

DECISIVE POINT

The USAWC Press Podcast Companion Series:

Podcast Transcript

Kevin D. Stringer and Jelle J. H. Hooiveld

“Urban Resistance to Occupation: An Underestimated Element of Land Warfare”

Due to a global trend toward urbanization and Russian and Chinese aggression toward Ukraine and Taiwan, respectively, urban resistance to occupation merits greater study. The research here presents a much-needed and unique analysis of Dutch-language primary sources on the Netherlands’ World War II urban resistance to occupation. It provides deeper insights into the occupation experiences of a highly urbanized, densely populated country in which clandestine underground and auxiliary elements played paramount roles in resistance efforts for most of the occupation period. It also illustrates the feasibility of overt, guerrilla-based activity in urban environments during the final phase of a conflict and offers insights into an understudied Landpower activity that modern at-risk countries should develop and hone.

Read the article [here](#).

Email usarmy.carlisle.awc.mbx.parameters@army.mil to give feedback on this podcast or the genesis article.

Keywords: resistance to occupation, Resistance Operating Concept, underground, special operations forces, megacity

Episode Transcript

Stephanie Crider (Host)

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Joining me today are Dr. Kevin D. Stringer and Jelle Hooiveld, authors of “[Urban Resistance to Occupation: An Underestimated Element of Land Warfare](#),” which was published in the Autumn 2023 issue of *Parameters*.

Stringer is a retired US Army colonel and a visiting professor at the Military Academy of Lithuania. He’s also a lecturer at the Baltic Defense College.

Hooiveld holds a Master of Science, a Bachelor of Economics, and is a PhD candidate at the University of Leiden. He’s a senior lecturer and team coordinator within the security management bachelor’s degree program at Saxion University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands.

Welcome to Decisive Point, gentlemen.

Kevin D. Stringer

Thank you, Stephanie.

Jelle Hooiveld

Thanks, Stephanie.

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Host

Kevin, you were involved in the development of the Resistance Operating Concept, which also prompted this *Parameters* article about urban irregular warfare. Can you tell us a little bit about the project please, and why a Dutch case is such an important piece of it?

Stringer

The Resistance Operating Concept was (a) catalyst for this article. I have to go back to 2013. The leadership at Special Operations Command Europe assigned me to be the project officer to establish an academic and practitioner network that would start examining resistance as an integral part of national defense. This is especially relevant for countries like the Baltics, Poland, Moldova, Georgia, and others on the eastern flank. In 2014, as we all know, Crimea was occupied, the Russians invaded it and occupied it, and the interest in this subject increased substantially, particularly in the European theater.

And so, what we did as part of the project—we organized a series of multinational workshops, events, and writing groups that ultimately resulted in a Resistance Operating Concept. The intent was to have a document that a country could take and then apply to their unique national context. The Resistance Operating Concept itself was published in 2020 by the Swedish National Defense University and Special Operations Command Europe and was placed with a variety of nations to do exactly the intent.

Dr. Otto Fiala, who was on my team—he’s the lead author—deserves a lot of credit for the document, but a number of others I’ll just mention briefly: Dr. Byron Harper, Sergeant Major Rob Yates, and Colonel Jed Medlin contributed effort, time, and resources to presenting this. Nevertheless, the Resistance Operating Concept is a snapshot, and it has some gaps. And one of the gaps I identified in subsequent years since 2020 has been a focus on urban resistance.

During the COVID period, I had the privilege to read Jelle’s book—which I highly recommend to all listeners—*Dutch Courage*, which looks at Dutch resistance in World War II. And parts of his book really spoke to me about . . . this could be a way to address this underdeveloped literature for urban resistance. We got in contact and, as you might say, the rest is history.

Host

Jelle, can you give us a general description of the Netherlands in World War II and why it was such a difficult country in which to conduct clandestine activities?

Hooiveld

Well, the first thing you should realize is that the Netherlands was one of the most densely populated countries in Europe, and it was also a very small country in terms of its size. In comparison to France, for example, the Netherlands is about 14 times smaller. And if I compare the Netherlands to a US state, the country is not much larger than, for example, the state of Maryland.

One of the other characteristics that is important to mention is that only about 8 percent of the country was still forested. But that means the rest of the country was basically open agricultural grounds or urban areas. Also mind that during World War II, the Netherlands was basically trapped between Nazi Germany in the east and the North Sea in the west. And what complicated things further was that the country was surrounded by other states that were occupied, so there were no friendly neighboring or neutral countries in which Dutch resisters could find a refuge or support.

And, of course, these demographic and geographic factors offered the Germans an ability to exercise strict control. And numerous of German police and counterintelligence units, such as the notorious Gestapo, Sicherheitsdienst, and Abwehr, were stationed in the country, and these units were assisted by collaborating Dutch forces, such as Nazi police auxiliaries and lots of native informants and spies. This all meant that Dutch resisters couldn’t detach from society; they

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couldn't form guerrilla camps in rural areas. They always had to operate in extremely close proximity to German forces, and this is what made it so difficult for the Dutch underground to conduct its operations.

Host

This one's for both of you, can you describe why the Dutch case illustrates the need for pre-war security force assistance to prepare selected elements of a threatened population in peacetime?

Stringer

The Dutch, as we note in our article, were totally unprepared for this. There was no pre-war planning or training for resistance. And this reflects, or has reflected, itself in the situation that we found in Europe in, let's say, the 2013 to 2014 time period. Preparation is key, this is not something you want to do impromptu. As Jelle said, the consequences of lack of preparation are literally death. A number of networks—highlighted a few in the article, more in his book—were destroyed. The Gestapo, or one of the other internal security organizations, took out the whole network—and this meant detention, death, execution, or being sent to a concentration camp.

So, the lack of preparation was not good for the Dutch resistance. I think it should inform a modern perspective that if we have time to prepare, we have to think of this as an integral part of national defense—not exclusive. Conventional warfighting, conventional national defense, is quite critical. Preparation for resistance, if you're a country that is going to be threatened by a Russia or China, would be prudent to enable survival of the resistance organization in occupied territory.

Hooiveld

Good summary from Kevin. I'd like to stress that the Dutch population wasn't prepared at all for an occupation, and they were largely unknown (unfamiliar) with methods of resistance, and this cost a lot of early resistance in the Netherlands, literally, their lives. And it was just basically trial and error, and that is not ideal. You want to be prepared for an occupation.

And I'd like to stress that there was another major problem because of the Dutch government lacking to prepare the resistance—that was the fact that there was a shortage of weapons and explosives in the country. The Germans had requisitioned (or confiscated) most of the weapons that circulated in the country after the occupation, and this meant that the Dutch resistance was totally dependent on external support after the start of the occupation. And again, that situation isn't ideal.

Host

You rightly stressed in your article that modern technology creates both advantages and threats to urban resisters. Will you elaborate on this, please?

Stringer

I'll kick us off on the technology discussion. Clearly, World War II Netherlands is different than what we see in the twenty-first century, and in fact the twenty-first century raises a lot of questions about the survivability of resistance movements—facial recognition, biometrics, drones . . . they preclude this romantic view of resistance in the forest or in uninhabited terrain. It creates almost a paradox, and I know Jelle has some thoughts on this because we've talked about it. Urban terrain might be the only place where you're a survivor in the twenty-first century, but the technology is going to be looking for you very closely. Social media and digital footprint would be just one example. This can be tracked, and if it can be tracked, it can be found. And if it can be found, it can be detained, killed, or captured, which makes the life of a resistance member very tenuous.

Let me pass to Jelle for his thoughts, because technology is relevant in this discussion.

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Hooiveld

Well, I'd like to mention that some researchers argue that due to the global urbanization trend, resisters and guerrillas will find cover in overcrowded cities. I think that we don't underestimate the technology Kevin already mentioned, and one definitely must take automated surveillance technology into account—and I find that very interesting as I'm also a lecturer in security management.

For example Taiwan's capital, Taipei—it has over 30,000 CCTV cameras in the capital alone and that is a large risk. If you imagine, in a hypothetical situation, that, for example, China invades Taipan (Taipei) and they can utilize those thousands of cameras, it will be a major threat to the urban resister and its support network. An example of technology that can create some advantages for urban resistance, if I may, is the ability to use modern, highly effective, and portable weapons. Looking at the Dutch resistance that were issued rather primitive weapons, such as sten (submachine) guns and bazookas. We know them from the Second World War, and they were basically very ineffective weapons. And if I compare it to the technology and weapons that are available to the modern resister, I'd like to stress that modern urban resistance forces can potentially contribute even more than their World War II predecessors.

Host

Do you have any concluding thoughts you'd like to share before we go?

Stringer

Our article was really designed to get policymakers and senior military officials to start thinking about urban resistance. The Dutch example I would offer is unique, particularly because with Jelle, he was able to access Dutch archives and interview Dutch participants, which provided a different, let's say, real-world flavor to this historical vignette. This is not a theoretical exercise in today's world. We have a number of countries that are occupied—Ukraine's occupied, Georgia's occupied, Moldova's occupied. And a number of countries that are under threat—Taiwan, potentially Mongolia, the Baltics, and Poland.

So, I would offer three concluding remarks. Pre-war preparation for this sort of Landpower activity is essential. Conventional planning needs to think about dealing with resistance groups on the modern battlefield. And last, but not least... tradecraft. How one is going to survive and operate clandestinely in an urban environment. Those skills and expertise need to be trained and implicated in the resistance network.

Host

Jelle, do you have anything to add?

Hooiveld

This was a very good summary, Kevin. The only thing I'd like to mention is that, in my opinion, the urban and densely populated World War II Netherlands was basically ahead of its time. And that's why I'm very happy that Kevin was willing to write this article with me, and I'm very happy that it was eventually published in your journal. So, thank you very much for that.

Host

We're delighted to have you in the journal. In fact, listeners, if you're interested in reading the article, you can find it at press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters. Look for Volume 53, Issue 3.

Kevin, Jelle, this was a real pleasure. Thank you so much for your time today.

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Stringer

Thank you, Stephanie, for the time.

Hooiveld

Thank you, Stephanie, very much.

Host

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