

The Modern Blitz: The Collapse of Strategic Warning as a Response to Tactical Alert

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The Modern Blitz: The Collapse of Strategic Warning as a Response to Tactical Alert

Operational “Zero-Time” and the Failure of Linear Defense¹

Yacov Bengo

Introduction

The collapse of strategic warning—the “fundamental surprise” written about by Dr. Zvi Lanir²—is no longer a localized intelligence failure but rather a profound conceptual one. It is defined by the loss of the ability to identify the enemy’s changes in intent and pattern in time, within the framework of outdated conceptual models. In this reality, the pattern of the “Modern Blitz” has evolved—a multi-domain, simultaneous, massed offensive intended to exploit the operational “zero-time” of the first 24-72 hours to generate a decisive strategic achievement. The technological capability to mass, maneuver, and camouflage threats at high speed under a cloak of strategic deception erodes the relevance of tactical alert as a mechanism enabling adequate preparation for border defense.

Beyond this, it turns out that even when a strategic warning is received, the connection between that warning and tactical preparation is loose. This is because border defense models are focused on “penetration prevention” and cannot transform with the required speed into a containing force capable of independent deployment and immediate kill chain execution (sensor-to-shooter loop closures).

¹ This article was first published in Hebrew in *Maarachot*, Issue 510. For the original article, see: maarachot.idf.il/33092 For the full issue, see: maarachot.idf.il/33080/

² Zvi Lanir, *Fundamental Surprise: Intelligence in Crisis* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1983), 45-53.

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Thus, a reality is created in which, even when there is a strategic warning, the likelihood of a tactical alert collapse is not only a prelude to a fundamental surprise but also an accelerant of a tactical failure on the ground that, within hours, can cascade into a strategic threat to stability and sovereignty. Hence the need to shift from a doctrine of prevention to a doctrine of “Immediate Containment”—building border areas based on independent, multi-domain containing forces and capabilities that can regain control over operational time even in the absence of an effective strategic warning.³

The shift in foundational assumptions

In the past, the management of borders was entrusted to Routine Security Operations forces that served primarily to prevent “drip” attacks and localized infiltrations. This allowed many states to “cheapen” border defense, avoid deploying high-quality forces to their vicinity, and, in some cases, view it as the purview of another security branch altogether that is disconnected from the national military. Today, the border is a target for a rapid, systemic breach by enemy forces to achieve strategic gains. The border must be transformed from the soft underbelly of the state’s security apparatus into a concentration of power sufficient to counter a Blitz threat.

3 James Black et al., *Multi-Domain Integration in Defence: Conceptual Approaches and Lessons from Russia, China, Iran and North Korea* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2022). A RAND report reviewing multi-domain integration through a comparison of great powers. Emphasizes sensor-to-shooter coordination, shortening decision cycles, and integrating cyber and space into maneuver; Antulio J. Echevarria II, “Putin’s Invasion of Ukraine in 2022,” *Parameters* 52, no. 3 (2022): 21-32. A strategic analysis of the Russian invasion. Examines flawed assumptions and their implications for modern strategic theory; Michael Fowler, “Intelligence and Operational Warning: Lessons from Ukraine,” *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 19, no. 2 (2024): 147-165. Addresses warning failures and the transition from intelligence to operational effect. Highlights the limitations of early warning without rapid response capabilities; Oleh Semenenko, Mykola Tkach, and Ihor Tkach, “A Multi-Domain Operation – A Modern View,” *Military Sciences Journal* 2, no. 1 (2024): 15-28. Presents a contemporary concept of MDO as an adaptation to environmental changes and multi-systemic threats; Alexandru Manolache, “The Role of Multi-Domain Operations in Modern Warfare,” *Revista Academiei Forțelor Terestre* 28, no. 2 (2023): 141-148. Emphasizes MDO as a response to hybrid threats and time compression in the battlespace.

The core of the failure lies in a shift in the doctrinal foundation. Defending nations still operate under a concept of “penetration prevention” and “delayed response” on the assumption that strategic warning will provide sufficient tactical time to prepare against a developing threat. At the same time, their adversaries are operating according to a doctrine of “immediate occupation and strategic achievement” utilizing systemic paralysis and mass.⁴

Five classical baseline assumptions have collapsed:

1. **“Strategic warning is the answer to border defense readiness”:** Technology now allows threats to be massed and maneuvered at high speed under advanced strategic deception. Warning is thus rendered almost irrelevant, even given last-minute tactical alerts, as current border defense structure is focused on penetration prevention.
2. **“The border is an inactive demarcation line”:** The border is in fact a multi-domain, active combat zone requiring continuous force projection, particularly in light of warfare developments in various domains, emphasizing the ability to operate in the near-earth (low-altitude) airspace with aerial vehicles.
3. **“The threat is uni-dimensional and land-based”:** The threat is in fact multi-domain (ground, air/UAS, cyber, EW, and cognitive) and is executed in full synchronization.
4. **“The threat is singular and linear”:** In fact, the threat has become massive and simultaneous on land (thousands), in the air (thousands at the Forward Line of Own Troops [FLOT] and in-depth), and in cyber (at the FLOT and in-depth). It is designed to shatter the human-based, linear decision-making system.

4 David C. Gompert, Martin Libicki, and Martin Fischerkeller, "Detect and Engage: A New American Way of War," *Survival* 65, no. 5 (2023): 7-34. Argues for a conceptual shift: warfare based on continuous detect-and-engage. Emphasizes shortening the time between sensor and effector as the key to decision; David V. Gioe, Michael S. Goodman, and David S. Frey, "A Tale of Two Clocks," *Armed Forces & Society* 50, no. 3 (2023): 651-676. Proposes a framework for analyzing time pressure in the Russia-Ukraine War. Demonstrates how control over operational tempo affects initiative and decision.

5. **“Time can be assumed for a delayed response (force alerting)”**: As a complementary concept, this is inadequate for the reasons detailed above. By the time such a force arrives (if it does indeed arrive), the tactical and strategic damage will be extensive, necessitating immediate containment and forward readiness of organic forces capable of confronting the mass within mere hours.⁵

Paradigmatic shift in the threat: Rendering strategic warning obsolete

The enemy has transitioned from small-scale actions (drips) to a coordinated, high-mass, multi-domain offensive, the critical characteristic of which is the compression of operational time due to the loss of strategic warning’s ability to buy time for the complete operational system.

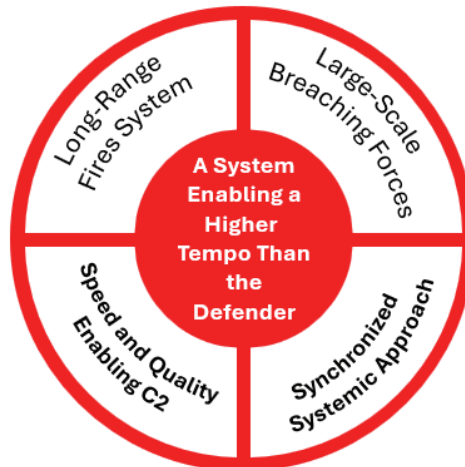
The practical manifestation of this is the pursuit of a decisive achievement within 24-72 hours, before the main national force (the Order of Battle/ ORBAT) can organize and mobilize an effective response.⁶

5 Gheorghe Minculete, "Conceptual, Organizational and Relational Approaches to Multi-Domain Operations," *Romanian Military Thinking* 1 (2023): 93-110. Analyzes the organizational and conceptual aspects of MDO, with an emphasis on joint and multi-domain integration; A. K. Keuhlen and J. A. Mains, “The Common Operational Picture in Joint Vision 2020” (DTIC, 2002), <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA421610.pdf>. Examines the limitations of the Common Operational Picture (COP) and highlights the complexity of command and control in an information-saturated environment; Sherrill Lingel et al., *Joint All-Domain Command and Control for Modern Warfare* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2020). Presents an analytical framework for JADC2. Emphasizes artificial intelligence, networking, and rapid connection between detection and strike to shorten kill chains; Vasile Vereş, “Integration of Multi-Domain Capabilities in Land Forces Units,” *Bulletin of ‘Carol I’ National Defense University* 13, no. 2 (2024): 51-62. Discusses the integration of multi-domain capabilities at the tactical-land echelon to improve kill chain closures; Black et al., *Multi-Domain Integration in Defense*.

6 Gioe, Goodman, and Frey, "A Tale of Two Clocks"; Gompert, Libicki, and Fischerkeller, "Detect and Engage".

Four core components constitute the enemy's modern operational pattern, rendering strategic warning obsolete and irrelevant to tactical echelons:

- **Mass of mobile ground-breaching forces:** Whether regular armies (formations) or irregular forces—an attack capable of massing thousands of fighters at several focal points simultaneously, overwhelming the defense system.
- **Supporting fire systems:** Thousands of items of various types (UAVs, loitering munitions, rockets, missiles) supporting the mass of breaching forces and preserving the ground achievement through two main outputs: first, fixing and destroying the defender in-depth before and during the maneuver; and second, disrupting to the point of paralyzing the defender's decision-making C2 capabilities.
- **Synchronized systemic approach:** The full, simultaneous employment of tools (UAS, cyber, EW) to deny warning to the defending force.
- **Enabling command and control (C2):** Flexible and rapid C2 capability allowing for wide deployment and simultaneous action.⁷



7 Lingel et al., *Joint All-Domain Command and Control*.

To examine the assertion regarding the gap between warning time and action time and its operational and strategic consequences, four case studies from recent years and one hypothetical scenario are detailed below. These cases show a recurring pattern of rapid, multi-domain attacks exploiting a narrow time window to create irreversible achievements. Although the geographical and political contexts differ, all demonstrate how a failure in the immediate containment of a tactical attack can rapidly devolve into a systemic crisis and even an existential strategic threat to the attacked state.

Russia-Ukraine War (February 2022)



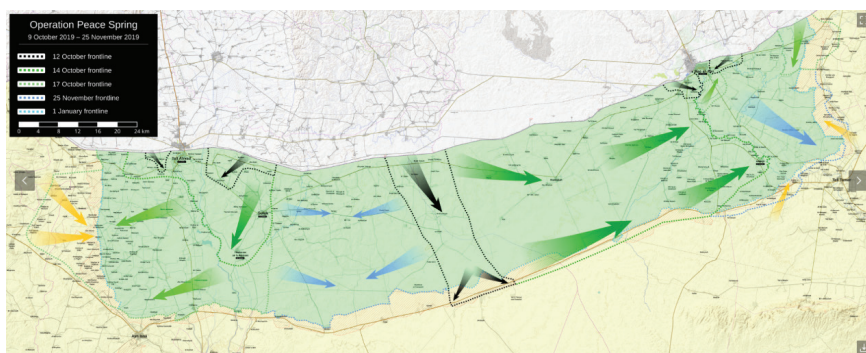
AI-generated image

The Russian multi-axis invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 is an example of a Modern Blitz attempt to topple a regime via deep paralysis. The strategic warning duration prior to the attack was about three years (according to NATO). The Russian forces consisted of units from the 35th Army, the 76th Airborne Division, and numerous armored units. There were two main axes of attack: the northern axis (a breach from Belarus via Chernobyl, with a strategic airdrop at Hostomel Airport for a “vertical envelopment” of the capital Kyiv); and the southern axis (a breach from the Crimean Peninsula to capture the coastline and generate strategic depth).

The results were a 15-20% loss of the state's sovereign territory, thousands killed and wounded, approximately 10 million internally displaced persons, and billions of dollars' worth of civilian and military infrastructure destroyed.

The **operational failure** was the collapse of the Ukrainian forward defense within 48 hours and the rapid penetration of hundreds of kilometers without effective containment. This stemmed from the absence of sufficient forward containing force power, which was supposed to generate response time.⁸

Turkey-Syria (2019-2022)



Source: Ecrusized / Wikimedia Commons (CC0 1.0).

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Operation_Peace_Spring.svg

Operation "Peace Spring" (October 2019) is an example of a rapid border breach based on logistical and C2 paralysis. The strategic warning duration prior to the attack was about one year (according to diplomatic publications). The Turkish forces were made up of the Turkish military and supported Syrian rebel organizations.

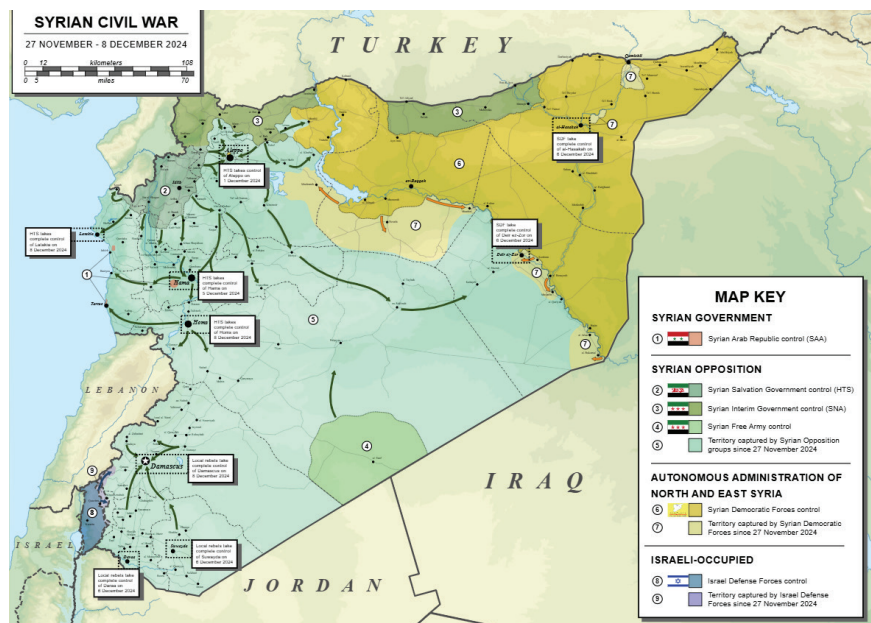
The main axes of attack were a breach along the border strip, around Tell Abyad and Ras al-Ayn, aimed at creating a security buffer zone. The results were a 2-5% loss of the state's sovereign territory, thousands

⁸ Echevarria, "Putin's Invasion of Ukraine in 2022"; Gioe, Goodman, and Frey, "A Tale of Two Clocks"; Fowler, "Intelligence and Operational Warning".

murdered and injured, approximately 250,000 refugees, and billions of dollars' worth of civilian and military infrastructure destroyed.

In this instance, the **operational failure** was the paralysis of the Kurdish forces' command and logistics systems. The offensive utilized precision air and artillery fire to simultaneously strike critical routes and command centers, which led to a rapid mental and command collapse.

Collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria (November-December 2024)



Map: Rr016, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Source: [Wikimedia Commons – Syrian Civil War \(November–December 2024\)](#)

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The final systemic collapse of the Assad regime occurred within mere days due to a synchronized Modern Blitz that exploited a strategic window of opportunity. The warning duration prior to the attack is unknown. The attacking forces consisted of HTS (Hayat Tahrir

al-Sham, the dominant military force in the north) and the rebels' Military Operations Centers (MOC), which, exploiting the distraction of Russia and Iran in other theaters, were able to coordinate Islamist factions and small rebel groups.

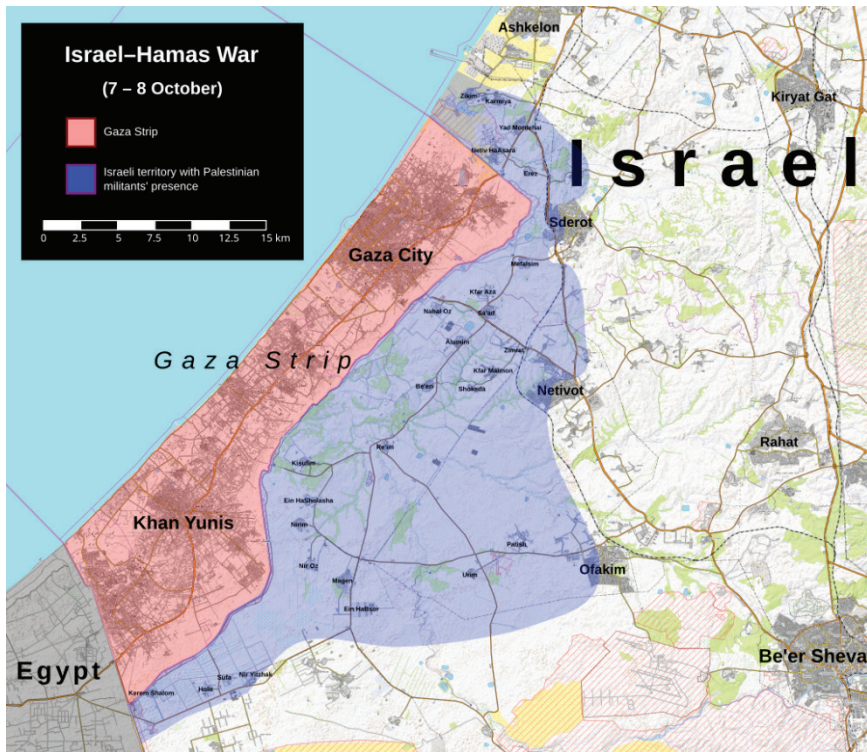
The main axes of attack can be divided into the northern axis (a lightning offensive that began on November 27 from Idlib and captured Aleppo on November 30, Hama on December 5, and Homs on December 7); and the southern axis (a pincer movement by local factions and Druze fighters that took over Daraa, al-Suwayda, and Quneitra on December 7).

The central regime and its main army collapsed, thousands were killed in the ensuing days, and tens of thousands of Syrian civilians became refugees, in addition to the destruction of civilian and military infrastructure worth billions of dollars.

The **operational failure** here was structural paralysis (the pincer movement) and the regime's exploitable strategic isolation resulting from Russia's and Iran's inattention. The operation was based on a cohesive military doctrine developed since 2019, including a dedicated drone unit (the Shaheen UAV) for infrastructure attack and reconnaissance and the unification of rebel forces. The combination of multi-axis pressure, speed, and the severing of supply arteries (Homs as a logistical hub) led to the fall of Damascus without a fight on December 8.⁹

9 Sean J. MacFarland, "Non-Linear Operations: A New Doctrine for a New Era" (Fort Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, 1994), <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA284137.pdf>. Presents the transition to non-linear warfare and the breaking of the classical frontal continuum—a conceptual foundation for MDO; RAND Corporation, *Alternative Futures Following a Great Power War* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2023). Strategic scenarios following a great power war. Analyzes the military, economic, and political implications, as well as the need for sustained systemic resilience.

Israel-Hamas (October 7, 2023)



Map: Ecrusized, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Source: [Wikimedia Commons – October 2023 Gaza–Israel conflict \(7–8 October\)](#)

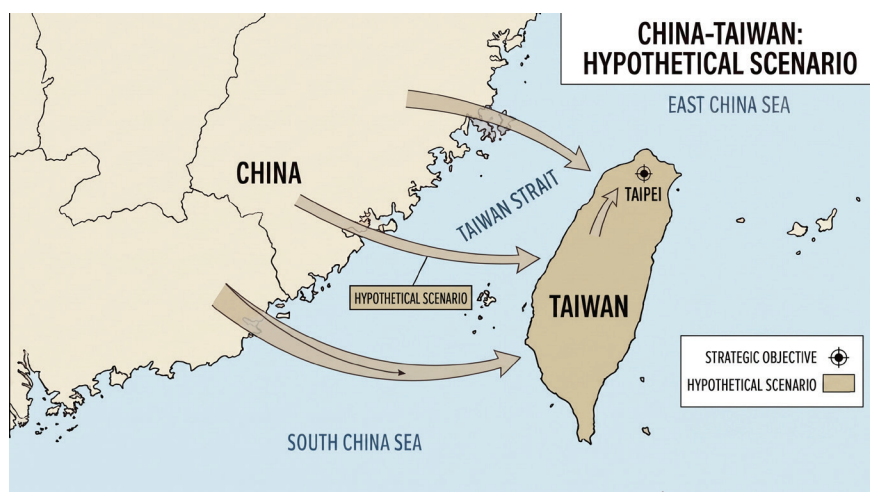
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The Hamas attack on October 7 is an example of a limited Modern Blitz (Mini-Blitzkrieg) designed for tactical paralysis and immediate strategic gain. The strategic warning prior to the attack was about one year. Hamas forces consisted of approximately 3,000 Nukhba fighters who came across the border in numerous waves. The main axes of attack were the breaching of over 30 locations along the barrier and the penetrating of dozens of civilian communities (such as Sderot, Be’eri, and Kfar Aza) and military bases (for example, the Gaza Division).

The results were severe: thousands were murdered and wounded, over two hundred were abducted, hundreds of thousands were evacuated from their homes, and massive destruction was inflicted on civilian and military infrastructure worth billions of dollars.

The **operational failure** was a total conceptual and operational collapse against a threat in mass. The technological barrier was breached using simple means, with preemptive paralysis of the observation and communications array via rocket fire and electronic warfare. The forward force was too sparse and collapsed against the mass.

Taiwan collapse scenario - Operation “Phantom Unification” (202X)



AI-generated image

The final event has not yet occurred. It is based on a scenario of a Chinese naval-hybrid invasion as an example of a strategic Modern Blitz striving for global decision via time compression. The strategic warning prior to the attack has been known for several years. The putative attack is undertaken by the Chinese Navy (PLAN), Air Force (PLAAF), Cyber and EW units, and Special Operations Forces (SOF). The main axes of attack are divided into preemptive paralysis (drone and hypersonic missile attacks on airbases, seaports, and C4I [Command, Control, Communications, Computers, and Intelligence]

facilities) and rapid vertical envelopment (airlifting special forces and deploying rapid amphibious forces directly into Taiwan's political and urban centers of gravity [Taipei]).

This (hypothetical) **operational failure** is a collapse within 48 hours due to an inability to establish continuous immediate containment in the maritime domain. The Taiwanese fail to defend against the initial wave of paralysis, leaving the defense forces disconnected and incapable of deploying reserves. The decision is achieved by establishing a strategic *fait accompli* (capturing the capital) before an external response can be mobilized.¹⁰

Implications for the defender: Fundamental surprise at the borders is increasingly probable

As stated, the structure of the adversarial system is based on four core components that enable it to generate the following operational patterns against the defender on the ground:

- **Identify and paralyze:** The adversary identifies that the border is held by a reduced ORBAT that is unprepared for high-intensity combat. It then activates a first strike wave that neutralizes command, communications, and surveillance systems.
- **Conduct breaches and assaults:** The adversary executes a rapid, massed penetration at multiple points, bypassing direct contact with main defense forces that have yet to arrive—until the attack culminates.
- **Pin and consolidate:** The adversary pins down remaining reaction forces through mass casualty and terror events. Within 24-72 hours, it establishes a foothold in the area, shifts combat into the territory's depth, and finally, if possible, initiates a second wave toward the state's centers of gravity.

10 Lingel et al., *Joint All-Domain Command and Control*; Black et al., *Multi-Domain Integration in Defence*; RAND Corporation, *Alternative Futures*.

Four main risks to the defender:

1. The attacker's primary achievements are secured in the initial hours of the breach.
2. It is immensely difficult to restore the status quo after that foothold is established.
3. A risk emerges of state collapse or regional paralysis.
4. Severe damage is inflicted upon the border region's population and infrastructure.

The conceptual root of the problem

Historically, border forces globally were built for routine security missions, meaning they were not trained for combat against a resolute and organized enemy. The traditional model of border defense is based on assumptions that were valid in an era of low-intensity threats (smuggling, individual infiltrations) that are now obsolete.

The historical model is linear and slow: **Detect→Alert →React→ Halt.**

In the new reality, the model collapses against rapid strategic attack patterns. The common mistake is to treat border collapses as technological or intelligence events ("there were no cameras," "there was no warning"). But this represents a misunderstanding of the root problem. In my view, the profound reason is conceptual-systemic.

Nations attempt to counter a new threat with old tools. They try to solve a war using a routine security model; to stop mass with presence rather than overwhelming firepower; to contain enemy maneuver with fences and obstacles instead of forward offensive capability. They pin their hopes on early warning intelligence instead of independent response capability, and centralize the entire response in a centralized C2—which is the first target to be taken down.

From situational awareness to “time to kill”

In the previous era, the main effort was invested in the proliferation of sensors, centralized control, and warning processes designed to generate a complete picture of what is happening at the border. We are now in a different world of “awareness of targets for immediate strike” (time to kill). Knowing is not enough. It is imperative to strike in time.¹¹

Even if numerous forward forces and significant reserves are deployed, they are exposed to the same systemic problem. When the enemy surprises, masses a multi-domain effort, and paralyzes C2 and communications in the first wave, the ability to rapidly close sensor-to-shooter loops—meaning to turn detection into lethal effect—is fatally compromised.

The adversary’s structure, relying as it does on massed mobile breaching forces, supporting fire, a synchronized systemic approach, and enabling C2, is designed for exactly this purpose: to identify a border held under a routine security concept, paralyze it, breach it in mass, pin down reaction forces, and establish a foothold within 24-72 hours—a time window in which the adversary’s primary strategic achievements are secured and the stability of the opponent may be decided (and, in some cases, the stability of the state itself, as in the case of the collapse of the Assad regime in Syria).

Thus, the old debate is sharpened between the **Infrastructure School** (fences, obstacles, sensors, and centralized C2) and the **Capabilities School** (independent fire, absorption, multi-domain integration, and organic kill chains for the forward force).

Against the phenomenon of the Modern Blitz, the bias must clearly shift toward the **Capabilities School**: force design at the borders where the detecting element is also the striking element, capable of operating even under disruption and C2 denial, and denying the

11 Gompert, Libicki, and Fischerkeller, “Detect and Engage”; Lingel et al., *Joint All-Domain Command and Control*; Vereş, “Integration of Multi-Domain Capabilities”.

attacker the advantage of operational time in the initial hours, before the tactical failure multiplies into an existential strategic threat.¹²

Blitz attacks aim as high as possible. It is a mistake to assume that all they seek to change is the status quo at the borders. They aim for regime change at the very least.

Conclusion: The collapse of time, from tactical breach to the undermining of sovereignty

The world has not failed in detection but in time. In the era of the Modern Blitz, the gap between detection and strike—decision time and action time—is the true decisive battlespace.

When the enemy compresses a multi-domain effort into a 24-72 hour framework, any defense mechanism based on warning, force alerting, and centralized C2 becomes too slow.

Thus, a new phenomenon is created: a focused tactical breach that rapidly snowballs into a strategic effect. This occurs not through gradual conquest but through the paralysis of command, logistics, and cognitive systems, and the creation of a nearly irreversible political *fait accompli*.¹³

The risk is not merely temporary loss of territory. It is loss of control, a blow to governmental legitimacy, an undermining of public trust, and sometimes even regime collapse. A failure of containment in the initial hours is enough to ignite a chain of events that is difficult if not impossible to reverse.

Hence the direction of the solution: a transition from a “Penetration Prevention” concept to an **“Immediate Containment”** concept. In this concept, the border is no longer reliant on sensors and fences but is a forward space with its own organic power—a space where he who

12 Gompert, Libicki, and Fischerkeller, "Detect and Engage"; Manolache, "The Role of Multi-Domain Operations".

13 Gioe, Goodman, and Frey, "A Tale of Two Clocks"; Gompert, Libicki, and Fischerkeller, "Detect and Engage"; RAND Corporation, *Alternative Futures*.

detects knows how to strike, is capable of operating under disruption and C2 denial, and can absorb, kill, and generate time autonomously.

The mission is not to wait for reinforcement but to deny the enemy the operational time advantage from the outset.

This is not a marginal tactical adjustment but a profound paradigm shift on the organizational, doctrinal, and budgetary levels. Building an immediate containment capability requires transferring significant weight from investment in infrastructure and situational awareness to investment in firepower capabilities, multi-domain operations, command independence, and systemic resilience.

This is a complex, expensive move that undermines longstanding conventions, but the alternative is clear: continued reliance on a linear model in a world that no longer exists.

He who does not regain control over time may lose control over the state.

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