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Are Tanks Still Relevant in War and Modern Warfare?

By
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Russia's invasion of Ukraine started on 24 February 2022 saw convoy of tanks and armoured vehicles deployed in the 'special military operation'. Many tanks and armoured vehicles were decimated by anti-tank weapons of Ukraine which drew comments that tanks are no longer relevant in modern battlefield and contemporary operating environment. After almost a year into the Russia-Ukraine war, recently Ukraine has continually requested for tanks to fight Russia (Ellyatt, 2023). Ukrainian presidential adviser said that tanks are key to ending war (Reuter, 2023). While Dmitry Peskov, Kremlin spokesman said supply of western tanks will not change the course of the war (Novoshenina, 2023). Additionally, military analysts said tanks could help Ukraine break through Russia's line of defence (Ng, 2023). Therefore, this commentary looks into **two concerns. First, the relevancy of tanks in modern warfare. Second, on the complexities involved in the request of tanks by a nation-state in its war against another state.** On the first concern on relevancy of tanks, there are a few questions to address: Are tanks still relevant in modern warfare with the advent of anti-tank weapons? Would cyberwarfare influence the usage of tank in the battlefield and its relevancy? Also, what about the impact and effects of guerrilla and small unit operations as well as the use of drones and unarmed aerial vehicles against tanks? Taking these factors into consideration, what would be the best tanks for deployment? On the second concern pertaining the plead for tanks by Ukraine, the questions that would be pertinent to ponder are: Is seeking allies and support from other states to counter tank aggression a viable move? What would be the political implications of using tanks in invading neighbouring state? Is it wise to use tank for invasion on another state? What would be the political implication of using tanks in invading neighbouring state?

On the first concern regarding the relevancy of tanks in modern warfare, there is a need to understand the deployment and employment of tanks in the battlefield. The advocates of tank and mechanised warfare believe that tanks are still relevant and an important feature of modern warfare. Tanks are heavily armoured vehicles that can move quickly through rough terrain and offer a mobile platform for heavy firepower. They can also be used to support infantry and other ground forces by providing cover and suppressing enemy fire. Additionally,

tanks are frequently used in reconnaissance and as a means of psychological warfare. Tanks are also used in peacekeeping and stability operations, as well as in counterinsurgency and anti-terrorism operations. Overall, they argue that tanks remain a vital asset for many militaries around the world and are likely to continue to play an important role in warfare in the future. Nevertheless, the advent of anti-tank weapons has certainly increased the challenges faced by tanks in modern warfare, but tanks still possess unique characteristics that make them valuable in certain situations. Tanks have heavy armour that can protect them from small arms fire and many types of anti-tank weapons, and they are also equipped with powerful guns that can destroy other armoured vehicles and fortifications. Additionally, tanks are mobile, which allows them to rapidly move to areas where they are needed and to engage in flanking manoeuvres. However, the development of new anti-tank weapons, such as anti-tank guided missiles, has increased the vulnerability of tanks to long-range engagements, making it necessary for tanks to operate with support from other units, such as infantry and aircraft. It means that tanks are often used in coordination with other types of military assets, rather than operating independently. All in all, it is argued that while anti-tank weapons have certainly made it more difficult for tanks to operate in modern warfare, tanks still have unique characteristics that make them significant in certain situations. Tanks are still considered a key player in the battlefield and are likely to continue to play a significant role in warfare in the future.

Next, it is contended that the relevancy of tanks in the modern battlefield is also influenced by cyberwarfare. Opinions are abounding that cyber warfare has the potential to greatly influence the usage of tanks in modern warfare. It is said that with the increasing integration of technology into tanks and other military systems, tanks are becoming increasingly exposed to cyber-attacks. One-way cyber warfare can impact tanks is by compromising their communication systems, making it difficult for tanks to coordinate with other military assets. Cyber warfare can make it more difficult for tanks to operate effectively in battle. Another way cyber warfare can impact tanks is by compromising the navigation and targeting systems, which could affect tanks to fire at the wrong targets or even friendly forces or make them susceptible to enemy fire. Cyber attackers may also try to disrupt the command-and-control systems of tanks, making it difficult for commanders to direct their operations or take control of the tank remotely. Finally, cyber attackers may attempt to steal sensitive information such as tank's design, strategies, or location that could be used to gain an advantage over the enemy. Overall, it is opined that cyber warfare has the potential to greatly impact the usage of tanks in modern warfare, making it necessary for militaries to take steps to protect their tanks from cyber-attacks and to develop strategies for dealing with cyber threats on the battlefield.

Another deliberation on the relevancy of tanks in the modern battlefield is about the impact and effects of guerrilla and small unit operations against tanks. Guerrilla and small unit operations can have a considerable impact on the effectiveness of tanks in modern warfare. One of the main ways that guerrilla and small unit operations can impact tanks is by making it more difficult for tanks to operate in certain terrain and environments. Guerrilla fighters may use ambushes, hit-and-run tactics, and the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) to attack tanks in areas where tanks are difficult to manoeuvre, such as in urban or mountainous terrain. Examples of this could be seen in the on-going Russia-Ukraine war. Another way that guerrilla and small unit operations can impact tanks is by making it more difficult for tanks to identify and target enemy fighters. Guerrilla fighters may blend in with the civilian population, making it hard for tanks to distinguish between fighters and non-combatants. They may also use camouflage and deception tactics to evade detection and target acquisition by tanks. Guerrilla fighters may also use anti-tank weapons, such as rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs) to attack tanks from a

distance. This can make it difficult for tanks to engage guerrilla fighters effectively and can make tanks vulnerable to long-range attacks. Additionally, guerrilla fighters may use unconventional tactics to disrupt and neutralise tanks. They may, for example, use infiltrations to sabotage the tank's systems, steal sensitive information or even, attempt to take control of them remotely. Thus, it can be surmised that guerrilla and small unit operations can have significant impact on the effectiveness of tanks in modern warfare by making it more difficult for tanks to operate in certain terrain and environments, identifying and targeting enemy fighters, and by using anti-tank weapons, unconventional tactics and sabotage. As a result, tanks may have to be used in coordination with other types of military assets, such as infantry, in order to effectively counter guerrilla fighters.

The next aspect for consideration of the relevancy of tanks is about the appearance of drones and unarmed aerial vehicles (UAVs) in the battlefields. It is argued that drones and UAVs have the potential to greatly impact the usage of tanks in modern warfare. One-way drones and UAVs can impact tanks is by providing intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities. Drones and UAVs can fly over a battlefield and provide real-time information about enemy positions, movements, and activity, which can help tanks to avoid ambushes and to engage enemy forces effectively. Another way drones and UAVs can impact tanks is by providing firepower. Some drones and UAVs are equipped with weapons, such as missiles and bombs, which can be used to attack tanks and other armoured vehicles. This can make it more difficult for tanks to operate in certain areas and can increase their vulnerability to attack. Drones and UAVs can also be used to disrupt and neutralise tanks. They can be used to disable or destroy tanks, disrupt communication systems and even try to take control of them remotely. Additionally, drones and UAVs can be used to disrupt the command and control of tanks. For example, they can be used to jam or disrupt radio communications, making it more difficult for tanks to coordinate with other military assets. Thus, it is said that drones and UAVs have the potential to greatly impact the usage of tanks in modern warfare by providing intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities, firepower, and the ability to disrupt and neutralize tanks. As a result, tanks may have to be used in coordination with other types of military assets, such as drones, in order to effectively counter enemy forces.

Another aspect to consider in considering the relevancy of tanks in battlefield is the **deployment of tanks in built-up areas and open ground.** The deployment of tanks in built-up areas and open ground can vary significantly. In built-up areas, tanks face several challenges. The streets and buildings can constrain the movement of tanks and can make it more difficult for tanks to manoeuvre. Also, tanks can be vulnerable to attacks from above, such as from high-rise buildings, which can make them more susceptible to anti-tank weapons. In addition, tanks can cause significant damage to the infrastructure and civilian buildings, which can lead to negative political and public relations consequences. On the other hand, tanks can have a significant advantage in open ground. They are built for cross-country travel and can move quickly across rough terrain. They can also engage in flanking manoeuvres, which can make it more difficult for the enemy to defend against them. Additionally, tanks can provide cover and suppressing fire for other ground forces, such as infantry. They are also less likely to cause significant damage to the infrastructure and civilian buildings, which can lead to less negative political and public relations consequences. In general, tanks are better suited for operations in open ground, where they can take advantage of their mobility and firepower. However, tanks can still be used in built-up areas, but they may need to be used in coordination with other types of military assets, such as infantry, to effectively counter enemy forces. In sum, the deployment of tanks in built-up areas and open ground can differ significantly, tanks can face several challenges in built-up areas, but they can have a significant

advantage in open ground. It is necessary to assess the terrain and the objective of the operation to determine the best way to deploy tanks.

Having looked at the pros and cons on the use of tanks in battle, it can be surmised that there are a **few criteria to choose the 'right' tank for battle**. The first and foremost criterion is the mission requirement, the tanks must be designed to handle the specific task they are intended for. For example, tanks designed for urban warfare will have different characteristics than those designed for open terrain. Next is on mobility whereby the tanks should be able to move quickly across rough terrain and be able to manoeuvre effectively in different types of environments. Another criterion is armour protection. The tanks should be heavily armoured to protect the crew from small arms fire and anti-tank weapons. The tanks should also be equipped with powerful guns that can destroy other armoured vehicles and fortifications. It should have advanced electronic systems to provide communication, navigation, and targeting capabilities. Additionally, the tanks should have good crew comfort, ergonomics, and safety features to ensure the crew can operate effectively for long periods of time. Importantly, the tanks should be easy to maintain and have low logistics requirements. On cost, the tanks should be cost-effective, considering the cost of acquisition, maintenance, and upgrades. Another criterion is interoperability. The tanks should be able to operate effectively with other military assets and be compatible with the existing equipment. Likewise, political and diplomatic considerations must be taken into account. The tanks should be able to meet the political and diplomatic requirements of the nation-state that will use them. In summary, when choosing the right tanks, it is important to consider the mission requirements, mobility, armour protection, firepower, electronic systems, crew comfort, logistics, cost, interoperability, and political and diplomatic considerations. By taking these criteria into account, it will be possible to select the tanks that are best suited for the intended mission and will provide the most effective support to the troops.

On the **second matter involving the request of tanks by a nation-state in its war against another state**, it can be seen that the request of tanks by Ukraine for its fight against the Russians has implored different opinions. Some analysts argue the move to use the tanks and armoured forces by Russia in the invasion of Ukraine was not a wise move. Nevertheless, others opine that whether it is wise to use tanks for an invasion of another country depends on several factors, including the objective of the invasion, the terrain and environment of the target country, and the military capabilities of the invading force. On one hand, tanks can be a powerful tool for a rapid and decisive invasion, as they can provide heavy firepower and armour protection for ground forces. They can also be used to quickly move across rough terrain, which can be useful in certain environments. Additionally, tanks can be used to support other ground forces, such as infantry, and can be used in reconnaissance and psychological warfare. On the other hand, tanks can be vulnerable to certain types of attacks, such as anti-tank weapons and IEDs, and may cause significant damage to the infrastructure and civilian buildings. Additionally, tanks can be less effective in built-up areas or in mountainous terrain, where they can be constrained by narrow streets and lack of open space. Furthermore, the use of tanks in an invasion can also have political and diplomatic consequences, as it can be seen as a sign of aggression and can lead to negative public relations. Hence, whether it is wise to use tanks for an invasion of another country depends on several factors, and it is important to carefully consider the objective of the invasion, the terrain and environment of the target country, and the military capabilities of the invading force. It is also important to take into account the political and diplomatic consequences of the invasion, and consider alternative options before deciding to use tanks.

Another aspect to consider is the political implication of using tanks in invading neighbouring states. The political implications of using tanks in invading a neighbouring state can be significant. First, the use of tanks in an invasion can be seen as a sign of aggression and can lead to negative public relations, both domestically and internationally. The nation-state that is being invaded may see the use of tanks as a provocation and this can lead to heightened tensions and increased hostility between the two states. Second, the use of tanks in an invasion can lead to condemnation from the international community. Other states and international organisations may view the invasion as a violation of international law and may take diplomatic or economic measures to condemn the action. This can lead to a loss of support and isolation for the state that is using tanks to invade. Third, the use of tanks in an invasion can lead to a humanitarian crisis. Tanks can cause significant damage to infrastructure and civilian buildings, which can lead to loss of life and displacement of people as seen in the Russia-Ukraine war. This can lead to a negative impact on the population, further fuelling the tension and hostility towards the invading state. Fourth, the use of tanks can lead to a prolonged conflict, as the invaded nation-state may resist and fight back, which can lead to a costly and prolonged war. Finally, the use of tanks in an invasion can also lead to a blowback effect, as the invaded nation-state may seek allies and support from other states to counter the aggression, which can lead to an increase in regional tensions and instability. In short, the political implications of using tanks in invading a neighbouring state can be significant, as it can lead to negative public relations, condemnation from the international community, humanitarian crisis, prolonged conflict, and a blowback effect that can increase regional tensions and instability. Therefore, it is paramount for a nation-state to consider the political implications before using tanks in an invasion, and to weigh the potential costs and benefits of such an action.

An interesting question to address is whether seeking allies and support from other states to counter tank aggression is a viable move. It is postulated that seeking allies and support from other states to counter tank aggression can be a viable move depending on the circumstances. One way that seeking allies and support can be effective is by forming a coalition with other states that share similar interests or goals. This can provide the invaded nation-state with more military and economic resources to resist the aggression and to counter the tanks. Additionally, seeking allies and support can also be effective in terms of diplomatic pressure. Other states and international organisations may be more likely to take diplomatic or economic measures to condemn the aggression and to support the invaded nation-state if there is a coalition in place. Furthermore, seeking allies and support can also lead to a diplomatic solution, as the aggression can be perceived as a threat to regional security, which may encourage states to mediate and find a peaceful resolution to the conflict. However, seeking allies and support also has its limitations. Some states may not be willing to get involved in the conflict or may not have the resources to provide meaningful support. Additionally, seeking allies and support can also lead to an escalation of the conflict if the other states decide to intervene militarily, which can lead to prolonged and costly war. In brief, seeking allies and support from other states to counter tank aggression can be a viable move, as it can provide more military and economic resources, diplomatic pressure, and a chance for a diplomatic solution. However, it's important to consider the potential limitations and the possibility of an escalation of the conflict before making such a move.

Having deliberated the two concerns pertaining the relevancy of tanks and the viability of request for tank support by a nation-state for its fight against another state, the use of tanks and its outcome in the Russia-Ukraine War would be a testimony of the relevancy of tanks in the modern warfare. Doctrinally, Russia's deployment strategy for its armoured and mechanised forces focuses on rapid deployment and the ability to respond to a wide range of

military threats. One key aspect of Russia's deployment strategy is the use of its airborne and air assault units, which are designed to quickly deploy to potential hotspots around the country. Additionally, Russia also has many mechanised and armoured units that are based near its western and southern borders, which allows for rapid deployment in the event of a crisis. In addition to rapid deployment, Russia also places a strong emphasis on the use of combined arms tactics, where armoured and mechanised units are used in conjunction with other military assets, such as artillery and air power. This allows Russia to bring a wide range of firepower to bear on an enemy and to engage in coordinated attacks. Another important aspect of Russia's deployment strategy is the use of its Strategic Missile Forces, which are equipped with intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and other nuclear-capable systems. This allows Russia to have a strategic deterrent, which can be used to prevent conflicts or to respond to potential aggressors. Finally, Russia is reported to have a strategy of constant training and readiness, it has large-scale exercises for its armoured and mechanised units, which allows them to maintain a high level of readiness and to be able to respond quickly to a potential crisis. It can be seen that Russia's deployment strategy for its armoured and mechanised forces focuses on rapid deployment, combined arms tactics, strategic deterrent, and constant training. Thus, these aspects indicate Russia's stand that tanks are still relevant in war.

Responding to the request for tanks by Ukraine, the United Kingdom has announced that it will supply Ukraine with advanced Challenger 2 tanks and advanced artillery systems. This announcement was made during a phone call between British Prime Minister Sunak and Ukraine President Zelenskyy (Holden, 2023). It is inferred that heavier tanks are crucial for recapturing occupied territories. Nevertheless, critics say the tanks of UK will not be a game-changer. Pressures is mounting on Germany to send its Leopard tanks to Ukraine to boost fight against Russian forces. The Leopard tanks are used by 13 European countries. There are about 2,300 Leopard 2 tanks across Europe in warehouses of army bases. Germany has provided Ukraine with Marder Armoured Personnel Carriers and howitzers. However, Germany said it is concerned about escalating Russian invasion by sending tanks to Ukraine. Germany's governing coalition is also divided on increasing military assistance to Ukraine. Analysts say Germany is looking to the United States to take the lead in sending tanks to Ukraine (Ridgwell, 2023). On this aspect, the United States is finalising its US\$2.6 billion weapons package including Stryker combat vehicles for Ukraine ("Ukraine Army", 2013). Nevertheless, this package does not include Abrams tanks or ATACMS long-range missiles. On the other hand, the Western Powers are concerned that the deployment of Western tanks will risk escalating tensions with Russia. The facts that tanks are provided by the countries supporting Ukraine indicate that tanks are still relevant in war and modern warfare.

All in all, the Russia-Ukraine war will be a showcase of the relevance or irrelevance of tanks in modern battlefield. It will be everyone's guess on what the outcome of the Russia-Ukraine war would be. Likewise, it is difficult to predict the winner of 'battle of the bulge' between Russia and Ukraine. Regardless, the fact that Russia deploys its tank in the battlefield and Ukraine has requested tanks for its fight against Russia is indeed a contention for many to decide that tanks are still important platforms for inclusions in war and the modern battlefield.

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