



THE SPECIFIC FEATURES AND NEW TACTICAL METHODS OF EMPLOYING SMALL UNITS IN MODERN ARMED CONFLICTS

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Abstract

The transformation of modern warfare has significantly increased the role of small units in conducting combat operations. Rapid technological development, the widespread use of unmanned systems, and the integration of reconnaissance and strike capabilities have fundamentally changed the methods and principles of employing small tactical formations. Modern armed conflicts demonstrate that highly mobile and well-coordinated small units are capable of achieving significant operational and tactical results. This article examines the specific features of employing small units in modern armed conflicts and analyzes new tactical methods based on recent combat experience, particularly the lessons learned from the Russia–Ukraine conflict. The study also highlights the impact of network-centric warfare, unmanned aerial vehicles, and decentralized command systems on the effectiveness of small-unit operations.

Keywords: small units, tactics, modern warfare, unmanned aerial vehicles, FPV drones, network-centric warfare, infantry operations, decentralized command, maneuver warfare, Russia–Ukraine conflict.

Introduction

Modern armed conflicts are characterized by high mobility, rapid changes in the operational environment, and the extensive use of advanced technologies. The experience of recent military operations has shown that the effectiveness of combat



actions increasingly depends not only on large formations and sophisticated weapons systems but also on the capabilities of small tactical units operating at the platoon, squad, and section levels.

The changing nature of warfare has led to a significant transformation in the organization and employment of small units. Traditional tactics based on massed formations and centralized command have gradually been replaced by more flexible and decentralized approaches. Modern small units are expected to operate independently, adapt rapidly to changing battlefield conditions, and effectively integrate reconnaissance, communication, and fire support capabilities.

The development of information technologies and the emergence of network-centric warfare have further increased the importance of small tactical formations. Real-time intelligence, digital communications, and battlefield awareness enable commanders and subordinate units to coordinate their actions more effectively and respond quickly to enemy activities. Consequently, small units have become one of the key elements in achieving tactical success in contemporary military operations.

The Russia–Ukraine armed conflict, which began in 2022, has clearly demonstrated the increasing significance of small-unit operations. Both Ukrainian and Russian forces have extensively employed small assault groups, reconnaissance teams, and unmanned aerial vehicles to conduct offensive and defensive operations. The battles for Bakhmut, Avdiivka, and other strategically important areas have highlighted the effectiveness of decentralized command, rapid maneuver, and close coordination between infantry units and drone operators.

In addition, the widespread use of first-person-view (FPV) drones, loitering munitions, and real-time reconnaissance systems has introduced new tactical approaches that significantly influence the conduct of military operations. These developments have emphasized the need to reassess traditional concepts of infantry tactics and adapt small-unit operations to the requirements of modern warfare.



The purpose of this article is to analyze the specific features of employing small units in modern armed conflicts and to examine new tactical methods based on contemporary combat experience, with particular emphasis on lessons derived from the Russia–Ukraine conflict.

The Role and Specific Features of Small Units in Modern Armed Conflicts

The evolution of modern warfare has significantly altered the role and employment of small tactical units. In contrast to traditional large-scale operations, contemporary armed conflicts increasingly rely on highly mobile, flexible, and technologically equipped small formations capable of operating independently under rapidly changing battlefield conditions. The experience gained from recent military confrontations demonstrates that platoons, squads, and specialized assault groups have become essential elements in achieving tactical and operational objectives.

One of the most important characteristics of modern small units is their increased autonomy. Decentralized command systems and mission-oriented tactics allow subordinate commanders to make decisions independently according to the current battlefield situation. Such an approach enables units to react quickly to enemy actions and exploit emerging opportunities without waiting for detailed instructions from higher headquarters. This principle has been widely employed by Ukrainian forces since the beginning of the Russia–Ukraine conflict, contributing to increased flexibility and operational effectiveness.

Another significant feature of modern small-unit operations is the application of network-centric warfare principles. The integration of reconnaissance assets, communication systems, and fire support capabilities provides commanders with enhanced situational awareness and facilitates rapid information exchange. Digital



communication devices and satellite communication systems allow infantry units, artillery formations, and drone operators to coordinate their activities in real time. Such capabilities considerably improve the speed and accuracy of target engagement.

High mobility and dispersed operations have also become essential requirements of contemporary warfare. Due to the extensive use of precision-guided weapons, long-range artillery systems, and unmanned aerial vehicles, large concentrations of personnel and military equipment are increasingly vulnerable to enemy attacks. Consequently, modern small units operate in dispersed formations and employ rapid maneuver tactics to increase survivability and reduce the effectiveness of enemy fire. This approach has become particularly evident during combat operations in eastern Ukraine, where both sides have adopted decentralized formations to minimize losses caused by artillery strikes and drone attacks.

The integration of unmanned aerial systems with infantry operations represents another important feature of modern combat. Reconnaissance drones provide real-time intelligence, target acquisition, and battlefield surveillance, while first-person-view (FPV) drones and loitering munitions are used to engage enemy personnel and armored vehicles. During the battles for Bakhmut and Avdiivka, Ukrainian units extensively employed commercially available quadcopters and FPV drones to identify enemy positions and coordinate artillery fire. Similarly, Russian forces utilized Orlan-10 reconnaissance drones and Lancet loitering munitions to support offensive and defensive operations.

The experience of the Russia–Ukraine conflict has demonstrated that effective cooperation between infantry units, reconnaissance elements, artillery assets, and unmanned systems significantly increases combat efficiency. Small units equipped with modern communication technologies and supported by drone operators are



capable of conducting reconnaissance, directing artillery fire, and performing offensive and defensive missions with greater precision and effectiveness.

Therefore, the changing character of warfare requires small tactical units to possess high mobility, operational flexibility, technological proficiency, and the ability to operate independently in a complex and dynamic combat environment. These characteristics have become decisive factors in achieving success on the modern battlefield.

New Tactical Methods of Employing Small Units: Lessons from the Russia–Ukraine Conflict

The Russia–Ukraine armed conflict has become one of the most significant examples demonstrating the transformation of small-unit tactics in contemporary warfare. The extensive use of modern technologies, combined with decentralized command structures and the integration of unmanned systems, has led to the emergence of new tactical approaches that differ considerably from traditional methods of combat operations.

One of the most notable developments has been the widespread employment of small assault groups consisting of five to fifteen personnel. Such groups are characterized by high mobility, flexibility, and the ability to conduct independent operations. During the battles for Bakhmut and Avdiivka, both Ukrainian and Russian forces frequently utilized assault detachments composed of infantry personnel supported by drone operators and artillery observers. The use of small groups reduced vulnerability to artillery strikes and enabled forces to infiltrate enemy defensive positions more effectively.

Another important innovation has been the integration of unmanned aerial vehicles into tactical operations. First-person-view (FPV) drones have become one



of the most effective tools employed by small units. These systems are used for reconnaissance, target acquisition, and direct attacks against armored vehicles, fortified positions, and personnel. Ukrainian forces have extensively employed FPV drones to destroy tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, and artillery systems. The relatively low cost of such systems and their high effectiveness have significantly changed the nature of tactical engagements.

The coordination between drone operators and artillery units has also become an essential element of modern combat. Real-time reconnaissance provided by quadcopters and tactical unmanned aerial vehicles enables artillery crews to detect enemy positions and adjust fire with greater accuracy. Such cooperation considerably shortens the time between target detection and engagement. As a result, small units equipped with reconnaissance drones are capable of inflicting substantial losses on enemy forces while maintaining a high degree of mobility.

Russian forces have also adapted their tactics in response to changing battlefield conditions. Reconnaissance drones such as the Orlan-10 and loitering munitions including the Lancet system have been extensively employed to identify and destroy artillery systems, armored vehicles, and logistical infrastructure. In addition, Russian assault detachments have increasingly relied on small, dispersed formations supported by electronic warfare assets and indirect fire systems. These measures have enhanced the survivability and combat effectiveness of small tactical groups.

Urban warfare and trench combat have further emphasized the importance of decentralized tactics. During operations in Bakhmut, both sides frequently conducted offensive actions using small groups supported by drones and artillery. The complexity of urban terrain and the extensive use of fortifications required rapid maneuver, close coordination, and continuous reconnaissance. Consequently,



traditional large-scale assaults were often replaced by smaller and more flexible formations capable of adapting to changing tactical situations.

The experience gained from the Russia–Ukraine conflict demonstrates that modern small-unit operations increasingly depend on the integration of reconnaissance assets, unmanned systems, artillery support, and digital communication technologies. These developments indicate that future armed conflicts will require highly trained personnel capable of employing advanced technologies and operating effectively in dispersed and rapidly changing combat environments.

Future Trends in Small Unit Operations

The analysis of recent armed conflicts indicates that the role of small units will continue to increase in future warfare. The rapid development of artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, and digital communication technologies is expected to significantly influence the organization and employment of tactical formations. Modern armies are increasingly investing in advanced reconnaissance systems, robotic platforms, and integrated command and control networks to improve battlefield effectiveness.

One of the most important trends is the growing use of unmanned systems. Future small units are expected to employ various types of reconnaissance drones, loitering munitions, and autonomous ground vehicles to enhance situational awareness and combat capabilities. Artificial intelligence technologies will facilitate target recognition, data processing, and decision-making processes, thereby reducing reaction times and increasing operational efficiency.

Another important tendency is the development of multi-domain operations. Contemporary military operations require close coordination between land, air, cyber, and electronic warfare capabilities. Small units equipped with advanced communication systems and supported by intelligence assets will be capable of



operating effectively across multiple domains. Such integration will provide greater flexibility and improve the survivability of military formations.

The increasing importance of electronic warfare and cyber operations also necessitates the development of new tactical approaches. Future small units must possess the capability to operate in contested electromagnetic environments and maintain combat effectiveness despite disruptions to communication and navigation systems. Consequently, modern military training programs increasingly emphasize adaptability, initiative, and technological proficiency.

Conclusion

The transformation of modern warfare has significantly changed the role and employment of small tactical units. The experience of recent armed conflicts demonstrates that highly mobile and technologically advanced small formations have become one of the decisive factors in achieving tactical and operational success.

The Russia–Ukraine conflict has provided valuable lessons regarding the effectiveness of decentralized command systems, drone-assisted operations, and the integration of reconnaissance and fire support capabilities. The battles for Bakhmut and Avdiivka have shown that small assault groups supported by unmanned systems and artillery assets are capable of conducting effective offensive and defensive operations under complex battlefield conditions.

Furthermore, the extensive use of first-person-view drones, loitering munitions, and digital communication technologies has introduced new tactical methods that differ substantially from traditional approaches. These developments indicate that future armed conflicts will increasingly depend on highly trained personnel, technological superiority, and the ability of small units to operate independently and adapt rapidly to changing operational environments.



Therefore, the study of contemporary combat experience and the continuous improvement of tactical methods are essential prerequisites for enhancing the combat capabilities and operational effectiveness of modern armed forces.

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