Decelerating Militaries: A Strategy to Limit Urban Destruction

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Politics, Philosophy, and Economics
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Faculty Adviser: Dr. Ben Meiches

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Introduction

Changes and innovations in war have often reflected the state of civil society. Industrial practices translated into brutal displays of violence that prioritized speed and efficiency over all else. The 21st century has accelerated this tendency toward increasing speed. The invention and distribution of planes, trains, and automobiles have allowed people to move at a speed that was never previously possible. Computers exponentially increase the speed of processing with every new model. Communication, weapons, and vehicles are faster than ever before. But technology is not limited to one sector of society. Similar innovations in speed capability have occurred in the military. Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles promise the destruction of entire countries within minutes, providing deterrence for capable states but offering no such protection for incapable states. Never before has violence been so readily available and rapid.

At the same time, more conflicts have been taking place in cities. Asymmetrical conflicts have positioned strong militaries against militia, insurgency, or "irregular combatants" who take advantage of the natural defensive nature of a city to provide protection. Anthony King notes two factors that led to this change. First, King highlights rapid urbanization during the 20th century. Throughout the 1900s general populations grew quickly along with the relative urban population to rural (Davis 1965). To accommodate the population swell, cities grew both horizontally and vertically. The exponential growth of cities created new challenges to militaries. As King put it "These huge buildings and subterranean passages complicate the battlespace, multiplying its acreage, impeding airpower, and providing opponents with almost infinite cover" (King 2021 pg. 68). Despite this demand, as cities grew, militaries shrank. Between 1939 and 2012 for instance, the French Navy decreased from 186 total ships to 23 ships despite maintaining the 4th highest defense budget in the world (Nordenman 2012). Funds that initially went towards increasing the

quantity of military goods are now invested in technology and innovation. King considers this the second cause of urban fighting. Due to a general decrease in large-scale conflict and innovations in weapons technology, fewer people were needed to achieve similar tasks. As a result, militaries became smaller over time. To establish and hold a large front line in an open battlefield requires a state to field a large army. The decrease in military sizes, "made urban warfare more likely, because armies, no longer big enough to form fronts, have been dragged into cities, but it has also transformed the anatomy of the urban battle itself" (King 2021 pg 16). King concludes that urban war as a trend should be expected as the dominant form of conflict. Due to the physical expansion of urban areas and the relative decrease in the size of armed forces, urban conflict is a reality that politicians, militaries, and urban citizens will have to contend with in the future.

Furthermore, due to these trends, the strategic importance of cities in military operations has grown. "The urban battle has coalesced into a series of localized micro-sieges in which combatants struggle over buildings, streets and districts" (King 2021 pg 16). Limited resources and labor power mean militaries must carefully choose their targets and sites of conflict. While for most of human history, urban conflict was to be avoided at all costs, capturing cities is now considered a valuable military objective. Their size and perceived value cause cities to become targets when no clear military motivator seems present. In an analysis of Russian operations in the war in Ukraine, John Spencer notes "not all cities are strategically or operationally significant; many, in fact, do not even offer much tactical value from a strictly military perspective. Cities such as Severodonetsk, which Russia seized in June, and Bakhmut, where the fighting continues today, represent little military value on their own" (Spencer 2023). For these

reasons, Spencer, King, and countless other military analysts suggest urban war is the future of conflict and militaries must be prepared.

The result has been disastrous for civilian life in these urban regions. In 2022, the UN Security Council discussed the impact urban war has had on civilians and civic society in the 21st century. According to António Guterres, the UN Secretary-General, over 50 million people worldwide were facing the consequences of urban conflict (UN 2022). Despite restrictions on who and what can be targeted during military operations under International Humanitarian Law, massive urban regions are destroyed in international armed conflicts. Even in cases where civilians can escape a city before a battle begins, the destruction of the urban areas threatens their community and way of life (Coward 2009).

While eliminating urban conflicts would be ideal, many experts in military and security studies believe they are the new normal of international conflict. Allowing the current trajectory of conflict to go on without intervention will lead to drastic consequences for future civilians trapped in a battlespace. Considering the history of military innovation and recent attempts by technologically advanced militaries to reduce collateral damage in urban regions reveal that humanitarian consequences can be reduced. In this paper, I argue that speed and acceleration are the distinct variables exacerbating the deadliness of urban conflict for civilians. Therefore, to reduce the damage of urban warfare on civilian life, international law should seek to limit and decelerate the development, deployment, and use of military technology.

Challenges in the Urban Environment

Paul Virilio argues that technological advancements—primarily in transportation and communication—have compounded and accelerated every facet of the human experience, including military sciences. The benefits of speed are clear. General Fuller, a British Army

Officer articulates this point perfectly: “When the combatants threw javelins at each other, the weapon’s initial speed was such that one could see it on its trajectory and parry its effects with one’s shield. But when the javelin was replaced by the bullet, the speed was so great that the parry became impossible” (Virilio 2006 pg. 153). Once one state has an advantage of speed or acceleration, every other state is incentivized to innovate its military technology to put them ahead in the race. Virilio recognizes the tendency to increase speed and acceleration leads to a “consumption of total security” that refocuses its efforts on “technological and industrial development in the area of weaponry” (Virilio 2006 pg 144). If the party with the highest capacity for speed and acceleration is advantaged in armed conflict, then it follows that a state would focus its attention on this specific factor.

If a good offensive approach prioritizes speed, then a good defense would regulate speed. From trench to wall, infrastructure that inhibits the movement of advancing forces and forces them to slow down will give an advantage to the defenders. Historically, militaries have had to make use of their natural environment and ability to manipulate the earth to create defensive infrastructure. A city, on the other hand, is fundamentally designed to regulate speed creating new challenges for offensive operations. Virilio notes that since governments seek speed, they also seek to regulate the speed of their population through traffic lights, barriers, and other physical speed inhibitors. He states that the goal of military engineers in the context of urban defense is “not to stop armies, to contain them, *but to dominate, even to facilitate their movements*” (Virilio 2006 pg. 38). To Virilio, speed and acceleration are such a cornerstone to innovation and military strategy that it is vital for urban defenders to actively seek to slow down and decelerate their opponents. Speed and acceleration are always at the axis of competition between armed forces. In cities, offensive operations value speed while defense operations do

everything to limit that speed. For this reason, the tension between militaries and cities that are designed to regulate speed, battles in urban areas bring several unique challenges.

The first challenge militaries face in urban spaces is the battle of intelligence. With dense populations and tight streets turning the battle space into a maze, intelligence is incredibly important to the operation. In this context, the defender will always maintain a higher level of intelligence. As Muhammadally puts it, “The terrain makes detection and identification difficult, as surface and subterranean areas can cover and conceal military objectives and be used to launch attacks” (Muhammadally 2020 page). As military forces move through a city, they constantly operate with less knowledge than their defending opponents. King notes various doctrines of urban fighting that advise urban operators to move consistently throughout the city in small groups allowing them to maintain anonymity (King 2021 pg. 49). In other words, smaller squads that understand the space they are fighting in can know where their enemy is without exposing their position. This advantage was made very clear during the Russian invasion of Grozny in the 1990s. Russian forces were fighting against “irregular” soldiers who used their defensive position to their advantage. These small units of Chechnyan fighters traveled in small groups and waited until precisely the right moment to attack Russian forces. These attacks often took the form of positioning themselves in high rises and guiding Russian forces into a specific street creating a narrow line of units where the Chechnyan fighters could consolidate firepower (King 2021, Grau and Thomas 1999 pages). At the time, the Russian military was still organized on the principles of WWII. One principle Russian officials assumed would remain true is that they would “have a period of conventional combat to fully develop procedures and identify problems before” (Grau and Thomas 1999). Instead, the Russian army marched directly into the city where combat began. As a result, the Russians were unprepared for urban combat. While

they expected to meet a front of Chechnyan fighters, Russian forces were instead bombarded by guerilla tactics that leveraged the natural defensive architecture of the city. The Russian military eventually responded with scorched earth tactics that included reducing entire city blocks to rubble before and after advancing. The challenges of fighting in the urban environment were so difficult to overcome that the Russian Army essentially chose to eliminate the hostile environment before engaging in combat. In a nonurban battle environment, the Russian military's tactics that leveraged their operational speed and power would have ended the conflict quickly. Due to the complex urban space, the conflict instead took multiple operations, damaging or destroying entire blocks of the city in the process. This conflict highlights just how novel combat in urban regions is. Despite their massive advantages over the Chechnyan fighters, Russian forces took years to capture Grozny due to the intelligence deficit compared to urban defenders.

A lack of intelligence can be disastrous for the offensive force in an urban battlespace. The same challenge was seen during the US Marine Corps operations in Fallujah during the Iraq War. Fallujah was described as a "densely populated, industrial city" with up to 300,000 residents within the 3-kilometer block (Spencer and Geroux 2022). The city was a complex web of narrow streets and alleyways filled with trash and old cars. The combatant insurgents often operated out of their homes in small fire squads. As these descriptions show, the city was an ideal landscape for a defensive operation that would slow down any incoming attack and buy more time for the attackers. Leading up to the larger battle, various smaller attacks resulted in both American and Iraqi casualties. Operating in a populated city, some of these deaths were civilian. On March 31st, Iraqi insurgents made an offensive move that triggered the larger battle. The insurgents attacked and killed four American contractors, dismembered their bodies, and hung their remains on a

public bridge. On the same day, images of the bodies were shown on American news publications across the country. The American public and politicians were furious and demanded a quick response to the attack. Marine Major General Mattis felt like they were under-prepared and under-informed to launch a successful operation in the city. Despite his objections, the Marines were instructed to take action within three days. The result was a poorly planned hasty reaction that had to be halted in a mere six days.

The Marines had such little intelligence that officials' best estimates of enemy personnel in the city ranged between 500 and 6,000 combatants. Two infantry battalions attempted to pinch the combatants by invading from opposite sides of the city. But the streets these battalions hoped to utilize were littered with roadblocks, cars, and people. The enemy combatants, in a similar fashion to the Chechnyan fighters opposite of the Russians, took advantage of the fact that they knew where their opponent was while their whereabouts remained unknown until they staged an attack. One summary recalled that "Insurgents surprise U.S. with coordination of their attacks: coordinated, combined, volley-fire RPGs, effective use of indirect fire. Enemy maneuvered effectively and stood and fought" (Spencer and Geroux 2022). Despite the US forces holding an overwhelming technological and numerical advantage the insurgents, they struggled to gain the upper hand in a battlespace they were unfamiliar with. To fight back, they utilized mortars, artillery, and air support. Using these types of weapons to overcome a lack of intelligence led to the destruction of civilian property and casualties that led to an outcry from the international community.

Like the Russian experience in Grozny, the American invasion of Fallujah shows the dangers of an intelligence deficit in urban battles. To a military, a city is a matrix of time and space. They must operate quickly to prevent the defense from preparing but also must contend with a space

that limits the speed of weapons and operations themselves. The space is too complex for militaries to simply rely on size and strength to complete an operation. The 3-dimensional space of the urban landscape is more prohibitive of movement than ever before (King 2021). This means that advancing units in an urban space are not only underinformed on the battlespace, but also must move slower through it. Strength in numbers may be enough for an underinformed military force to achieve victory in a conflict but the prohibitive nature of the city compounds this challenge. Defending combatants can take advantage of their knowledge of the city to pinch invaders into preferred areas before launching an attack. Invading forces with heavy vehicles and large battalions struggle to move out of dangerous situations or into preferred situations because of their slow speed and lack of intelligence. To combat this, militaries have built replicas of urban regions where combat may take place (Graham 2011). While this may prepare combatants for the space they will be operating in, it cannot simulate the second and more concerning challenge in urban battles: the presence of civilians.

While the complex ecology of an urban battle creates many challenges for invading militaries, collateral damage in urban spaces threatens the way of life for civilian inhabitants. As noted in the Russian assumptions for urban battles, until recently, many urban battles took place in cities that were mostly evacuated. Now, more urban conflicts are happening in the center of a populated and busy city space. A report written on civilian casualties in the Iraq war found that in urban battles, 90 percent of the casualties are civilians (Muhammadally 2020). Combatants now must plan and prepare for battles where they will certainly be in the same space as civilians. For every individual combatant, whether defending or attacking, every action brings with it a higher chance of collateral damage. International Humanitarian Law requires that militaries only cause collateral damage that is proportional to the military target. In other words, if a military

strike causes civilian casualties or the destruction of civilian property, there must have been a military target that was the actual target of that strike. On top of targeting military objectives, the law also requires that damage to civilians is proportionate to the military target that was destroyed in any case of war, the cost-benefit analysis of civilian life or property to military targets would be a difficult calculation. Michael Schmitt, a scholar at West Point and the US Naval College, asked "How, for example, does one objectively calculate the relative weight of an aircraft, tank, ship, or vantage point in terms of human casualties?" (Schmitt 1999). In many cases, the conditions of war along with the desire for self-preservation and, ultimately, victory, lead militaries to take actions that jeopardize civilians and cause more harm than could ever be considered proportional to the military objective. If victory could be ensured with high levels of collateral damage, perhaps it would be logical for militaries to accept these civilian losses as the cost of war if it would prevent more deaths in the future by ending the conflict quickly. In large sprawling cities where combatants' positions are largely unknown and can change rapidly, increased collateral damage cannot guarantee a quicker conclusion to the conflict. More collateral damage can only guarantee more civilian deaths. Keeping civilian destruction proportional to military destruction becomes even more difficult in cases of urban battles where the civilians are part of and interwoven with the battlespace militaries operate in.

Even if militaries were able to limit civilian casualties, the effect urban war has on the civilian ecosystem is devastating. While initially, the destruction of an urban environment may appear to be collateral damage of war that is less significant than civilian causalities, this perspective "devalues the theoretical importance of phenomena such as the destruction of the urban" (Coward 2010). The modern urban areas of the world take on a form similar to that of an organism through their complex and consistent systems of imports and outports, food and water,

and lines of communication (King 2022). Furthermore, due to this network of interconnectedness in the city, urban life is fundamentally tied to the infrastructure in which it takes place. Destruction of a building may cause casualties later since the infrastructure is tied to urban life. For instance, if an air strike hits a building and causes no civilian casualties but that building contains a water treatment facility, its destruction may lead to the death of civilians who depend on that building for their water supply. The connection between the city and life within the city can be observed in the aftermath of the Gulf War. In the aftermath of the Gulf War, "Iraq's infrastructure was extensively damaged – roads, bridges, communications, electricity supplies, water and sewage systems,,weapons factories health care facilities administrative centers warehouses, homes and much more" (Salvage 2002). While the exact number of deaths caused directly by military action is unknown, this report estimates that over 100,000 Iraqis died from health complications related to the war. In comparison, to 15,000-5,000 casualties during the conflict, this figure demonstrates the lasting impact urban conflict has on the local population (Salvage 2002).

These two challenges of urban war—the intelligence advantage of defenders and the presence of civilians and civilian infrastructure—are products of the battlespace itself. While historically, battles took place outside of the city where it was easier to gain intel and avoid civilian structures, urban battles take place in a speed-regulative environment full of thriving communities. Due to a lack of intelligence, invaders must operate slower to ensure the safety of their teams yet this also exposes their forces to defenders who take advantage of the space. To deal with these challenges, advanced militaries have created weapons that overcome the complex battlespace by identifying and striking targets faster than ever before.

Military Solutions: Speed Acceleration

Militaries commentators and analysts are aware of the challenges that a lack of intelligence and the presence of civilians create for military planners and are addressing them. Technological innovations in the urban space have primarily happened along the axis of speed. Virilio wrote in the 1970s that militaries and governments always innovate to increase their speed of systems, operations, and weapons as a part of a dangerous feedback loop. Military technology has always evolved to increase speed because the fastest military has the greatest advantage in combat (Virlio 2006). From the invention of the orthopedic insert to the internet, technological innovations happen when a military recognizes an opportunity to gain a speed advantage over their opponent. He goes so far as to call speed "the hope of the West" maintaining that "it is the speed that supports armies' morale. What 'makes war convenient" …With it, earth no longer exists" (Virilio 2006). During the Cold War, both the US and the USSR were constantly innovating to create weapons systems that operated faster than the other.

This is the same logic applied to military technology today. Experts like John Spencer have called for "cheap, expendable drones for all squads", "a Heavy-Duty remote, armored bulldozer" and other technological innovations that echo a dromological approach to military science (Spence et al. 2023 page). Certainly, these weapons may offer an advantage, but these accelerations are now happening in a different context. While dromological innovation during the Cold War was done to "keep up" with the opponent, modern urban battles are often fought against opponents who do have the capacity to compete in an arms race of speed. Therefore, accelerating weapons systems is not to keep pace with the opponent but rather to directly address the challenges of the urban battle space. Whether the technology aims to rid a city of speed-

inhibiting barriers or infiltrate enemy positions without needing a return flight, the goal is to end operations quickly with fast weaponry.

This tension is the cause of various humanitarian crises. High-speed weapons systems within urban areas create high risks for civilian collateral damage. Even recent innovations highlight this trajectory. Airpower has become an important strategy in urban environments. The United States' use of precision airstrikes in Mosul and the Israeli Defense Forces' use of "The Gospel" perfectly encapsulates the risks of innovation through acceleration. During the war against the Islamic State in Iraq, the United States conducted what Major Shane Huff referred to as "one of the most precise air campaigns in military history" (Kahn and Gopal 2017 page). The campaign was meant to strike ISIS fighters from a distance while limiting collateral damage. If the campaign was successful, it would eliminate targets without risking friendly soldiers. This technological advancement addressed issues such as the accuracy of payloads dropped from aircraft, promising a future of combat that is clean and low risk. In International Humanitarian Law, the principles of discrimination and proportionality require militaries to not strike civilians and if they must, that the loss is proportional to the military target (Kinsella 2010). However, because of these doctrines, the United States insisted that the move toward precision air strikes was safer for civilians and overcame some of the largest challenges in the urban environment (Shaw 2002). Precision airstrikes allowed military operators to engage with enemy combatants without navigating through complex streets and risking military personnel due to a lack of intelligence. If this technology worked well, it would be a welcome solution for military operations in urban environments. And it seemed to be just that. The coalition reported that precision airstrikes had killed thousands of ISIS fighters while only killing 466 civilians (Kahn and Gopal 2017 page). This number is staggering but compared to other urban contexts, like the

battle of Fallujah where civilian casualties outnumbered combatant deaths, it was declared a success of technological innovation (Spencer and Geroux 2022).

Unfortunately, the truth was not so simple. A report on the effects of precision airstrikes in Iraq "found that one in five of the coalition strikes we identified resulted in civilian death, a rate more than 31 times that acknowledged by the coalition" (Kahn and Gopal 2017). The cause of these deaths was chalked up to "the result simply of flawed or outdated intelligence that conflated civilians with combatants" (Kahn and Gopal 2017). The inability to meaningfully differentiate between civilians and combatants was a clear violation of International Humanitarian Law. With more deliberation, time spent identifying targets, and gathering intelligence, hundreds if not thousands of civilian lives could have been prevented. This can be understood as a problem of acceleration. Coalition forces used a new technology that allowed them to quickly eliminate targets while supposedly reducing the risk of collateral damage. The speed of the identifying, targeting, and attack itself were all increased through this technology and the fallout for civilians was disastrous despite the US posture that said it was a net positive for civilians. While a similar technology would have offered countless upsides with few concerns in a battle where the enemy is separate from civilians, in the context of a city, the population is too dense and diverse for such a system to not harm civilians.

The United States military is a good indicator of the direction military technology is headed. The economic investments into military technology have led to incredible displays of power and new tactics. But another government is constantly on the cutting edge of military technology. Israel for years has worked side by side with the US for decades to become one of the world leaders in security technology. The allies have gone so far as to build replicas of urban regions to simulate and prepare for invasions (Graham 2010). A look at modern military

approaches by Israel then can give insight into the future of the acceleration of weapons and its implications for civilians in urban regions.

The most recent innovation by the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) is simply referred to as "The Gospel." This weapon targeting system has been used by the IDF since October 7th to identify targets are strike them quickly with missiles, rockets, drones, and other forms of attack. The system works by allowing an AI to identify targets which are then confirmed by operatives. The system "given new, generous parameters of who and what can be attacked… is generating lists of targets so rapidly the military cannot keep up" (Cook 2024). The loose parameters have been disastrous for Palestinian civilians. Official IDF figures suggest that roughly 90 percent of all the deaths at the hands of The Gospel have been civilians (Cook 2024). Of course, the intention of the Israeli government must be criticized. That being said the purpose of AI targeting systems reveal a clear issue of speed. At its core, "The Gospel" promises to identify targets faster than its human counterparts ever could. The system is primarily concerned with the speed of identification. But when the system's function is to determine who will be targeted by a deadly attack, speed is not the only metric that should measure success.

The Guardian initially published an article on Decembe[r] 1st, 2023 revealing the IDF's use of The Gospel system. Quotes and comments from IDF and Israeli officials in this article reveal the intention of acceleration behind this military innovation. The IDF website said that the system is meant to "produce targets at a fast pace…through the rapid and automatic extraction of intelligence" (Davies et al. 2023). The problem with this system then is not the AI integration or even the weapon itself. Once a target is selected, typical rockets, missiles, or bombs are deployed that are similar to other states' arsenals. The concern is that the speed at which this system operates has turned the IDF into a "mass assassination factory" where the "emphasis is on

quantity and not on quality" (Davies et al. 2023). In theory, each attack must be approved by a human eye, but the overwhelming number of proposed targets means human operators are far less likely to discover an error. Much like the US-led coalition in Iraq, the IDF claims that this system is designed to protect civilians. And like in Iraq, civilians have paid a high price.

Looking forward, "The Gospel" should alarm peacemakers and activists. The system accelerates target acquisition and execution speed to a level that has never been seen before in human history. The result has been thousands of deaths due to negligence and violations of the Geneva Conventions. The technology should be protested for its use by the IDF against Palestinians, but it also generally for its acceleration of speed and violence. Appropriating AI to accelerate targeting takes agency away from human combatants and places it in the hands of a system no one fully understands for the sake of speed. Virilio was concerned that innovations "have never been made by the people, but by the military institution" yet now innovations are being taken out of the hands of even the military and into the hands of AI in another act of speed and acceleration (Virlio 2006 pg 136). The technology is still novel but may be appropriated and used by other militaries and security forces if it is not met with pushback from the public. The tendency of security forces around the world to utilize technology developed in separate conflicts is because innovations in military technology do not remain in the vacuum of military strategies. Graham notes that "the same techniques and technologies used to wall off of neighborhoods in Baghdad or Gaza are the same as that in the US and Mexico" and that "Military-style command and control systems are now being established to support 'zero tolerance' policing and urban surveillance practices" (Graham 2010) page. While currently isolated in the Israel-Gaza conflict, the dromologocial tendencies of powerful militaries will encourage them to create similar systems to match the speed capacity of the IDF.

But framing this specific problem as a challenge of technology and speed helps in raising support for action. If "history progresses at the speed of its weapons systems" (Virilio 2006 page) then "The Gospel" is a sign that we are amid a leap forward that the world is not prepared for. The weapon's ability to target and assassinate people with little to no human oversight is a concern in its own right. But in the urban context, this technology threatens not just incorrectly identified targets, but also anyone within proximity. In an urban space, the risk for collateral damage is far too high to use a tool that "mark the home and bomb the house and kill everyone there" (Davies et al. 2023 page).

When he wrote about Dromology in the 1970s, Virilio believed that the fierce competition for speed between the US the USSR led to a stalemate between the states that could eventually end in nuclear war. What he hadn't considered, nor could he have predicted, was how a rise of urbanism and shrinking militaries would lead to conflict in cities. These spaces created new challenges for militaries that were less severe or nonexistent in battles outside of the city. Horizontal and vertical growth of cities created a matrix so complex that it would be nearly impossible for an invading force to map out the area and predict where their enemy would be. Enemy combatants could take advantage of their knowledge of the terrain and despite massive disadvantages, inhibit or even defeat the invading force. Amid this new complex battlespace, the presence of civilians made every operation more difficult to execute without collateral damage. To address these challenges, modern, technologically advanced militaries such as the US and IDF have updated their weapons systems along the axis of speed and acceleration despite their opponent being unable to do the same. The result has been asymmetrical warfare that protects the combatants from the invading forces while destroying communities at a rate that should terrify the international community

Recommendations

The failure of militaries to comply with international law while operating in urban environments is clear. While peacebuilding and nation stabilization efforts have grown in the last couple of decades, in the context of war, the destructive capacity for weapons used in cities has increased. The militaristic tendency to create weapons that are faster than their adversaries is a competitive tendency. But in urban conflicts against asymmetrically disadvantaged adversaries who cannot keep pace with technological innovations, dromology becomes a strategy for domination instead of competition. Instead of offering a tactical advantage that can end conflicts quicker with more precision, these weapons endanger the local population and life the cities where they are deployed. Because of this, I believe the ideal action would be an update to International Humanitarian Law that limits the speed of weapons systems in urban battles. Twelve weapons or weapon classes have already been outlawed by international law with the most recent treaty being passed in 2008 (IRC n.d.). Passing a treaty that requires a minimum time between identifying and striking targets would be a small step that allows more oversight. This action may not prevent the violence in urban regions but it would prevent a future where dromologically inclined militaries use AI and technology to wage wars at a speed that is currently incomprehensible.

My first recommendation to work toward a ban on fast weapons is to continue research on International Humanitarian Law and speed. According to International Lawyers who advise governments on International Humanitarian Law, there is little evidence to suggest “The Gospel” violates the existing legal standards. Looking further into the precedents of AI weapons systems and collateral damage as it relates to IHL could reveal avenues for action that can be taken. Researchers should explore how the UN can “interpret or clarify existing laws” to improve

protections for civilians by limiting speed could be a step in the right direction (Sassòli 2022). Using the existing language of international law to call for changes in armed conflict may be more effective than lobbying for a language change that prohibits certain systems or imposes limits on speed.

My second recommendation would take advantage of our global interconnectedness and community support. That would be to use the logic of speed in public demonstrations or art to raise awareness and support for protests against "The Gospel" and more generally, the military trends toward-acceleration. A challenge in raising support to protest international conflict or military practice is convincing the audience to buy in for a cause that does not directly affect them and is happening on the other side of the globe. Artists and activists have "taken advantage of the presence of transnational media" to transmit their "street protests, social movements, grassroots organizations, and formal political organizing" to call for international change (Graham 2010 page). Graham discusses political art such as Paula Levin's 'Shadows from Another Place: Baghdad< - > San Francisco' that superimposed maps of the cities onto each other as the 2003 coalition invasion took place (Levine 2003). These maps were updated regularly with marks that indicated the San Francisco geographic equivalent of the space that had been bombed in Baghdad. The purpose was to mobilize the public through art. Displays that communicated the incredible pace of urban destruction with modern weapons may assist in mobilizing widespread support from the public. Virilio stated that "military-industrial democracies have made every social category, without distinction, into *unknown soldiers of the order of speeds*" (Virilio 2006 pg 137) in other words domestic production and experimentation contribute to the speed innovations of militaries. But this would imply that we, the workers, innovators, and agents of change, have power to regulate or reduce the speed of violence we see

around the world. Showing locals what urban violence would look like in their home city could encourage them to use the influence they possess to advocate for change.

But of course, this approach has some shortcomings and challenges. Marco Sassòli, an international lawyer and professor of international law, notes that the need for unanimous decisions from member states to amend the articles of International Humanitarian Law could prevent actual change to the doctrine (Sassòli 2022). A legal change of this sort would require strong legal footing, widespread public support, and significant political will from UN member states. Furthermore, even if the laws of war were updated, there is no guarantee that it would have any impact on how actors operate in the field. While legal distinctions can disincentivize certain actions, regulating how people will behave in the context of war is difficult at best.

Small actions that feed into larger change may be necessary for effective change. In a piece on sustainable development, Scott Campbell notes that "To achieve consensus for the plan, language will be reduced to the lowest common denominator, and the pleasing plans will gather dust" (Campbell 1996). In other words, while activists rightly want to tackle the root of an issue, it takes time to develop a solution that holistically addresses a problem. In the meantime, meaningful change happens through compromise and action. In this context, as people interested in peace, our instinct is to advocate for nonviolence. This is an honorable cause but violence continues to exist despite decades if not centuries of people advocating for peace. If right now peace seems distant, actions that mitigate collateral damage in wartime are better than no actions at all.

Conclusion

If the respected voices in military and security studies suggest that urban warfare is going to constitute a majority of international conflicts in the foreseeable future, then scholars,

activists, and peacebuilders from across disciplines should be searching for ways to limit the loss of civilian lives. While the best solution would be to prevent conflicts before they happen if that is not an option then action needs to be taken to protect people in urban environments if these conflicts are inevitable. The acceleration of military technology creates new dangers for civilians in the modern context of urban warfare.

The tendency for militaries to innovate based on the principle of acceleration is not new but it is outdated. In an open field, speed acceleration brings with it relatively less risks. In a city where populations are dense and the geography is unknown, creating weapons and tactics to execute quickly is dangerous at best and irresponsible at worst. During the US precision airstrikes in the invasion of Iraq, the new system was presented as a new technology that limited civilian casualties. In reality, the system allowed the US military to strike their enemies with speed and precision but at the cost of thousands of civilian lives. Similarly, the Israeli AI targeting system promised to identify and eliminate enemy combatants with levels of speed and precision that would be impossible for humans to imitate. Instead, the speed of the system, with few checks and balances by human operators, had led to rapid and imprecise strikes disproportionately killing civilians and destroying their communities. These weapons offer an eerie warning about the future of urban war if it progresses unchecked.

I am no artist and I've never been one to rally a crowd. But this problem deserves the attention of the public. Demonstrations and art installations that show audiences how fast lives, homes, and communities can be wiped away may be effective in rallying the support needed to create change. At the same time, further research that considers legal mechanisms and avenues for change may be useful in providing feasible action for activists and politicians.

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