on the personnel who were going away.

As we watched the militiamen flee, we knew it was not over; other challenges, other fights, and other risks awaited us! We had had, in the firefights, fourteen wounded. When I visited them at the field hospital, I found them with high morale, and they told me: *"Don't worry about us, Commander and continue with the operation!"*. It seemed as if it was them who had to comfort me. At that moment, I felt grateful to my soldiers, women and men, who had followed me with courage and selflessness. I will never forget them!

Gian Marco Chiarini, Lt. General on auxiliary reserve was born in Ferrara in 1952. A graduate of the 153rd Promotion of the Military Academy of Modena, he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in 1973. During his career, he has held prestigious positions: Liaison Officer at the Armoured Center in Fort Knox, USA, Chief of Staff of the 3rd Italian Division.



Adaptation is our strength

Exercise Steadfast Defender 2024 and
the Allied Reaction Force





"The nature of war is constant change".

Sun Tzu

On 4 April 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty was signed. In Article 5, the new allies agreed that *"an armed attack against one or more of them... shall be considered an attack against them all"* and that following such an event, each country would take *"such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force"*.

In the East, in 1955, the Soviet Union and the Eastern European states under its control formed the Warsaw Pact, which for decades represented the Eastern Flank of the Alliance. This was materialised in the Berlin Wall, which from 1961 onwards would constitute an impenetrable boundary for years and mark the beginning of the historical period we know as the "Cold War."

This unfought conflict would persist in various forms for 40 years, until the years from 1989 to 1991, when the collapse of the Soviet Union first raised existential doubts in Western public opinion: is NATO still needed? How long should the Eastern Flank be considered the West's primary concern?

To reaffirm its identity in the absence of an evident threat, NATO embarked

on a process of renewal and partnership. With a radical shift in approach, it distanced itself from the Alliance's "historic" reason for being –the principle of Collective Defence– apparently less relevant after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Over the course of three decades of transformation, three pivotal moments stand out: the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, the invasion of Crimea in 2014, and the armed assault on Ukraine on 24 February 2022, which effectively brought war back to Europe.

It became clear that NATO needed to accelerate its adaptation processes not merely to keep pace with the times but to anticipate an increasingly uncertain future. This future is defined by the necessity of operating with innovative military capabilities to address the challenges of hybrid and multi-domain warfare in the years to come.

The decisions made at NATO summits in Madrid and Vilnius have proven to be historic. The adoption of the new Strategic Concept in Madrid and the new regional defence plans in Vilnius has allowed the Alliance to resume its strategic adaptation process to the changes in the international situation with renewed momentum.

After two years necessary to structu-

re a complete and coherent thought, 2024 is a crucial year for the Alliance, which sees as focal points the verification of the operability of regional plans through the conduct of Exercise Steadfast Defender 2024 and the transition from the NATO Response Force (NRF) to the Allied Reaction Force (ARF).

Steadfast Defender 2024 brought together the most extensive series of exercises since the end of the Cold War, marking the beginning of a new era in NATO's 21st-century deterrence and defence construct. It demonstrated the capability of the Alliance's Command and Control Structure and its assigned units to conduct and sustain complex, multi-domain operations over an extended period, thanks in part to the enduring strength of the transatlantic bond, which remains as strong today as it once was.

For personnel serving at Allied Joint Force Command Brunssum, Steadfast Defender 2024 was an exceptional opportunity to display their capabilities in planning and conducting multi-domain operations, demonstrating their ability to quickly address the few gaps which had emerged over two decades, during which the Command had been exclusively focused on the reach-back function for the Operation in Afghanistan. Three-

e-quarters of the activities were conducted under Brunssum's control, with a peak deployment of approximately 60,000 men and women out of a total of 90,000.

The activities under JFC Brunssum's control began with Brilliant Jump, an exercise designed to validate NATO's standby reaction force, the Very-High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), which is the immediately deployable element of the NRF. This year, the VJTF comprised Albania, Poland, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Turkey troops. Through a significant logistical effort conducted in Poland involving civilian infrastructure and institutions, the VJTF subsequently integrated with the main body of the NRF and additional Polish forces, bringing together a total of nine nations. The scenario and location of this exemplary Exercise contributed to demonstrating NATO's resolve and unity, once again, along the Eastern flank after thirty years.

Subsequent exercises further assessed the capability of member nations to support the considerable military effort for potential operations in conventional warfare. These exercises tested the capability to deploy reinforcements in terms of personnel, means, and materials rapidly and effectively to the time and place where they are needed.

Achieving the level of efficiency demonstrated during Steadfast Defender required a considerable effort to align the national planning of each Ally with NATO's framework, resulting in an extraordinary leap forward

in terms of efficiency and economy of the tools employed (1). This achievement also emphasised the critical importance of insisting on pursuing full interoperability.

At such a delicate moment in history, Steadfast Defender delivered a clear and unequivocal message: NATO is capable of defending the territory of its individual Member States and stands ready to do so at any time!

In this context, the recent entry of Finland and Sweden not only marks the swift culmination of a process initiated during the Madrid summit but also significantly expands the Alliance's territory and capabilities, making it stronger than ever.

Finally, a further change must be considered, based on the New Force Model: for over 20 years, NATO's concept of "high readiness forces" has been successfully ensured by the NRF. This year, the Alliance's rapid response capability will evolve into the new concept of the Allied Reaction Force (ARF), a much larger set of forces that will take into account the lessons learned from the long NRF experience and support the concept of Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic area.

The ARF will comprise a complex array of multi-domain forces drawn from across the Alliance, capable of intervening at short notice and carrying out a full range of tasks. Under the authority of the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, these forces constitute a strategic reserve to be deployed wherever necessary, either to strengthen deterren-

ce operations or provide a prompt response to emerging crises.

As NATO's Operational Headquarters, Allied Joint Force Command Brunssum has been a cornerstone of security and freedom in Central and Northern Europe for over 70 years. Throughout this time, it has continuously evolved and adapted to the changing security context. Allied Joint Force Command Brunssum has consistently been at the heart of NATO's strategic planning, transitioning from the framework of the Graduated Readiness Plan to the modern construct of the Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA). This framework, embodied in the new Regional Defence Plans, underscores NATO's renewed relevance of NATO as a guarantor of freedom, democracy and respect for the international order.

NOTE

(1) *This also applied to the following exercises: Trojan Footprint 24, Crystal Arrow, Saber Strike 24, Immediate Response 24, Swift Response 24, Brave Warrior, Spring Storm, and Grand Quadriga, the latter conducted in Germany, which marked the conclusion of Steadfast Defender 2024.*

Lt. General **Guglielmo Luigi MIGLIETTA** born in Lecce, Italy, class of 1961, is as of June 3, 2022 the Commander of NATO Allied Joint Force Command Brunssum (JFC BS). The post comes from his international experience as Commander of Joint Task Force Lebanon and UNIFIL Sector West in Lebanon, NATO's "KFOR" mission in Kosovo and NATO Rapid Deployable Corps Italy. A freelance journalist, he has a Master's degree in "Strategic Studies" (U.S. Army War College) and in "Public and Institutional Communication" (Roma Tre University). He has, in addition, attended the Royal College of Defense Studies in Britain. He has commanded units of every orderly level, from platoon to Brigade, within the Cavalry. He is the recipient of numerous national and international honors granted by Allied and Partner countries.





Why the Red Sea?

A strategic hub for world trade

The Red Sea crisis is threatening global economic stability. Attacks by Houthi rebels are significantly disrupting international supply chains, forcing major shipping companies to opt for alternative, much longer routes. What will the consequences be? Why is this waterway so crucial for international trade? Italy plays a key role, having been designated by the European Union as the leading nation of the tactical command for the Aspides security operation.

The Red Sea is crucial for maritime transport, as it separates the Arabian Peninsula from Africa. At its northern entrance lies the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean Sea, while at its southern entrance is the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, which leads into the Gulf of Aden. 20,000 ships pass through these waters yearly,

accounting for one-third of global container traffic and roughly 15% of the world's transported oil. The route is indispensable, linking the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean and serving as a vital conduit for the flow of goods between Asia and Europe. In particular, the Suez Canal facilitates the rapid movement of goods, including oil and liquefied natural gas, significantly cutting travel time for shipping routes.

Consider that the navigation distance from Ras Tanura, Saudi Arabia, via the Cape of Good Hope, which implies circumnavigating Africa, is approximately 11,000 nautical miles. In contrast, using the Suez Canal, which crosses the Isthmus of Suez and provides vital navigation facilities between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, reduces this distance

to 6,400 nautical miles a reduction of 4,700 nautical miles, or 42%.

Since the attacks began, the number of containers usually crossing the Red Sea has dropped by more than half. Travel times have increased by one or even two weeks. The diversion via the Cape of Good Hope diversifies shipping routes and raises security problems, resulting in delays and higher costs. Sectors such as furniture and automotive are bearing the brunt of these changes. The critical situation in maritime navigation has widespread implications affecting businesses and consumers globally. Major companies like Tesla, Volvo, and Ikea have warned about potential delivery delays. Insurance and fuel costs have also increased. An additional risk of using alternative routes



around Africa is the growing threat of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea and along the southwest coast of Africa. The strategic importance of the Suez Canal was demonstrated in March 2021 when a massive 225,000-ton container ship, the “Ever Given”, got stranded in the canal due to 40-knot winds and a sandstorm that likely caused poor visibility. It is estimated that goods worth around ten billion dollars were immobilised for days due to the long queue of hundreds of ships unable to pass through the canal. This incident highlighted the vital role of the waterway and underscored its logistical and infrastructural vulnerabilities.

Why do the Houthis obstruct Red Sea trade routes? Since the October 2023 incursion by Hamas into Israel and the subsequent Israeli

offensives against military and civilian targets, the Yemeni Shia armed group, officially known as Ansar Allah (Partisans of Allah), has escalated its attacks. Likely supported by Iran, the group has targeted commercial and military ships in the Red Sea, focusing on those perceived as aligned with the Israeli cause. Their primary objective is to pressure Tel Aviv to stop its actions in the Gaza Strip. However, a considerable number of the vessels attacked have no direct ties to Israel. These assaults -marked by ship hijackings and the use of drones, missiles, and motorboats- have not only significantly heightened regional tensions but also disrupted the passage of foreign ships through the Bab al-Mandab Strait, a critical waterway for global trade. Beyond their pro-Palestinian

stance, the Shia-Zaydi armed group is also leveraging this opportunity to strengthen its popularity in Yemen. After a decade of conflict, Yemen is enduring severe economic and humanitarian crises, and the Houthis struggle to provide basic services. By shifting focus from internal issues, these attacks position the Partisans of Allah at the forefront of a regional confrontation with Israel and the United States under the banner of defending the Palestinian cause. Lacking international legitimacy, the Yemeni rebel group seeks to draw global attention and demonstrate that major actors cannot overlook their influence. Despite diplomatic efforts, it is unlikely that attacks on ships will abate in the near term. In fact, the Houthis are gaining domestic support and remain incentivised to continue their attacks as long as the conflict in Gaza persists.

In response to the increasing Houthi attacks on ships in the Red Sea, the European Union approved the military naval operation Aspides, with Italy in command of the forces. In a statement, the Ministry of Defence declares, ‘The destroyer Caio Duilio is currently deployed in the Red Sea, ensuring maritime surveillance to protect merchant’s vessels and safeguard trade routes. The area of operation established by the EU mandate covers the maritime space between Bab el-Mandeb and Hormuz, including the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Arabian Sea, Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf. As agreed at the European level, Operation Aspides will be a defensive mission focusing on protecting ships from sea attacks, following international law, upholding the principle of freedom of navigation, and directly supporting national interests.

The ongoing crisis in the Red Sea, triggered by Houthi rebel attacks, not only highlights the vulnerability of global trade routes but also has significant implications for the business and corporate sectors. It has become crucial to reassess and diversify trade routes and supply chain strategies, potentially paving the way for a transformation in global trade dynamics.



by
Andrea Spada

Anti-IDF militias' copied and recycled weapons in Gaza

Hamas' arsenal primarily consists of weapons made in Russia, China, Iran and North Korea. It includes assault rifles, sniper rifles, shoulder-mounted machine guns, shoulder-launched surface-to-air missiles, anti-tank projectiles, and rockets—many of which are homemade in Gaza.

An Associated Press study, which includes hundreds of videos and photographs taken during these months of fighting, shows that the Palestinian terrorist group has accumulated an arsenal of weapons that apparently originate from specific countries: Iranian precision rifles, AK-47 assault rifles from China and Russia, grenades from North Korea, and anti-tank rockets, many of which are secretly assembled in the Strip. Those who reviewed the images were able to identify features indicating where many of the weapons wielded by Hamas fighters were manufactured. However, the analysis does not provide evidence that these weapons were supplied directly by the governments of those countries or purchased through the thriving Middle Eastern black market, where weapons and components are advertised for sale on social media in war-torn areas like Iraq, Libya, and Syria.

What is clear is that many images show Hamas militants carrying weapons that appear relatively new evidence that the terror group has found ways to smuggle the weapons past the Israeli blockade, perhaps by sea, through tunnels, or hidden in cargoes of food and other goods.

Among the most distinctive weapons is the AM-50 Sayyad (Arabic for "hunter"), an Iranian-made sniper rifle that fires .50-caliber rounds powerful enough to pierce up to a centimetre of steel. The AM-50 Sayyad has previously been seen on battlefields

in Yemen and Syria, as well as in the hands of Shiite militias in Iraq.

Hamas fighters are also equipped with a variety of Soviet-era weapons copied and produced in Iran and China, including variants of the 9M32 Strela, a heat-seeking, shoulder-launched anti-aircraft missile system. Another weapon in their arsenal is a version of the Chinese Type 80 machine gun, a model also copied by the Iranians and rebranded as the PKM-T80.

Among the more sophisticated weapons produced by Hamas is a copy of the Russian PG-7VR anti-tank rocket, which is specifically designed to defeat reactive armour systems, such as those used on Israel's Merkava Mark VI tanks. These tanks are covered in explosive plates that detonate outward to destroy incoming projectiles. In propaganda videos, masked militants can be seen assembling a version of the Russian rocket, which Hamas has renamed the Al-Yasin 105, in honour of the group's founder, who was killed in an Israeli air strike in 2004. While the original Russian version can penetrate up to five feet of steel armour, it remains unclear whether Hamas's homemade explosives are as powerful.

Israeli military officials have stated that the group also relies on a wide "collection" of homemade weapons, often crafted from readily available civilian materials. Examples include a launcher capable of firing 14 rockets simultaneously and the "Zouari"

drone, an explosives-laden aircraft used to target Israeli observation towers and disable cameras during the 7 October attack.

Additionally, in a tactic learned from the battlefields of Ukraine, Hamas appears to have acquired or replicated Iranian-designed drones equipped with warheads that detonate upon impact, as well as Chinese-made quadcopter drones modified to drop explosives on tanks and troops.

Israeli Unexploded Ordnance

While the weapons come, directly or indirectly, from these countries, one might wonder: who supplies the explosives used by Hamas? The answer is Israel — or, more specifically, Israeli unexploded ordnance — which, over the years, has become the primary source of explosives for Hamas. A New York Times investigation has revealed to what extent Hamas has been able to build many of its rockets and anti-tank weapons using hundreds of unexploded Israeli munitions in Gaza. Years of bombing have left the entire Strip littered with thousands of tons of unexploded ordnance, ready to be dismantled and repurposed.

Hamas once relied on chemical fertilisers to create explosive materials for its rockets; however, since 2007, Israel has imposed a severe blockade on the Gaza Strip, limiting the import of goods, including electronics and computer

equipment, which could also be used to build weapons. This blockade, along with the partial closure of smuggling tunnels, has spurred Hamas to innovate and adapt, effectively building a sort of military industry in Gaza. While some laboratories operate above ground, the majority are underground.

How Hamas produces its weapons remains a mystery, as pointed out by analysts from Calibre Obscura, a website focused on weapons in the hands of terrorist groups in the Middle East and North Africa. However, these analysts believe Hamas is capable of producing improvised explosive devices (IEDs), rockets, suicide drones, and rocket launchers.

In 2014, after the war with Israel, Hamas established “specialised” teams to search for and collect unexploded munitions. Today, the group’s production capabilities are advanced enough to allow them to extract explosives from Israeli warheads and repurpose them. At the beginning of the current war, a video surfaced showing militants assembling Al-Yasin 105 rockets in an underground facility.

Hamas has also benefited from unexpected strokes of luck. In 2019, its militants discovered thousands of munitions aboard two British military ships sunk by German U-boats off the Gaza coast during the First World War. One of these, HMS M15, was sunk on 11 November 1917. This discovery enabled Hamas to produce hundreds of new rockets.

Webography

<https://apnews.com/article/israel-hamas-war-guns-weapons-missiles-smuggling-adae9dae4c48059d2a3c8e5d565daa30>

<https://theconversation.com/where-do-israel-and-hamas-get-their-weapons-220762>

<https://english.elpais.com/international/2024-02-03/hamas-weaponry-made-in-gaza.htm#>


<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/28/world/middleeast/israel-hamas-weapons-rockets.htm>





The case of Nagorno Karabakh

What does Azerbaijan's victory
over the armenians teach Us?



Since 1 January 2024, the Artsakh Republic –a state with limited recognition in the Caucasian region of Nagorno Karabakh, disputed between Armenia and Azerbaijan– has officially ceased to exist. In a lightning offensive unleashed on 19 September 2023, lasting less than 48 hours, Azerbaijan attacked the capital, Stepanakert, leading to the surrender and disbandment of Artsakh's Armed Forces. Many members of the Republic's government were arrested, and the local Armenian population fled to Armenia. Despite being overshadowed by international events due to the war in Ukraine and the Hamas attack in Israel a few weeks later, Azerbaijan's conquest of Nagorno Karabakh not only reshapes the geopolitical balance in the South Caucasus but also serves as a significant case study for military doctrine. It offers insights into how strategic and tactical choices are effectively matched and emphasises the importance of combining conventional and unconventional means to achieve victory.

From the Birth of Artsakh (1992) to the 44-Day War (2020)

The dispute over Nagorno Karabakh traces back to Soviet nationality policy. Armenians primarily inhabited this region, although the exact population figures and timelines are subjects of historiographical debate. Nonetheless, the USSR included the region in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan as an '*Autonomous Region*' back in 1923. After the fall of the Soviet Union in December 1991, the local Armenian population voted in a referendum to secede from Azerbaijan with plebiscitary results, creating the Republic of Artsakh (the Armenian name for Nagorno Karabakh) with Stepanakert as its capital. Although not internationally recognised, Artsakh was de facto an Armenian enclave within Azerbaijan, maintaining a dependent relationship with the government in Yerevan.

The geopolitical clash quickly turned into an ideological struggle with ethnic and religious dimensions. Azerbaijan, which has a

predominantly Turkish and Muslim population, laid claim to Nagorno Karabakh, receiving international support from Turkey. Conversely, Armenia supported the Republic of Artsakh and its Armenian Christian population, with Russia as its main international ally. During the war from 1992 to 1994, Armenia made significant gains, consolidating the positions of the Artsakh Republic and occupying seven districts in Azerbaijan. The conflict remained 'frozen' for three decades, with occasional, non-decisive outbreaks of fighting, such as in April 2016. A major turning point in the Armenian-Azerbaijani dispute occurred from September to November 2020. During this conflict, known as the '*44-day war*', Azerbaijan used Turkish (Bayraktar TB2) and Israeli (Harop and Orbiter 1K) remotely piloted aircraft, as well as swarms of suicide mini-APRs, modelled on the STM Kargu quadcopters, to deliver a decisive blow to Armenia's war capabilities in Artsakh. These drones played a crucial role in supporting ground manoeuvres, enabling the Azerbaijani forces to destroy a substantial number of tanks, artillery vehicles, armoured combat vehicles and personnel carriers. The centrality of drones in targeting the enemy's rear areas, as later demonstrated in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, was already exemplified in the 44-day war.

The Final Offensive in 2023: Azerbaijani Victory or Armenian Defeat?

An analysis of the Azerbaijani blitzkrieg from 19 to 20 September 2023 reveals careful planning and the successful implementation of the element of surprise, a classic principle of the art of warfare. This was made possible by accurate strategic assessments guiding tactical choices. The first preparatory step involved the occupation of the Lachin corridor through an exemplary 'hybrid warfare' approach. The Lachin corridor, a 5-6 km land route, was the only direct link between Nagorno Karabakh and Armenia. In December 2022, groups of self-proclaimed



environmentalists from Azerbaijan – among whom were undercover military personnel– began to occupy access to the corridor. In the following months, they conducted a series of sabotage actions: damaging infrastructure and high-voltage lines, cutting gas and electricity supplies, and blocking internet connections. Over nine months, from December 2022 to September 2023, the Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh were progressively isolated, facing severe repercussions not only material due to the lack of basic necessities but also psychological, stemming from a sense of abandonment by the Armenian homeland.

The Lāçin blockade was executed unconventionally to test the enemy's military reaction capability and diplomatic and international repercussions (concerning the role of Russian peacekeepers tasked

with monitoring the area under the 2020 ceasefire agreements) without formally taking responsibility for hostile actions. The test yielded encouraging results for Azerbaijan: despite protests by international organisations about the illegal nature of the blockade, neither Armenia nor Russia intervened to break it.

Another crucial aspect is the timing of the attack, launched immediately after a severe internal political crisis in the Republic of Artsakh. On 1 September, Artsakh's president, Arik Harutunyan –considered close to Armenia's premier Nicol Pashinyan– resigned, citing difficulties in managing the blockade. Ten days later, however, his designated successor, Samvel Shahramanyan, received an icy reception from Pashinyan, bordering on delegitimation. Thus, in this context, with the Lāçin blockade consolidated,

internal political chaos, and misunderstandings with Armenia, Azerbaijan launched an 'anti-terrorist operation' on 19 September (also in violation of the ceasefire agreements), confronting a disorganised enemy chain of command and control and managing to seize territory in less than 48 hours. The following week, a decree formally sanctioned the dissolution of the separatist republic effective from 2024.

Further aspects can be highlighted from the Armenian perspective, offering valuable lessons from such an apparently sudden and objectively inglorious capitulation. Indeed, 'intelligence with the enemy' played an important role in internal disintegration. For example, in the Armenian press, the controversial figure of Commander Samvel Babayan, a former Defence Minister, rival of Shahramanyan, and close to Arme-



nian PM Pashinyan, has generated significant controversy. Babayan managed to reach Armenia despite the Laçın blockade, avoiding arrest, which suggests privileged contacts with Azerbaijani authorities. He was, therefore, accused of negotiating a diplomatic solution with the enemy without any mandate, allegedly intending to be installed in power later, ultimately being manipulated by the Azerbaijanis. In contrast, Babayan qualified his opponents as being ‘agents of Russia’ incapable of resolving the blockade and responsible for the collapse of Artsakh. These complex internal disagreements underscore an even more significant rift between Armenia and Russia. Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan had been critical of Russia’s ‘special military operation’ in Ukraine, even planning joint Armenian exercises with the United

States. This context explains how Russia –despite being part of a military alliance with Armenia, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO)– failed to intervene to break the Laçın blockade or halt the Azerbaijani blitzkrieg. Conversely, Azerbaijan has strengthened its alliance system in recent years. Relations with Turkey have remained excellent, culminating in the founding of the National Defence University in 2022, consistent with President Aliyev’s goal of transforming the Azerbaijani army into a ‘miniature Turkish army’. Additionally, Baku has forged very strong relations with Israel to counter a common regional competitor: Iran. It was precisely the collaboration with Israel that enabled the modernisation of Azerbaijan’s war capabilities displayed during the 44-Day War.

However, the achieved technical-military superiority appears to be merely a corollary to a more articulated strategy. Azerbaijan retook Nagorno Karabakh by applying closely Sun-Tzu’s famous maxim that ‘supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy’s resistance without fighting’ (The Art of War), exploiting at least three significant disruptions in the adversary camp: the internal rift among the Artsakh Armenians (culminating in the political crisis at the top of the republic prior to the Azerbaijani blitzkrieg); the rift between the Artsakh Armenians and the Yerevan government in Armenia (evident in the failure to react to the Laçın blockade); and the rift at the international level between Armenia and Russia (with Moscow allowing Azerbaijan to punish Yerevan for its attempts at rapprochement with the West).



Leni Riefenstahl

by
Fabrizio Luperto

The director of “Olympia”

If there is one name in the history of cinema forever entwined with Nazi propaganda, it is Leni Riefenstahl. Born in Berlin in 1902, she was not only a photographer and documentary filmmaker but also an innovative and brilliant director.

Always drawn to the arts and entertainment, she began as a dancer, later became an appreciated actress, and finally a director. Her career behind the camera took off in 1932 when she met Hitler. After hearing a speech by the future Chancellor of Germany, Leni wrote to him requesting a meeting. That single encounter was enough for Hitler to appoint her as his trusted director.

Her first assignment was to film the congress/rally of the National Socialist Party following their rise to power (Nuremberg, 1933). The result was the documentary *Der Sieg des Glaubens* (1933), followed by *Triumph of the Will* (1935), which documented the 1934 congress. Riefenstahl was granted a degree of creative freedom and significant resources for this second project. However, there were controversies and differences of opinion with the mighty minister of propaganda, Goebbels, who likely resented the beautiful director's productive independence due to Hitler's esteem and friendship.

Although her extraordinary skills were already evident, these works remained propaganda films, unsuitable to secure her the international recognition she arguably deserved.

The turning point came when she was commissioned to document the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Hitler granted Leni full creative control over the project, providing cutting-edge technical equipment, 45 camera operators, abundant technicians and editors, majestic sets, and unlimited film stock.

The result of this monumental production effort was *Olympia* (1938), a film divided into two parts with a combined runtime of just under four hours (various versions of differing lengths exist) and considered one of the best films of its time.

“*Olympia*”, it must be noted, is a regime film with a specific purpose: to present Germany as peaceful and enlightened to the world, even as the country was, in reality, preparing for war.

The clearest example of this intent lies in the attention dedicated to the victories of Jesse Owens. While many American newspapers in the southern United States sought to downplay his achievements, the National Socialist film celebrated them an attempt to mask the deeply racist ideology at its core.

Despite everything, Leni Riefenstahl made “*Olympia*” not just a celebration of Germany and a chronicle of the games but also a high-level aesthetic work, with references to classical culture in a symbolic handover between Greece and Germany.

Many of the director's ideas were absolutely innovative for the time: the

camera angles, the underwater shots during the swimming competitions, and a play of lights, shadows, and reflections.

Over the years, the film had to undergo several cuts and fierce censorship due to the political climate of the time (hence the different lengths of the various versions).

For example, after the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia, the athletes from that country were removed from the film. It is clear that the Second World War and Nazi violence cast a negative light on the German director, who was also accused of using Sinti extras, who were detained in Nazi concentration camps, for the film *Lowlands*.

After the war, following a period of detention and several trials, despite her attempts to dissociate herself from Nazism by denying any involvement and only admitting that she offered her talent out of love for her work, it became clear that there would be no more room for her in the world of European cinema and, above all, that she would never find producers willing to finance her projects.

She moved to Africa, where she shot documentaries and created highly appreciated photography books. Leni Riefenstahl died in 2003 at the age of 101.

Her closeness to Hitler and her contribution to building the regime's consensus cannot, however, overshadow her great artistic dimension, cultural influence, technical innovations and prestige as a visionary director.



The banality of evil and a man

Friedrich Jeckeln, from loser to SS butcher



The Obergruppenführer of the SS, Friedrich August Jeckeln, was primarily responsible for some of the worst pogroms that took place in Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe between 1941 and 1944.

As the Higher Commander of the SS and Police (Höhere SS und Polizeiführer, HSSPF) – in southern Russia in the Reich Commissariat in Ukraine, based in Kiev – he carried out horrific massacres. He later became Commander of the Reichskommissariat Ostland in Riga, Latvia, on 30 October 1941, leaving behind a trail of blood and pain. Furthermore, from 22 February 1944, Jeckeln was appointed to the same position in Northern Russia, expan-

ding his power until January 1945, and earning numerous decorations for his role in fighting against the partisans and the Red Army.

Captured by the Soviets, before being executed, he confessed to causing the death of between 190,500 and 253,500 people, though he emphasised that he was not able to provide precise figures. Yet, nothing would have suggested that this man could become such a ruthless executioner. He chose his path freely, shaped by his childish, victimised and bloodthirsty worldview, as well as his insatiable hunger for power. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that cultural factors played a significant role in shaping him.

Friedrich August Jeckeln was born on 2 February 1895 in Hornberg, a town in the Black Forest, Grand Duchy of Baden, German Empire. The third of five children of a very wealthy industrialist, he was orphaned when he was only four years old. After graduating from high school, beginning studies (which he never completed) to become an engineer, and joining the army, Friedrich Jeckeln faced the global event that would turn his life and the lives of millions of people upside down: the First World War (1914-1918). A brave soldier, the very young Jeckeln fought on the Western Front for two years, suffering a wound and horrible diseases contracted in the filth of

the trenches. Later, in 1916, at just over twenty years old, he served on the home front as a pilot, but without taking part in aerial combat.

In this terrible period, however, Jeckeln's life was very rewarding. He was a highly decorated Second Lieutenant and even received the Iron Cross, Second Class. For his cultural world, this meant being a good German who did his duty and protected Germany from its enemies – an extremely important concept for a young man of that generation. In 1918, a few months before the end of the war, Jeckeln married despite his father-in-law's hostility. On 11 November, Germany surrendered to the Allies after the fall of the Kaiser, the authoritarian model from which Jeckeln drew his inspiration.

The idea soon took hold that the new republican government, led by socialists and Jews, sparking unrest at home, was the main reason for the defeat of the Reich. This government was even said to have signed a shameful armistice without the knowledge of the army, which remained undefeated on the battlefield.

This victimised and false view of reality quickly won the hearts of veterans, who considered it unthinkable that they had sacrificed their lives for such an unjust defeat. As a result, they believed the blame must inevitably fall on a plot hatched by socialists and Jews.

Furthermore, the reduction of the army, imposed by the victors, and the collapse of the German monarchy in November 1918 shattered Jeckeln's dreams of becoming a professional officer, and he was demobilised in January 1919.

This marked the beginning of the most unsatisfactory phase of his life, a phase that Jeckeln would try in every way to erase or, at least, modify after he became General of the SS. He was the archetypal far-right war veteran, disillusioned by the new democratic Germany. Expelled from the army, Jeckeln initially worked on his father-in-law's farm.

Between 1922 and 1924, he became a member of the "Order of Young Germans", a right-wing organisation. Shortly thereafter, in 1925, due

to economic issues and his growing anti-Semitism, he finally broke up with his father-in-law, whom he described as the "typical Jew".

From 1925 to 1929, he held various temporary jobs, first as a civil engineer, despite lacking the necessary qualifications. During this period, he divorced his wife – who was Jewish, by the way – and abandoned his children, remarrying after a few months. However, his professional life was erratic and disastrous: he began drinking and, shortly afterward, declared bankruptcy. Burdened by debts with his former father-in-law and the alimony payments to his ex-wife, he would later describe himself as a "failure" during this period.

But suddenly, a man, also a veteran, who had witnessed the same Jewish-communist plot steal victory from the German Imperial Army, emerged, and Jeckeln saw an opportunity for redemption. This man was Adolf Hitler, leader of the National Socialist Party, who found the right words to attract a resentful and nationalist veteran like him.

On 1 October 1929, with his professional life in collapse, he joined the Nazi Party (membership number 163,348) and became a public speaker. Fifteen years later, while being interrogated by the Soviets, he declared that he had joined the NSDAP to provide a job and a happy life for all Germans.

Subsequently, on 1 December 1930, Jeckeln joined the party's defence squads, the still young "Schutzstaffel" (SS, number 4367), and was granted the rank of SS-Mann (private) on 5 January 1931.

That date marked the beginning of his SS career – a brilliant yet brutal career – one that he embraced with all his heart, indifferent to the pain he caused, and which transformed him from a loser into a highly successful hangman. It ended on 3 February 1946 in Riga, Latvia, when Friedrich August Jeckeln was hanged by the Soviets in the old Latvian capital in front of thousands who had gathered to witness his inglorious end.



Friedrich Jeckeln.

The nightmare of urban combat

The battle of Mariupol and the siege of Azovstal





The Russian attack along the Mariupol route began immediately upon the invasion. Before describing the characteristics of the battle, it is appropriate to address the question: "Why Mariupol?". The answer is that the city is strategically important as it provides access to the Sea of Azov. In March 2022, Russian forces were on the outskirts of the town and had surrounded it. At the onset of the blockade, the city lacked enough food and fuel to sustain a prolonged siege. The only route to connect Mariupol with the Ukrainian territories was the Kuznetsovsky Bridge, located on the border between the Zaporizhia and Donetsk regions. However, the bridge fell within the range of both Russian land and naval artillery and was equally subject to air raids. The balance of power was undoubtedly in favour of the Russians. So, what allowed the Ukrainians to hold out in Mariupol for over two months despite being outnumbered and almost completely cut off from supplies and personnel reinforcements in their worn-out units?

For the Russian Armed Forces, the occupation of Mariupol was extremely difficult: the army had not stormed such a large city since the Battle of Grozny during the First Chechen War. Moreover, it must be noted that the Ukrainian army's equipment and training level were significantly higher than that of the Chechen fighters. In terms of learning speed, the opinion expressed by DPR (Donetsk People's Republic) militiaman Vladlen Tatarsky is noteworthy:

"There are nuances everywhere that you have to adapt to. Many of us are used to just sitting in trenches. But people adapt and learn quickly. The attack is underway."

The events of those days remain vivid in the memories of those who participated in the attack on Mariupol. For this reason, I have chosen to analyse the key elements that emerged from the testimonies of Russian soldiers who returned from that battle. Stripped of the Kremlin propaganda spread through the articles examined, and notwithstanding the unfolded tragedy, these accounts offer valuable insights as *"lessons learned"*.

You need to be cunning; you need

to learn how to move through constant manoeuvres, sometimes slow, sometimes fast, but always with the utmost caution. It is extremely difficult to find your bearings, especially in the dark. The Command sets the activities and indicates the reference points, but these reference points cease to exist as air force, naval, and artillery attacks devastate everything. Defenders hold the advantage: in Mariupol, the dense clusters of buildings packed closely together in

and light grenade launchers. We scattered around the courtyard as best we could- some took cover behind burned-out cars, others near overturned tanks. You couldn't stick your head out; you couldn't see anything. We tried firing back somehow in the direction of the building to deliver suppressive fire, but it was of little use." Once they had occupied a building, the Ukrainians would simply create openings in the walls to move from one apartment to another, allowing them to traverse the entire floor. So-

We searched the entire house, and inside, there were six corpses. Six, do you understand? ... That's the point I'm trying to make. If those six had had enough ammunition, they could at least have held off a battalion there until their heavy weapons ran out of ammunition or they collapsed from exhaustion."

A small group positioned correctly in urban environments can easily halt a much superior enemy force. Judging by the tactics adopted, it can be said that the defence of buildings



certain neighbourhoods facilitated communications and enabled the elimination of numerous Russian soldiers moving between them at street level. Here is the testimony of a rifleman named Andrey:

"It was a nightmare, what was happening there. I'll share just one episode. We moved into a block where the fighting had long since ended. It was completely empty -no civilians, no units of ours. And then, suddenly, they started shooting at us fiercely from the windows of a five-story building. The first three fell; one screamed loudly (which at least meant he was alive), but no one could tell what had happened to the others. They fired at us with a machine gun, submachine guns,

metimes, they installed makeshift stairs between the floors to move quickly throughout the building. After preparing the defensive infrastructure, they placed sandbags, grenade launchers, and pre-loaded magazines in the apartments. The Russians reported that waiting for the enemy to run out of ammunition was never a viable solution, as it inevitably resulted in heavy losses. Andrey continued:

"Wait until the ammunition runs out? ... Bad option. They will kill us first; we're almost out in the open, and sooner or later, someone will spot us. The commander called for support over the radio. Fortunately, there were armoured vehicles nearby. Under their cover, we rushed toward the building.

was expertly organised in Mariupol. At the individual level, this involved carefully selecting positions, setting up their protection and rotating between alternate positions. At the command level, it meant strategically choosing the structures in which to position the units. Any building can be transformed into a fortress, which exacts a heavy toll on the attackers. The words of Denis, a platoon commander, illustrate what kind of "duel" can be triggered and underscore how essential previous experience is when fighting in such a scenario:

"The preparation must be carried out carefully: it's not just about 'placing machine gunners at the windows'. The Ukrainians, for example, very

often positioned armed armoured vehicles in the archways of buildings. They would peek out from the openings of their positions, fire a couple of shots, and retreat. It was very hard to hit them. In Mariupol, we learned not only, and not so much, how to storm cities, but how to fight in general”.

Officers with Syrian experience admit that the situation in Ukraine is different. While Syria is also densely built up, the number of floors in the buildings is much lower. The Russians themselves have acknowledged that establishing a battle position in Mariupol, particularly on the key terrain of Azovstal, was a conscious and planned decision by the Ukrainian forces, not dictated by enemy pressure. Still, despite facing overwhelming enemy forces and countless difficulties, they ultimately prevailed:

“...It's not that we defeated them near Mariupol; it's that they retreated into the city and couldn't get out because our soldiers were everywhere. No, they voluntarily sacrificed their garrison to create this hell for us. Everything was very problematic. The supply of ammunition, the rotations, the evacuation of the wounded: everything turned into infernal haemorrhoids (literally quoted from the original, author's note).”

Establishing a structured front line seamlessly in a city is impossible. It is full of gaps and uncontrolled sectors through which reconnaissance patrols and groups of saboteurs can pass. From every building, it is possible to observe the surrounding area and identify squares and areas suitable for engagement. Andrey concludes:

“The soldiers learned a lot during the attack on Mariupol, and I hope the Command did too. But thinking about new urban battles makes me feel physically ill”.

This last statement offers some reflections on the psychological impact of urban combat, especially in a scenario like that of Mariupol (and Ukraine in general), which, in certain historical and sociological respects, could be seen as a “civil war” in the broader sense. The words of Roman, commander of a reconnaissance unit, dramatically summarise this aspect:

“Mariupol is a normal post-Soviet city.

Almost every person who grew up in Russia can see something familiar, something dear to them. Here is a school building exactly like the one you went to. The courtyard is surrounded by a fence, just like the one where you grew up. And the soccer field is the same, and there are garages like the ones behind which you and your friends ran to smoke. Only now, it is all strewn with burned equipment and corpses; the gates are burned, the school has been turned into a defensive structure, and a tank is firing from behind the transformer house. After participating in the raids, my mind began to falter... You throw a grenade into an apartment, and along with the shock wave, fragments of someone's life are blasted out: furniture, clothes, personal items. It's hard to get it out of your head: you walk down the street and constantly think about where they might hit you from, where you would establish your position. The city itself will remind you of the horrible scenes you've witnessed. It's difficult. It's as if you were destroying not just an enemy but life itself. And not the enemy's life, but life in general.”

On 10 April 2022, Russian troops announced they had reached the Azovstal plant and taken control of several neighbourhoods. The huge Azovstal metallurgical complex features an intricate system of shelters and underground communication routes that extend deep below the surface. As urban combat doctrine demonstrates, such subterranean networks not only allow for surprise attacks against surface units but also offer significant protection against air and artillery strikes, making it exceedingly difficult to flush out those moving in these labyrinths. In addition, the fortification works carried out by Ukrainian forces further increased the Russians' difficulties in capturing the site. On 13 April, part of the personnel from Ukraine's 36th Separate Marine Infantry Brigade successfully broke out of the encirclement at the Ilyich Metallurgical Plant, where they were deployed and joined the “Azov” Regiment in Azovstal. To suppress Ukrainian resistance and maintain the siege of the plant, the Russian Armed Forces and DPR militiamen sealed off

all routes into and out of the complex. They subjected the site to heavy artillery and missile bombardments, as well as intensive airstrikes, employing even strategic aviation.

Once again, I quote the words of the machine gunner Leonid:

“The Ukrainian army in Mariupol proved strong, and, in my opinion, this was due to a well-conceived defence strategy rather than high morale. Therefore, the Azov forces tried to minimise risks. I admire the way they planned this operation, but it is an admiration for evil and sheer cynicism. The military-political leadership of Ukraine decided to destroy this city. I don't know why. Maybe they wanted to project an image to the Western public, keep us stuck, or maybe they believed that the units storming Mariupol, or Russian society as a whole, would morally distance themselves from what they witnessed.”

And again: *“The fighters note that the city has truly become a tough nut to crack. In addition to the Azov regiment, which is always mentioned in the media, there are other formidable units, such as a Marine Brigade.”*

In this case, the reference is to the 36th Separate Marine Infantry Brigade, which, as mentioned, had joined the “Azov” Battalion in the defence of Azovstal.

The situation was challenging for the besiegers, but for the besieged, it was dire. Ukrainian military personnel, trapped in the basements of the complex alongside civilians, suffered from severe shortages of water, food, medicine, and ammunition. On 29 April, satellite images revealed that nearly all of the facility's buildings had been destroyed. The Russian leadership repeatedly issued ultimatums demanding that the defending forces cease their resistance. In return, they were offered access to territory controlled by the Kiev authorities after surrendering their weapons. However, the Ukrainian troops refused to surrender, believing that doing so would prompt the Russians to execute all prisoners. The siege of Azovstal ended on 20 May with the surrender of all Ukrainian military personnel. In the following days, about 2,500 soldiers were handed over to the Russians.

Steel in Europe

Between winds of crisis and a green future



The steel industry is struggling across Europe; steel production levels are affected by developments in the Asian market. The automotive sector is the hardest hit, but the defence industry also suffers. The decline of a historically world-leading sector is being offset by the prospect of cleaner steel, offering hope for the future. In the medium term, the green steel sector is expected to grow significantly, driven primarily by green hydrogen from renewable sources, playing a key role in decarbonising the sector.

A significant economic factor behind the European steel industry's current difficulties is the collapse in global steel prices, which is also driven by economic tensions and political factors. Lack of transparency and unfair trade practices, such as dumping—where products are sold below production cost—make it hard for European producers to compete on equal terms.

Furthermore, while essential for sustainability, EU environmental commitments have resulted in higher production costs. These higher costs have led to the relocation of production to less regulated regions, further weakening the EU's steel production capacity.

The steel industry's dependence on raw materials, arriving at low cost from China and other Asian countries, has intensified market pressure despite the introduction of import tariffs to benefit European companies. Steel producers have faced numerous challenges in recent years, from the pandemic to conflicts in Ukraine, the Middle East, and Africa, along with geopolitical tensions between the US and China.

Currently, global markets are facing cyclical and structural pressures. On the one hand, there is overproduction, especially by the Asian giants. On the other hand, there is a complicated search for 'green' solutions. As the Institute for International Policy Studies (ISPI) reports: 'Over the last 50 years, the structure of the world steel industry has undergone an epoch-making revolution with the progressive transfer of production capacities to Asia and

emerging countries that have made very massive investments to have local production capacity, favoured by the availability or geographical proximity of essential mineral resources. In 1970, China's steel production was 18 million tonnes, Western Europe's was over 137.5 million tonnes, followed by the Soviets (117.9) and the US (119) out of a world total of 419 million. In 2023, the situation has radically changed: China is now the world's leading producer and accounts for more than half (54%) of global production, India has shown remarkable dynamism reflecting its economic success, and the US has been able to retain its perimeter thanks to the significant protectionist measures inherited from the Trump era and facilitated by the Inflation Reduction Act signed in 2022 by President Joe Biden.

In contrast, Europe is suffering heavily from the effects of the crisis, which has resulted in a significant contraction of its production.' No European companies are represented among the world's top ten steelmakers, ranked by ownership rather than operations. The top spot belongs to the Chinese state-owned China Baowu Group, followed by ArcelorMittal—controlled by a Luxembourg-based holding company but owned by Indian billionaire Lakshmi Mittal—Ansteel Group (China), Nippon Steel (Japan), and HBIS Group (China). The steel volumes produced by these and the other five players in the ranking corresponded to about 27% of world production, according to data from the World Steel Association.

These long-term difficulties in steel production have also had a knock-on effect on the defence industry, which relies heavily on special steels used mainly in constructing armoured and combat vehicles and even in producing military equipment and infrastructure. Statements to Defense News by Jukka Holkeri, executive vice-president of the global division of Patria, the Finnish security, defence and aerospace company, are examples of this. 'Delivery times for components used to

build equipment, whether armoured vehicles or electronic defence systems, have lengthened. On top of that, the cost of some components, from semiconductors to armoured steel, has increased, both due to the reduced availability of spare parts and higher transport costs.' Armin Papperger, managing director of Rheinmetall AG, Germany's largest armament industry, said in an interview with Dimensions-Magazine: 'The biggest problem at the moment is sourcing the necessary materials. If you order special steel for armour today, receiving it can take eight or even twelve months. In addition, the tanks need tracks, cannons, and electronic components. The delivery time for electronic components can be 24 months. In short, it can easily take a year and a half or even two years before a tank is ready.'

There are, however, some opportunities for alternative development. The growing demand for environmentally friendly materials could open up new markets for green steel, which can be produced with reduced carbon emissions, greater efficiency, and lower costs.

But what is green steel? It is steel produced using an innovative technology that significantly reduces CO2 emissions compared to traditional methods. Currently, most steel

is produced using blast furnaces, where the carbon in coal is used to reduce iron ore. This process is very polluting because it releases large quantities of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. On the other hand, green steel aims to replace carbon with hydrogen as a reducing agent, a solution that, if implemented on a large scale, could significantly reduce emissions.

Starting in 2026, the Swedish steel group SSAB, one of the world's largest producers of new-generation steel, will produce the first commercial green steel. Hydrogen will completely replace carbon coke, and CO2 emissions are expected to be reduced to zero. Other steel companies also work in the same direction, significantly impacting future coke consumption. Despite the many green investments, the industry continues to seek the use of certain metals (chromium, manganese, molybdenum, nickel, copper, silicon, tungsten, and lead) to produce increasingly sophisticated special steels. The ease with which these metals are extracted and refined from China explains the creation in 2022 of the Mineral Security Partnership, an association of fifteen Western countries aimed at guaranteeing a stable supply of critical raw materials.





Red Sea pirates

The Houthis and their strategy

With the myth of brigs and culverins long gone and the dream of coffers brimming with gold doubloons now faded, at least in part, the charm of the pirate remains alive to this day. It is still tied to a chivalrous image almost that of a brave gentleman ready to fight for justice. This narrative, however, hardly finds its basis in history, except in the versions spun by Hollywood. Yet, perhaps in an effort to lean into the legend, this summer, the Houthis undoubtedly today's most active practitioners of modern piracy yielded to the demands of environmental protection. They interrupted an attack on an oil tanker transiting the Red Sea to allow rescue teams to intervene and prevent crude oil spillage, thus averting disastrous pollution.

The ship, flying the Greek flag, was the *Sounion*, carrying 150,000 tonnes (one million barrels) of oil. It had been attacked on 21 August by Yemeni Ansarullah rebels using a kamikaze drone and small arms. At first, the Houthis themselves, along with other maritime sources, reported that the ship had been mined, making towing impossible and raising the spectre of an unprecedented environmental catastrophe. Later, however, the Yemeni rebels gave the go-ahead for the rescue action, while the crew was evacuated by a French Horizon-class destroyer participating in the European 'Aspides' operation.

Committed to paralysing traffic in the Red Sea with a symbolic yet highly tangible struggle on behalf of the Palestinians in Gaza, the Houthis chose a significant gesture.

However, they clarified that the rescue of the *Sounion* was only a concession tied to the ecological emergency and did not in any way signify a truce in their military operations. To further strengthen their message, they continued targeting other passing oil tankers. Their offensive triggered sharp price increases in maritime transport, affecting both the vast majority of companies that preferred the longer circumnavigation of Africa a detour exceeding 5,500 kilometres and the few more daring ones that braved the Red Sea route, forced to pay exponentially higher insurance premiums. Considering that, as a rule, 10-15 per cent of sea transport and 30 per cent of container traffic transit through the Suez Canal and therefore must cross the Red Sea the consequences on world trade have been severe.

In other words, the Houthis have unmistakably revived the tool of piracy, repurposing it for military objectives. Unlike the Somali groups operating off the Horn of Africa or the Nigerian pirates in the Gulf of Guinea, this Shia group's fundamental aim is not enrichment but political pressure on countries allied with or friendly to Israel, urging them to take action to stop the war in Gaza.

Three elements make the neo-pirate strategy effective, the first being meticulous communication efforts. In the Arab world, the Shiite militiamen's military campaign has garnered widespread consensus, particularly when compared to the purely verbal and utterly ineffective reactions of most Islamic countries

to the events in Gaza. According to the American magazine *The Atlantic*, the founder of the Yemeni group, Abdelmalik al Houthi, 'may be the most popular public figure in the Middle East'. The Shiite rebels also excel at propaganda, with one notable example being a viral TikTok video featuring a young militiaman dubbed the "Houthi Tim Chalamet" due to his resemblance to the actor from the film *Dune*. The video shows the young man advocating for his group's cause on the deck of the captured ship *Galaxy Leader*, owned by an Israeli tycoon.

In addition, Ansarullah's offensive explicitly ties itself to the situation in Gaza. The Yemeni rebels declared their willingness to halt attacks if Israel ceases its offensive and even pledged to return the *Galaxy Leader* when Hamas deems it appropriate. The Yemenis also transferred the captured crew to the Palestinian group as potential bargaining chips. According to the Soufan Center, a US-based think tank specialising in security analysis, 'the Houthi approach has allowed the movement to attract new recruits and portray its internal adversary, the UN-recognised government of the Republic of Yemen, as a tool of Western interests unwilling to support Gaza's suffering civilian population'.

However, communication tactics are only the first element of this strategy. Ansarullah's propaganda succeeds largely because its military actions project the image of resourceful warriors with limited means who can challenge some of the world's most powerful armies. In reality,





the Houthis are well-equipped with Iranian weaponry, and their operations have been remarkably successful. Since the beginning of their Red Sea offensive, Yemeni guerrillas have targeted over eighty ships using missiles and drones, seized one and sunk two, causing at least four victims. Despite efforts by Anglo-American missions and the European 'Aspides' operation, anti-Houthi measures have so far failed to stop the offensive. 'The little Houthi versus the great Europeans globally, it is perceived as David against Goliath', summarised French Admiral Pascal Ausseur, director of the Mediterranean Foundation for Strategic Studies, with a note of criticism.

The EU mission, in particular, was conceived with a purely defensive approach, focusing on intercepting missiles and drones. Even the American strategy, which includes the possibility of ground attacks, has failed to deter the Shia guerrillas. The second key advantage for the Houthi pirates lies in their lack of fixed bases or other vital targets that Western military technology can strike. This inevitable characteristic of asymmetrical warfare has been skillfully exploited by the Yemeni group's leadership.

A third element is what, in other contexts, might have represented a strategic advantage: the fact that the West has very powerful tools seemingly too much, at least for the intended political objectives. The

choices available to military planners appear almost predetermined. In the early 19th century, when Barbary pirates threatened Mediterranean shipping, raiding coastal areas and enslaving inhabitants, the naval powers of the time first the United Kingdom, then the United States, France and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies reacted by attacking island outposts (Lampedusa and Pantelleria) and ports (Tunis, Tripoli, Algiers), destroying pirate fleets and wiping out their offensive capabilities.

Today, however, a land operation in Yemen is entirely off the table. The lessons of Afghanistan are still too fresh for a military landing to even be considered. What remains is the option to strike from above and at a distance without risking the lives of Western soldiers. Yet modern weaponry seems not only oversized but also prohibitively expensive for a confrontation like the one unfolding in the Red Sea. The goal of halting attacks by intercepting missiles and drones after launch, thus protecting ships, is achievable but unsustainable.

This concern has been energetically pointed out by several US Congress members, alarmed by escalating expenditures on aircraft carriers, destroyers, cruisers, and air assets deployed in the Red Sea for a mission whose resolution still seems far off, if not largely undefined. The US Secretary of the Navy, Carlos Del Toro, reported that total spending

exceeded \$1 billion from October to July. The 'Eisenhower naval task force alone, deployed from October 2023 to June 2024, launched 135 Tomahawk cruise missiles and 155 Standard missiles, incurring costs of half a billion dollars without even counting the air-to-ground missiles used by the aircraft carrier's jets.

The disproportionate investment is clear even to Ansarullah strategists, who in July launched a more advanced drone against Israel. This drone, valued at only a few tens of thousands of dollars, could not return to its base but managed to reach and strike Tel Aviv. The remotely piloted aircraft exploded at low altitude above the Israeli city, killing one person and injuring a dozen.

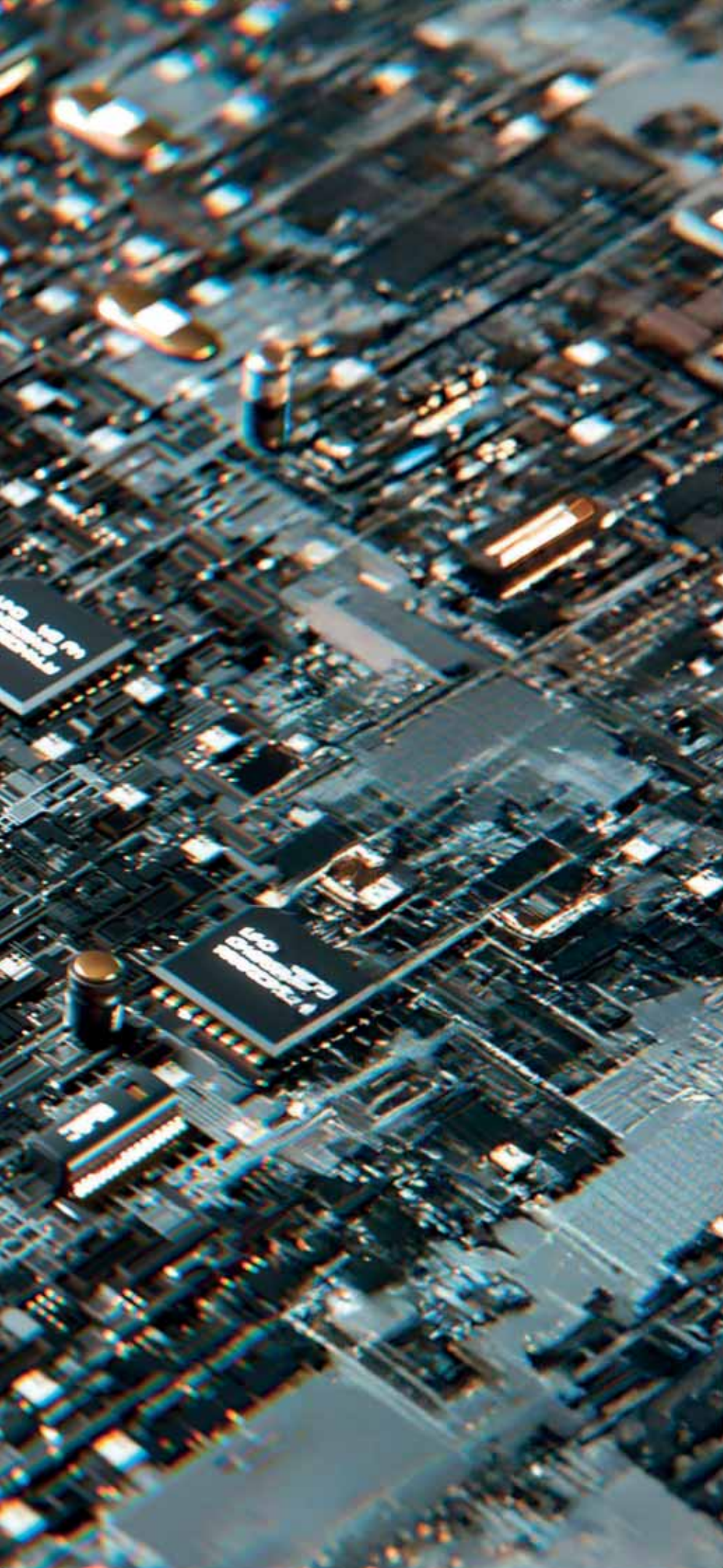
An American missile used in the Red Sea has an average cost exceeding two million dollars. A rudimentary, handmade drone built in Yemen, with minimal sophistication, can cost as little as two thousand dollars. However, if shooting it down before it strikes passing ships requires a missile, the scenario has troubling implications for the Pentagon.

The Military Staffs work to adapt their defensive tools to each emerging threat, but the cycle of evolution is unending. In short, if this is a David and Goliath scenario, David remains the more agile and easily adaptable of the two. And if he presents himself as a pirate, he holds an additional trump card in shaping public opinion.



Giampaolo Cadalanu, a special correspondent for the daily newspaper La Repubblica, has reported on crises and conflicts all over the world for over thirty years, covering regions from the Middle East to the Balkans, Sudan to Afghanistan, Libya to Ukraine, and Sri Lanka to Lebanon. As a defence correspondent, he has accompanied Italian soldiers on various missions abroad. Among his awards are the FAO's Boerma Prize and the Golden Dove from the Disarmament Archive.

AI on the battlefield



Coordination measures are among the most challenging topics covered in military schools when addressing operational planning. Though complex, they are indispensable because effectively coordinating the phases of a manoeuvre –whether it involves different components of the military force or various available weapon systems– can determine victory over the adversary. This principle has always held true: the great commanders in history distinguished themselves by their ability to coordinate the manoeuvres of vast armies and employ, in mutual support, what we would today classify as distinct combat arms: archers, infantry and mounted troops in classical times; infantry, cavalry and artillery in modern times; and these same arms augmented by the advent of the aeroplane in the 19th century. The evolution of technology has steadily increased the complexity of coordination, placing ever more sophisticated tools and capabilities in the hands of generals and admirals.

The German ‘blitzkrieg’ secret did not lie in their assets (the Anglo-French forces had similar resources) but in their ability to coordinate, using radio to unify armoured units and fighter-bomber squadrons into a single, cohesive force. Today, as we see in Ukraine, the emergence of new weapon systems, operational domains and dimensions –such as the cognitive domain– has introduced further challenges to coordination, which remains crucial for the effective employment of multi-domain military forces.

A few years ago, the focus was on Command-and-Control systems, which, through a network of sensors (primarily radar and satellites), provided commanders with an updated, near-real-time picture of the operational situation. This enabled the coordinated and effective use of their assets while reducing incidents of fratricidal (blue-on-blue) fire. Command nodes, structured in a hierarchical

pyramid, were responsible for coordinating the tactical, operational and strategic levels of the overall manoeuvre.

Today, this organisation faces a crisis essentially due to two key factors. First, the cyber domain and the cognitive dimension, combined with the proliferation of long-range weapon systems, have rendered the traditional division of manoeuvre into levels obsolete. A tactical action now inevitably influences operational and strategic manoeuvres and vice versa.

Second, the exponential growth of surveillance systems (space-based, airborne and surface-based; manned and unmanned; optical, radar, and spectral) has made the battlefield effectively transparent. As a result, the decision-making cycle must be shortened, replacing the sensor-decider-actuator paradigm with the sensor-to-shooter paradigm. This removes the decision-maker –traditionally the Command and Control centre– now serving only as ‘a red-card-holder’ with veto power.

Interference between weapon systems is still managed through spatial and temporal parameters. However, these parameters hold little relevance in the cyber domain, where threats can emerge virtually anywhere and within extremely short time frames.

The modern multi-domain manoeuvre requires a swift and comprehensive coordination and management system to fully realise its potential. This is where artificial intelligence can play a pivotal role. AI must replace human staff in linking targets to actuators, redefining the aforementioned paradigm into a new form: sensor-AI-shooter.

Artificial intelligence will need to take charge, within the manoeuvre and constraints set by the commander, of directing sensor search activities, selecting the optimal actuator to neutralise detected targets, de-conflicting the actions of the selected shooter with other activities carried out within the same domain-space-time box,

managing interferences between domains and operational dimensions, and prioritising interventions among assets. The staff will retain responsibility for monitoring the operation’s progress and advising the commander, if and when necessary, on adjusting the manoeuvre scheme or vetoing a specific action. If implemented, this approach will provide tangible substance to the principle of multi-domain operations, enabling the coordinated and effective employment of all resources across various operational domains and dimensions.

How far are we from achieving this? Undoubtedly, whoever gets there first will gain an undeniable and substantial advantage over potential opponents, marking a true revolution in the conduct of military operations.



Lieutenant General **Pietro Serino**, Signal Officer, and former Chief of the Italian Army Staff from 2021 to 2024.



**BEST PICTURES
OF 2024**

