

ISMS 2018 WARSAW

PROPOSAL

TOPIC:

Operation Euphrates Shield and the Hybrid Warfare in the Urban Environment: The Dilemma and Challenges of Using Conventional and Special Forces in the Fight Against Daesh.

WORKING GROUP: 1. WAR STUDIES

AUTHORS:

Brigadier General (Ret) Ömer Faruk CANTENAR, PhD

Cyprian Aleksander KOZERA, PhD

ABSTRACT:

Since 2006, when the Israeli Defence Forces engaged Hezbollah in Lebanon, resulting in both conventional and unconventional warfare, much has been said about the hybrid nature of the modern warfare. Yet the fluidity, resulting in the need of adaptability, is perhaps the most inherent element of hybrid warfare nature. Thus, each successive hybrid conflict added a new characteristic to the modern warfare, surprising those who were prepared to wage the last war – to use a military cliché. Although the urban character of such warfare seems to remain a core element of the modern hybrid conflict, other challenges arise that require deeper academic attention.

The Turkish military operation codenamed “Euphrates Shield” (OES), conducted in northern Syria (August 2016-March 2017) led to engagement of Turkish Army and its allied non-state armed groups from the Free Syrian Army (FSA) against Daesh, a terrorist organisation capable of using both conventional and unconventional means of war. Specifically, the case of 15-weeks long al-Bab battle (6 November 2016 – 23 February 2017) exemplifies challenges that the forces of OES faced when fighting a hybrid warfare in the urban environment against an irregular enemy.

The battle of al-Bab started as special forces (SF) operation conducted alongside allied non-state armed groups of the FSA, yet when Daesh increased its resistance with its conventional weaponry such as ATMs, mortars, rockets, then the conventional element of the operation was significantly increased. To confront these increased conventional capability, Turkish Military had to deploy more conventional forces to the ground. However, the command of the operation remained within the hands of the SF commander. This may have been one of the key challenges to the efficient leadership in the operation. The battle of al-Bab showed how demanding it was even for an

experienced and well-equipped NATO army to conduct a campaign against a terrorist organisation that merges both conventional and unconventional methods of warfare.

The authors of the proposed presentation would like to focus on analysing the dilemma and challenges that arose during the OES, and especially the battle of al-Bab. These include the dilemma of leadership in an operation that includes both special forces and conventional land forces with a strong armed component (including 'Leopard 2' tanks), and challenges of, namely, coordinating operation with various non-state armed groups, using tanks in an urban battle, fully exploiting the potential of SF, and, last but not least – providing a counternarrative to terrorists' propaganda. The presentation also aims to concentrate on how Turkish Army applied those lessons learned to capture the city and how ISIS transformed its tactics during the operation. Since one of the authors was directly engaged in the operation, the lessons learned proposed in the conclusions, shall have both academic and professional character.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES:

Brigadier General (Ret.) Dr Ömer Faruk CANTENAR

Retired from Turkish Army in September 2017. He was the commander of 4th Commando Brigade before his retirement and he served in Syria with Euphrates Shield Operation from October 2016 until August 2017. Previously, he worked as a research advisor in NATO Defence College in Rome and as the Director of Operations in the Resolute Support Mission Train Advise and Assist Command Capital, in Kabul, Afghanistan in 2015. Before that, Dr Cantenar served as the Chief of the Education and Training Department in the NATO Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism, in Ankara, from 2013 to 2015. He was also a lecturer in Turkish Military Academy and taught graduate level courses, on “Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism” and “Internal Security Policies”. He was affiliated with Turkish Special Forces for more than ten years. During this time, he was deployed on various overseas missions in Bosnia Herzegovina and Northern Iraq. He holds an MBA degree from Bilkent University and a PhD degree in Security Strategies Management from Turkish Police Academy. He can be contacted at: cantenar@gmail.com

Dr Cyprian Aleksander KOZERA is a lecturer at the War Studies University in Warsaw and holds a PhD degree in Security Studies from the National Defence University, Warsaw. He has completed several courses, programmes and workshops in the NATO Centre of Excellence – Defence Against Terrorism, George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, European Security and Defence College and European Academy of Diplomacy. He has conducted field

research in Iraq, Israel, Kenya, Tanzania, Turkey and Mali. Dr Kozera presented on numerous international conferences, including annual conferences of the International Society of Military Sciences held in Copenhagen, Vienna, Helsinki, Warsaw and Oslo between 2013 and 2017. He researches and lectures on irregular urban warfare and terrorism, OSINT and obfuscation, believing that the future warfare will be highly dependent on all these elements. He can be contacted at: kozeracyprian@gmail.com.