

# BAR

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BAR is looking for articles for a new series of Special Reports on specific battles and the lessons to be drawn from them, in particular how they relate to the British Army of the 21st Century. If anyone is interested please contact BAR at [armyreview@armymail.mod.uk](mailto:armyreview@armymail.mod.uk)

**Cover Photo: Sergeant Mark Webster RLC**

# Urban Operations

*Lieutenant Colonel Richard Sernberg and the rest of The Environment Team at the Warfare Branch, Land Warfare Centre provide a foreword for this Special Report on Urban Operations.*

At first glance, this anthology of BAR articles, the first of two volumes focussing on urban operations, may give veteran readers a feeling of having seen it all before. After all, throughout all our careers, the urban operations drum has been beaten with metronomic regularity. We all know that most of the world's population lives in urban areas, that the urban environment has provided some of the greatest challenges in contemporary conflicts, that our potential enemies are likely to use urban terrain to negate some of our technological overmatch and, therefore, that urban operations are increasingly likely to feature in any future British Army deployment.<sup>1</sup> It's just that there always seems to be something more important that needs to be done before we properly grasp the urban operations nettle. However, the reality is that, often as a result of debate provoked by BAR articles, the British Army has developed some excellent tactical urban doctrine and training and has operated successfully in many urban environments across the globe.<sup>2</sup>

That said, we cannot afford to be complacent. Despite some sound low-level tactics, we have tended to lack focus on unit and formation level Combined Arms manoeuvre in the urban environment, and our urban TTPs are limited in coherence and scope. Our potential adversaries, as well as our allies, have recognised this challenge and are developing their own urban capabilities.<sup>3</sup> Understanding how a division orchestrates and how a brigade executes urban operations through the application of Integrated Action will be key to our success in this operating environment in the future. But what is the Army doing to realise this? Or, as usual, is there just too much else going on?

Firstly, it's important not to view the ability to operate in the urban environment in isolation. It's important but to focus solely on improving this aspect of the Army's capability would be irresponsible. Improving our urban capability is only one of several areas where the Army needs to get better. Better exploiting the technologies which we already have, implementing our own and our partners'

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1 *Identified within the Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre's Future Operating Environment 2035.*

2 *Belfast, Londonderry, Basra and Kabul are all cities where the British Army has operated and (in the case of Kabul) continues to operate.*

3 *Most notably, the French and German urban training facilities at Sissonne (CENZUB) and outside Magdeburg (Schnöggersburg) respectively.*

operational lessons and getting the correct balance in our training are some examples; there are many more. The Land Warfare Centre has been charged with optimising the fielded force to support the generation of the Army's contribution to a joint and interoperable force capable of defeating a peer(+) enemy in complex terrain. It bridges the gap between Capability Development (CAPDEV) and Warfare Development (WARDEV) to ensure current and emerging threats can be addressed with current resource. Whilst CAPDEV is about giving us new and better capabilities (doing better things), Force Optimisation is about doing better with current capabilities (doing things better). Force Optimisation therefore prioritises fielded force vulnerabilities and opportunities and seeks to treat or exploit them using the levers available to the Field Army - structural adjustment, cultural change, innovation, developing doctrine, training and interoperability or through Balance of Investment decisions. It draws on extant risk, lessons and CAPDEV process and is governed by the Force Optimisation Review Board. Urban is one of these Force Optimisation priorities.

Luckily work towards optimising our urban capability (and fulfilling the Decisive Condition) has not needed to begin from a standing start. The Army instinctively knows that urban operations are important and much work is already underway to improve our urban capability, but this has been discrete activity rather than a focused effort across the force. This atomisation of effort was recognised at the urban operations stocktake held in January 2018.

Consequently, a Land Domain Urban Operations Steering Group has been established to provide the leadership and momentum required to cohere all the training and doctrine development activities within WARDEV, as well as informing and being informed by the experimentation, research and equipment procurement being conducted during CAPDEV. Representation is primarily from Army organisations but, recognising this is a 'pan-defence activity', both Navy and Air command as well as the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL) and the Defence Infrastructure Organisation are represented. The Steering Group will drive urban operations development, identifying priorities for funding and assuring coherence and efficiency by ensuring that urban workstrands seek to answer multiple questions rather than multiple discrete activities attempting to answer a single question.

A key step in improving our 'match fitness' for urban operations will be to understand what the Army needs to do and how it needs to be equipped to succeed in the urban environment against a peer+ enemy. To achieve this, an urban operations estimate was conducted in September. This defined an urban roadmap which charts a path of activity to ensure the Army remains competitive in the urban environment into the future. To better focus activity and avoid dissipation of effort,

several key actions have been identified on the roadmap which will bring most advantage in the short to medium term. Teams are being generated to drive these actions forward and some coherence will be sacrificed to ensure rapid progress. This roadmap nests within the wider Force Optimisation work.

Alongside experimentation for Strike, 1 AI Brigade has conducted urban operations development activities under the URBAN DAWN series of exercises. These have been designed to inform changes in urban WARDEV (the findings were considered during the urban estimate), recommend optimal combat teaming for urban operations, inform short term (0-3 years) enhancements to make urban training more realistic and competitive, and to catalyse the joint force focus within the urban environment. To complement this, work is ongoing to gain an understanding of the urban operations development work being conducted in the Joint arena and by our multinational partners, as well as reinvigorating links between the Land, Air and Maritime Warfare Centres for air-land integration and for littoral-urban operations.

Many of you will have used our existing urban training facilities and will be aware of their limitations. They are no longer state of the art, are limited in scale and lack the necessary variety in urban terrain types. Most current facilities replicate isolated villages and do not include industrial, commercial or subterranean terrain types (or do so in a very limited manner). Work is ongoing to change this but major building projects will take time and therefore ways of better using our current training facilities, or using other areas of the defence estate, such as empty barracks or government owned but unused infrastructure, are being sought.

There is already a sound doctrinal basis for urban operations, and the Land Domain's combined-arms urban doctrine is currently contained within *Doctrine Note 15/13 - Operations in the Urban Environment*.<sup>4</sup> However, of all the environments in which the Army may be called upon to fight, urban terrain is the one which changes most rapidly. Despite some slight changes wrought by global warming, woods and forests and cold weather and their effect on military operations have been similar for millennia, while urban terrain continues to develop and change apace. Therefore, the Land Warfare Centre will commence work shortly to update our current doctrine, capturing the lessons from the URBAN DAWN series of exercises as well as aligning it with doctrine that has been published recently, principally: *ADP Land Operations*, the Warfighting tactics series of AFMs and *AFM Stability Operations*. In the longer term, urban operations doctrine may be given more prominence within the doctrine hierarchy as befits its status as the most likely environment for future military action.

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4 Both the *DN and Urban Tactics Handbook* are available on the *British Army Electronic Battle Box*.

## FOREWORD

The Steering Group (and other similar organisations) do not have a monopoly on ideas. As always, the best are likely come from personnel currently serving at sub-unit level; the COs and RSMs of the future and those who have grown up and are most comfortable in the interconnected and all pervasive information environment which is at its most dense within the urban setting. Therefore, if you have an idea or identify an issue related to urban operations, make sure it is captured during After Action Reviews and/or Post Exercise Reports. You may also wish to add to this anthology of urban operations articles by committing your thoughts to paper and submitting them to the editor.



# Thinking of the Urban Environment

*Louise Tumchewics, Resident Fellow at the Centre for Historical Analysis and Conflict Research (CHACR) provides a very brief overview of the CHACR Urban Operations Research Programme.*

Urban operations are as old as cities themselves. There are countless examples throughout history of fierce fighting in urban areas, from the battle of Hamoukar in 3500 BC to Mosul in 2017. The complexities of urban warfare have long been appreciated, and military theorists including Sun Tzu and Clausewitz advised avoiding or isolating cities rather than becoming embroiled in combat within them.

Demographic trends suggest that it may become increasingly difficult to avoid fighting in cities. In the 21st century the majority of the world's population (c. 60%) will live in urban centres rather than rural areas, a shift unprecedented in human history.

It is therefore likely that the British Army will be involved in urban operations in the future, and it is timely that we reassess our preparedness, and consider the challenges we might encounter. Over the next year, CHACR's urban research programme will be exploring how, if physical manoeuvre is constrained, can a small army find advantage in a big city? What lessons can we learn from history? How do major urban centres work, and how can we leverage existing systems and infrastructure? What does the future city look like? How can we best train and prepare for urban operations across a range of scenarios, from conventional warfare to humanitarian operations?

Our activities will include support to WARDEV and CAPDEV programmes, participation in experimentation and exercises, historical research and publications, battlefield studies and study days. CHACR will be a permanent partner in the University of Warwick's 'War in the Global City' workshop, and will be engaging with the academic community in the UK and abroad. We are also seeking the advice of civilian experts in urban planning, construction, communications, public transportation and utility providers, to gain a better understanding of how cities work, from the subterranean to cyberspace.

We welcome engagement across the army, and we hope that this anthology contributes to your thinking on urban operations.

*Troops from The 2nd Royal Regiment Of Wales take part in Exercise Urban Warrior, Cenzub, France, December 2012 to experiment with armoured warfare in an urban environment. Photo: Corporal Mark Larnar, Crown Copyright*



# FIBUA: Lessons from History

*This article by Charles Dick, then head of the Conflict Studies Research Centre was originally published in Army Training and Doctrine News No 22, Summer 2006*

I thought about writing about the experience of Arnhem and Aachen, Budapest and Berlin, Cassino and Manila. I rejected these WW II examples as being unlike the sort of combat you are likely to face. True, the techniques to defend or clear streets and city blocks are remarkably little changed compared with ‘normal’ battles. But you will be wearily familiar with lessons such as: clear houses from the top floor downwards or avoid open spaces and mousehole from house to

house. What has changed is the nature of the opposing sides and their objectives in these city fights. WW II battles were fought between conventional armies, with one trying to hold its city and the other to take it, both, often, at whatever the cost.

I have put relatively little tactical detail into the piece, preferring to concentrate on some broader issues. I shall concentrate on three more recent struggles: for Hué in 1968, for Tyre and Beirut in 1982 and for Grozny in 1994-95. In each of these, the forces were asymmetrical in type and aim. Regular armies were doing battle with guerrilla enemies, and the latter were ultimately less concerned with holding their cities than with making a political point. These are more likely paradigms for your future enemies, as are the constraints under which the regular forces laboured. And you are likely to face FIBUA in the future - my point of departure.

## **Growing Prevalence of FIBUA**

Asked why he robbed banks, the American Willy Sutton replied, “that’s where the money is”. Why will you probably face city combat? Because that is where the people are. In the 21st Century the majority of the world’s population will live in cities; and if anything, they are growing faster in less developed countries than in the First World. In the Third World, the urban boom is often contributing little to economic growth and prosperity. The rural poor are fleeing overpopulated agricultural regions in search of work and the good life in cities. They are mostly disappointed. They populate ever-growing slums and suffer unemployment and the lack of basic services. Faced with hardship, unemployment and the breakdown of traditional social controls and possibly ethnic or religious tensions or conflict, these members of atomised societies live in a potentially explosive atmosphere.

Clausewitz pointed out that war is merely a continuation of politics by other means. Urban warfare in the future will be the ultimate expression of this truth. Many cities represent the substantive economic and psychological heart of their nation and contain many significant symbols. They are important to peoples and their governments – and therefore to armies; some will be centres of gravity. (Quite apart from the point that the entry points for expeditionary armies, such as ours now is, will be ports or airports that are in or adjacent to cities.) Whether conducting a Peace Support Operation (PSO), an anti-terrorist operation or a Non-combatant Evacuation Operation (NEO), never mind defeating an enemy state or restoring a friendly one, attention will have to be paid to the urban environment.

Moreover, cities may provide the future battlefield of choice for relatively ill-equipped insurgents/guerrillas. If you are trying to make a political point, you must do it where you can be seen and heard. The media can be kept away from battlefields in remote mountains or forests/jungles, and anyway, no-one worries too much about trees being bombed. Journalists’ natural environment is the city; as they sip their

G&Ts in the international hotels that is their habitat, they occupy a ringside seat for urban combat. They can talk to leaders and observe actions at first hand; usually, what they will see is the regular forces making full use of their superior firepower and causing huge non-combatant casualties and collateral damage. Often, militarily successful actions will produce political defeat in consequence.

There are also good military reasons for guerrillas/insurgents choosing to fight in an urban environment. In field conditions today, the weapons and equipment of sophisticated armies and air forces, especially the American, confer on them huge advantages. They possess historically unparalleled mobility, firepower and the means to control, co-ordinate and target them swiftly to smash the enemy simultaneously throughout the depth of his deployment. Cities deprive them of these advantages, or at least limit their utility. Guerrillas/insurgents can remain concealed. They can exploit local knowledge of the terrain to conduct purposeful and covert manoeuvre. And they will find that their relatively primitive, usually short-range weapons are almost as effective as the armament of regular troops in the close combat that characterises FIBUA. While they will



*Warrior Fighting Vehicles enter the village during Exercise Urban Warrior at Cenzub, France, December 2012.  
Photo: Corporal Mark Larner, Crown Copyright*

lack the armour, artillery and CAS of their enemy, the use of these by the regulars will necessarily be restrained by restrictive ROEs; either that or their unrestricted use will alienate the local population, the international community and perhaps their own domestic audience and the aggressor can come to be seen as the victim. And when things go badly for them, the irregulars can often melt into the local population and live to fight another day.

In other words, FIBUA is a great equaliser. Especially on home ground, it can enable a technologically inferior side which is nevertheless rich in manpower and political will to compensate for its weaknesses and impose its preferred style of war on the stronger adversary: a relatively long drawn-out and manpower-intensive, fragmented and attritional struggle for which western armies and societies are psychologically ill-prepared.<sup>1</sup>

## **The Battle for Hué**

When Ho Chi Minh launched the Tet offensive in January 1968, he had two aims in mind. By moving to the third stage of revolutionary war and mounting a general, conventional offensive, he hoped to produce a general uprising that would collapse the South Vietnamese government. In this, he failed. The second aim was to strike at the US centre of gravity - American public opinion - in an election year. He hoped to discredit President Johnson and destroy American confidence in the war effort. Even if victory was not achieved in the field, the US could be driven from the war, and without American support, the republic of Vietnam would collapse. He succeeded in this second aim. Battles in Saigon and Hué had much to do with this.

The communists had excellent intelligence on their enemies' strength, deployment and expectations, not to mention local knowledge of the terrain. By contrast, while the Americans knew quite a lot about the enemy build up, they completely failed to gauge his intentions. It never occurred to them that they would seize Hué city.

On 29 January, two sapper battalions infiltrated into Hué to lead an all-out assault by two regiments (7,500 men) two days later. The NVA/VC seized most of Hué at the outset and then were reinforced by five more battalions. It required a 26 day battle to expel them. While ultimately successful tactically, the Americans/ARVN made several errors (some forced) which prolonged the battle and led ultimately to political disaster. The intelligence failure allowed the enemy to achieve

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*1 Western armies may also be unprepared in terms of capabilities. If the warfighting technology of the future is purchased at the expense of numbers (and in the expectation that it will make numbers irrelevant), they may find themselves unprepared to cope with the demands of large-scale FIBUA.*



*The old and the young flee Tet offensive fighting in Hue, managing to reach the south shore of the Perfume River despite this blown bridge. US Information Agency Press and Publications Service, National Archives and Records Administration, Wikimedia*

surprise. It also took senior commanders a long time to wise-up as they underestimated their enemy.

Command and Control was confused and disjointed, with US and ARVN forces under separate command. The lack of an overall commander resulted in no general battle plan and competition for fire and logistic support. And also to conflicting ROEs. There was a delay of over a fortnight before the city was tightly encircled and cut off from reinforcement and resupply.

At first, the Marines, unlike ARVN, operated under restricted ROEs, and suffered severely for it, especially from snipers. When these were relaxed, the casualty rate went down but wholesale destruction ensued. Little effort was made to look after the needs of the 22,000 DPs from the city. Distrusting the media, the Americans lost the propaganda war by default; for example, they did not exploit the mass executions of civilians by the communists to balance reports critical of American actions.

The Americans suffered 1,578 casualties and the ARVN another 2,412 in the battle for Hué. Enemy casualties were estimated at about 5,000 and almost 6,000 non-combatants were killed (about half being executed by the communists). 80% of the city was ruined, including many historic buildings and churches/pagodas and schools. While a military victory (albeit a costly one), Hué and Saigon were a political defeat. The shock produced by TV coverage of the destruction, the misery of refugees and the atrocities committed by the ARVN and even Americans rocked the USA and gave birth to the anti-war movement that ruined the reputation and morale of the US Army and compelled withdrawal four years later.

## **Lebanon 1982**

The Palestinians had created a state within a state in Lebanon, which they used as a secure base from which to launch attacks on Israel. The Israelis decided to solve the problem by military means. They would: drive the PLO terrorists back from the border; destroy their personnel and infrastructure (camps, CPs, equipment); and establish a new political order in Lebanon dominated by their Christian allies.

This would be accomplished through a 3-4 day, overwhelmingly powerful, armour-heavy blitzkrieg to Beirut. But the PLO largely refused to fight in the open where the Israelis' superior numbers and technological sophistication gave them a walkover. They gave battle in Tyre, Sidon and, most significantly, in Beirut.

An entire division was committed in Tyre, plus an amphibious assault, to overwhelm the enemy - 'shock and awe'. Psyops teams urged the civil population to flee the coming storm, then armoured columns drove into the city on multiple axes to fragment the opposition prior to destroying in detail those elements that did not simply give up. PLO fighters ambushed some columns and caused heavy casualties to the APC-borne infantry. The Israelis found that they had to conduct a painstaking, clearing operation against defended areas, an operation hampered by lack of sufficient infantry (mostly untrained in FIBUA) and forced to rely on massive firepower. Originally restrictive ROEs were soon lifted. Their enemy proved elusive, exploiting local knowledge and mobility to fight a manoeuvre battle rather than holding positions to the last man. They wanted to cause casualties, not hold ground. The Israelis did nothing to provide for the 30,000 refugees that fled the city, or even



*Checkpoint 4, Beirut 1982. It was manned by US Marines and Lebanese Army Soldiers. Photo: James Case, Creative Commons Attribution Generic License, Wikimedia*

to control their movement, and their return in search of food and shelter clogged roads and hampered military activity. When the PLO's position became untenable, the Palestinians melted into the floods of refugees.

Much the same pattern characterised the battle for Sidon, though the Israelis had learned the need for larger forces (three divisions were involved) and for infantry to operate dismounted. But the whole process took time. The invasion commenced on 6th June and Beirut was not reached until the 13th. A politically important timetable had collapsed.

The Israelis were somewhat at a loss to know how to tackle Beirut. The city was large - at 50 sq km and a population of over one million, about 26 times the size of Sidon and 71 times that of Tyre. There were about 14,000 PLO and Lebanese fighters and over 2,000 Syrian regular troops in West Beirut, the PLO stronghold, and they had prepared the area for defence. FIBUA had already proved to be expensive in casualties and the casualty-sensitive Israelis wanted no more of it, even though their 50,000 troops with 400 tanks and over 100 heavy guns greatly outnumbered the lightly armed defenders. They spent a fortnight sealing off the city and trying to persuade the Lebanese Phalangist (Christian) militia to capture West Beirut. To their disappointment, their allies declined the honour.

Having placed the city under siege, the Israelis spent July bombarding it from air, land and sea. Then they launched a series of limited attacks to isolate and reduce PLO strongpoints, gradually compressing the enemy held area. On 12th August, international, especially American, pressure compelled them to accept a cease fire and the internationally supervised withdrawal of the PLO from Beirut.

The war was a disaster for Israel. It cost 344 killed and over 2,000 wounded, most of them in FIBUA - a heavy bill for a small, casualty-conscious country. It really failed to achieve the aim as the Palestinian centre of gravity was not

infrastructure in the sense of buildings, equipment and formed units. It actually lay in popular support and the social/welfare organisation that gave rise to it. The PLO metamorphosed into a more amorphous, subversive/evasive organisation that blended into the population and continued to mount guerrilla attacks from there. And the war was the PLO's best recruiting sergeant.

The 17,000 or so civilian deaths and huge collateral damage turned most of Lebanon against Israel. Even hitherto pro-Israeli Shias in the South were turned into the country's implacable foes (today's Hizbollah).

Moreover, Israel's Phalangist militia friends were allowed (encouraged?) to massacre Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatilla camps, to international outrage. Israel lost its image in international (though not US) eyes as a victim and was seen as an aggressive bully visiting wanton destruction on innocent civilians in another country. The Israeli information campaign (denial of the use of CBUs, cutting off utilities as a weapon, pretending strikes were precision, surgical) failed to hide the truth from omnipresent journalists

Although the PLO was driven from Lebanon, the Palestinians had their successes. They had sought to maximize enemy casualties, a politically sensitive



*Part of a damaged apartment building in Grozny, Chechnya, Russia. Photo Michal Vogt, Creative Commons Attribution Share Alike License, Wikimedia*

issue in Israel.<sup>2</sup> They had wished to prolong the war until the world turned against Israel (indeed, there was even the start of a peace movement inside Israel). They had preserved their organisation essentially intact, and their fighters lived to fight many another day.

### **Grozny 1994-96**

In this example, I shall descend more into the tactical weeds. These weeds are similar to those in Lebanon, the Palestinians having adopted, albeit in less organised form, the same sort of structures and tactics as the Chechens.

Having failed to bring the breakaway republic to heel using loyal Chechen militia, the Yeltsin regime committed the Russian Army in December 1994. Like so many Yeltsin decisions, this one was cavalier and not thought through. The plan, such as it was, was to demonstrate overwhelming force to intimidate the resistance into giving up without a fight. After all, it had worked in Prague in 1968, Kabul in 1979 and Baku in 1990. On New Year's Eve, three armoured columns, with 6,000 men, converged on the city centre to take key buildings such as the presidential palace. There were about 4,500-6,000 fighters defending Grozny. The attack was decisively repulsed with heavy losses as columns fell prey to anti-tank ambushes.

Overconfidence and under-estimation of the enemy, as in Hué and Tyre, had much to do with the Russian repulse. But there was also much wrong with the army in 1994. The conscripts were unenthusiastic and very ill-trained, even for 'normal' operations. Units were all ad hoc, composite organisations where troops and officers did not know each other (the army was trying to retain an unrealistically large, Soviet force so most were mere cadres). Equipment appropriate to the specialised nature of FIBUA was not supplied in sufficient quantities (eg, flamethrowers, suitable infantry radios). And a well-developed doctrine had been forgotten.

The Chechens fought for a cause in which they reposed a passionate belief. Their militia remembered their Soviet training and built on it in preparation for the battle they knew was coming. They prepared the urban battlefield, both physically and in tactical terms. They were far from the poorly organised and ill-disciplined groups of bandits the Russians led themselves to expect.

Mobile operations of lightly-armed, highly flexible and well-integrated teams were the key to Chechen tactics. They did not seek to hold terrain but to impose an unacceptable cost, in casualties and time, on the Russians trying to take it.

The basic sub-unit comprised 5-6 men with an RPG, 1-2 machine guns and a sniper. Three such 'sections', together with riflemen/ammunition carriers and

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*2 Adjusting the casualty figures to make them demographically equivalent to the USA, they would have equated to about 196k.*

a medic would form a 25-man group. Three such groups, with a mortar or two, comprised the unit. Command and control was exercised through commanders operating well forward and relying on excellent Motorola or Nokia commercial light radios down to section level.

The city was divided into quadrants, with 75-man units deployed along parallel streets, in ambush. When a Russian unit penetrated, the street would be sealed by destroying the first and last vehicles and the rest were picked off at leisure by groups concentrating to counter-attack. Initially, they were aided by the reluctance of infantry to leave the illusory protection of their BMPs and BTRs. Once the Russians learned to dismount their infantry, the machine guns and snipers were used to strip the infantry from their AFVs and pin them while RPGs destroyed their vehicles and supporting tanks (mostly from above to avoid their reactive armour). At all times, the Chechens sought to hug the enemy closely to avoid strikes by the powerful Russian artillery.

Support weapons were used to good effect. Mortars, with their rapid, high-trajectory fire were used to pin and inflict casualties; they would shoot 3-4 rounds, then scoot to avoid CB fire. Air defence cannons, ZPU-2/4 and 12.7/14.5 mm machine guns, deterred Russian aircraft, especially attack helicopters, from interfering effectively in the battle. Snipers were used to good effect, lowering Russian morale and preventing movement over large areas.

Fighters, disguised as civilians, were used to misdirect the Russians and lead them into ambushes. The Russians were also frequently tricked by false orders over their radio nets (the Chechens spoke the language, including military Russian). The Chechens gave unlimited access to Russian and foreign journalists while the Russian authorities neither tried to limit their activities nor exploit them. The rebels won the all-important PR battle.

The Russians learned lessons from the initial disaster and adapted. Many more troops, some better (AB, NI), were brought in and others given some training. FIBUA assault detachments and groups were formed as per doctrine. They were given the tools to do the specialised job – eg, decent street plans, portable ladders, RPO-A launchers, more smoke, more snipers, more engineers, direct fire artillery, SP AAA to engage upper stories. Better tactics were used, including garrisoning areas gained to prevent them from being retaken by Chechens infiltrating back (often underground). Cooperation between army and Interior Ministry troops was improved (though still hampered by incompatible radios).

The siege was long, not least because the Russians never managed to seal off the city. But after 2½ months, Grozny was largely taken, the Chechen fighters having melted into the civil population or withdrawn to fight elsewhere. But in August 1996, the Chechens infiltrated to retake the city from the inadequate



*Troops from Colchester-based 7th Parachute Regiment Royal Horse Artillery practice house clearance drills at Fingringhoe Ranges during Exercise SPHINX DILIGENCE. Photo: Corporal Obi Igbo, Crown Copyright*

and incompetent Interior Ministry garrison. In three weeks of fighting, the army failed to retake it, and a negotiated settlement ended the war on terms favourable to the Chechens. The primary reason for the Russian defeat was growing war weariness. The media encouraged disillusion with the government and the army, most importantly in Russia but also internationally. And the casualties told their own, depressing story; the Russians probably suffered about 8,000 deaths and serious casualties during the campaign, almost one third of them in Grozny.

### What Lessons Do These Three Battles Teach?

There are common threads running through these battles, threads which explain why they were so costly to the regular armies that fought them and why eventual military victory nevertheless helped to produce political defeat.

Political guidance to military commanders was vague or contradictory. The guerrillas' centre of gravity was incorrectly identified, skewing military planning. By contrast, the enemy correctly identified and went for the attacker's centre of gravity.

Intelligence was woefully inadequate on the strength, determination and competence of the irregular enemy, and on his intentions. There was also inadequate intelligence preparation of the battlefield (eg, decent maps and town plans (including subterranean) were lacking). When the vital importance of Humint was realised, poor understanding of the local population resulted in the attackers being misled into error.

Commanders underestimated the size of the problem they faced and allowed wishful thinking to guide their decisions for far too long.

In consequence, the forces employed were, at least initially, too small. They also lacked FIBUA training. This both prolonged the battle and gave rise to higher than necessary casualties.<sup>3</sup> It also led to:

- *a reliance on more or less indiscriminate, certainly excessive use, of artillery and airpower; initially tight ROEs were loosened as soon as the troops encountered serious resistance. The consequent destruction and non-combatant casualties had political repercussions.*
- *The cities were only belatedly (or not at all) sealed off from the possibility of reinforcement and resupply by the defenders.*
- *In addition to the regular forces, others, local or from a different ministry, were employed. This complicated command relationships, leading to conflicting orders and considerable friction.*
- *Civil affairs was neglected, leading not only to unnecessary hardship but to adverse local, international and domestic political reactions. This problem was exacerbated by:*
  - *Failure to get the media on side - even those from the attackers own country.*
  - *The way that the attackers went about capturing the city not only lost them legitimacy but acted as a powerful recruiting sergeant for the guerrillas and helped the fighters to melt into the general population when defeated militarily.*

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<sup>3</sup> *Shortage of infantry was a particular problem. Future western armies may well find themselves in a worse plight as numbers of men are substituted for by high-tech systems.*

## **Some FIBUA Lessons From History**

### ***Intelligence***

The competence and combat effectiveness of the enemy may not be obvious to regular soldiers possessed of western cultural prejudices. Because the opposition comprises scruffy, apparently undisciplined gangs, it is too easy to underestimate its capabilities and determination. It is essential to acquire an understanding of the enemy that goes deeper than simple stereotypes; a sophisticated understanding of his cultural roots and traditions will be necessary.

The enemy's aim will probably not be the seizing and/or holding of terrain. It may, for instance, be to cause you politically insupportable casualties, to provoke you into excessive/indiscriminate use of force and to prolong operations for political reasons. His objective must be accurately diagnosed.

Humint is often critical in FIBUA. But beware; the local population may be a dependable source of intelligence for the enemy and an undependable one for your forces. Beware of misinformation and invitations to ambushes.

Wishful thinking and intellectual predispositions frequently prevent commanders from accepting accurate intelligence.

One of the enemy's main strengths is likely to be local knowledge of the terrain and the human environment. To level the playing field, it will be necessary to acquire, in advance, detailed, up to date town plans and maps of underground passageways and photomosaics. Ethnographic (religious and cultural) maps will be needed, and reliable Humint to explain them and their limitations.

RPVs can provide useful real-time intelligence, but there will be problems in interpretation. The enemy will learn to shelter many activities from prying eyes in the sky and adopt confusing/covert patterns of movement, not least to attract fire against politically-sensitive targets.

### ***Nature of Combat and Operational Considerations***

It is likely that the future FIBUA problem will be greater than merely capturing a town or city. The most probable opponents will often be local forces, strongly rooted in the population and indistinguishable from civilians. The problem will not, therefore, be a purely military one but will have complicated political elements that need clear enunciation. It is important that commanders are aware of well-defined policy objectives and are given clear direction as to what is, and is not, politically acceptable. ROEs must be clear and also realistic, balancing the need to limit civilian casualties and collateral damage and the need to minimize casualties to friendly forces. It will often be difficult to obtain clear guidance.

Local allies may be seen as useful to give legitimacy to your presence and as sources of local knowledge and manpower, especially when your own resources are stretched. Using such help may carry risks. They will have their own agenda and may use you to exact revenge on domestic political/commercial rivals through the passage of disinformation. They may use your presence as protection for their settling of old scores, undermining the legitimacy of your presence. They may, especially if coming from an ethnically homogeneous region, actually work for the other side from time to time because of divided loyalties or the desire for an insurance policy against your defeat. Sides may shift with circumstances.

Unity of command is essential both to synchronise the actions of all tactical elements and to ensure that ROEs and other constraints are applied uniformly. This will often be difficult to achieve in coalition operations, especially where local forces are involved.

The city/town must be isolated as early as possible to prevent enemy reinforcement and resupply.

The effectiveness of area (ie, non-precision air) and artillery bombardment is less than in field conditions, making it difficult to wear the enemy down by fire. Moreover, the resultant 'rubbilisation' will hamper mobility. Nowadays, for political reasons, and to avoid antagonising the local population, indiscriminate and excessive use of firepower must be avoided - even if to do so risks casualties. Heavy reliance on artillery and air-delivered area fires is almost always counter-productive in the longer term.

Because urban terrain favours the defence, the Soviets used to accept that the force ratio required to take a city was 6-7:1 rather than the 4-5:1 required to take a position in the open. FIBUA consumes large numbers of troops.

It is not enough to clear the enemy from areas you need to capture. They have to be adequately defended afterwards as the enemy will attempt to infiltrate and retake them. This will be relatively easy for him as there are no clearly-defined fronts, flanks and rear areas and underground passages offer easy ways into your depth. The fighting in urban combat is so intense that soldiers tend to 'burn out' much faster than in field operations. Therefore, substantial second echelons will usually be necessary to maintain tempo and give a respite to exhausted troops.

If a quick conquest is required, the best approach is to launch powerful, deeply echeloned, concentrated drives along narrow axes (usually chosen along the most trafficable routes) to converge on the heart of the city. These divide the defence into isolated, non-mutually supporting sectors and prevent lateral movement to achieve counter-concentrations. Ideally, forward and/or heliborne detachments will be used in coup de main type actions to pre-empt the enemy

establishment of depth defence lines/citadels. But such actions can be very risky in built up areas.

Fighting will develop in a non-linear, fragmented fashion, and it will be difficult for senior commanders to keep abreast of the situation and control the battle. It will inevitably degenerate into a series of individual sub-unit actions. This requires the pre-formation of combined arms groups down to company, even sometimes platoon level. These will need direct fire artillery and sappers as well as tanks and mortars.

### ***Tactics***

Constraints on observation and the difficulties of reconnaissance mean that it is usually possible for both sides to spring tactical surprises. Infiltration tactics may be highly successful, especially where the enemy force density is low (and not least through the execution of subterranean manoeuvre).

Because of the need for deep echeloning in attack, frontages will be constricted. A company group will usually take on a single street or medium-sized but well-defended building and a battalion two streets or a city block.

Both to control the battle and energize tiring units and sub-units (FIBUA is especially stressful and exhausting), commanders at all levels need to keep well forward. This is particularly true where many decisions will have a political dimension.

Fighting will often focus around strongly-built structures such as churches, hospitals banks, government offices and factory complexes as these both enhance defensibility and are sited in tactically useful places. The enemy may exploit politically sensitive places such as schools, old-peoples' homes and infirmaries to site heavy weapons and ammunition dumps, etc, to limit the attacker's ability to bring heavy firepower to bear against them.

Rigorous comsec is vital; all too often, regular forces underestimate an irregular enemy's ability to exploit its lack of gain intelligence and issue confusing, contradictory or counter-productive fire orders. Conversely, EW resources is needed to intercept the enemy's often excellent communications (often based on commercially available radios and mobile phones) and to jam them when desirable.

Certain equipments, sometimes being used in unusual ways will be very useful in FIBUA. Tanks are vital for their ability to bring protected, direct firepower close to the enemy. But they need infantry protection. Their value is enhanced by adding reactive, or even appliqué, armour to the tops and sides. Medium/heavy SP artillery direct fire is better than tanks for blowing entry holes

in buildings and suppressing the occupants, or even collapsing some structures; a 44 kg round from a 152mm beats a smaller shell from a high velocity tank gun. Thin-skinned ICVs/APCs are of limited value and can be death traps; on the other hand, tanks converted to become APCs, like the Israeli Achzerit, can enable infantry to advance rapidly on some axes.

Mortars are particularly useful for their high angle fire (including for smoke and illumination); 120mm are preferable to 81mm mortars as they will penetrate roofs. SP anti-aircraft guns like the US Vulcan or the Russian ZSU-23-4, with their high elevation and rates of fire are excellent for suppressing enemy in stories above ground level.



*AS90 Self-propelled guns of 'J' Battery, 3 Regiment, the Royal Horse Artillery, engaging Iraqi positions as they support the battlegroup of the 1st Battalion, the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, outside Basra. Photo: Corporal Paul Jarv, Crown Copyright*

Armoured bulldozers are the best means of clearing barricades and other obstacles impeding mobility and thus tempo. They are also useful for smothering fire positions and shelters and preparing fire positions. Heavy machine guns (eg, 12.7mm and 14.5mm) are especially useful for suppressing the many potential fire positions in buildings as they have penetrative power as well as a high rate of fire. RPGs are omnipresent and effective against some buildings as well as against AFVs, in the latter case particularly if used against thin top armour.

The RPO-A disposable, thermobaric launcher with a range of 600m provides unbeatable 'pocket artillery' for infantry; its round relies on blast rather than splinters to inflict casualties in enclosed spaces and is thus better than HE. Lacking RPO-A, flamethrowers are all but essential for house clearing. Snipers are exceedingly cost-effective and destructive of enemy morale. They can impose delay out of all proportion to their numbers. They can also be a good source of intelligence.

### ***Logistics***

Some equipments will be needed in greater quantities than in field combat. These include: infantry radios and radio-relay; scaling ladders/grapnels; axes; flame-throwers; bulldozers (especially armoured); night vision devices, active and passive; loudspeakers for psyops teams. Exploitation of local resources, eg builders' yards, construction sites, will provide useful resources.

Ammunition expenditure tends to be very high. Considerably larger than normal provision will need to be made of: small arms ammunition; tank HE rounds; grenades (including smoke); engineer explosives (eg, satchel charges), rounds for manpack anti-tank weapons; smoke. Attacks frequently ground to a temporary halt through ammunition shortages; resupply must be held well forward.

### ***Civil Affairs***

Failure to prepare to deal with large numbers of Displaced Persons (DPs) will bring major political repercussions. They must be channelled away from the fighting, fed, watered, sheltered and even clothed. EOD teams must be committed as early as is practical to enable civilians to return to their homes, especially if controversial weapons like cluster munitions are employed to limit enemy manoeuvre. This requires advanced thought and preparation and cannot be improvised on the day.

While psyops will have little impact on fanatical fighters, they can be used to inform non-combatants about how to minimize risk (eg, by staying put in some areas and evacuating others) and how to obtain help. Civilians are often reluctant

to act sensibly, for instance refusing to abandon homes when warned to do so for fear of looting or murder by your forces (a fear that will be encouraged by the enemy). Local spiritual and political leaders should be encouraged where possible to influence public opinion – and not just in the combat area. And local fire and police officials may be co-opted to preserve order, identify hazardous material sites.

Humanitarian relief agencies must be treated with respect, kept informed and cooperated with to avoid negative publicity.



*Troops from the Household Cavalry Regiment and 1st Battalion the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers within 1 Mechanised Brigade train at British Army Training Unit Suffield in Canada.  
Photo: Corporal Kellie Williams, Crown Copyright*

*Troops of 1 Kings Own Scottish Borderers (KOSB), 9th Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division, firing a captured Hotchkiss machine gun during street fighting in Caen, 10 July 1944 © IWM (B 6918)*



# Some notes on Fighting In Built- Up Areas (FIBUA)

*This article by Warrant Officer 2nd Class, R.D. Jenkins, The Queen's Regiment, was originally published in BAR 75, December 1983*

With the exception of those who took part in battles between Christians and Moslems in Beirut, in recent years, I would venture to state that there now are no experts in fighting in built up areas. The yet more recent battles between Israelis and PLO were not true FIBUA. Since Stalingrad, Leningrad, Arnhem or the last days of Berlin, very little fighting has been carried out under the conditions that are likely to prevail in the event of Soviet forces invading Western Europe.

The problems of finding first-hand accounts of such battles are compounded by the length of time past and the national loyalties of those who took part and made recordings of the actions.

Russian-made films of Stalingrad are notoriously biased and show 'staged' battles, as does some German coverage, though not, I have found, to the same extent.

What is clear, after an interesting study of this subject, is that there are many lessons to be learnt, even after all these years, and many basic operational procedures that we could readily adopt with our existing kit, but have yet to do so.

The first point I would make is that we have few publications on Fighting in Built up Areas.

*Pamphlet 45 of the Infantry Training Basic Tactics* gives one chapter on the subject and is good as far as it goes. But for the Company Commander who plans a FIBUA exercise, the recce itself becomes an interesting TEWT, because of all the associated problems that come to light as the following paragraphs show.

## **Time and Workload**

To prepare a two bedroom semi-detached house with cellar but without a garage, for defence by one infantry section, takes approximately 3,500 sandbags.

In a recent trial by 1/7 Gurkha Rifles, it was found that, as a general rule, a platoon could construct a section position in 12 hours of daylight. The question arises, how many days can we expect to be in the position before it is attacked? This question becomes even more pressing in winter.

A previous trial, conducted by 2nd Battalion The Parachute Regiment (2 Para), clearly demonstrated the 'time in position' problem. The following paragraph is taken from the Trial Reports:

*One of the main problems encountered was just how long it takes to fortify a house inside and out. C Company fortified 5 houses as section positions and a further decoy house on the outside only. This work took 76 men 32 hours to build, a total of 2,432 man hours. Most of the work was carried out in daylight and in effect some 3.5 days were spent by a company building a platoon position. The following main items of defence stores were used:*

- *Sandbags* 8,400
- *Barbed Wire Concertina* 75 Coils
- *“ Reels* 32 Reels
- *6 foot pickets* 174
- *2 foot pickets* 64
- *Black Hessian* 140 yards

It must be pointed out that during this trial there was a shortage of sand bags and black hessian. Had there been more available they would certainly have been used, and in fact the report goes on to say that an increase of some 9,000 sandbags, making a total of 18,000, and an increase of some 400 yards of Hessian, should be held for future exercises of this type.



*Abandoned German equipment standing by the side of a ruined farm-house at Breville, © IWM B 5473*

## Casualties and Kit

Assuming that we have prepared our positions, we must now prepare ourselves for air attack and artillery barrage. It is interesting to note that at Stalingrad immediately after barrages by German artillery and tanks, most defending Russian soldiers were deaf. Communications will be difficult enough for the defence, and indeed for the attacking troops, without the added problems of using sign language. I will refer later to problems over communications, and only add that, for the want of hearing protectors, or some similar piece of kit, our first problems will be maximised. I suspect that the normal issue, small ear defenders, will be inadequate. Apart from deafness, one of the more common injuries in this type of combat is broken and sprained ankles.

If we find a demolition site and attempt to run up and over any newly created pile of rubble, the cause of this seemingly odd injury at once becomes apparent. Cover the rubble with an inch of snow and you have one massive man trap complete with natural concealment.

Until we come up with something better, the present puttee seems to be the only answer, giving ankle support to a degree not enjoyed by the wearers of NI patrol boots. It would also be wise to wear gloves (leather) and extra padded clothes round elbows and knees.

Having prepared for Fighting in Built up Areas (FIBUA), troops crawling up from the cellars will probably find that the buildings above them are to a great extent demolished.

The amount of ammunition to be carried is also a bone of contention. To be as sure as possible, that the next room holds as little threat to one's life as practicable, we must consider a grenade for every room, a burst of gunfire for every door, cupboard, ceiling and floor. This means an enormous amount of ammunition. Commanders may choose to adopt the leap frog system of relief and resupply combined. I have not so far, come up with as good an alternative. It can perhaps be argued that the amount of ammunition used, as I have described above, is wasteful, and borders on the American flare for 'Recce by Fire' adopted in Vietnam. However, fire discipline is most difficult to enforce in the realities of FIBUA. Which rooms, for example, do I assume to be safe and enter without preparing my way?

The 5.6 mm (.233 inches) weapons system improves our fighting effectiveness within buildings and ruins, mainly because of its size compared with the SLR. Its steel-cored round greatly improves its power of penetration.

In the close confines of collapsed buildings our present 'battle order' webbing is a dangerous hindrance. When ordering men into this type of battle,

Commanders must clearly define the dress. Incidentally, slightly modified claymore bags make excellent grenade carriers.

### **Communications**

Once the battle has started, Commanders at all levels will often experience the frustration of being out of contact with their subordinates. By the very nature of the terrain, communications will be difficult. These difficulties will be compounded by the fact that in this type of fighting, the area will be a mass of individual fire fights out of sight of each other.

I have no doubt that our modern radios are second to none and I would be the first to state that I believe our signals training to be excellent. But picture the radio in the hands of a soldier in a cellar filled with dust and burnt propellant fumes. The antennae will either be 'remoted' (and so probably cut) or underground with the set. The soldier is trying to contact a point section who is attempting an assault along a sewer system, or taking out tanks in an underground car park a street away. The discerning reader will, I hope, stifle a scoff at my remarks and bear in mind that just before this article was written the PLO were certainly housing not only tanks in buildings but artillery as well.

A lesson to be learnt from the Arnhem assault was that the civilian telephone system was working throughout. Had the troops on the ground realised this, and had the necessary coins, they would have had almost complete communications with the rear echelons.

Army antennae fixed to roofs are immediately fixed on plotting charts by fire controllers, but there are millions of civilian television aerials in every city. Perhaps our experts could come up with a means of readily adapting these to our own use.

Control of troops will be difficult enough. We can only overcome the communications problems by practice, and, when practising, Commanders must remember that, in this type of battle, Command Posts (CP) will move like the waves up and down a beach and we cannot be expected to stay long in a dugout CP as we might in a wooded area.

### **Snipers**

I do not remember exercising much in amongst ruins when I did my sniper instructors course. Of course the curriculum may have changed since those days and indeed I hope that FIBUA is hammered home. Without doubt, the ruined town or city is the ideal hunting ground of the sniper. The Russians still sing a song about a sniper who held out against the Germans, denying them a



*A soldier taking aim with his Sharpshooter Rifle during a Section Commanders Battle Course (SCBC) Final Exercise in Celeini Village, SENTA. Photo: Ian Griffiths, Crown Copyright*

group of buildings adjoining a tractor factory for forty nine days. In terms of cost effectiveness-the kills per man per round-the sniper comes into his own.

Streets will, of course, be mined but any open area that is not already a problem to the enemy, may be taken care of for an interim period whilst the Commander catches up on himself, by diligent use of a few snipers. In FIBUA every patch of open ground, be it children's' playground or market square, becomes a killing ground.

### **Enemy Courses of Action**

We know that Russian forces have FIBUA training areas. They must realise as we do, that the growth of urban areas in Europe necessitates a training programme incorporating this type of training.

The determined defender may well force the enemy to search for other options than the direct advance. By-passing the defended area may not be possible, bearing in mind the growth rate of urban areas.

The enemy commander may be tempted to employ nuclear or biological weapons, if FIBUA proves too costly for him in time and casualties. However, with the exception of the poor souls sitting at Ground Zero, in a nuclear attack

the advantages will be with the defenders in their shored up, sandbag-reinforced cellars and holes. If we have frustrated the enemy commander so far, it is possible that he may employ airborne forces in our rear, dropped either by parachute or helicopter. In the case of parachutists, these would, of course, only be used if the town was relatively small and suitable dropping zones were available. However, use of helicopter borne troops does offer real possibilities in the larger towns and cities, provided the Landing Zones (LZs), such as football grounds, stadiums, parks and other open areas within the city confines, can be secured. The means by which this would be achieved is open to debate but almost certainly civilians could be employed in the early stages.



*Soldiers train underground in purpose built-tunnels at British Army Training Unit Suffield (BATUS). This prepares troops for the possibility of entering a tunnel system in operational theatres abroad. Photo: Corporal Russ Nolan RLC Crown Copyright*

## **Civilian Population**

To the FIBUA Commander, the civilian population will present problems. Those people who do not follow the natural inclination to move away when the fighting starts, are likely to become a millstone around the commander's neck. Thus it would be wise to seek out key persons in the preparatory stage, such as civil defence leaders and local experts on such things as power stations, water works and gas works. At a later stage, these individuals may prove to be invaluable in the continued running of local supply establishments. Certainly the Sappers and Ordnance will benefit from their first-hand knowledge.

## **Underground Routes**

When quizzing the local civilian experts, we must remember to extract detailed knowledge of all underground routes from railway lines to sewers. In some cities there are networks of underground workings that may be used for attack, withdrawal, or resupply. If we do not intend to use certain passageways ourselves, then we must consider whether to regard them as reserve demolition tasks, to block them immediately, or simply to guard them until a decision is made. In any event, the platoon commander must have blueprint knowledge of the routes beneath the feet of his men. When preparing defensive positions, sewers will often provide the only feasible communication routes between sub units.

The larger underground systems, such as railways, are by their very nature, invariably straight or, at best, have long curving bends. These should be regarded in the same manner as we would regard a surface road, with the added anomaly of the measure of overhead protection. Mines, sand bagged emplacements, ambush positions and perpetual darkness must all be taken in to account.

The shallow smaller sewers also have their own particular characteristics. Some major cities can boast veritable rabbit warrens, with tunnels ranging from those through which a man can crawl, to large underground canals. We must learn to be ferrets.

Once again, we must consider which tunnels to blow in. It may be that the commander on the ground decides to retain main passage ways and to blow the smaller 'off-shoots' serving individual areas. Either way, the plan must include careful consideration for our own routine passage, advance, withdrawal and possible enemy infiltration.

Defence of smaller sewers should be much more easily achieved than the larger tunnels. Small arms fire and anti-armour weapons can be 'channelled' down these tubes to great effect. The enemy will no doubt make use of his flame throwers and we must be prepared for this weapon. For our part, we must make

use of our ingenuity in the form of booby traps, claymore mines and petrol-based anti-personnel command-detonated IEDs.

It is worth making mention of certain blast effects in tunnels and pipes. Our own explosive experts can no doubt provide great detail on the problems to be faced when using explosives in confined spaces.

Should the commander on the spot not have expert advice readily available, he should stick to the simple rule 'All men up when blowing up'. No man must be underground when charges are blown. This may seem so basic as to be an insult to our intelligence but you will still find the individual who, working in a sewer perhaps a street away from another Platoon's charge, considers himself safe. The effect of a channelled charge through a sewer can be likened to firing a blank with a beetle crawling down a rifle barrel. It would make little difference if the barrel had bends or kinks in it. The beetle would still be dead.

### **Conclusion**

In war there will undoubtedly be more situations requiring house clearing skills and house defence techniques, than there will be for rubble tactics. Indeed, there would have been FIBUA in Stanley, if the Argentine surrender had not come. In Ulster, gunmen often set up business in buildings.

I have not covered detailed tactics that was not my intention. Rather, I have acted the part of the infuriating shooting instructor who tells you that you are missing clays behind, but does not explain how to cure the problem.





*A British soldier carries a little girl through the devastation of Caen, 10 July 1944 © IWM (B 6781)*



*A Paratrooper from 1st Battalion The Parachute Regiment (1 PARA) gives covering fire during a dawn attack on Salisbury Plain Training Area. Amidst gunfire, smoke and the rising sun the three Battle Groups (BG) assaulted Copehill Down FIBUA (Fighting in Built up area's) village. Army Photo, Crown Copyright*

# More Notes on FIBUA

*This article by Warrant Officer 2nd Class, R.D. Jenkins, The Queen's Regiment, was originally published in BAR 76, April 1984 and follows on from his previous article published in BAR 75, December 1983*

Having survived the publication of my article in BAR 75, I decided to venture forth again, this time going into a little more detail on fewer subjects.

## **Entry and Defence from Entry**

The most crucial time during FIBUA will be the initial gaining of a foothold. That is the taking of the first rooms of the first buildings. *Infantry Training Pamphlet 45 Part 2* tells us that a section can clear a house with up to six rooms. It then goes on to give us the drills, using a ten-man section. Much of what follows is designed to provide a closer look at that statement.

The Falklands battles have reminded us of the need to direct maximum fire power at an enemy position to win the fire fight.

The Section Commander's first thought on being tasked with the clearance of a building should be to request that the whole of the Platoon's fire power should be directed at the objective for the short time taken for his men, 'the assault group', to approach the building. This is essentially a section task, although, by involving this extra fire power, it does, in effect, become what the pamphlet describes as a Platoon drill.

This extra fire power is not a luxury, it is a necessity. Indeed, if a friendly tank is around, he should be asked to concentrate with main armament and machine gun fire. By the time the two entry men have entered the first room this mass of fire will have been stopped and the operation go ahead as a true Section action rather than a Platoon attack. If there is a further building to clear, the Platoon Commander will still have sufficient weight of fire at his disposal to enable an entry to be made. However, I believe that to attempt an entry with only two machine guns and a 66/84mm as the pamphlet suggests would be foolhardy, especially if we are up against a determined, modern, well prepared enemy.

Having said this, we must explore still further the sort of defences that our assault group encounter BEFORE they reach the building. It must be realised that there will be a vast difference between clearing terrorists from a building in London and a counter attack against Russians in Fallingbosten. Fortunately, we have specialists to carry out the former operation, and will invariably have the luxury of time on our side when we encounter similar situations in Ulster.

Nevertheless we must all know how to deal with the latter and we must be able to gain ground quickly. Given the likely situation that we are counter-attacking buildings previously held by our own troops, we must assume that the defences were originally constructed by our own side and that they have been further improved by the present defenders,

## **Exterior**

The reasoning behind my requirement for mass fire power during the initial assault can be justified I believe, when one considers some of the items that



*Abandoned Argentine Rheinmetall 20mm AA gun at Goose Green. © Crown copyright. IWM (FKD 2841)*

I would certainly place forward of my own defensive position were I given a building or group of buildings to hold:

- *Anti-Tank Mines*
- *Anti-Tank Ambushes*
- *Anti-Personnel Mines (Issued type)*
- *Anti-Personnel (Improvised RC IEDs) Mines*
- *Claymore anti-personnel devices (Issued and homemade)*
- *Anti-personnel (Petrol based IEDs). Mines*
- *Mantraps (Improvised, See Jungle Warfare Pamphlets)*
- *Butane Gas A/Personnel perimeter defence devices (as used in Vietnam)*
- *Low Wire entanglement, using 3 foot pickets*
- *High Wire entanglement, using 6 foot pickets*
- *Sniper fire*
- *Dannert Rolled Wire*
- *Pre plotted SOS fire tasks for mortars and machine guns in the sustained fire role.*



*Members of B Coy, 1PWRR, 20 Bde taking part in Exercise Desert Fist, in Bavaria that took place at the Bonnland village, Fighting in Built Up Areas (FIBUA) facility at the Hammelburg German Infantry Training Centre. Photo: Mike Weston, Crown Copyright*

The list is not endless, but almost so, depending on the ingenuity of the defender.

All too often I have seen units practicing within that sweet imaginary Utopia where, against blank ammunition and thunderflashes, the good side always gets into the building. Troops must be made aware during training of the almost certain existence of out side defences.

It may not be necessary to go over ground covered by all the nasty devices listed above. If we have made our preparation of defensive positions correctly then we will have maps of the underground sewage workings, underground waterways, rail networks and tunnel systems. The drills and SOPs for dealing with fighting underground I will deal with at a later date but I felt it required a mention at this stage, as it is here that the knowledge is required.

Let us suppose now that our assault group have reached the house. Assuming that it is still standing, they must gain entry. The assault group consists of two entry men, two bombers and a lookout.

Our tactical teaching suggests that, where possible, we should enter the building from as high a point as possible and fight down, clearing a floor at a time. Use of a tank's main armament is probably the best method of punching the entry hole but, if this is not available, then pole charges or anti-tank weapons are our

next choice. It will take a number of rounds from a good 84mm anti-tank gunner to produce an aperture large enough for our purpose.

Where there are outbuildings against gable ends, it is also often the case that these are flat roofed. There are fewer windows on the ends of these houses than on front and back. It may also have been necessary to site anti-tank weapons on flat-roofed outbuildings, protecting them with sand bag sangers. These and other factors must be considered when selecting the point of entry.



*Royal Welsh personnel from the NATO enhanced Forward Presence Battlegroup conduct urban training, also known as OBUA (operations in built-up areas) or FIBUA (fighting in built-up areas) alongside their Estonian counterparts. Photo: Sergeant Siim Teder, Estonian Defence Force Copyright*

## **Interior**

### ***Making an Entry***

Throwing anti-personnel mines into the building before entry is the normal method of teaching this form of entry. Furthermore, we can add the odd homemade petrol bomb (no need to light it), followed by white phosphorus if:

- *we are entering at ground level*
- *we do not wish to re-occupy the building, (as these should burn the place down)*
- *we are clearing cellars.*

I remember how, in Aden in 1965, a rather inventive Arab tied some fish hooks on to a No 36 grenade in an attempt to get it to catch on to the wire mesh that we had covering the backs of our Bedford lorries. That the armed grenade caught on his shirt and remained there, despite his frantic efforts, in no way diminishes the quality of his original thought!

I am not advocating that soldiers be issued with fish hooks but the story reminds me that we often place our wire netting wrongly.

Chicken wire, when available, should be nailed to the tops of windows on the inside, and stretched to the top of a sandbag wall built to the same height as the bottom of the window, and placed approximately four feet inside the room.

This ensures that any hand thrown object is deflected down in between the sandbag wall, and the buildings wall, beneath the window. This is an effective grenade trap without digging, and the wire mesh cannot be pushed in from the outside, as it can when placed in the conventional manner.

Whilst on the subject of windows, net curtains are much better than hessian when left up at windows, providing that there is no 'through silhouette'.

If the defender finds that there are windows front and back, a single curtain of black hessian hung from the ceiling across the centre of the room, between the windows, will ensure that no 'through silhouette' occurs.

In my first article I listed quantities and types of stores required to prepare a house for defence against a modern well equipped enemy force. Let us now make mention of the points to remember when planning our work:

- *On occupying the building, check what services, if any, are still on. Turn off any gas and electricity but keep the water supply on for as long as possible. Baths and sinks should be filled for emergency drinking supply. This is an emergency supply and should not be used for quenching fires. I realise that various publications advocate this very use, but I disagree.*
- *During the first twenty four hours, sandbags will be filled and emplacements built. These sand bags should be used to put out fires as they occur.*
- *On entering our defended house, the enemy should be confronted with an inhospitable darkened man-trap.*
- *Doors should be nailed shut, blocked or wired. Halls or corridors should be a mass of furniture, dannert wire, iron stakes, trip wire, booby traps. Rip up a few floor boards here and there to help the enemy fall over.*
- *A roll of dannert wire stretched up the stairs is a quick but not ideal obstacle. Better to get your APC tow chain through the front door and pull the stairs out complete. If you do this, remember to have some form of aid to enable you to climb up and down yourself. Perhaps sheets/blankets tied together to make a rope.*

- *It may prove difficult to obtain such items as ropes for each house, or 400 odd 6 inch nails per flight of stairs for nail boarding - but get them if you can.*
- *Timber to reinforce ceilings may also be hard to come by. It may be necessary to use the floorboards and joists from the hallways and entrance ways already mentioned. It must be remembered that as the house collapses, 'hopefully' from the top downwards, the weight of rubble above our heads will increase alarmingly, crushing anyone not in a well-prepared position.*
- *When placing supports we should begin in the cellars and work up as far as our stores permit.*
- *Escape routes should be at, or under, ground level. I emphasise escape and not communication routes as these can be over or through roofs, or through adjoining walls of terraced houses. Underground sewer systems can sometimes be used for this purpose to good effect.*
- *Fire positions should be set back into a room with weapons being fired, where possible, at an angle through openings. This will, however, give a very limited field of fire, and commanders must not only take particular care in interlocking the fields of fire, but also showing the men that they are not in isolation, by each man physically viewing the next room's position.*

### **Anti-Armour**

Anti-tank weapons such as 66mm, 84mm, Carl Gustav and Milan can all be fired from inside buildings providing certain rules are applied.

These rules are detailed, I will not include them here but suffice to state at this stage, that providing the room is big enough, strong enough and has adequate ventilation ie doors, windows etc, we can site anti-tank weapons within it.

This, of course, opens up all sorts of avenues of thought on the siting of anti-armour ambushes within built up areas.

As recently as 1968, Russian armour was being attacked with Molotov Cocktails. The only difference between these and our well-known petrol bomb being the addition of a sticky thickener. This can be tar, treacle, thick sump oil or sugar (if left to stand for a day).

The defence of Stalingrad showed that petrol bombs have little effect on armoured vehicles and this has been borne out many times in Ulster. Molotov Cocktails, however, were effective, size being the governing factor. Small bottles may be thrown but have limited effect. Large bottles such as gallon cider casks or even earthen ware jugs, can be dropped from above. Ambush teams consisting of a sniper and two 'Cocktail Bombers' working from above in Stalingrad, Minsk and Kiev succeeded in destroying many German



*Soviet infantry in action in the ruins of Stalingrad. © IWM (NYP 38410)*

tanks. The sniper took out the commander or periscopes, the bombers simply dropped their wares.

It is a brave man who attacks a tank at close range with shoulder controlled weapons. Nevertheless, class-quarter man-against-tank fighting will be probable rather than a possibility.

Where possible, shoulder controlled anti-armour weapons should be given a downhill field of fire. This may mean siting weapons on top of or high up in buildings. Tests show that the percentage of hits per rounds fired are greater than those achieved with a flat trajectory.

I have not been able to trace any battle experience to support this idea. However, the better field of fire and perhaps some psychological feeling of superiority created by being above may play no small part in achieving the results required.

### ***Siting and Fields of Fire***

We can reasonably expect buildings still to be standing at the end of an engagement. This means that when selecting positions initially we accept, in the main, the existing open areas and, to a degree the blind spots caused by standing structures.

It is also good practice, where possible, to recce the area from the ground and actually get into fire positions in order to ensure that the men can see their required area.

However, if we are thinking in terms of fighting within buildings, it may well be reasonable to expect a large proportion of the buildings to be reduced to rubble within an hour of the initial bombardment.

The ten storey Krankenhaus that provided such excellent high anti-tank positions thirty minutes ago may well be no more than a smoking ruin now. At the same time, the platoon in the office block behind, who had a very limited field of fire because of the hospital can now see for miles.

One can appreciate from this example that whereas in Ulster we would use photographs and a stereoscope to achieve intervisibility between firer and target in Hanover we could well use ten pounds of plastic explosive to achieve the same aim.

Commanders should therefore consider, when laying out their defences, which, if any, buildings should be destroyed to aid friendly force positions. It may well be possible to combine demolition and ambush in the form of giant booby traps.

Demolition on any scale must be tied in at Company level and above. Platoons requesting permission to blow buildings in front of their position to enhance their field of fire may have to be refused because of the Company plan. Conversely, an order to destroy a house may come to the Platoon Commander from above, although the immediate purpose, perhaps the need to site tanks later, may not be obvious to him at the time.

### **Training**

At the time of writing this article, Longmoor COIN and FIBUA Training Complex was one of the few establishments specifically laid out for training the soldier in urban warfare. Though it has been open for only sixteen months it has become apparent that it is already regarded as an excellent addition to our limited resources in this field.



*Soldiers from the 1st Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment (1 PWRR), conduct house clearance and contact drills within the Urban Defence Training Area (UDTA) of Sennelager Training Centre.  
Photo: Mr Dominic King, Crown Copyright*

During the first six months of being opened very few bookings were made. This was because units were unaware of our existence. During the second six months some four thousand troops have trained there, many units making further bookings.

It is interesting to note that whilst weekdays are used by regular units, the weekends are snapped up by Territorial Battalions. Seeing every unit that uses the area, I concluded that certain TA units are becoming as proficient as many and better than some regular battalions at Fighting In Built Up Areas.

At the moment, bookings are taken from all units near and far. One would like to see further FIBUA training areas opened around the country in due course, thereby giving far more opportunity to practice a vital element of our Priority One role within the UK.

Since man built his first hut and guarded it against his enemies, there has been a requirement for expertise in fighting in built up areas. When man learnt to destroy solid concrete and brick buildings, the requirement extended to knowing how to survive and fight in demolished areas. We must practice our trade using what facilities we have and where necessary we must improvise. The Spartan who complained to his mother that his sword was too short was told, 'Add a step to it'.





*Pictured is a soldier from 1st Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment (1 PWRR) working alongside an Estonian comrade in an urban operations environment in the Sennelager Training Area in Germany as part of 20 Armoured Infantry Brigade, who were the lead element for NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (Land) 2017 (VJTF(L)17). Photo: Mr Dominic King, Crown Copyright*



*1st Battalion Scots Guards (1 SG) and the 1st Battalion The Royal Welsh (1 R WELSH) part of the King's Royal Hussars (KRH) Battle group attack the village of Hettar during Ex Prairie Tempest in British Army Training Area Suffield (BATUS), Alberta Canada. Photo: Sergeant Mark Webster RLC, Crown Copyright*

# Are we prepared for the challenges of Future Operations in the Urban Environment?<sup>1</sup>

*This article by Lieutenant Colonel D. A. Barley, was originally published in BAR 125, September, 2000*

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<sup>1</sup> *Army Field Manual Part 5 Urban Operations defines these operations at 3 levels: MACP, Coalition and FIBUA (warfighting) based on their legal foundation*

*The most important single lesson learnt from WWII experience of OBUA is to use machinery rather than men... In today's climate of opinion as affecting casualties, the only alternative to acquiring specialist equipment for OBUA may be to abandon the idea of fighting a serious enemy in an urban environment.<sup>2</sup>*

There is a growing feeling that it will be urban terrain, rather than any other, which will dominate future operations. This is matched by an enthusiasm for the subject of future urban operations within US defence circles and, as their military think tanks are often at the vanguard of military thought, it features regularly in military journals and is top of the doctrine rewrite list. Yet, there appear to be few novel ideas on how to conduct such difficult operations nor do emerging technologies provide revolutionary solutions.

During the Cold War military doctrines of both the Warsaw Pact and NATO generally sought to avoid towns and cities. Some readers will recall the hatched areas on command post maps designated 'no go' or 'undefended cities'. With the possible exception of Berlin this view not only ignored the geography of Germany but also military history. With plenty of evidence from which to draw, history provides conflicting advice:

- **Do Not Attack**

*...the worst policy is to attack cities.... Attack when there is no alternative.*

*Sun Tzu<sup>3</sup>*

- **Do Attack When The Potential Benefits Outweigh The Cost**

*'It is indeed true that you are about to assault the walls of one town, but in that one town you will have taken the whole of Spain.'*

*Scipio Africanus to his men before their successful attack on New Carthage, 209 BC<sup>4</sup>*

## **Dominate Urban Areas But...**

In Vietnam the US and South Vietnamese forces controlled the urban areas yet failed to dominate the enemy who retained influence in villages and in the countryside.<sup>5</sup> Controlling the city will not necessarily lead to winning a war and much depends upon the socioeconomic structure of the country. In this case Vietnam was an agrarian society.

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2 Jary and Carbuclun, 'In The Jungle of The Cities', BAR 122, April 99

3 Sun Tzu, 'The Art of War', Oxford University Press, 1982

4 Liddell Hart, B.H., Scipio Africanus: Greater than Napoleon

5 Argued by Russell Glenn in We Band of Brothers, a call for joint Urban Operations Doctrine, RAND Corporation, ISBN 0-833 0-27328, p 7

## The Current Situation

There are substantial costs in preparing troops for operations in urban terrain. This issue does not yet attract the 'big ticket' for funding in the USA nor does it in the UK. Yet British soldiers have operated successfully in towns and cities across the world in all manner of operations. It is a common thread that weaves through our recent military history. Consequently we have developed:

- *Some very useful tactics, techniques and procedures, principally for Operations Other Than War - now called 'Other Operations.'*
- *First rate urban training areas, the envy of all.*
- *Extensive COIN experience<sup>6</sup> and expertise fully recognised by our allies*
- *However, as an Army, we lack recent true warfighting experience in the urban areas. We draw our lessons from World War II and watch Russia's exploits in Grozny with interest.<sup>7</sup>*



A U.S. Army M113 armored personnel carrier guards a street near the destroyed Panamanian Defense Force headquarters building during the second day of Operation Just Cause. DoD photo: PH1(SW) J. Elliott, Released

6 *There are plenty of examples ranging from Aden to Northern Ireland where theories expounded by Sir Robert Thompson and General Sir Frank Kitson were applied to urban areas as well as other complex terrain*

7 *See AFM Part 5, 1999*

### Has the Situation Changed?

We share a view with our allies that urban areas will create significant problems for future military operations. The questions that we must address are; what is the scale and nature of the urban problem, how important is it and what are we going to do about it? Studies of the future operating environment suggest that the situation has changed.<sup>8</sup>

- *A Growth in Urban Population. If demographers and political strategists are correct then there will be more people concentrated in more cities, the majority of which will be on the littoral.*<sup>9</sup>
- *Globalisation. Our national interest and that of our allies, will become increasingly global. Political, diplomatic, media and economic centres of gravity will increasingly reside in urban areas. Western alliances and coalitions may find themselves operating within these places with increasing frequency especially during Other Operations that tend to be ‘people centric’ hence urban-based.*
- *Asymmetric Opposition. We will face a greater variety of enemies and opposition forces many of whom will chose to operate in urban terrain in order to create an asymmetric<sup>10</sup> response to the West’s military technological overmatch that is optimised for open terrain.*

History suggests the urban areas are great equalisers of armies and recent experience in Grozny tends to reinforce this point, as do lessons from Mogadishu and Hue. If this is all true then perhaps the dynamics of battle change significantly. Aspirations to operate with greater tempo through a less dense battle space, that were so enthusiastically embraced in the 1990s as a vision for 2010+, are not questionable or at least demand modification.

The clash between the ‘west and the rest’ is best summarised by two Chinese colonels in a recent publication entitled *Unrestricted Warfare*.<sup>11</sup>

*Professional armies are like gigantic dinosaurs, which lack strength commensurate to their size in this new age. Their adversaries, then, are the rodents with great powers of survival, which can use their sharp teeth to torment the better part of the world.*

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8 *These points are drawn from DGD&D’s Future Army work*

9 *By 2015 between 60 to 75% of the world’s population will live in urban areas, 70% of the cities will be on the littoral*

10 *Arguably the US Armed Forces have a significant asymmetrical advantage over practically all potential adversaries in open terrain conventional combat*

11 *Liang, Qiao and Xiangsui, Wang, ‘Unrestricted Warfare’, Beijing, PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House, February 1999*

The battle between the dinosaurs and the rats will probably take place in the city. Even if it were desirable it is difficult to produce doctrinal templates for such asymmetric operations. What is clear is that commanders will require a detailed understanding of the situation with its potential mix of opposing conventional forces, guerrillas, paramilitaries, local people, international agencies, culture, customs and climate.

## **Mission Impossible?**

### **The Constraints on Future Warfare**

The constraints, and perhaps some contradictions, inherent in future warfare are particularly clear when examining the application of force in urban operations. While these constraints can be split into the following areas, they are closely connected:

- ***Dismounted Close Combat versus Zero Casualties:*** *Being forced into close and predominately dismounted operations against an enemy without incurring significant casualties will be a major challenge. It is not the casualties themselves that create the problem but the image portrayed by the media; whether they are dead Americans being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu or decapitated Russians in Grozny, the effect is profound.*
- ***Fighting Amongst the People:*** *The problem of achieving a military mission with conventional means, against an enemy who uses human shields and hides in hospitals is becoming increasingly evident. Mark Bowen illustrates this with an absurd example in his best seller *Black Hawk Down - A Story of Modern War*. He describes in graphic detail the complexity, brutality, and surrealistic nature of modern warfare. This specific scene from the book describes the US Rangers' fight in the middle of Mogadishu with the Somali warlord's militiamen. The latter are using human shield tactics without ethical consideration: - The US Rangers saw a Somali with a gun lying prone on the street between two kneeling women. The shooter had the barrel of his weapon between the women's legs, and there were four children actually sitting on him. He was completely shielded in non-combatants, taking full cynical advantage of the Americans' decency.<sup>12</sup>*
- ***Military Success and Public Support:*** *Success must be achieved without significant collateral damage and non-combatant casualties. Soldiers are forced to walk a tight rope between defeating an enemy and retaining legitimacy and public support.*

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<sup>12</sup> Howden, Mark, *Black Hawk Down*, p 46

- **Different Rules:** *The absolute necessity to co-operate within strict rules (including ROE) against an opposition who deliberately shuns such international norms is another asymmetry that would work against a western coalition.*
- **Rapid and Clean Victory:** *The public expectation or almost sterile warfare achieved through precision-guided munitions was established during the Gulf War. The application of technology to achieve similar success in urban areas is increasingly doubtful as modern weapon systems are not optimised for urban terrain and operations are likely to be drawn-out.*



*The lull before the storm as Right Flank Company from 2 Scotts Guards attached to the 2 Royal Welsh Battle Group wait for the smoke to clear before conducting a company attack on Hettar as part of Ex Prairie Storm in the BATUS Training Area, Alberta Canada. Photo: Sergeant Mark Webster RLC, Crown Copyright*

## **When Will Future Urban Operations Take Place?**

Unlike the Army of World War II, future UK forces will be required to operate throughout a continuum of conflict that includes pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict activities. The continuum also encapsulates warfighting, and Other Operations that range from peace support to internal security and humanitarian tasks. Other Operations are capable of escalating into combat operations but these are probably limited in time, intensity and locality. An assessment of the broad types of urban operation (each operation will be scenario dependent) might be:

- **Symmetric Warfighting:**<sup>13</sup> *First, warfighting between relatively similar forces on a scale and level of intensity illustrated by the battle for Stalingrad. Given the intensity of such an operation it may only be contemplated during wars of national survival rather than operations of choice. Indeed, in operations of choice, General Rupert Smith has argued that the UK and her allies can 'no longer afford to lose armies, or fleets and airplanes.. no longer do we have the hardware, let alone the trained crews to man equipment. In modern war attrition rules must be kept low... we cannot afford high intensity war, not if we want to be at the victory parade.'*<sup>14</sup>
- **Asymmetric Warfighting:** *Second, warfighting operations illustrated by Russian experience in Grozny might be considered asymmetric. To conduct such an operation using more attritional methods may not be realistic given the constraints on a NATO or Western-led coalition particularly with regards to collateral damage,. The UK is likely to avoid such a conflict and, while the frequency of these operations is likely to be relatively low, a capability to conduct limited warfighting must be considered as a necessity when operating as part of a coalition.*
- **Other operations:** *Finally, other Operations are likely to be more frequent and urban-centric. Although most of these operations are relatively benign, the situation may escalate calling for a capacity to war fight. Uncertainty and escalation are common threads running through this model of conflict as the US forces experienced in Mogadishu or the potential escalation the ARRC*

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13 *Concept Paper endorsed by ECAB describes symmetrical combat as between like forces and asymmetric as between forces that differ in their political intent, strategic objectives, doctrine and ways of fighting, including tactics and equipment. It is anticipated that asymmetric opponent will undermine western forces through attacking their vulnerabilities: sensitivity of public opinion to casualties, reliance on information superiority and restrictive rules of engagement, to name three areas.*

14 *From a presentation to AFNWEUR 1996, A Personal Perspective on the Changing Nature of Warfare, TRDC Index, 12179*

*faced before entering Kosovo. The ability to conduct warfighting, perhaps in a limited way, should therefore guide any future urban operations capability.*

### **How will Future Urban Operations be Conducted - The Manoeuvrist Approach**

Focusing on warfighting, a quick survey of emerging thoughts on future urban concepts suggests that new and novel solutions will not be found readily. Fort Benning and the USMC aided by the RAND Corporation, with support and encouragement from the highest level in the US Department of Defense have started to grapple with the problem and have yet to identify a breakthrough in thinking.

The only way for the UK to address this problem is to apply the Manoeuvrist Approach, the foundation of our doctrine. In this approach to operations success is achieved by focusing military force against the enemy's will. This is accomplished through the concept of striking at the opposition's centre of gravity, the source of their strength and willpower. As Clausewitz states succinctly it is:

*The hub of all power and movement around which everything depends... the point at which all our energies should be directed.*<sup>15</sup>

The asymmetric enemy draws its power not necessarily from numerical strength or technological advantage but from less material sources. This challenges conventional soldiers operating in urban areas to focus not exclusively on the terrain, but try to find their objectives within the human architecture. Perhaps it is more important to understand the enemy and the non-combatant population (often trapped in the city): their thoughts, motivation, hopes and fears rather than the street plan, crucial as it is to the soldier at the sharp end of planning. Indeed General Sir Rupert. Smith supports this view and states that 'modern war takes place amongst the people as opposed to between groups of people.'<sup>16</sup> Furthermore Ralph Peters, in an article for *Parameters*, the US Army War College Journal, argues that 'tribal cities are the most difficult urban environments for peacekeepers and are growing in size and number.'<sup>17</sup> This highlights the problem for interventionists who find it almost impossible to tell the difference between the various clans. Peters cites Mogadishu, Kigali, Former Yugoslavia, Freetown and Belfast as examples of where identification are most acute and ends his article with a prophecy:

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15 *From Clausewitz, 'On War', edited and translated by Michael Howard and P. Paret, Harvard University Press, 1994, page 177*

16 *ANWEUR Study Day presentation, op cit*

17 *Peters, Ralph, 'The Human Terrain of Urban Operations', Parameters, Vol XXX, No 1, Spring 2000*



*Soldiers from 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment train in their Jackal armoured fighting vehicle during rehearsals for the Joint Expeditionary Force Demonstration as part of Exercise Joint Warrior in Copehill Down, Salisbury Plain Training Area. Photo: Corporal Mark Larner, Crown Copyright*

*We look back on a century in which a rural world became an urban one, and the practical and psychological changes are not yet fully apparent. The urbanisation of the world's masses will require centuries of adjustment.*<sup>18</sup>

### **The 'Ways' of Applying Force**

Ralph Peters suggests that military forces will take time to adjust to such significant changes to the ways and means armies conduct their business. Both practical and psychological challenges need equal treatment in developing our thinking. Current doctrine in the form of *Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) Volume 1 Operations* provides the right foundation for developing our thoughts on operating in urban areas in the future. It cites that pre-emptive moves combined with surprise would be an ideal option against an enemy moving into the urban terrain. If successful, rapid reaction to an urban-based crisis might reduce casualties and negate the need to fight in urban terrain at all, but it requires a willingness to take risks. Should the enemy take the fight to urban areas then the use of dislocation and disruption, inherent in the manoeuvrist approach, would unbalance him psychologically and physically. The core functions of Find, Fix and Strike provide a useful framework to develop this approach rather than adopt new doctrinal language.

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<sup>18</sup> See Peters, Ralph, *The Human Terrain of Urban Operations*

## **Broad Options at the Operational Level**

Within an area of operations it is likely that a commander will have to conduct operations over a variety of terrain. It may be that the operation is within a single urban area as it was for the UN in Somalia or it may include several towns as in Chechnya. The commander must decide whether urban areas are vital, hence decisive, or might be bypassed, sealed-off or whether they are necessary to shape or support more important aspects of the campaign. Should the commander embark on urban operations, and he will not do this lightly, how might an enemy in an urban area be dealt with without recourse to massive firepower and direct assault:

- *In terms of economy of effort, aim to pre-empt the enemy by a coup de main operation to occupy the urban area first or attack him before his defences are established.*
- *Seige by air, sea and land but also by controlling information then wait. This approach reflects Russian tactics in the second battle for Grozny that aimed to reduce their casualties, but eventually they resorted to the overwhelming use of firepower to achieve a decisive result. A willingness to sit it out, and the impact of such measures on non-combatants, will undoubtedly influence the course of events as they are played out on the world's media.*
- *Interdict enemy resupply routes into urban areas through deep penetration operations and the use of air and sea power perhaps to support a siege.*
- *Aim to separate the enemy from his population (remember counter-revolutionary warfare principles) as a preliminary action before an attack or siege*
- *Select those targets that would undermine the enemy's strength, his centre of gravity, through a combination of information operations and physical attack. This approach might be viewed as a series of raids rather than systematic and sequential large-scale seize and control operations. Fundamental to achieving this will be the need to dominate large areas of urban and other terrain through technology: remote sensors, satellites, high and low level UAVs to gain information to enable such surgical strikes. Whilst this might be a better way to conduct operations it is not risk free and is heavily dependent on good information.*

## **Tactical Level Considerations**

Before applying the Manoeuvrist Approach at formation level and below, as expounded in *ADP Volume 1 Operations*, there are a number of factors that will impinge on operations that require consideration:

- Close Combat and Fighting at Arms-Length:** *The requirement to minimise casualties by avoiding close combat (not Close Operations<sup>19</sup> but the hand-to-hand variety) will be a key force development driver. Combat units should aim to avoid the ‘danger-zone’, usually within 300 metres of the enemy. To achieve this requirement battlegroups need a means of stand-off attack to overmatch an enemy. But as ADP Operations states: ‘Fighting at arms length implies using simultaneity, manoeuvre and counter-fire to hit and disengage. It does not mean simply seeking to out-range the enemy: desirable though this may be. Nor does it mean a greater reliance on indirect rather than direct fire.’<sup>20</sup> To compliment a standoff capability the dismounted soldier still requires the ability to close with the enemy with improved information, mobility, protection and firepower. Vital to achieving this will be the critical requirement to locate and track the enemy. All this presents a serious challenge for technology, particularly equipping the soldier, and calls for imaginative thinking to revise Tactics, Techniques and Procedures. (TTPs)*
- Non-Combatant Control:** *Non-combatants need to be separated from the enemy to avoid casualties. This may not be a practical proposition as the locals who remain in the urban combat zone generally go to ground. An alternative is to use less lethal effects that temporarily neutralise both enemy and neutrals alike and allow friendly forces to enter a building relatively safely. This is a technique more akin to Special Force operations rather than conventional infantry tactics for house clearance and should be investigated.*
- Mobility:** *A manoeuvre formation must have the means to move above ground, through and up buildings and down them and along sewers or other underground passages.*
- Urban Escalation:** *Units require to be optimised for warfighting but able to adapt, without serious regrouping, to less intensive tasks. The urban environment is probably the most volatile. Commanders require the mental flexibility to cope with an unexpected change in the urban situation as it both escalates and de-escalates. Arguably decisions are made at much lower levels in urban terrain as opposed to open ground given the fragmented nature of operations and engagements at very close ranges. Paradoxically the conditions of close combat often deny commanders the ability to manoeuvre freely and the time available for decision-making is compressed. The requirement for effective low-level leadership is often personified in what the USMC call the ‘strategic corporal’ reflecting the British experience on the streets of Northern Ireland often referred to as a ‘Corporal’s War’. Doctrinally, it is the ability to apply Mission Command.*

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19 As defined in ADP1 Operations, pages 5-14, 15

20 ADP Operations, page 5-15, 0535b



Pictured is a member of Charlie Company, 40 Commando Royal Marines during an aviation insertion by Chinook helicopters during Exercise Joint Warrior. May 2, 2018. Photo: PO (Phot) Si Ethell, Crown Copyright

- The Size of Cities:** Given the predicted size and complexity of future cities, numerical dominance is unlikely. Ground forces will only be able to dominate specific areas of the city for short periods. This requirement suggests limiting activity geographically, however, it should not focus exclusively on terrain. It was argued earlier that centres of gravity are not always found within bricks and mortar but in the motivation of the opposition. The US Rand Corporation<sup>21</sup>, refers to this approach as ‘selective dominance’ through the targeting of ‘nodes’. Selective dominance appears to be a variation of our manoeuvrist theme and ideas on ‘key terrain’ and ‘vital ground’. Unfortunately an overemphasis on physical nodes, such as enemy HQs, TV stations and enemy leaders may fail to address the enemy’s true strength, which may be less tangible. The Chechens adopted ‘defenceless city’ tactics based on mobile teams with RPG-7s, sniper rifles and captured equipment without presenting static ‘nodes’ or defences. The viability of this concept requires further examination.

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<sup>21</sup> This was described at the Urban Warfare Conference 3-4 November 1999, run by SMI in London by Dr Russell Glenn of the RAND Corporation during his presentation entitled *US Doctrine on Urban Operations*

## **Find, Fix and Strike**

Inevitably there will be a requirement for close operations and specifically dismounted close combat. This is the dichotomy of the manoeuvrist approach that on one hand aims to disarm the enemy rather than destroy him but asserts that physical destruction will most likely be necessary at lower levels. The use of force at sub-unit level still aims to attack the opponent's will to encourage him to stop fighting at the earliest opportunity. The enduring requirement to Find, Fix and Strike at brigade and unit level requires further development along these lines:

## **Finding the Enemy**

*To achieve victory we must as far as possible make the enemy blind and deaf by sealing his eyes and ears and drive his commanders to distraction by creating confusion in their minds. Mao Tse-tung, On Protracted War.<sup>22</sup>*

Finding the enemy in the urban labyrinth may be difficult particularly as Mao suggests when an enemy applies successful deception. Information, or its product 'situational awareness' will also have a second and equally important purpose and that is to allow the commander to make a better risk assessment particularly when deploying vulnerable but critical assets such as rotary wing aircraft. The use of technology to deliver better ways of locating an enemy and non-combatants should be a high priority. To minimise potential casualties this should be done remotely with a robust mix of sensors and platforms ranging from UAVs, UASs, UGVs and SIGINT to air delivered multi-sensors. The use of airborne relays would enhance combat net radio effectiveness, a necessary prerequisite to achieving situational awareness.

## **Fix**

Before conducting raids or ambushes against a 'node' the flanks of the striking force should be secured. The use of safe avenues of attack is not a new idea (they were used by the Russians in the first battle of Grozny in 1995) but technology may improve the effectiveness of such a tactical manoeuvre. This might be achieved by a combination of remote sensors linked to weapon systems that deliver both lethal and non-lethal area and point effects to 'sanitise' mobility corridors. Instrumental to fixing the enemy will be the requirement to overload his thought process through the use of deception, EW and information operations rather than just massing firepower.

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<sup>22</sup> Taken from an article, 'Deception and Urban Operations', by Dr Russell Glenn

**Strike and Momentum:**

If it is necessary to strike the enemy physically, then experience suggests this be done by using a combined arms approach. Over reliance on a single system whether infantry without armour or vice versa, is likely to fail as it did in the first Russian operation in Grozny. Also the geometry of buildings presents a major challenge for most conventional weapon systems that might only be overcome by a robust mix of direct and indirect effects available at the lowest levels. Whether conventional ground troops should conduct the strike function or whether there is increase scope for the wider use of Special Forces (perhaps conventional forces, especially infantry in a specialist role), is worthy of debate. Critical to any operation will be maintaining momentum. This poses significant problems in urban terrain. To achieve this momentum might require the rotation of units through formations based on six units, rather than the doctrinally correct principle of four supported by forward based logistics with integral combat power for protection. This proposal does not sit comfortably with current aspirations to reduce the size of unit manpower and replace it with technology. Perhaps the solution lies in maximising the utility of existing manpower particularly in infantry battalions.



*A US Marine Corps soldier returns fire from inside a building during the final attack of EXERCISE SABRE STRIKE at an abandoned old soviet military camp in Skrunda, Latvia. Armed Forces from the United States, Norway and Royal Marines from the U.K played Enemy while Canada, Spain, Netherlands, Denmark, Italy, Latvia were all fighting to defend the base. Photo Leading Phot Dean Nixon, Crown Copyright*

**Then Control:**

Subsequently there is a requirement to control the urban area either locally or as part of a post-conflict operation. Whether specialist urban units conduct this type of operation is questionable.

**Tactics, Techniques and Procedures**

At the lower tactical level, combined arms teams will require ways and means to achieve manoeuvre and tempo to overwhelm the enemy. They need to:

- *Destroy a building with precision weapons using highly lethal effects and an ability to bust bunkers.*
- *See inside a building and know the location of own forces. Given the high level of friction and confusion inherent operations, improved situational awareness (where I am, where my friends are, the neutral population and where the enemy is) will be necessary to avoid fratricide and civilian casualties.*
- *Penetrate a building remotely and robotically to reduce the exposure of ground troops*
- *Deny a building, or seal it off, and suppress open areas of less tactical importance with a cocktail of lethal and non-lethal, area and point effects*
- *Protect themselves against the enemy's most lethal weapons, particularly novel explosives*
- *Neutralise the building that contains non-combatants perhaps used as human shields with non-lethal or less lethal weapons.*
- *Counter enemy 'hugging tactics' that aim to create confusion especially at night and render longer-range weapons less effective. This requires the ability to overmatch the enemy with Battle Group integral weapons capable of operating in close quarter engagements from and against buildings and against personnel*
- *Dominate the night to create a physical and psychological advantage over the enemy.*
- *Support and sustain operations call for an increase capacity to resupply units in contact, evacuate casualties, provide water and fresh manpower.*

**DGD&D Initial Findings**

As a result of DGD&D's work on future urban operations we have drawn these initial conclusions:

- *Geographical analysis of likely areas of operation shows that there are also serious water obstacles, mountains and deserts as well as urban areas.*

*However, trends suggest that an asymmetric enemy will seek sanctuary in urban areas, and Other Operations tend to be people centric hence urban focused.*

- *In a search for new conceptual and doctrinal solutions we found that the best guidance rests with the UK Defence's intellectual investment into the manoeuvrist approach. A review of TTPS should be based on the perceived change in the way we conduct operations reflecting an increasingly restrictive legal and moral frame-work. This will require selective equipment enhancements to turn what might be best described as a cudgel into a rapier.*
- *Whilst the aim to reduce casualties is necessary, an over emphasis on force protection and a ready acceptance of political and public expectation of almost zero casualty rates demands a re-think. Decision-makers need to be briefed on the realities and enduring nature of combat, and the necessity to prepare for it.*
- *Future equipment and munitions must have increased utility in urban terrain. Investment in close operations, especially equipping the infantry will require serious thought*
- *A lack of an ability to find the enemy has significant implications for surgical strikes and casualties amongst both combatants and non-combatants. There is a clear requirement for HUMINT and technology to produce a real time picture for the commander.*
- *But technology will create only a temporary advantage, the requirement is to generate a capability with an effective mix of doctrine, sufficiently broad for commanders to use their imagination and avoid template solutions, well trained soldiers with excellent junior leaders and logistics to sustain such testing operations.*
- *Whilst the trend towards precision guided munitions supports evolving urban doctrine they are expensive and potentially in short supply. 'Dumb munitions' will be required as a backup for more protracted urban operations or alternatively an increased direct fire capability.*
- *Underestimating the importance of the moral component of fighting power as the Russians found to their cost in the first battle of Grozny, will lead to failure. The requirement is to protect our own morale whilst targeting that of the opposition. Information operations will have a key role in this.*
- *Significant short term improvements will be influenced more by training and equipment rather than by concepts and emerging doctrine. In the longer term technology may enable a significant enhancement to Find, Fix and Strike capabilities and will require the necessary R & D priority.*



*Soldiers from the 1st Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment (1 PWRR), conduct house clearance and contact drills within the Urban Defence Training Area (UDTA) of Sennelager Training Centre.  
Photo: Mr Dominic King, Crown Copyright*

- *Post conflict considerations and 'winning the peace' must be included in the operational plan especially the targeting policy.*
- *Urban operations are dislocated in nature, lacking a clear FEBA and characterised by broken lines of communication. This situation creates extra demands on a CSS system that requires protection and an ability to sustain operations that are most severe. CSS urban concepts call for greater self-sufficiency and the rehabilitation, echeloning and perhaps roulement of combat units given the intensity of combat with its ensuing mental and physical fatigue.*

## **Next Steps**

There are no shortages of current initiatives: NATO Urban Operations 2020 study, a variety of US experiments and updates of current doctrine that attempt to resolve the problems inherent in future operations. The challenge remains a daunting one and there are no easy conceptual and doctrinal solutions or technological 'silver bullets.' The UK, with her main allies, is keen to address the problems of operating in urban areas and has made a start:

- *HQ Infantry is developing ideas on TTPs equipment enhancements and structure to improve the Battle Group's ability to conduct close operations within a combined arms context.*
- *The MOD Central Staffs aim to lift the profile of this issue within wider Defence. DCD&D continue to offer an Army perspective and exchange ideas with our allies through the medium of formal army-to-army staff talks*
- *The Army, with the Royal Marines, continues to monitor closely the experimental work conducted by our allies particularly in the USA where this subject and that of non-lethal weapons has attracted a higher profile although not necessarily the funding.*
- *The Russian experience in both battles of Grozny has produced valuable lessons learned.*
- *RCMS student projects have provided an excellent insight into the potential for technology to deliver major enhancements in urban operations.*
- *JSCSC hold Urban Operations Symposiums that are focused on the human element of these operations.*



*Soldiers from the 19th Engineer Battalion, react to a simulated rocket-propelled grenade attack at Zussman Urban Combat Training Center during their recent Platoon Certification Exercise. The exercise examined troop leader procedures in different environments to include Fort Knox's Zussman Urban Combat Training Center and Wilcox Range. Photo Sergeant Michael Behlin, US Army, Released*

# Strategies for Operations in Cities

*This article by Alice Hills was originally published in BAR 126, December 2000. Alice Hills was a member of the academic staff of the Joint Services Command and Staff College*

The Ministry of Defence Report on lessons from Kosovo emphasises that military planning and operations must be co-ordinated with political and economic measures.<sup>1</sup> The strategic implications of this approach for the Army are as yet unclear but when such proposals are combined with existing political and demographic trends it seems likely that future operations will need to focus on societal centres of gravity. Such centres of gravity tend to be found in cities, and if urban operations become as characteristic of the next two decades as peace support operations have been of the 1990s – as many US analysts now think - then exploitation of the complex systems and high population densities characteristic of cities will become a priority.

Just as it is essential to understand the physical environment of cities in order to overcome tactical and geometric constraints, so it will be necessary to understand the nature of the multi-faceted human systems to be exploited. For cities are the likely points of interface between us and foreign state and non-state actors. Not only do political elites usually live in them, but cities have become links in the global production chain and targets for foreign investment; they also account for an increasing share of national income, generating 55 percent of gross national product (GNP) even in low-income countries. In addition, cities are not neutral environments. They can act as catalysts through which conflict is exacerbated or ameliorated because they introduce: 'a set of characteristics - proximate ethnic neighbourhoods, territoriality, economic interdependency, symbolism, and centrality - not present to such an extent on wider geographic scales.'<sup>2</sup>

This can bend or distort the conventional factors on which our understanding of cities - and strategies for urban operations - is based. The complexity of cities suggests that we need to review the assumptions on which our expectations about urban operations are built. Terrain must remain central to the solution of tactical problems but urban operations present their greatest challenge at the strategic level, and will require a more creative approach to the application of military force than is currently common. There is thus a need to question aspects of the broad consensus that urban operations currently enjoy. This must start with strategic issues, not least of which concern trends in contemporary conflict suggesting a future scenario of simultaneous or transitional operations, covering policing and terrorism, humanitarian relief and peace enforcement, and warfighting within a

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1 *Mod, Kosovo: Lessons from the Crisis, Stationery Office, London, 2000; Comptroller and Auditor-General, Kosovo: The Financial Management of Military Operations, Stationery Office, London, 2000. See Chapter 5*

2 *Bollens, Scott A., argues that the organisation and physical infrastructure of cities can influence the processes and outcomes of nationalistic conflict. See On Narrow Ground: Urban Policy and Ethnic Conflict in Jerusalem and Belfast, State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, 2000*



*US Marines, armed with M-249 SAW machine guns and M-16A2 rifles, conduct a building-to-building sweep of the weapons cantonment area seized in an early morning raid. As the 6:00 a.m. deadline to surrender the area was ignored, US Marines from Task Force Mogadishu surrounded and seized General Aideed's weapons cantonment area in the northern part of the capital city. Photo: PHCM Terry C. Mitchell, US Department of Defense, Released*

city. Such scenarios are likely to be ambiguous in comparison with the clarity of many past urban operations.<sup>3</sup>

As events in Mogadishu and Dili emphasise, we think of city structures in Western terms. This is understandable, given that many political problems associated with cities present themselves in conventional terms. Yet many cities in the South (taken here to mean the regions outside the main North American, West European and East Asian economic systems) already display fluid authority systems, for instance, that represent something rather different. We need to understand these trends, just as much as economic regionalisation, decentralisation, globalisation or, indeed, urbanisation, because it is only then that we shall be able to use force to produce specific strategic results.

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<sup>3</sup> *Norms and doctrine can change quickly though, more usually as a result of political, technological and personality factors than military requirements. In 1939, for instance, two years before the RAF adopted Bomber Harris's strategy for Germany, the RAF's instruction was to avoid bomb attacks which could result in civilian injury.*

### Strategies For Urban Operations

We need to specifically consider strategies (rather than tactics) if we are to exploit or manage cities to our advantage. This is especially so if innovative theories of warfare, focussing on weaknesses, are developed by our adversaries.<sup>4</sup> Four general factors support this belief. First, operations such as Somalia challenge our belief that urban operations are necessarily amenable to Clausewitzian notions based on the Westphalian paradigm of the nation state. This belief is likely to present problems. Definitions of end-states and objectives for international forces, for instance, are already difficult to identify in existing intrastate wars because the defeat of an enemy military force has been replaced by a mandate to facilitate political settlements.<sup>5</sup> A variant problem could present if Western forces become involved in non-Western wars, perhaps because of the presence of their nationals. This could represent a challenge to our understanding of what constitutes an urban operation. Africa, for example, remains an overwhelming rural continent but civil war in the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) in 1997 was often urban. Roads are rare, and airfields rarer, but 62.5% of the population live in cities and there were several thousand foreign nationals in Brazzaville.<sup>6</sup> Significantly, the resultant urban actions were not operations so much as mob warfare with looting, RPGs, mortar and artillery dominating. The example is extreme but it represents a type of scenario, which Western forces may not be able to avoid.

Second, as Leningrad showed during the Second World War many cities are not only politically symbolic but may be deliberately invested with strategic significance. We should therefore consider how or when that significance may be exploited, manipulated or defended for manifestly political reasons.

Third, operations in cities are also political because cities are often the entrance point to an intransigent political problem (Grozny is a case in point, as was Mogadishu and Beirut) or because military operations within a city are invariably understood as representing intervention or challenge. Both factors are relevant to the issues of political authority associated with major cities. The fact

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4 See Ahrari, Ehasan, 'Unrestricted War: the leveller', *Jane's Intelligence Review* (February 200) pp 44-47. Compare Rackley, David R., *The PRC finally starts its move towards remaking a Bi-Polar Military World*, *Defense and Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy*, 12, 1999, pp 8-12

5 See Francard, Loup and Patry, Jean-Jaques, *Mastering Violence: An Option for Operational Military Strategy*, *Commandement de la Doctrine et de l'Enseignement Militaire Supérieur de l'Armée de Terre*, 1998, p.9

6 Geibel, Adam, *Brazzaville - 'The Congo: Dying Cities in an Unknown Civil War'*, 1997, *Infantry*, September-December 1999, pp 17-20. Compare Odom, Thomas, *Dragon Operations: Hostage Rescues in the Congo, 1964-1965*, *Leavenworth Papers No 14*, *Combat Studies Institute*, 1988

that US forces slipped from providing humanitarian relief to becoming a faction in the Somali civil war as the result of international and domestic politics was undoubtedly facilitated by the fact that insufficient attention had been paid to the nature and organisation of Somali political authority because it did not reflect international criteria.

A fourth, linked, reason concerns reconfigurations of political authority. State competence has already been redefined by the emergence of new pressures in parts of Latin America and Asia, when drug organisations have assumed such key state functions as the provision of social welfare and protection. But the authority of many states has been reduced in a more fundamental manner by the economic deregulation and growing interdependence of markets associated with globalisation. Sovereignty has been qualified by international commercial markets, regional bodies and the increasing influence of international governmental organisations and non-governmental organisations. In addition, parts of the South in which the West has some interest have seen the emergence of state systems which no longer need territorial, bureaucratic or consent-based authority in the traditional sense.



*A Chechen fighter during the battle for Grozny. Photo Mikhail Evstafiev, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license, Wikimedia*



*U.S. Army Paratroopers, 3rd Platoon, Company D, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade, clear the upper floor of an abandoned building during a bi-lateral training event with the Polish 6th Airborne Battalion, 16th Airborne Brigade (not pictured), in an urban operations training facility in Wedrzyn, Poland, November 21, 2016. U.S. Army photo by Sgt. William A. Tanner, Released*

Resolving the problems associated with operations in such environments will require more innovative tactics and technology. It could, for instance, involve innovative ways of projecting political power. We therefore need to focus on the strategic possibilities relating to the integration of domestic and international assets and infrastructure, especially where a city is a regional hub. Three issues likely to affect the political environment of cities in which future operations may take place are addressed here as a means of rebalancing the resultant concerns, for if the balance is not adjusted there is a danger of urban operations presenting us with problems we have not recognised, let alone considered. The first two issues, systems and reconfigurations of political authority, have so far received little attention from military commentators, while the last, the control of civilians, is a consistent tactical theme but is rarely considered strategically nowadays. Post-hostilities operations are not covered here but they also represent a significant theme because, as happened in Kosovo, most contemporary conflicts are accompanied by reconstruction programmes requiring a civil implementation presence of the type referred to in MoD's Kosovo: *Lessons Learned from the Crisis*. Urban operations will probably be no different; indeed, infrastructure issues may come to the fore as a means of achieving overall strategic aims.

## **Systemic Effects**

Although the complexity of the physical infrastructure of urban terrain is acknowledged, exploitation of the various systems underpinning cities is more difficult to quantify. The set of systems cities represent usually consists of an organisational infrastructure, often involving coercive forces, transport or utilities, overlaid on social and cultural structures and perhaps reflecting sociocultural patterns. They are also likely to be bureaucratic. Such systems tend to consist of organisations made up of groups and individuals, existing for specific purposes, and employing relatively structured types of activity with an identifiable boundary. But systems are also driven by actors pursuing their own incentives, and the complexity of cities results from interaction between various parts of the systems. City inhabitants may base their understanding of their city on the geographical areas in which they live, the public and political organisations of their state, province or country, or the historical aspiration of their community, often understood in terms of territory. This means that the fluid human networks underpinning the myriad systems in a big city are more difficult to identify than the physical or economic networks.

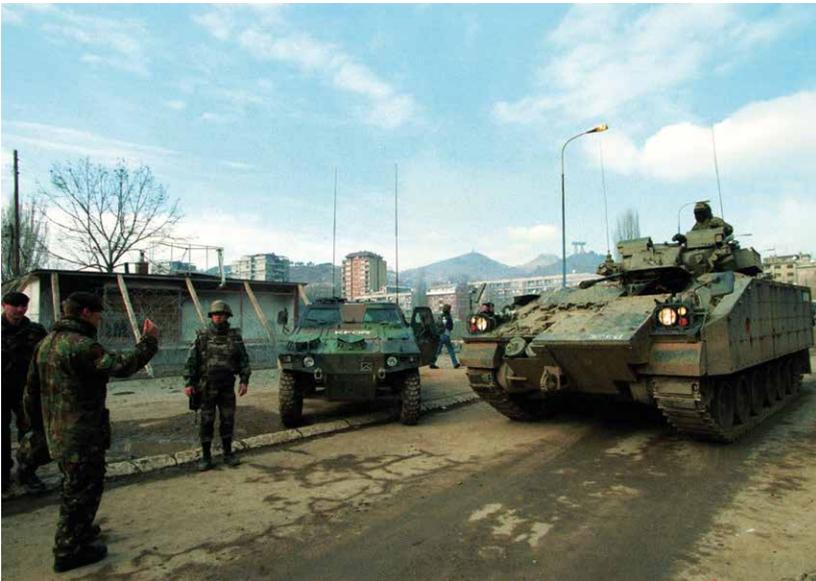
Ultimately, the requirement to understand the resultant systems will depend on the type of operation concerned. But the expanded scope of most recent operations, the humanitarian emphasis, the media intensity and the ambiguity of strategic direction suggests that city systems are likely to present strategic and tactical impediments, especially when combat takes place simultaneously with enforcement and relief. The requirement to understand the systems underpinning the workings of cities in such circumstances, especially those representative of non-Western values and norms, is likely to complicate strategic considerations, either directly or in terms of discontinuities, unanticipated effects and uncertainty.

Long term success in such an environment will require a strategic response because success will represent factors which technology alone cannot resolve and because of the nature of the resultant operations will make the development of strategic objectives capable of being quickly translated into operational or tactical mission statements difficult. Furthermore, although such a situation represents conventional levels of systemic complexity, future urban combat could also drive an escalatory process in terms of systemic relationships. This may not necessarily be a linear process but it could represent more than a simple combination of factors reacting in a chain. War has often acted as a social and political accelerator in the past, so urban operations may prompt, destroy or cause systemic change. Urban operations may themselves have systemic and strategic effects.

A common obstacle to success in contemporary operations, especially those with expanded missions, has been the failure to determine who is in charge. One

reason we are reluctant to consider urban operations from a strategic point is because the West has difficulty in dealing with alternative, non-institutionalised forms of authority, and because many areas of life in which centralisation is taken for granted in the West are outside the scope or reach of Southern governments.

Although formal authority structures are rarely pivotal in determining the effectiveness of operations, Western states need identifiable political authorities with which to treat. The problem this represents is unlikely to lessen because it is linked to the legitimisation currently required by international operations (typically provided by UN mandates or, more controversially, self-mandated in the case of NATO in Kosovo), and to the way in which recognition by the military, (as happened in Somalia and Bosnia) confer an inappropriate legitimacy. It may also link into issues associated with the professional identity of the military (especially in peace support operations) or with the disintegration of existing military and political codes. Or it may be connected to wider trends in the nature of political authority as reflected in debates over globalisation, localisation and non-state actors. Violence in East Timor and economic disaster in Indonesia have, for instance, been directly linked to the support of western banks and governments for a regime that tolerated a weak rule of law.



*An RGJ Warrior is maneuvered into place on the bridge between the south and north of the divided city of Mirovica.(the north of the city is shown in the background). Photo Wendy Sumerell, Released*

There are many possible reconfiguration of political authority but, if the changes evident since the end of the Cold War are fundamental, it is distinctly possible that future urban operations will take place in an environment in which city systems represent, or are composed of, multiple competing institutions and overlapping jurisdictions. We can gain insight into what such a situation might mean from the developments referred to as neo-medievalism and shadow states. If authority, primarily in the South, is understood in terms of neo-medievalism, then zones of political authority with overlapping boundaries and, significantly, no universal centre of competence, can be identified. This could mean that certain cities become enforcement agencies (or execution places) for decisions made elsewhere in the global system, while urban operations could be aimed at inflicting coercion elsewhere. Victory in any ensuing operations could prove illusive, not least because of the difficulties associated with creating effective and multi-functional co-ordination mechanisms for multinational operations in such circumstances.

An alternative interpretation to neo-medievalism is that of shadow states. Shadow states present alternative forms of structure and power (and profit), in which regimes draw authority from their ability to control markets and resources, such as diamonds, rather than territory or coercive agents such as police.<sup>7</sup> The resultant development of associations and activities not directly under state control are nothing new but they undoubtedly represent a 'highly subversive space where new structures and norms may take hold to challenge the existing state order.'<sup>8</sup>

It might be argued that the results of such trends - the erosion of the post-colonial state and a return to the enclave economies and private armies of earlier years - are peripheral to future urban operations because the regimes running shadow states (and often employing Western private military companies) are most unlikely to engage Western military forces in combat. Similarly, their relevance might also be debated on the grounds that we shall not choose to become embroiled in urban operations in any African state, but this would in practice be to rule out the possibility of operations in more than 50 fragile states. Irrespective of such issues, however, the value of shadow states here is that they present a dramatically different configuration of political authority which Western politicians and military forces are likely to find great difficulty in confronting, let alone defeating. Globalisation will exacerbate such difficulties; as recent events in West Africa make clear, the ties between foreign firms and African rulers in states where politicians

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7 *The phrase was first suggested by William Reno in Corruption and State Policies in Sierra Leone, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995*

8 *Fallon, Robert, Predatory Rule: State and Civil Society in Africa, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, CO, 1992, p. 185*

and big men use private networks to extend their powers of patronage have played a dominant part in driving conflict in the continent. Strategic incoherence is the probable result of Western operations in such states, exacerbated by the fact that the role of our state-centric diplomacy will be limited in such circumstances, and our strategy will have to accommodate centrifugal forces.

## **Post-Modern Conflict**

The characteristics of many contemporary operations suggest it may be necessary to redefine our expectations of the type of conflict associated with such environments. Indeed, the trend for conflicts to be intrastate (and to transmute into prolonged crises) not only implies a changing location of political violence in relation to the nation-state, but, through its relative informality suggests that the organisational forms and borders of conflict are also changing. Thus future urban operations may involve many actors, ranging from the warlords, militia and child soldiers of existing states, to those representing the more futuristic Netwar.

The identification of warlords or local strongmen able to control an area and exploit its resources while at the same time keeping both central and foreign authorities at bay and successfully forging linkages with the international economy would appear relatively straightforward if it were not for the considerations made explicit by the debacle of Somalia. The role of militia also seems relatively straightforward though various types of militia played an integral part in urban operations in Mogadishu, while the lessons the Red Army learned in Afghanistan should not be forgotten. The systematised use of child soldiers could present greater problems for Western forces, initially at least. Their use in all recent wars in sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, has been made possible by the availability of cheap, light and easy to use automatic weapons but many commanders prefer children because they are controllable. The systems such actors represent may appear to be unsophisticated but, as Somalia showed, they should not be underestimated.

The potential threat from the more sophisticated actors associated with transnational networks, with lateral forms of control, authority and communication, appears clearer in comparison. The resultant Netwar is relevant to urban operations because it is notoriously difficult to fight and because it involves measures short of traditional war in which the protagonists use of network forms of organisation and related doctrines, strategies, and technologies exploits information technology. This factor may introduce new features that a simple reliance on established counter insurgency (COIN) principles, for instance, does not address. Not only may past lessons turn out to be less easily transferable to this new situation than is often assumed, but the assumptions on which they



*A Russian Mi-8 helicopter shot down by Chechen fighters near the Chechen capital, Grozny.  
Photo: Mikhail Eustafiev, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license, Wikimedia.*

are based may themselves prove dangerous simply because many forms of networks appear familiar. In Netwar, as in COIN, tactical focus is unlikely to be sufficient when Netwar is able to cut across standard boundaries, jurisdictions, and conventional distinctions between state and society, public and private, war and crime, civilian and military. If, as seems likely, it is necessary for us to draw on the same organisational designs and principles (on the principle that it takes networks to fight networks) then strategic coherence will be essential.

### **Controlling Civilians**

The third major complexity factor identified here is that associated with the presence of civilians. Even if a city such as Shanghai, with its associated population of 125 million in more than 2,300 square miles, presents an extreme and improbable scenario, recent events in Chechnya emphasise that cities are never empty, civilian casualties are an emotive issue, evacuation policies have not been seriously considered for many years, and the presence of non-combatants complicates existing military-civil distinctions. Between 10,000 and 40,000 civilians were estimated to remain in Grozny at the beginning of January 2000,

either unable or unwilling to escape bombardment,<sup>9</sup> and separating them from combatants proved difficult.

Russian forces were not constrained in their dealings with civilians, nor were they required to distinguish between humanitarian, enforcement and combat operations, but the lessons of Chechnya should not be dismissed as irrelevant to the West because it is arguable that they apply to 'any modern, mechanized force fighting a determined enemy in a city'.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Chechnya represents a situation that an expeditionary force could face if a threat to an important ally or trade route necessitated some form of power projection: crime is rampant, law non-existent and terrorism and religious extremism have made dramatic inroads. The control of civilians is likely to be a significant factor in any such operation but the problems associated with achieving that control should not be underestimated, not least because the policing of big cities is difficult for even unaccountable forces familiar with the nuances of the city concerned, and because the policing of smaller cities, by either military or civilian forces in Kosovo-like operations is even more so.

Relying on recent experience for guidance in future operations may be misleading. Urban policing missions are often considered to be low-risk, but scale will make a difference; although almost 65 per cent of the world's urban residents live in small and medium-size cities, the scale of important coastal cities such as Cairo, Calcutta, Lagos and Los Angeles exemplify the potential problem. And the resources needed to conduct operations are always very high in relation to the geographical size of an area, even when fighting between distinct armed forces, as in Grozny, is unlikely. Less-than-lethal weapons (especially those associated with the electronic stimulation of nerves) may prove very useful but the scale of their application is likely to be small. Furthermore, different types of cities in different regions may require different forms of management; boom cities such as Seoul are different to the reservoir cities (Johannesburg) where men are held in suspension, while dispersed cities or conurbations on the scale of Washington DC are different again.<sup>11</sup>

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9 *BBC World News*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk>, 7 January 2000

10 *Grau, Lester W., and Thomas, Timothy I., Soft Log and Concrete Canyons, Russian urban Combat Logistics in Grozny, Marine Corps Gazette 83, 10, 1999, p 73*

11 *Peters, Ralph, 'The Future of Armoured Warfare', Parameters, XXVII, 3, 1997, 54. The rioting in Los Angeles in 1992 extended over 32 miles, covering about 100-150 square miles. See Peterson, Steven, Civil Disturbances in the American Urban Environment: An Evaluation of US Army Doctrine, Part 2, Low Intensity Conflict and Law Enforcement 3, 1, 1994, P 159. Despite the scale, however, the armed gangs and mobs concerned require the application of riot control and law enforcement techniques, rather than those of combat.*



*A female British soldier of Juliet Company, CIMIC (Civil Military Co-operation) is pictured on patrol in Lashkar Gah. Photo: POA(Phot) Dave Husbands, Crown Copyright*

Yet it may be easy to over-estimate some of the problems associated with the presence of civilians simply because the principle of military necessity is likely to dominate wherever the situation is sufficiently serious for combat to occur. Much will depend on case specifics but civilian control by the military, even in PSO, is inspired less by humanitarian concerns than those of military necessity or public health and safety. Indeed, NATO documents explicitly acknowledge CIMIC as a combat support function, its purpose being to facilitate the military task by smoothing relations between NATO military and the local population. It achieves this by taking into account the legal, administrative, social, cultural, economic and environmental context of operations.

MC411 specifies that CIMIC must be considered by operational commanders as an integral part of the planning process for any operation. For this reason it is probable that civil affairs and CIMIC will revert to more traditional modes of expression - bringing with them long-standing problems associated with its command and control, status and quality<sup>12</sup> - during force-on-force operations.

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<sup>12</sup> See Donnison, F.S.V., 'Civil Affairs and Military Government: Northwest Europe, 1944-46', HMSO, London, 1961, and *Civil Affairs and Military Government: Central Organisations and Planning*, HMSO, London, 1966

The civil affairs organisation created during the Second World War for operations in cities such as Naples, Berlin and Vienna, for instance, may have fulfilled public health and feeding duties but it acted primarily in support of military-related objectives, such as relieving combat troops of the requirement to provide the civil administration what the law of war required of them.

Civil affairs did have a duty to assist in the restoration of 'normal conditions' amongst civilians as soon as possible, but such objectives were offset by the requirement to ensure that the requirements of military necessity were observed and the economic resources of occupied or liberated territory made available to the occupying forces. Civil affairs was an instrument of military authority rather than humanitarian relief, existing (as General Eisenhower noted) 'to keep the civil population from under the feet of the Army'.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the invaluable experience provided by the Second World War, the problems associated with the effective, let alone efficient, management of civilians in the light of contemporary Western values remains unresolved. The British experience in Northern Ireland may hold some general lessons for urban operations, as may that of the Israelis in Jerusalem, but the fact that our involvement in contemporary conflicts is prompted by choice, rather than necessity, and is shaped by liberal norms and fears, suggests that political guidance will be essential for the foreseeable future. Much seems to depend on the region in which conflict takes place - thus emphasising that political factors are paramount. This can be illustrated by two contrasting examples.

The presence of civilians during the liberation of Western European cities in 1944-45 was considered a tactical or operational problem, with civilians merely imposing some restrictions on movement and weapons choice. But it is evident that the existence of civilians during the liberation of the Low Countries, for instance, imposed more limitations on the occupying armies than it did in Caen. Take the case of the battle for the city of Groningen in the Netherlands in April 1945. Military options were dictated by the fact that the eastern flank of Groningen was effectively unassailable because the existence of a large hospital meant the use of heavy artillery was unacceptable. In contrast, UN forces in Somalia were unrepentant that civilians close to the scene of an attack were regarded (and treated) as combatants whether armed or not: 'In an ambush there are no side lines for spectators'.<sup>14</sup>

Different cultures place different values on human life but both the Second World War and Somalia suggest that the presence of civilians will intensify

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13 Reckitt, B.N., *Diary of Military Government in Germany 1945*, Ilfracombe, 1989, frontispiece.

14 UN official quoted in *Financial Times*, 11 September 1993

political and operational problems in multi-national operations, especially when the issues concerned are linked to prestige or social constructs such as criminalisation. The UN military operation in Somalia, for instance, was weakened by disputes within the 27,000-strong 28-nation force, with many nations resenting US dominance and questioning the wisdom of demonising General Aideed. Many commanders cut informal deals with local militia to protect their forces from snipers, while co-operation between troops of different nationalities was often minimal and when disputes occurred they became full-blown diplomatic incidents. This is not to suggest that such a response is directly linked to the presence of civilians so much as to emphasise that the presence of civilians cannot be considered in isolation from political issues.<sup>15</sup>

### **Strategy The Key**

In order to reconsider strategies for operations in cities we need to question our assumptions about the ways in which cities work because the problems currently associated with urban operations may be a natural consequence of the logic of our present approach; we may be able to deal with the problems only by restructuring the logic. Ignoring strategic considerations could end in entrapment, if, as a result of misunderstanding the resultant flawed policies, essential questions are evaded, preventing a full examination of the character of commitment and the authority structures to be coerced. The policy processes associated with the development of urban operations must be made responsive to the risks of entrapment, for entrapment may itself become the objective of an adversary if he is able to influence such processes.

One way in which the issue can be addressed is through ideas and scenarios suggested by the concept of escalation, with its implications of complexity and uncertainty. The value of escalation (as opposed to chaos or complexity) theory is that it is concerned with strategic planning. The metaphor of escalation is essentially a tool for considering the growth potential of known types of operations, from a conventional base of past events to a bizarre and unprecedented level of complexity, dislocation, longevity and scale. It encourages the imagination required for planning against high-impact events with a low probability and can be usefully applied to work on future urban operations; it is a support for analysing strategic policy, decision-making models, and the nature of crisis. Use of the escalation metaphor here is a warning that the phrase 'urban

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<sup>15</sup> *The point is emphasised by the £3m damages awarded in 1988 against Nicolai Tolstoy for repeatedly calling Lord Aldington a war criminal. Lord Aldington had, as Brigadier Low, been the officer responsible for handling the forced repatriation by British troops of some 25,000 Cossacks and Caucasians what had fought for the Germans*



*Soldiers from the 1st Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment (1 PWR), conduct house clearance and contact drills within the Urban Defence Training Area (UDTA) of Sennelager Training Centre.  
Photo: Mr Dominic King, Crown Copyright*

operations' implies a degree of control which rarely exists, and that routine methods of planning must be open to new ways of thinking. This is important because 'there is a close relationship between the way we think and the way we act, and... many organisational problems are embedded in our thinking.'<sup>16</sup>

To achieve new ways of thinking about urban operations will require more than a simple identification of the military options available in cities, for urbanisation creates two significant and potentially strategic changes in a state's centres of gravity and in its effects on decision-makers. The culture and behaviour of an urban society tends to be different to that of a rural society, while governments usually respond differently to threats against a city to those made against more rural areas. It is the resultant mix of political and personal objectives, urbanisation, globalisation, decentralisation, technological development, reconfigurations of political authority, reconstruction and international intervention that results in a potentially changed strategic situation.

The role of cities is likely to be critical in future geopolitical disputes, not least because cities, especially when functioning in the midst of nationalistic or ethnic conflict, can influence the processes and outcomes of both specific and broader conflict. For cities introduce a set of characteristics and factors that are capable of strategic effect. Self-interest suggests we should therefore concern ourselves with strategies for military operations in cities, as opposed to tactics for urban terrain generally, because such operations can easily generate unforeseen consequences and contradictions that could endanger our own interests.

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<sup>16</sup> Morgan G., *Images of Organisation*, Sage, London, 1986, p. 335. The concept of escalation is primarily associated with Khan, Herman, *On Escalation*, Pall Mall Press, London, 1965



*Fallujah, Iraq (Nov. 15, 2004) - Iraqi Special Forces Soldiers assigned to the U.S. Marines of 2nd Squad, 3rd Platoon, L Company, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, patrol south clearing every house on their way through Fallujah, Iraq, during Operation Al Fajr (New Dawn). Operation Al Fajr is an offensive operation to eradicate enemy forces within the city of Fallujah in support of continuing security and stabilization operations in the Al Anbar province of Iraq by units of the 1st Marine Division. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Corporal James J. Vooris (RELEASED)*

# Urban Warfare in the Future: Balancing our Approach

*This article by Colonel Robert C Owen USAF Air Mobility Command was originally published in BAR 128, Winter 2001-2002*

During the past several years of renewed interest and experimentation in Urban Warfare, scholars and the military community have expended most of their efforts on exploring its tactical level of operations. Until recently, they have devoted only a tiny fraction of their thinking, writing and experimentation to exploring its operational and strategic aspects. Recent Joint Doctrine publications and other writings have expanded the body of thought about the operational and strategic levels of Urban Warfare, but only barely. Consequently, the operational concepts and resource allocation prescriptions emerging from this unbalanced exploration remain overwhelmingly focused on cracking the secrets of conducting direct surface assault to clear streets and buildings. Little guidance is available to commanders (or their political leaders, for that matter) trying to determine how and when to engage in urban battles or on how to determine their overall military and grand strategic importance.

This skewed body of guidance is not merely an academic issue – it presents at least two concrete dangers. It can lead military and civilian leaders to make inappropriate resource decisions and it can predispose Joint and Component commanders to undertake inappropriate or unnecessary battles for urban objectives. Those leaders and commanders, therefore, should be demanding a broader and more balanced urban warfare discourse. Tactics are a crucial part of the equation, of course. Effective land, sea and air tactical capabilities make the operational and strategic levels of urban conflict meaningful rather than merely academic, but operational and strategic thought, in turn, give tactical capabilities and achievements their meaning and value. So it is reasonable to echo Army Major General Robert H. Scales' opinion that we have made 'too quick a leap beyond the more conceptual aspects of war in urban terrain and into the weapons and tactics necessary to fight street-to-street and door-to-door.'<sup>1</sup> The time has come to begin to bring our operational and strategic understanding of urban warfare abreast of our growing tactical grasp of that particularly daunting realm of warfare - not by slowing down tactical development, but by lighting a fire under our efforts to understand the other two levels of thought.

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1 Scales, Robert H. Jr, *'The Indirect Approach: How US Military Forces Can Avoid the Pitfalls of Future Urban Warfare'*, *Armed Forces Journal International* October 1998, p 68. Also see Robert E Podlesny's comment that *'what is missing [from the USMC and Army approaches to Urban Warfare experimentation is an approach ... which requires mission planners to address strategic, operational, and tactical issues in a holistic manner'*, in *'MOUT, The Show Stopper'*, *Proceedings*, Feb 98, p 53.

## **The Current State of Urban Warfare Thought: Strategy, Operations, TACTICS**

As most individuals interested in the development of urban warfare thought likely would agree, strategic and to a somewhat greater extent, operational issues have been elements of the discourse over the past several years. But their treatment has received nowhere near the volume and detail of interest as have tactical issues. A review of just the articles cited here will bear out that perception. Many begin with short sections declaring the looming prevalence and likely horrors of urban battle and then spend the bulk of their text laying out tactical prescriptions and shopping lists.<sup>2</sup> Except for the shopping lists, the keystone Service doctrine publications follow the same pattern. *Field Manual (FM) 90-10 and Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 3-35.3*, both of which are titled *Military Operations on Urbanized Terrain (MOUT)*, expend only a few paragraphs on the place of cities in campaign planning and then spend hundreds of pages on unit tactics, weapons effects, mine warfare and the like.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, the major service experiments such as the US Marine Corps' URBAN WARRIOR and aspects of the US Army's Army After Next (AAN) programs, predominantly focus on the tactical issues of Military Operations in/on Urban Terrain, or MOUT.<sup>4</sup> Even the Joint Staff's recently published *Handbook for Joint Urban Operations* has significant limitations as a guide for operational-level resource and operational planning. Written expressly to illuminate the operational-level of urban operations, this Handbook is a rich source of assertions about the theoretical and historical nature of urban terrain and combat, and of a useful categorization of Joint urban operations, as those aimed at isolating, retaining, containing, denying, or reducing urban areas.<sup>5</sup> But, as in the literature in general, a reading of this document provides little guidance to commanders seeking to blend a particular urban battle in their campaign plans or to best employ their particular mixes of aerospace, naval, and land forces

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2 For examples of the tendency to focus on tactical level issues, rather than strategic and operational, see John M House, 'The Enemy After Next', *Military Review*, March-April 1998. pp 22-27, and Sean D Naylor, 'A Lack of City Smarts?', *Army Times*, May 11, 1998, p 22; Russell W Glenn, *Combat in Hell: A Consideration of Constrained Urban Warfare*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND. 1996, throughout, and 'Entering the Intersection: Choosing the Right MOUT Strategy, for the Twenty-First Century' in *Denying the Widow-Maker Summary of Proceedings, Rand-DBBL Conference on Military Operations in Urban Terrain*, Santa Monica, CA, RAND 1998, pp 77-114.

3 Department of the Navy, HQ US Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 3-35.3, 'Military Operations on Urbanised Terrain (MOUT)*, US Army Field Manual (FM)90-10, *Military Operations on Urbanized Terrain*, 15 Aug 1979.

4 Gourley, Scott, *Marines Train For Three Block War*, *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 21April 1999, p 30.

5 United States Joint Staff, *Handbook for joint Urban Operations*, 17 May 2000, throughout

to accomplish specific objectives. Consequently, there is virtually nothing in the document that helps long-range resource planners, such as Service Chiefs and Secretaries, to determine the likely frequency, scale, and relative importance of urban operations in the overall defense environment of the United States.

What passes currently for the 'strategic' discussion of urban warfare generally amounts to little more than an uncritical proposition that global demographics and sociology will make cities the predominant battlefields of the future.

As Third World urban populations bloom and come to consist increasingly, of young, dissatisfied 'barbarians', numerous authors presume that rebel lions, insurgencies, factional armies and warrior bands will thrive in the rubble of failed states, cities, and megalopolises.<sup>6</sup> Unavoidably, therefore, most of these authors assert or at least implicitly presume, that the United States will be drawn into the maelstroms of these urban battles, with considerable disadvantages in its cultural technological and informational readiness to fight.<sup>7</sup> So certain are these writers of the patent truth of this notion that urban battles will define future warfare most of them jump past strategy as quickly as possible to get at what they seem to perceive as the more important and pressing issues of tactics and resource advocacy. Ralph Peters, currently one of the more influential and outspoken urban warfare thinkers expressed this notion clearly, when he wrote that

*...the future of warfare lies in the streets, sewers, high rise buildings... shacks and shelters that form the broken cities of the world. We will fight elsewhere, but not so often, rarely as reluctantly, and never so brutally ... stop preparing for [a] dream war and get down to the reality of the fractured and ugly world in which we live - a world that lives in cities... seize the future before the future seizes us.<sup>8</sup>*

The operational level discussion of urban warfare in the current literature is richer than the strategic discussion, barely.

*FM 90-10 and MCWP 3-35.3* for example, discuss the pros and cons of factoring cities into campaign plans, but only in a few paragraphs and in the form of rudimentary advice to avoid them, if terrain and the location of main lines of communication allow.<sup>9</sup>

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6 *For discussion of the effects of demographics and sociology, see: William G Rosenau, 'Every Room is a New Battle: The Lessons of Modern Urban Warfare', Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, Vol 20, 1997, pp373-385.*

7 *Saffold, op cit, p 53; John R Groves Jr, 'Operations in Urban Environments', Military Review, July-August 1998 pp 34-5, 39. Groves argues that, given the inevitability of urban combat, the civil and military leaders must develop policies as clear as possible for dealing with its manifold ambiguities and variations. Also Rosenau, p 372*

8 *Peters, Ralph, 'Our Soldiers, Their Cities', Parameters, Spring 1996, pp 43, 50*

9 *MSPW 3-35.3, pp 2-1 through 2-2, FM 90-10, chapter 1, Introduction, p 1.*

The *Handbook for Joint Urban Operations* does give more treatment to this area, but just barely, and as an exception in the realm of official literature. For example, perhaps the only time the *Handbook* discusses an alternative to direct urban assault is in its encapsulation of the 1995 Operation DELIBERATE FORCE air campaign against the Serb Republic. Implicitly, at least, the publication shows that the UN relieved the city of Sarajevo through air attacks mainly against targets outside its boundaries.<sup>10</sup> Otherwise, only a few writers have examined operational level issues in much depth, most notably General Scales and Marine Lieutenant General Paul Van Riper. Scales has discussed sieges as alternatives to direct conquests of some cities under certain circumstances.<sup>11</sup> Paul Van Riper, drawing on conceptual work by the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory, has explored what can be considered as the intra-urban, operational level of MOUT, by advancing a concept of 'swanning' tactics by infantry units moving through urban sectors in loose coordination, and then converging from all directions to support fellow units actually making contact with an enemy.<sup>12</sup> These two senior leaders also have collaborated to discuss the general problem of urban conflict, and the relative values of technology and doctrine in its conduct.<sup>13</sup> In broader treatments, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology Study Group, the RAND Corporation, and others have explored the circumstances under which cities belong or will not belong in well-crafted campaign plans.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, several air thinkers have considered the possibility of employing aerospace power in ways that obviate or at least reduce the need to go into cities or to mitigate the costs of urban fighting.<sup>15</sup> A pending RAND study will significantly expand on these and other aerospace urban warfare concepts.<sup>16</sup> So there is a growing body of operational

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10 *Handbook for Joint Operations*, IV-51

11 *Scales*, throughout.

12 *Van Riper, Paul K.*, 'A Concept for Future Military Operations in Urbanized Terrain', *Marine Corps Gazette*, October 1997, *passim*; *The Marine Warfighting Lab at Quantico Marine Corps Base, Virginia remains perhaps the most important single source of conceptual and practical urban warfare development, particularly at the tactical and operational levels of surface combat. The author would like here to thank Mr Randu Gangle (Colonel, USMC retired), Senior Operational Advisor at the MWL, for his careful review, and comments in support of this paper, despite his probable conviction that he was trying to teach a pig to sing.*

13 *Van Riper and Scales*, 'Preparing for War in the 21st Century, Parameters, Autumn 1997

14 *Press, Darrell G.*, 'Conference Summary: Urban Warfare, Options, Problems, and the Future', MIT Security Studies Program, Cambridge MA. January 1999, p 16; *Russell W. Glenn, Widow Maker*, pp 4-5

15 *Saffold*, pp 14-25, *James Kitfield*, 'War in the Urban Jungles', *Air Force Magazine*, December 1998, p 74

16 *Alan Vick, John Stillion, and others*, *Exploring New Concepts for Aerospace Operations in Urban Environments*, Los Angeles, RAND, November 1999



*The soldiers from GGK use the assault ladder to storm the "terrorist hideout" during the Defense Services Asia 2016 or DSA 2016 Exhibition at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Photo: Rizuan, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License, Wikimedia*

level discussion of urban warfare. But it remains shallow and often derided as irrelevant or of low priority, some, including again Ralph Peters, who declared that ‘sloganeering about sieges and technology and nonsense about being too wise to enter an urban fight reduces our Army to satire’.<sup>17</sup>

The urban warfare discourse comes alive at the tactical level, where the overwhelming presumption is that ‘combat in urban areas is primarily a small unit infantry intensive operation’.<sup>18</sup>

Urban terrain, according to FM 90-10, ‘favours the employment of infantry, supported by other arms’.<sup>19</sup> In support of this view, most tactical writers presume that the vertical walls and close confines of urban terrain will relegate machine-intensive arms such as aerospace and naval forces, artillery, armour, engineers, and advanced command systems to providing support to ‘huge numbers of

<sup>17</sup> Peters, Ralph, 'Will We Be Able to Take the Cities?', *Army Times*, May 11 1998, p 34.

<sup>18</sup> MCWP 3-35.3, p 1-13.

<sup>19</sup> Citation taken from *Army Doctrine Homepage*, which does not offer pagination. However it is located in the third paragraph of the 'CHARACTERISTICS OF URBAN WARFARE' section of Chapter 1.

soldiers'.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, they expect that in the midst of the large numbers of non-combatants likely to be present in city battles, only infantry forces will have the 'Precision' required to operate within the restrictive rules of engagement (ROE) likely to be imposed on 'civilized' combatants.<sup>21</sup> Under such physically and politically restrained circumstances, many argue that such combatants will find their advanced technology difficult or perhaps even counterproductive to apply in urban battles.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, suggests one analyst,

*...the ability of US forces to overcome any opponent may be more limited by political guidance translated into operational and tactical ROE than military capability.*<sup>23</sup>

In other words, the weight of current opinion is that commanders wanting to achieve objectives in cities must plan on doing so primarily with infantry. Consequently, the discourse is loaded with discussions of infantry 'penetration', 'thrust', and 'swarm' tactics.<sup>24</sup> But one will search at least the open literature in vain to find concepts such as 'fleeting target working groups in urban combat', or 'naval operations on urban shores'.<sup>25</sup>

Not surprisingly, given their tactical focus, most urban warfare writers enthusiastically build shopping lists to complement their particular visions of urban fighting. These tend to come in 'low technology' and 'high technology' versions. Low technology lists usually include existing systems or systems requiring relatively minor investments to develop, such as sniper weapons, rocket-propelled grenades, flamethrowers, and cell phones. High technology lists include such things as 'revolutionary new man-machine fighting systems', 'next-generation individual assault weapons', 'advanced urban combat vehicles',

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20 Podlesny, *op cit*, p 51. In a more circumspect approach, Generals Van Riper and Scales argue that emerging precision guided munitions and 'microchip' technologies should be 'designed to enhance rather than replace land power', rather than to underpin reliance on 'distant attack', their euphemism for aerospace and missile attacks, 'Preparing for War', pp 12-13. See also Peters, 'Our Soldiers, Their Cities', p 47, Scott E Packard, 'Bottom Line: It's Infantry, Proceedings, November 1998, pp 29-31, and T R Milton Jr, 'Urban Operations: Future War', *Military Review*, February 1994, p 40.

21 Rosenau, pp 377, 389. Glenn, *Combat in Hell*, pp i-iii, 5.

22 Hahn, Rober F. II, and Jezior, Bonnie, *Urban Warfare and the Urban Warfighter of 2025, Parameters*, Summer 1999, p 76; Podlesny, p 53

23 Groves, John R Jr, *Operations in Urban Environments*, *Military Review*, July-August 1998, p 37

24 Packard, pp 29-31.

25 Rosenau, p 388; Milton, p 44.

'Vertical Assault Urban Light Transporters', and a host of other systems that particular writers think justify their high costs.<sup>26</sup> Importantly, both sets of lists reflect the prevailing notion that infantry will dominate in urban warfare.<sup>27</sup> The difference is that 'low end' lists reflect the notion that ordinary units can conduct urban operations, preferably with enhanced stocks of certain otherwise conventional weapons, while 'high end' lists usually support calls for the creation of forces specifically for urban combat.<sup>28</sup>

### **An Alternative View: Strategy, Operations, Tactics**

The argument here for balancing the urban warfare discourse is simple: some of the foundational presumptions of the current state of thought and policy development are unsubstantiated and perhaps outright wrong. Put concisely, the combined body of literature and experimentation is overstating the strategic importance of urban warfare and the likelihood that the United States will engage in frequent, sustained, and large scale urban combat, even as it understates the operational alternatives available to achieve objectives and desired effects. The importance of these miss-statements, of course, is that they may lead defense planners to invest in urban warfare capabilities inappropriately and they may constrain the operational options of commanders.

To begin with strategic importance, the case has not been made that cities will be the predominant battlegrounds and military prizes of the future, at least not for the United States. That their demographics, cultural, social, and economic characteristics will make cities the arenas of frequent and sometimes large-scale conflicts probably requires little proof other than common sense. But to argue that the United States or other countries will take or be trapped by these opportunities to engage in urban combat frequently and/or on a large scale requires more proof than simple arguments about population growth and street thugs. As a minimum, that argument requires careful placement of urban fighting in such disciplines as military and urban history, strategic theory, the sociological and psychological make up of likely enemies and enemy organizations, national policy, and operational concepts. These disciplines offer numerous insights into the strategic realities of urban warfare, some of which suggest that:

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26 Hahn and Jezior, p 84; Van Riper, 'Concept for Future Military Operations', A-4 through A-6

27 'MH', 'MOUT Experiments Pay Early Dividends', *Jane's International Defense Review*, November 1998, p 13.

28 Milton, p 45; Timothy L Thomas, 'The Battle of Grozny: Deadly Classroom for Urban Combat', *Parameters*, Summer 1999, p 94; Peters, 'Our Soldiers', p 49; Hahn and Jezior, p 83.

- *Urban warfare is a well-established and accommodated aspect of military and urban history as reflected at least in military science and urban design.*<sup>29</sup>
- *The wealth and power of cities simultaneously make them attractive to conquerors and insurrectionists, while simultaneously concentrating the power of states to resist them*
- *The characteristics of urban terrain tend to offer countervailing advantages and disadvantages to both attackers and defenders.*<sup>30</sup> *Urban terrain may offer defenders cover and plentiful supply of fortified positions, for example, but it also may cover the approaches of their attackers until they are very close. Accordingly, the advantage in urban combat tends to go to the side maintaining the clearest view of the battlefield and the greatest freedom to exploit that view through tactical and operational manoeuvre, shock and or fire, just as it does in other realms of war.*
- *Urban fighting usually only makes sense in conjunction with either control of the surrounding terrain or an inadequate ability to traverse that terrain. Attackers with the option of going around urban areas often are well-advised to do so. Defenders unable to draw support from or retreat into surrounding rural areas usually are committing their forces to certain destruction in the face of a force that controls the outside, particularly if it also retains manoeuvre advantage within the city.*
- *Consistently, US Marine Corps analysis indicates that ‘no single factor is more important to the attacker’s success than isolation of the urban area.’*<sup>31</sup>
- *Most urban battles have been fought and won by ‘standard’ forces, and standard weapons pressed into the task, perhaps with some preliminary training or realignment of unit tables of equipment.*<sup>32</sup> *The exceptions, of course could include defensive victories by pre-industrial city garrisons, which often stemmed from the external and sometimes distant manoeuvres of field armies or other forces.*
- *Cities offer fertile ground for the development and sustenance of terrorism, organised crime, civil disobedience, extend rioting and other forms of rebellion. But, ultimately, purely urban-based insurgencies have had few successes probably because of their inability to provide secure base areas for large-scale forces and their inability to draw support from surrounding rural areas.*<sup>33</sup>

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29 Ashworth, Gregory J., *War and The City*, London, Routledge, 1991, pp 97-121

30 Ashworth, pp 97-121

31 MCWP 3-35, pp 1-17

32 McLaurin and Miller, *op cit*; Thomas, *Deadly Classroom*, pp 93-4

33 McLaurin and Miller, 15-7



*U.S. Army soldiers use a wall and a pillar as a shield while they tactically enter and clear a building in Fallujah, Iraq, during Operation al Fajr (New Dawn) on Nov. 9, 2004. The soldiers are assigned to 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division. DoD photo: Sergeant 1st Class Johancharles Van Boers, U.S. Army. (Released)*

- *Under many circumstances ‘it will be imperative to get civilians out of a city before fighting starts.’<sup>34</sup> Civilian non-combatants hinder operations, may provide support to enemy combatants, and constitute a major obstacle to achieving political and military objectives where ROE are restrictive and/or restoring or gaining popular support is imperative. In most cases of large scale, intense city fighting, there will at least be a significant portion of the non-combatant (or at least those that would like to be non-combatants) who will simply want to get off the urban battlefield. Preparation for successful urban operations, therefore, may also include preparations to evacuate and care for potentially tens of thousands of friendly, unfriendly, or just plain scared people from urban areas and districts in short order.*

Taken together this list of insights (which is hardly definitive) may explain the conclusion of, General Scales that:

*...only a desperate enemy, defending at great disadvantage, willing to sacrifice initiatives, his cities, and a large portion of his military force, has taken to defending cities. A casual glance at 500 years of major war history shows that*

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34 Thomas, p 99, McLaurin and Miller, P 142, Rosenau, pp 387-9

*as more of the world blankets itself in urban sprawl the incidents of actual street fighting have declined.*<sup>35</sup>

Cities are as much traps as they are bastions for conventional armies, and then, potentially are just as risky for non-state forces as well. Of course, the propositions above bear fuller investigation, before their true implications for urban warfare theory or resource priorities can be understood confidently, particularly in the context of warlord, barbarians, and street thugs – but, that is the point of this paper. Leaders and their motivations raise another significant weakness in the notion that urban warfare should assume a dominant role in defence policy.

The open literature so far has not offered convincing evidence for the emergence of enemies simultaneously willing and able to conduct urban warfare on a large scale.

On the one hand, there is ample evidence that the ‘new warriors’ and ‘barbarians’ emerging in cities everywhere eschew the humanitarian values, sense of proportionality, and rules of engagement that many states impose on their armies. Consequently they are more than willing to conduct their operations in the cities and behind the shields of non-combatants. But there is little evidence that such thug armies can or cannot sustain large-scale combat or control significant urban areas in the face of determined action by quality forces, as opposed to actions by peer groups or the atrophied militaries of failing states.<sup>36</sup> The October 1993 Battle of Mogadishu, for example, is often offered as evidence for the ability of ‘new barbarians’ to defeat first-class militaries in urban battles. But all that incident really teaches is that a country like the United States can follow up a tactical engagement that ended favourably at least in terms of casualty ratios, with political surrender. What if the United States and the UN had chosen instead to exploit that battle more aggressively? The question is tantalizing and, of course, unanswerable. But our ability to ask it suggests that the prevailing view that thug armies are a major threat demands rigorous scrutiny and more careful definition. Likewise, why should we expect that national armies will be more likely to fight in their cities in the future than they have in the past? As in the past, why should we expect that the future owners of cities will be any more prepared to see them destroyed, except in extremis? For that matter why would a country like the United States go into a defended city, unless it becomes absolutely critical to rout out last-ditch defenders or to close an otherwise ended war in short order?

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35 *Scales, Indirect Approach, p 69*

36 *David Tucker pursues this idea of the ultimate impotence of these new barbarians in the face of organized states in 'Fighting Barbarians', pp 69-78.*

If time was not pressing, sieges and/or neutralization would be likely options of choice as opposed to the bloodletting of direct reduction. It seems reasonable from all of this to assert something of an aphorism for future urban combat: the groups most willing to fight in cities will have the least capabilities to do so, while the ones most able to fight large-scale urban battles will be least willing to do so.

Again, the credibility of that aphorism is important, because it says a lot about the likely importance, scale, and appropriate concepts of city fighting in the future. Somebody should take it on.

At the operational level, frequent and large-scale city fights seem even less likely in light of the campaign alternatives. From the operational-level perspective, cities can be likened to fortified islands in rural seas, with big cities being equivalent to archipelagos of distinct districts and neighbourhoods. Cities resemble fortresses as classic military problems in so far as they are only, important to the extent that they contain things simultaneously of value to attackers and defenders, or provide a base for their possessors to exert political or military influence beyond their immediate boundaries.<sup>37</sup> The things that might draw a country like the United States into a contested city could include weapons of mass destruction, endangered hostages, or political importance. The idea that the mere prevalence of violence, rebellion, and even revolution in the fallen cities of the world forces the hands of countries like the United States bears sceptical and realist re-examination. Cities also are like fortresses in that their physical contrast to their surrounding geography means that forces entering them may have to re-orient their organization and operating patterns substantially as they cross from rural into urban terrain. On the other side of the fortress/island metaphor cities resemble islands in their critical dependence on access to outside sources of food, fuel, raw materials, psychological security and other essentials, and in their vulnerability to attacks and isolation by forces possessing freedom of manoeuvre outside their boundaries. Usefully then, cities can be likened to islands of the Pacific Theatre during World War II. They can be extremely tough nuts to crack by direct assault, and simultaneously vulnerable to neutralization by operational level manoeuvre and/or asymmetrical attack. These similarities carry over into the realm of operational level technique, since both islands and cities can be taken out by operational concepts such as:

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37 *As Carl von Clausewitz suggested, 'the effectiveness of a fortress is obviously composed of two distinct elements... The first appears in the protection that it gives to the area and everything in it. .. the second, it exercises a certain influence on the countryside beyond the range of its artillery'. From Michael Howard and Peter Paret, eds and trans of Carl von Clausewitz, On War, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1989, p 394.*

- **Selective Assault:** As was the case for island-hopping, the isolated nature of small cities and of the internal districts of larger cities may offer commanders opportunities to fight only for those cities or parts of them most important to furthering their operational and strategic aims. For example, clearing a line of communication from the coast to its interior may only require taking a few sections of a port, not the whole city or even all the towns along the way.
- **Indirect Approach:** As in the cases of Carthage during the Second Punic War, and of Kuwait City over 2,000 years later, astute commanders may force enemy armies out of their urban bastions by threatening the things their rulers value, such as, in these respective cases, their rural 'breadbasket' or their line of retreat,
- **Siege:** If time and other circumstances permit, sieges offer opportunities to conquer or control cities without assaulting them directly or at least until their garrisons are weakened. As battles, however, sieges also offer defenders opportunities for initiatives, such as spoiling attacks or tormenting local citizens, that might either break the siege or force their besiegers into premature attacks. The principal dilemma of sieges is that they raise the issue of population control to an active level, since they may be difficult or impossible to conduct without inflicting great suffering on noncombatants as well as armed enemies.<sup>38</sup>
- **Isolation:** Attackers can embargo or blockade belligerent cities militarily and politically, by selectively restricting the flow of personnel, materiel, information, and/or other items in and out of them, as required by the objectives of the attacker. Isolation usually would not have the aim of reducing a city to terms directly as would be the case for a siege, but it also might not place the same force demands on the attacker. For example, if the purpose of an embargo is simply to prevent steady vehicular traffic from going in and out of a city, it could be maintained by a relatively thin mix of ground and air surveillance and strike units, as compared to the forces required to maintain a more airtight siege.
- **Neutralization:** Attackers can degrade or neutralize the offensive capabilities of urban-islands through 'operational-level sniping' Faced by a strong urban enemy, for example, an attacker can employ long-range fires or aerospace attacks to destroy, the things that give the enemy power to influence outside events, such as heavy weapons, mobile forces, supplies, and communication facilities.
- **Strategic Attack:** During World War II, the Allies obviated the need to invade many Japanese-held islands by conducting strategic naval and air operations against the home islands. In a more modern example of this kind of indirect

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38 Peters, Ralph, 'Will We be Able to Take the Cities', p 34

*approach, NATO avoided at least potential battles for Sarajevo and Pristina, in 1995 and 1999 respectively, by conducting strategic air operations against the Serb Republic in the first case, and Serbia in the latter.*



*Photograph of a section of the Dobrinja suburb before the reconstruction of war-damaged buildings by the local civilian population. Photo: SPC Mmoses Mlasko, US Army, Released.*

These operational concepts are also applicable within the environs of large cities. Cities, particularly megalopolises, are not geographically unitary battlefields. Large cities are broken into sections by man-made and natural terrain, including different architectural styles, rivers, wetlands, parklands, and in major thoroughfares. They also tend to be 'empty' battlefields, in the sense that even in circumstances of major conflicts between organized armies; urban defenders typically will occupy only small portions of a city's terrain and structures.<sup>39</sup> Consequently it is likely that there will be plenty of room for attackers to employ operational concepts such as selective assault, isolation, and even strategic attack. For that reason, in battles as diverse as Groningen (1944), Hue (1968), Beirut (1992-93), and Grozny (1996 and 99), freedom to manoeuvre and prevent coordinated enemy movement were key determinants in the outcome of specific engagements and of the battles in general.<sup>40</sup> As a logical expression of these concepts, Marine General Van Riper recently suggested that in future urban battles 'instead of grinding their way from house to house, Marines will deftly manoeuvre through built-up areas, using new and unorthodox mobility techniques to avoid the surface and exploit gaps. They will bypass and isolate the enemy's centres of resistance, striking killing blows against those enemy units, positions, or facilities upon which his force depends'.<sup>41</sup>

If accepted, the strategic and operational perspectives thus far discussed challenge the unfettered notion that infantry and close battle will be the decisive arbiters of urban warfare, or even urban combat. To be sure, the infantry has no peer when urban combat comes down to the tough and dangerous job of going into buildings, sewers, and other structures to clear them inch-by-inch, room-by-room. But, even in that specific task, combat experience suggests that infantry works best when teamed with combat engineers, armour, and close support from artillery and aircraft.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, depending on objectives, rules of engagement and details of terrain, infantry may function primarily as the 'pointer' for aircraft and artillery, which will do the actual killing. The US Army itself is looking at ways to use mobile 'battle forces' to conduct isolation and strike operations on urban terrain.<sup>43</sup>

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39 Hahn and Jezior, p 76

40 Ashworth, p 131; Thomas, 'Deadly Classroom', p 95

41 Van Riper, 'Concept for Future Military Operations', A-2 through A-3; in a similar vein, Colonel John M. House reports that an underlying assumption of the Army After Next (AAN) program is that 'anticipated improvements in battlespace knowledge will help leaders exploit advances in mobility... knowledge and speed are AAN's watchwords' in 'Enemy After Next', p 22

42 Rosenau, pp 376-7, 38; MCWP 3-35.3, p 1-13.

43 Naylor, p 22

Once the analytical perspective is shifted to the operational level, both within and outside the environs of a contested city the role of infantry becomes even more that of a team member than of team captain. To stabilize an insurrected city, for example, a Joint commander might employ air-supported infantry to drive hostile forces into an isolated 'no go' zone, and then keep them there with a combination of air and ground patrols, aerospace sensors and artillery. One could easily come up with many such examples.<sup>44</sup>

This line of thought also calls into question the notion that only infantry have the 'precision' to conduct effective urban operations in the context of restrictive rules of engagement to minimize collateral damage. If soldiers could perform all urban tactical tasks with the cool precision of snipers, then this assertion might be valid. But, experience suggests that soldiers, as they become tired or angered by friendly casualties, may become less and less discriminating and precise in their use of their weapons.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, enemies often place themselves in positions where the choices for taking them out are bloody assault or the employment of heavy weapons. These considerations, coupled with standing doctrines that make shooting out door locks and reconnaissance-by-hand-grenade standard tactics for clearing rooms, tend to increase the likelihood that contested urban infantry assaults will be bloody and destructive for friend, foe and non-combatant alike.<sup>46</sup> The likelihood of such bloodshed, coupled with a perception of American intolerance for casualties, led one broad-based study group to conclude:

*No longer can the United States expect to commit multiple divisions to a long-term urban operation unless means of dramatically reducing personnel losses are developed.*<sup>47</sup>

It seems logical, therefore, to believe or at least to hope that, in many circumstances, primary reliance on military arms other than infantry to accomplish urban warfare tasks may be the beginning of both the more humane and the more efficient paths to success.

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44 MCWP 3-35.3 recognizes that 'in future urban warfare, aviation will be even more effective due to advances in ... aircraft, munitions, communications, sensors, and targeting systems', p 1-16.

45 Rosenau, p 389; Ashworth, p 121. For excellent accounts of urban battles that involved almost immediate escalations of the use of heavy weapons to 'clear' or breach structures, and to engage forces directly, see Eric Hammel's excellent *Fire In the Streets: The Battle for Hue, Tet 1968*, Chicago, Contemporary Books, 1991, particularly pp 98-99, 135, 151-55, 171, 257 and 268; and Mark Bowden's *Blackhawk Down: A Story of Modern War*, New York, Atlantic Monthly Press, 1999

46 MCWP 3-35.3, A-23 through A-39

47 Glenn, *Denying the Widow Maker*, pp x and 10



Combat cameramen, assigned to Fleet Combat Camera Pacific (FCCP), practice breaching techniques during FCCP's Winter Quick Shot 2015 joint field training exercise in the Angeles National Forest near Azusa, Calif., Feb. 25, 2015. U.S. Marine Corps photo: Lance Corporal Tyler S. Dietrich/RELEASED

## Implications

On the office wall of a RAND Corporation researcher reside these apocryphal final lines from a past project briefing:

*We have not succeeded in answering all your questions. In fact, the answers we have found only serve to raise a whole set of new questions. In some ways we feel we are as confused as ever but we believe we are confused on a higher level and about more important things.<sup>48</sup>*

Whoever the author of these words was, they also capture nicely the intent of this article: to raise the level of our questions and doubts about our unfolding knowledge of urban warfare, rather than to settle them. Its primary purpose

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<sup>48</sup> My thanks to that 'RAND Researcher', Mr Paul Killingsworth.

was to undermine any confidence that the current line of inquiry is producing a comprehensive foundation of theoretical and doctrinal guidance upon which to base policy, resource investments, and training. Its secondary purposes were to propose that urban combat may be less likely to dominate future warfare, at least for the United States, than some thinkers expect, and that it will be a truly Joint problem, in which all Services and arms will have important and sometimes 'lead' roles in solving. Urban warfare, as opposed to MOUT will be and is about much more than infantry, fighting 'three block war' with everyone else poised in support.

Several objectives for further inquiry flow more or less naturally from these propositions. First, military policy makers and commanders involved in urban warfare issues should add their voices to the scattered calls in the literature for a broader discourse on urban warfare, one that treats strategy, operations, and tactics with equal scope and rigor.<sup>49</sup> Second, it follows, all of the Services must take 'ownership' of this undeniably important aspect of conflict and make sure their doctrinal, resource, education, and training preparations are appropriate, energetic, in sync with the efforts of the other Services, and focused on giving Joint commanders the fullest range of options possible. Third, the urban warfare discourse needs to be reinforced in its general posture of objectivity and rigor. There is no call for the strident advocacy pieces that dot the current literature and even the sources for this essay. This is not a runaway problem that threatens with a degree of immediate failure which justifies pell-mell resource commitments without full assessments of their real value or opportunity costs, in terms of their impact on other important missions and tasks facing the defense community. Undoubtedly certain 'high marginal return' investments and actions justify immediate commitments, such as urban warfare experimentation, training, doctrine development, and the acquisition of infantry support equipment and weapons. The advantages of certain medium cost systems, such as specialized surveillance systems and 'tailored' aerial munitions might also justify near term investments, particularly since they will often offer advantages across a broad range of other conflict scenarios. But beyond those kinds of perhaps intuitively obvious sorts of resource and policy commitments, there is time to think this thing through - assuming we actually use that time to conduct objective, rigorous, and balanced analysis.

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49 Thomas, 'Deadly Classroom', p 93.



*US Marine Corps (USMC) members from L Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division, practice Military Operations and Urban Terrain (MOUT) warfare at the Camp Hansen, Central Training Area, using unarmed safety rigged Colt 5.56mm M16A2 Assault Rifles. Photo: Lance Corporal Antonio J Vega, USMC, Released*





*A soldier leaps out of a window at the FIBUA (Fighting in a Built Up Area) facility at Copehill Down Training Village. Photo: Sergeant Russ Nolan RLC, Crown Copyright*

# Urban Operations 2004

*This article by Capt M J G Elliot-Square was originally published in BAR 136 Spring 2005. It analyses the theory and practice of operating in the urban environment, much of which remains true to this day.*

*'The worst policy is to attack cities. Attack cities only when there is no alternative.'*  
Sun Tzu

*'The future may well not be the son of Desert Storm but rather the stepchild of Chechnya.'* Gen C Krulak, USMC

The two quotes above show that although we as military forces do not enjoy the prospect of fighting in urban areas, these areas exist and whether we like it or not we will have to ply our trade in the urban environment.

There is conclusive evidence that by the year 2020 the world's population will have increased by 25% of which 75% will be living in the urban environment. In 1995 globally, there were 14 Mega Cities, these are cities with populations of more than 10 million people. It is predicted that by 2030 there will be nearly 28 megacities.<sup>1</sup> The enemy of the future is more likely to be found in the urban environment, where violence can be prosecuted on their terms.

There are many drivers behind this growth and the changing threat environment. They are Societal, Political, Resource-based and Technological.

Global Society is changing. Western Culture (predominantly US) is a dominating force on society. Global inequality is becoming more visible. Fundamentalism both Islamist and anti-capitalist is rising in reaction to Western power and culture, leading to increasing mutual antagonism between the West and Islam.

Global Political Geometry is changing. There is a decline in state sovereignty with failing states becoming a threat to global security as politico-military alliances are formed. This leads to another problem: in the current climate, who is the enemy? The US, as the one remaining superpower, is changing its global military footprint. However, this is not to say that other superpowers will not arise, indeed China and India could enter the arena as global powers as soon as 2015.<sup>2</sup>

Higher populations put strain on Global Resources, with competition growing for scarcer resources. Famine and civil war will lead to more calls for humanitarian intervention. The same factors will also lead to increased migration within and across borders, and from rural to urban areas.

Technology is improving by the day. Intelligence preparation of the battlefield is more advanced, the use of low-level and medium level unmanned air vehicles (UAVs) as well as satellite advances mean that potential areas of interest can be studied from afar. A simple photo can be processed through a computer using shadow studying creating a three dimensional environment. The proliferation of new technologies (e.g. bio-technology) and weapons systems (e.g. enhanced blast and novel explosives) is gaining momentum. With emerging superpowers comes the likely emergence of new nuclear and WMD powers. This is in tandem with a new type of delivery through asymmetric means. The power of the media with live time link-ups across the globe means breaking news can be seen immediately while the cyberspace battlefield grows at pace.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Challenges of Urban Operations within the Context of the Future Strategic Environment - Mr T. Sharp, Sharp Global Solution Ltd.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*



Army Reserves soldiers from 6th Battalion The Rifles (6 RIFLES) take part in Exercise Wyvern Tempest in the Salisbury Plain Training Areas (SPTA) to test their skills in urban warfare, or fighting in a built up area (FIBUA). Photo: Corporal Daniel Wiepen RLC, Crown Copyright

The greatest risk to security is that the strategic environment will change faster than our forces can adapt their Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTPs), or apply its resources in order to meet that threat. This article sets out to look at the way the British Army conducts its Urban Operations training and will show that if the future of warfare is going to be in the urban environment then our TTPs need to be a reflection of this.

### **The Three Block War**

*Modern crisis responses are exceedingly complex endeavours. In Bosnia, Haiti and Somalia the unique challenges of military operations other than war were combined with disparate challenges of mid-intensity conflict. The Corps has described such amorphous conflicts as - 'the three block war' - contingencies in which marines may be confronted by the entire spectrum of tactical challenges in the span of a few hours and the space of three contiguous city blocks.<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> Krulak, General Charles M., *Marines Magazine*, January 1999

Globally, in Urban Operations language, 'The Three Block War' is a well-known theory. It is the idea that within three city blocks, forces can move from High Intensity, Combined Arms warfare, through Peace Support Operations (PSO), and into Military Aid to the Civil Authority (MACA) type tasks. Forces should, therefore, be prepared to move seamlessly along that spectrum of operations. In Beirut in 1982, Israeli forces were using armour and attack helicopters at one end of a street, whilst engaging in foot patrols, gathering information from the local population at the other end. At Copehill Down (CDV) on Salisbury Plain, The Urban Operations Wing (UOW) is concerned with training the high end, high intensity war fighting part of The Three Block War. The Operational Training and Advisory Group (OPTAG) deal with the PSO and MACA parts of the training. It should be noted that OPTAG is an advisory group working from information gleaned from operational lessons learnt. Although both organisations are seemingly polarised in TTPs and geography, it is hoped that in the future our paths will cross to cover the transitional gap in training.



*Soldiers get to grips with the multi-national NATO Fighting in Built Up Areas (FIBUA) Instructors course run by the British Army's Urban Operations Wing at Copehill Down. Photo: Corporal James Elmer RLC*

## **Training at Copehill Down**

Conventional warfare in open terrain is the preferred form of combat for the modern Army. It is a challenging undertaking, full of complexities. In order to perform well forces require large resources, regular training and effective organization. There are challenges that are inherent to this mode of warfare which are exacerbated in the urban environment. From Stalingrad to Inchon, Panama to Grozny, and more recently, Somalia, urban operations are known for poor communications, difficult command and control, unsure target acquisition (both friend, foe or civilian), short engagement ranges, reduced effectiveness for fire support assets and difficulties in providing logistical support to the front line. The heights of buildings and the presence of tunnels and sewers give the battlespace a three-dimensional challenge not realised in open terrain.

On the modern battlefield more recently characterized by the asymmetric threat, the urban environment is the ideal arena for irregulars to ply their trade, with the ability to neutralise any technological advantage that a conventional force may bring to bear. In order to combat the threat, modern forces must be able to conduct operations in this environment, and although there is less freedom of movement to prosecute elegant manoeuvrist actions as would be seen in open terrain, modern forces must apply these tactical tenets as effectively as possible in the urban environment.

As we spend more and more of our time on operations actually working in the urban environment, we need to allocate more of our pre-deployment phase training for it. So how in the modern army, do we prepare ourselves for Fighting in Built up Areas?

## **Theory**

Why has the doctrine that supports urban operations changed little from that of the Second World War? There is still a need to close with and kill the enemy. In the urban environment it is likely that the enemy may stay in the relatively safe confines of buildings and structures. There is no guarantee that they will withdraw, exposing themselves to small arms fire.

Offensive operations are characterised by a 5-stage battle. The war fighting stages are pre-empted by a detailed Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield process (IPB) and a pre-op phase of covert Infiltration of the area concerned. Independent small teams of Special Forces type units are used, in order to glean valuable information about the current battle picture. The 5 war fighting stages (The Investment, The Break-In, The Securing of Objectives, The Clearance and The Reorganisation); follow on from each other, sometimes overlapping. However,



*Soldiers taking part in a Section Commanders Battle Course (SCBC) Final Exercise in Celeini Village, SENTA.  
Photo: Ian Griffiths, Crown Copyright*

it should be stressed that there should be no gaps in between each stage ensuring that the defender remains fixed at all times.

Defensive operations are characterised by a 4-stage battle, pre-empted by a detailed IPB process. The 4 stages (The Perimeter Force, The Disruption Force, The Main Defended Area, and The Reserve), should be mobile and exploit depth, with the defender seeking to disrupt the attacker throughout all four stages of the battle. The idea of a siege mentality is to be avoided at all costs. The Defence is an aggressive action. The defender should be proactive in all stages, attacking areas where the enemy are weak, and counter attacking where the enemy is seeking an advantage.

Since WWII, the tactics of FIBUA have been constantly studied as, on a global scale, armies have become more involved in FIBUA. In a paper outlining lessons learnt from the first Chechen War, 1994-95, lessons came out that subsequently changed the way the Russian Army conducted operations for 'the re-match' in 1999-2000. The 5 key points were so apparent that not only did they change Russian thinking, but also helped reinforce the way our Army prepares for Urban Operations.<sup>4</sup>

- **Know your opponent and his ground:** *Planning is centralised and extremely detailed. Intelligence preparation of the battlefield, in this case, an unfamiliar urban environment requires extensive information gathering in order to understand where best to use forces.*
- **Don't assume - Prepare, Prepare, Prepare:** *Urban areas are different in size, level of development, and style. Within each urban environment, avenues of approach, densities of construction and population, street patterns, compartmentalisation, affluent and poor sectors, modernisation and the*

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<sup>4</sup> *Grau, Lester and Thomas, T., 'The Battle for Grozny', Foreign Military Studies Office, Fort Leavenworth, April 2000.*



Royal Welsh personnel from the NATO enhanced Forward Presence Battlegroup conduct urban training in the village of Varstu in southern Estonia, also known as OBUA (operations in built-up areas) or FIBUA (fighting in built-up areas) alongside their Estonian counterparts. Photo: Sergeant Siim Tedder, Estonian Defence Force, NATO.

presence of utility systems will influence the commanders' planning process. However, at the end of the information gathering and planning phase, the end result must be a plan that is simple enough to be passed down to the lowest level. At the sharp end, control is as de-centralised as possible with the current battle being fought by section commanders.

- **Choose the Right Weapons:** The combined arms approach to urban operations allows a powerful addition to the firepower of assaulting troops. The use of intimate direct fire support from armour in the shape of tanks or Armoured Fighting Vehicles such as Warriors means that section commanders must be aware of how to utilise them to best advantage, both as offensive assets but also how best to protect them at the same time. There are more assets now available at the section level. Under-slung grenade launchers (UGL), Rifle launched entry munitions (RLEM), and in the future, anti-structure munitions (ASM) add a lot more firepower to the lower level. This will allow section commanders to operate without having to ask for support further up the chain of command. This allows momentum to continue at a sustainable level, generating tempo and places responsibility for key battle winning decisions on the shoulders of junior commanders. However, thought must be given to the rules of engagement<sup>5</sup> to allow the section commander to make the right decisions.

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<sup>5</sup> The rules of engagement should reflect the reality of the situation. The deployment and employment of armed troops into towns and cities is abnormal and the law should be changed as necessary to permit the operations described here. (Editor).

- **Adapt Tactics to the Situation:** *No matter how hard you prepare to deal with an enemy, the enemy will not conform to your plan. Flexibility is key in Urban operations. New tactical concepts are being considered as a basis for exploring the use of dispersed forces in urban operations and making better use of manoeuvre, coupled with new technologies, and improved equipment. The techniques, described below, were used by the United States Marine Corps during Project METROPLIS, a series of battle labs to update USMC doctrine and TTPs. When executed by properly trained forces, missions were accomplished with less than historically demonstrated casualties.*

## **Urban Penetration**

This raiding tactic is designed for operations against clearly defined objectives. It is designed to quickly manoeuvre to the objective and establish control in a dispersed and non-contiguous operational area. Penetration requires sufficient mobility to move quickly to the objective area, seize the objective and isolate and protect it from the enemy and non-combatants. Defeat of the enemy, by seizing key objectives such as command and control centres and government buildings, will be crucial.

## **Urban Thrust**

This is a tactic focusing on achieving an assault against the enemy on a narrow axis of advance. As the thrust takes place the axis of advance is defended in order to hold the flank against potential enemy attacks. The thrust can take place on multiple axis and a commander can then halt one thrust and use it as an anvil, whilst a secondary thrust can act as a hammer. Overall, the intent is to avoid a linear assault where the aim is to confuse the enemy, force his flanks, isolate his forces, and deceive him as to the real objective of the assaulting force. This in turn will force his withdrawal and exposure without the need for detailed room clearance. Forced into this position, withdrawing forces can be dealt with using indirect fire and air assets. By refusing to withdraw, the defender can be isolated and dealt with piecemeal.

## **Urban Saturation**

The swarm consists of numerous fire teams or section-sized units operating in a dispersed, non-contiguous fashion in the urban environment. The direction of the axis can change allowing deception and manoeuvre through the urban environment. This has the effect of tying up enemy combat power as they try to fight a battle on many fronts. The key to success in this type of operation is speed and flexibility. As groups move forward to take over a situation the junior commanders need the flexibility and training to be able to reinforce that success. De-centralisation of

command is again implicit in this as junior leaders will be expected in such situations to assume increased levels of responsibility and command.

All of these concepts, with suitable adjustments, can be employed during operations in urban areas at any level of intensity. However, this requires sufficient training and the correct equipment for the troops involved. The three concepts all make use of the manoeuvrist approach to operations, and will, if properly executed, reduce casualties.

### **Anticipate and Resolve Communications Problems**

The degradation of radio communications and reduced visibility due to urban terrain are likely to have a detrimental effect on command and control. The size and make up of buildings will affect passage of information. Care must be taken to exercise strict net discipline when communications are working, so that timely, relevant information is sent on the net. To make this possible simple control measures will be essential to the effective co-ordination of an operation. Report lines, boundaries, nick numbers, objective names and areas of interest will help build up a clearer picture. Command will be de-centralised and to that end, consideration must be given to the use alternative methods to pass information. Have commanders assigned such tasks as link men and runners, should communications fail? A tactic as relevant now as it was in the Second World War.



*Soldiers take part in the Section Commanders Battle Course (SCBC) Final Exercise in Celeini Village, SENTA. The course is run by the Infantry Battle School in Brecon, Mid-Wales and is designed to deliver trained officers and soldiers to meet the operational needs of the Army within the urban environment. Photo Ian Griffiths, Crown Copyright*

## The Future

A phrase which immediately springs to mind, and although not directly attributable to any one individual, it should be familiar to anyone with a military background - *Train Hard, Fight Easy*.

Recent operational tours including Op TELIC testify that there is undoubtedly the need to train for High Intensity warfare. Armour, both Challenger 2 and Warrior, is a key battle winning asset, providing an overmatch, and commanding utmost respect. In combination with the use of precision-guided air munitions, forces can achieve surgical strikes if required. Armoured battle groupings can cover large areas relatively quickly and pack a heavy punch when required.

However, infantry soldiers will be required to clear areas of enemy and hold that ground once taken. Armour cannot do it alone, as it requires an infantry footprint. As described above, armour is vulnerable to attack. What happens if the enemy is better equipped? The Russians discovered this to their cost in the first battle for Grozny in 1995. Armour cannot move into an assault straight from the column of march without dismounts to provide protection to that armour. Chechen rebels were able to exploit the dead space around the armour, and also take advantage of the restrictions in elevation by using top down attack from the top floors of buildings. The asymmetric delivery of these attacks, including Molotov cocktails, was devastating. The immobilised tanks became obstacles as well as targets. This, combined with the restrictions in the traverse of the turrets, meant that the tanks could be destroyed from the side by Chechen anti tank munitions. High intensity warfare must be prosecuted with a combined arms approach.

But what next when the war fighting is over? The key asset to winning the battle remains the Mark 1 soldier. In the post war climate it is not just the conventional battle that must be won, but also the hearts and minds battle within this specific arena. However, this does not mean that the combined arms effect should be forgotten. After all, it is better to have and not need, than to need and not have!

There has been extensive study into the idea of the 'Tactical Corporal,' which stems from the USMC, whose very ethos is 'Every Marine a Rifleman'.<sup>6</sup> In the urban environment as previously stated, the fighting phase is a section commander's battle, with decision-making devolved to the lowest level of command. But what are the challenges facing the tactical corporal once that phase is over. It is clear that this will not be exclusively dealt with by infantry soldiers but ultimately by all elements of the combined arms battle group. Gunners and tank crews have found themselves on foot or on vehicle patrol in the urban environment. This is nothing new as history has demonstrated in Northern

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6 Hoffman, Lieutenant Colonel F, 'US Marine Corps Urban Lessons in Operation Iraqi Freedom', Centre for Emerging Threats and Opportunities (CETO).

Ireland. However, the future scenario is different, with rain being exchanged for sun, religious beliefs perhaps at odds with our own, customs meaning the opposite to what seems familiar and language differences being exacerbated.

In outline, the following must be considered. Legal training (Rules of Engagement), cultural training (knowing your friend as well as your foe), communication (dialogue with the local community will yield information), information operations (understanding the media and its effects), and outside agencies (Red Cross and NGOs). These questions need to be addressed throughout the ‘Three Block War’ scenario.

It is becoming increasingly clear that within the urban environment the follow up to war fighting takes place whilst high intensity ops are still in progress. Although we at CDV do not have a remit to train troops for PSO or MACA operations, we envisage that such considerations are taken into account in our teaching of combined arms tactics for urban war fighting. What is now needed is a ‘Combined Blocks’ approach to training, thus allowing units to experience all aspects of ‘The Three Block War’ in the same environment, with sub-units concurrently involved in FIBUA, Peace enforcement, Peace Keeping, and even support to humanitarian operations.

Posture plays an important part in all of this. If we do not know the enemy and the threat faced, forces may find themselves in a tight corner. Is the protection afforded by a Land Rover-based patrol enough to counter the threat of a road side improvised explosive device (IED)? Is casualty evacuation safe in a soft skinned vehicle if rocket propelled grenades are being used in theatre? If not, there is a need for armour to fill these requirements, something that would require integration initially at the training level with both UOW and OPTAG working in concert to achieve this end state. At the moment on OP TELIC the British



*Soldiers from the 6th Battalion The Rifles (6 RIFLES) reading a map during Exercise Wyvern Tempest where they test their skills in urban warfare. Photo: Daniel Wiepen RLC, Crown Copyright*



Army is involved in peace enforcement type tasks but using high intensity means to prosecute them.

The key to success in this type of operation is the education of the individual based on the weaknesses identified during previous operations and training. Furthermore, we should not forget to draw on the experiences of other nations. After all, the changing environment is not just the problem of our army, but global forces as a whole.



# Back to Basics: What the British Army should learn from the 2nd Lebanon War

*This article by William F. Owen, Defence analyst based in Israel, was originally published in BAR 150, Winter 2010 - Ed*

One of the defining characteristics of the 2nd Lebanon War was not any actual aspect of the conduct of the war but the very poor level of analysis that followed it. Many analyses have been done. A few were good. Most were not. The ones that stood out as good almost always made use of face-to-face contact with the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) and/or rigorous analysis of the fact as known and knowable at the time. The bad ones defaulted to the popular meta-narratives<sup>1</sup> produced by the popular press, and failed to subject the claims of both sides to sufficient rigour.

The purpose of this article is to provide information and perspectives that should aid the British Army in their understanding of the conflict and to warn against the unreflective acceptance of popular narrative which is at odds with the facts.<sup>2</sup>

This work takes the view that IDF sourced material is generally authoritative, in the same way the UK would view US sourced material as being of the same nature. This is not to suggest that it is wholly perfect and/or might not subsequently be proved to be incorrect, as would be the case with both UK and US sourced information.

With the possible exception of the IDF's use of Spike fibre optically guided missiles (which proved extremely effective), no weapon type employed in the Lebanon was new or unknown as a capability. By any possible measure, nothing seen during the conflict was new. Thus the popular conjectures about Hezbollah being the 'wave of the future' and a 'sophisticated enemy' are simply without evidence. Hezbollah's 'after the fact propaganda' has done a very good job at convincing a great deal of analysts and observers as to their own skill and actual capability.

*The enemy only has to have a very marginally superior capability to force you into using every element of combined arms formations.*

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- 1 *In critical theory, and particularly postmodernism, a metanarrative (from meta-narrative, sometimes also known as a master- or grand narrative) is an abstract idea that is thought to be a comprehensive explanation of historical experience or knowledge. According to John Stephens it 'is a global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience'. The prefix meta- means 'beyond' and is here used to mean 'about', and narrative is a story constructed in a sequential fashion. Therefore, a meta-narrative is a story about a story, encompassing and explaining other 'little stories' within totalizing schemes. (Wikipedia - Ed.)*
  - 2 *For example, the Defence Concepts and Doctrine Centres publication, 'Future Character of Conflict' (FCOC\_final\_revised\_12FEB10) makes no less than approximately eight substantially incorrect assertions about both Hezbollah and the 2006 conflict.*

## Hezbollah

Every single weapon used by Hezbollah in 2006 was known to the IDF prior to the conflict, including the Air To Surface Missile (ASM) and UAV threat. Some weapons, such as AT-14 and RPG-29 had not been encountered before, but were known to be in the inventory of Hezbollah. What the Lebanon War yet again demonstrated was that the enemy only has to have a very marginal superior capability to force you into using every element of combined arms formations. The British Army that faced the Boers in two wars learnt the same lesson.

Critical to understanding the 2006 conflict is that it was nothing to do with so called 'counter-insurgency.' It was by any measure a 'state versus state' conflict. That one player was 'irregular' is irrelevant. Hezbollah was not and is not the highly trained, well-equipped semi-regular organisation of popular myth and generated by so much of the analysis. Irregulars equipped with Anti-Tank Guided Missiles (ATGMS) (or any other weapons systems) do not make them a 'hybrid enemy' or anything other than irregulars or 'guerrillas'. In 1982, the PLO possessed tanks and field artillery without compromising their 'irregular' status. Analysis of the 2006 war requires no new language or new conceptions of conflict. It has all been seen before.



*IDF Artillery Corps practice firing. Photo: Sergeant Ori Shifrin, IDF Spokesperson's Unit, Wikimedia*



*Israeli Merkava M4 Main Battle Tank (MBT) with Bulldozer on the Golan Heights, 2008. IDF Wikimedia*

Based on Hezbollah's employment of ATGMs, it seems likely that only a small number of men had had much training. This is not to suggest that someone with limited training cannot be a very testing opponent, if sufficiently skilled and determined. Based on casualty figures released at the end of the conflict, (and ignored in almost all the published analysis), and open source reporting on Armoured Fighting Vehicle (AFV) losses, Hezbollah damaged fifty-two Merkava MBTs during the fighting. Estimates suggest that only five AFV and twenty-two MBT had their armour penetrated of which five MBTs were damaged beyond repair. Eighteen of the damaged tanks were the latest Merkava MkIV.<sup>3</sup>

Of the 23 members of the armoured corps killed in action, 15 were killed by ATGMs, and mines/IEDs killed 7. The cause of death for the other 1 is not recorded specifically, but it is most probably due to gunfire from commanding 'heads out'. Over 50% of the armour casualties are attributable to just 3-4 incidents and 50% of MBT deaths occurred in one engagement, at Wadi Saluki. The ATGM/MBT deaths are all accounted for by just 6-7 hits. Some sources suggest 14 Heavy APCs (Achzarits and Puma - manned by the Infantry) were hit by ATGMs, killing 7 embarked troops in 2 incidents. APCs were penetrated 11 times, but usually no deaths occurred. Three APCs hit mines/IEDs killing 5 infantrymen in two incidents (4 and 1); 90% of these APC casualties occurred in one night. Despite the many hundreds of engagements, there were only 8-9 recorded incidents where Hezbollah Anti-Tank (AT) fire was able to cause deaths inside armoured vehicles, and 4 times where AT fire killed troops in buildings.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Statement by Israeli Ministry of Defense Merkava Tank Program Office 26 August 2006*

<sup>4</sup> *This analysis is based on entirely open sources information, and accounts. It has been widely circulated within the IDF and has not been challenged as to its veracity. Minor errors may exist, but there is no evidence that the analysis is not fit for purpose.*



*Three Namer Armoured Vehicles during their first Company live firing exercise in June 2010 (Will Owen)*

Figures suggest 91 Infantrymen died in the conflict. Approximately 14 infantrymen were killed by ATGMs fired at buildings, and 12 by a 122mm rocket in a single incident. The majority of the remaining 65 deaths were from small arms fire and projected High Explosives (HE).

Additionally the analysis done from first hand interviews with IDF officers, by the US Strategic Studies Institute, also paints a very different story from that popularly perceived about ATGMs. In the majority of cases, Hezbollah had to fire numerous ATGMs to even score hits on stationary tanks.<sup>5</sup> There is no evidence that the salvos were designed to overwhelm armour self-protection systems as none were fitted to any IDF MBT at the time, as was a matter of public record and some open source debate with the IDF prior to the conflict. The armour system on IDF MBTs and Heavy APCs was predominantly passive and homogenous, and similar to that found on Challenger 2. Since the conflict two active protection systems have been procured for both MBTs and the new Namer APC - see BAR 146.

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*5 Page 72, 'The 2006 Lebanon Campaign and the Future of Warfare: Implications for Army and Defense Policy', - Strategic Studies Institute 2008.*

Hezbollah's ATGM capability has been greatly overstated, as has their overall tactical ability. Skilled employment of ATGMs would have seen a much higher IDF casualty list. However, the October 7th 2000 attack on an IDF patrol, was well planned and executed and resulted in 3 IDF dead. The 12 July 2006 attack near Zarit, which accidentally caused the conflict, was also not without some skilful execution, but numerous other Hezbollah abduction attempts had failed. It seems as if Hezbollah can put together small discrete and skilled operations some of the time.

Hezbollah also made poor battlefield use of their 122mm SSM arsenal relative to their known and proven utility. Instead Hezbollah opted to fire them almost randomly and very inaccurately into Israel with little actual effect. Nevertheless, 2 missile strikes caused 20 deaths in two attacks.<sup>6</sup>

It makes no sense to gift Hezbollah with perspectives when there is no evidence that they possess or employ such ideas as 'swarming' or 'Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield' - IPB. IPB used to be called an 'eye for ground,' and part of 'the estimate'. Having an understanding of terrain is essential to all soldiers and inherent to their profession. It should not be a distinct process, unless used in the preparation of specialist cartography, nor was it until it crept into UK training from the US in the late 1980s. Hezbollah, like everyone else, can look at ground and make reasonably accurate guesses as to where they think tanks can and cannot go. This is not demonstrative of great skill. Having said that, the Merkava MBT is known to be especially capable of crossing steep rocky terrain, and was designed to do so.



*Hezbollah secret bunkers found near a UN post. Pictured is the entrance to a bunker August 2006.  
IDF Creative Commons, Wikimedia*

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6 8 civilians died when a rocket struck Haifa Train Station on July 16th and 12 Paratroopers died when a rocket landed in their bivouac area at Kfar Giladi on August 6th

Hezbollah also proved reasonably skilled at building and concealing field fortifications, some of which were immune to 155mm artillery. 203mm and 175mm guns are no longer in the IDF ORBAT (nor the UK - but note that GMLRS-U, M31 may have ground penetration characteristics close to that of 203mm rounds). The skill required digging deep gallery hides and reinforced concrete field fortifications is not great, but obviously gives an advantage to anyone who can do it. The IDF was aware of Hezbollah field fortifications, and had even built copies for training purposes, though few in the IDF seemed aware of this. Training to deal with such fortifications was lacking prior to 2006.

If Hezbollah has a definable defensive concept of operations, it would be a variation of the post-1918 Fortified Region, which underpinned the organisation and training of Soviet Machine Gun Artillery Brigades. Fortified Regions constructed and conducted using skill and modern systems should be something well understood by UK Officers. As is well known, Fortified Regions is a concept to which North Korea adheres and was inherited from both Japanese and Soviet practice. The Japanese expression of the idea was seen in the defence of Okinawa, Iwo-Jima and numerous other islands between 1943-45. The North Vietnamese are thought to have halted the 1979 PLA invasion thanks to a fortified region. It seems very likely that Hezbollah would have been exposed to these ideas, via Iran, but failed in terms of skilled execution.

Hezbollah's effective use of technology has also been greatly overstated. IDF battle group radios of the time were mostly Israeli made un-encrypted UHF/VHF radios, similar to Clansman type radios. As with Clansman, these were easy to intercept using commercial equipment. Due to periods of captivity, it is not uncommon for Hezbollah members speak Hebrew. It does seem ironic that an Army widely recognised as a world leader in tactical Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) and Electronic Warfare (EW) got caught out in this way, though their lead has generally been attributed to the innovative application of SIGINT skills, rather than stand alone technological expertise.

There is no credible open source evidence that IDF-encrypted communications were compromised, nor is that a view held within the informed areas of IDF. IDF soldiers' private communications using personal cell phones that relayed through Lebanese cell sites were intercepted. This seems to be the main source of Hezbollah's claims to SIGINT skills. As a result the IDF now strongly enforces a 'no cell phone' policy when on operations, and this can include forces within Israel. Anyone familiar with the region will be aware of their cell-phone 'roaming' to cell sites outside of Israel when close to the borders. There is no evidence that the IDF's own encrypted mobile cell-phone system was compromised. On at least one occasion, Hezbollah was able to intercept and monitor a video-signal from a

commercial off-the-shelf system. Again this is neither surprising nor unusual as US Forces in Iraq discovered when it was revealed in 2009 that their own UAV signals might have been subject to intercept.<sup>7</sup>

### **IDF problems**

So, if Hezbollah were not really up to it, how did they inflict the damage they did? The vast majority of problems for the IDF can be traced back to un-proven concepts and post-modern command ideas that proliferated in the IDF in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Chief amongst them was 'Effects Based Operations,' but there were many others, including 'Systemic Operational Design'. Based on open sources and discussions with serving officers, the UK concept of 'Influence' would seem very similar to a lot of the ideas that failed under fire in 2006. What is important is that the IDF took firm remedial action to enforce a strict a back to basics campaign. As a result mission verbs like 'capture' and 'destroy,' have regained primacy over those that suggested '*rendering the enemy incoherent.*' Simplicity has once again become virtue. Short, clear and simple orders have been proven as the only ones that work.

More than anything, the avant-garde concepts undermined the classic and proven relationship between policy, strategy and tactics, and, lacking any overall objective planning, fell prey to numerous changes of mission, and seriously disrupted the 24-hour divisional planning cycle. A divisional planning cycle in excess of this is probably not fit for purpose.<sup>8</sup>

The IDF did not use the existing plans it had rehearsed for striking into Hezbollah's base areas. Instead it opted for a policy of air operations long after their utility had ceased and then, arguably, conducted indecisive raids with limited forces that seemed to adhere to the same broad concept of 'effects.' Bizarrely, this was because Israel's political leadership believed that committing more forces would lead to higher casualties.

Prior to 2006, the IDF had drastically cut training for much of the field army. Many units had never done unit level live firing, and some had gone years without even formation field training exercises. For some years before the conflict, the internal security operations on the West Bank had provided no basis for units conducting effective combat operations against an irregular enemy.

The well-publicised fiasco of 'Wadi Saluki' (see Wikipedia entry - Ed.) exemplified these problems as the commanders and planners were just not practised in conducting an obstacle crossing operation of that nature, and the orders seem not have made clear whether they were conducting an opposed

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<sup>7</sup> *New York Times* December 17, 2009

<sup>8</sup> *Anything in excess of 24 hours simply does not keep pace with events, as most commanders knew in 1918!*

obstacle crossing (which they were) or a tactical move between hides.

The unintended consequence of strategy-free combat operations arguably delivered such harm to Hezbollah that the Israel-Lebanon border has now seen 4 years of nearly un-paralleled peace, with Hezbollah failing to act even when their ally Hamas was under unprecedented levels of attack during operations in Gaza in 2009. Damage that delivers real deterrence is a well-proven strategy historically, and perhaps more could have been done if that objective had been made more explicit. The complete destruction or 'defeat' of Hezbollah was not required. Effective levels of attrition can and do suffice, but in 2006 this effect was gained accidentally. In 2008/9 in Gaza, it was arguably intentional. To quote an IDF officer re-phrasing a current British Army idiom, 'if the grass is very well mown, it takes a long time to grow and may never grow again.'

### **So What?**

So what can the British Army actually learn from 2006? The answer should be not much, because existing professional knowledge should have covered all the points previously made. Hezbollah did nothing surprising to anyone who had studied land warfare. Hezbollah used no new weapons, and no innovative or skilful application of weapons. The surprise was the failure of the IDF to do what they arguably used to do well, given the opportunity to fight at the formation level, employing all arms battle to force casualties upon the enemy. Essentially the British Army should just aim not to make the mistakes that the IDF did prior to 2006.

Hezbollah is a South Lebanon specific organisation in every sense. Unless the UK is planning to conduct combat operations in the Southern Lebanon, detailed study of Hezbollah will yield little insight for a British officer. Likewise assuming that some deep cultural understanding of Hezbollah or Iran provides some insight into the 'art of the possible' concerning skilled irregular land warfare operations in 21st century is fallacious.

What appears understudied is the fairly obvious nature of the long existing threats that the 2006 Lebanon War demonstrated, albeit it in a limited way. Studying how an irregular enemy may conduct a fortified region defence using a wide variety of modern means in widely varying terrain should give ample food for thought: ATGMs, MANPADs, SSM, Mortars and 14.5mm-23mm ground and AA capable HMG, all operating from very well concealed, mutually supporting and well constructed positions, which today might include fibre optically linked video camera and data transmission to direct planned indirect fire.

Could UK Infantry routinely conduct the 25km + dismounted infiltrations probably required in such operations while equipped with the 20kg of body armour UK policy currently requires for operational deployments? In the IDF, body

armour is a unit commander decision. Even cursory analysis suggests that faced with well dug-in irregulars, so-called 'Heavy Forces' are required, and have to be very well trained to attain the low loss-exchange-ratios policy makers' desire. Of particular note is the strong evidence that 'medium weight' forces would not fare well. The evidence from the IDF is that all arms combat operations against a competent enemy are the minimum standard required, and that from which all other capabilities flow. Assuming all future operations will be 'COIN' or so-called 'asymmetric,' is a failure of thought.



*What's left of a destroyed UN base in Lebanon. Photo: N McQ, Creative Commons Attribution Share Alike License, Wikimedia*

Since the Korean War, and with the notable exception of the PIRA, the UK has only fought against 2nd and 3rd rate opponents in terms of training, determination and equipment. Even the Koreans never matched the competence of the Wehrmacht. Again, as the Boer Wars showed, having fought poor enemies for the previous 40 or more years, the British Army of the day failed to understand the basics of land warfare, as they were known and knowable at the time, not once but twice! The immediate future of land warfare, and what it takes to succeed in it, is known and knowable. All the military capability and training that even a semi-competent irregular adversary could bring to bear against UK forces is obvious. As is what a competent and well-trained enemy might be capable of, but sadly the analysis of the 2nd Lebanon War would seem to indicate that few seem to study it; or, if they do, it rarely informs current doctrine, concepts and procurement.

The 2nd Lebanon War is not a blueprint or even a signpost for the future character of land warfare, but it should serve as a warning to the danger of ignoring what should be well known and well understood.





*Katyusha rocket fired from Lebanon hit Rothschild Hospital in Haifa Israel on the last day of the war.  
Photo: Tomer Gabel, Creative Commons License Wikimedia*



*Units from 4 Mech Brigade train at British Army Training Unit Suffield (BATUS) in Canada to take control of Hattar Village from insurgents during exercise Prairie Thunder. Crown Copyright*

# Urban Warfare: Lessons from the Past

*This article by Major Sergio Miller, originally published in BAR 154 Summer 2012, looks at the current role of urban warfare, examining three battles and offers lessons that can be learned from each of them.*

The recent URBNA WARRIOR exercises have raised the profile of urban warfare for current and future operations. Indeed, Commander Force Development and Training (FDT) has highlighted the role and importance of urban warfare. This article looks at three key urban battles - Hue (Vietnam 1968), Grozny (Russian Federation 1999-2000), and Fallujah (Iraq 2004) – and offers lessons that can be included in our own urban warfare training.

However, before looking at these three battles there is one other that needs to be examined because it dominates popular discussion of urban warfare - Stalingrad. This bloody battle is mostly cited as a warning of the difficulty and high human cost of fighting in an urban environment.

On Operation TELIC 1, the British Task Force was unwilling to assault Basra on the grounds that it might result in 'another Stalingrad'. This decision was judicious and humane but the allusion to Stalingrad was exaggerated. Quoting Stalingrad as a reason not to fight in Basra was as pertinent as if 2 Para had quoted Passchendaele as a reason not to attack Goose Green.

Stalingrad is a quite unique battle, largely because one side took the decision to fight at limitless human cost. This was not a tough decision for Stalin, and the results were spectacular. The Soviet Army suffered over 1 million casualties, almost half killed. As not all Soviet conscripts were in agreement with this strategy, roughly two division's worth were shot *pour encourager les autres*, that's more soldiers than the British Army can actually send to war.



Tank Battle at Stalingrad. Creative Commons Attribution license Wikimedia.

The second noteworthy feature of the battle is the scale. Twelve armies took part. At its height, the British wartime army was able to form one Army Group (and only with Canadian and Polish manpower). Today, the Army can deploy and sustain in extended operations one brigade, or less than one per cent of the manpower committed to the Caucasus Front in 1942. Stalingrad is an as epic tale of the human spirit, but no British government is ever going to countenance engaging in 'another Stalingrad', anymore than it would contemplate putting a man on the moon, because it cannot – it is simply not relevant to discussions about the British Army's future urban warfare capabilities.

### **Hue 1968**

The Battle of Hue is the most complex and on many levels the most fascinating of the examples examined here. The battle was one of several that took place during the Tet Offensive at the beginning of the Lunar New Year in 1968 (a holiday period) across South Vietnam.

Hue was different to the others for many reasons: the old city of Hue, the Citadel, was the ancient imperial capital of Annam - you could barely fire a bullet without hitting something of historical value; the USMC and US Army had been fighting a rural insurgency and were quite unprepared for urban fighting; the battle was initiated with a surprise attack by infiltrated North Vietnamese Army (NVA) units that failed to wholly seize the city resulting in a siege within a siege as South Vietnamese Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) units held on in one quadrant of the city; the fighting also flared up in the immediate countryside between Viet Cong (VC) guerrillas and friendly units rushed to retake the city. Retaking the city involved coordinating the actions of three land forces (USMC, US Army, ARVN), and three air forces (USAF, USMC and US Army), which did not necessarily like each other, still less cooperate with great enthusiasm. Lastly, the moody monsoon weather and stunning visual appeal of Hue acted as a honey pot for a bewitched press. Indeed, the battle inspired some of the best war photography and prose writing of the war.

The Citadel was an area roughly two kilometres square, located north of the Perfume River and surrounded by 40-foot thick ramparts and a 90-foot wide moat. South of the river was the modern town, modelled in American fashion, with state buildings, a university, Catholic cathedral and stadium. To the west was a sprawling, working class shanty town. The key features were the bridges, Citadel gates, moat, and the river which acted as a resupply route for the NVA. The population was around 140,000.

The initial North Vietnamese attack enjoyed the benefit of surprise but suffered the fatal flaw of believing its own propaganda. The NVA expected the people of Hue



*During the Battle for Hue in Vietnam A grenadier from the 3rd Platoon, Company 2nd H, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, carries a Vietnamese woman from to safety. US Marines*

to rise up and overthrow the ‘American imperialists’. Instead, the NVA was met with resistance, especially in the north-west corner of the Citadel (where crucially an air strip was located). Arguably, the single-most important decision of the battle was taken by Brigadier General Troung (ARVN) who immediately ordered two paratrooper battalions to the city, before the NVA was able to cut the roads. The failure to seize Hue and blow up the main road bridge doomed the NVA but it would take almost a month to expel them from the city. Accurate figures are difficult to confirm but it is known that at least three battalions took part in the first assault and that as many as 10,000 NVA (seven further battalions) and VC were in the city or general area over the course of the battle.

Initially, the US response was poor and much of this was down to the personality of the USMC Task Force X-Ray commander, coincidentally called LaHue. He first despatched just one marine company and four M-48<sup>1</sup> tanks to the city, a hopeless underestimation of the gravity of the situation. When his two commanding officers (Gravel 1/1 Marines and Cheatham 2/5 Marines) impressed

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*1 This is the US M-48 Patton medium tank*

on him the true situation he reacted intemperately and gave the officers impossible orders. Gravel was ordered to retake the entire Citadel with just one company that had already suffered casualties just getting to Hue! It would lose a third of this company, killed or wounded, obeying LaHue's order. The attack failed.

Gradually, order was imposed. Colonel Hughes, 1 Marines, was given the task of retaking the city. Four US Army battalions were airlifted to cordon the surrounding countryside, which they never fully accomplished.<sup>2</sup> ARVN reinforcements were flown in. It was provisionally agreed that US forces would clear the modern city and ARVN forces would clear the Citadel.<sup>3</sup> This was abandoned within a week, along with the restriction on bombing and shelling the Citadel. Iron bombs, napalm, and artillery shells began to rain down on NVA units holding out in the Citadel. The US Navy joined in the bombardment with offshore cruisers. The marines began using the handy six-barrelled 106mm Ontos to good effect, blasting obdurate NVA positions.<sup>4</sup>

To their astonishment M-48 crewmen discovered that their rounds bounced off some of the thicker walls in the Citadel but as one marine later put it, they could never have retaken the old city without the help of the tanks. Novel ideas, such as the use of CS gas, were attempted. The scale of the task was huge (100 city blocks in the modern half) not counting the maze in the Citadel, but it was undertaken methodically and with determination. The part played by the ARVN at the air strip should also be acknowledged - despite being trapped themselves, they did not quit.

The turning point came in the last week of February when 3 ARVN Regiment launched a very determined attack within the Citadel and US 1st Cavalry threatened to cut-off the western supply route along the river. NVA morale collapsed and the survivors made their escape along the same routes they had used to infiltrate the city. The NVA commander, General Tran Van Quang, later claimed that Hue had been unimportant to him, but this was disingenuous. In Washington, Hue provoked hand-wringing - ignoring that the USMC, after initially being caught on the back foot, had comprehensively thumped the NVA. The same was true across South Vietnam. The Tet Offensive finally created an opportunity for US forces to destroy NVA units *en masse*, which they did, but the political reaction was capitulation.

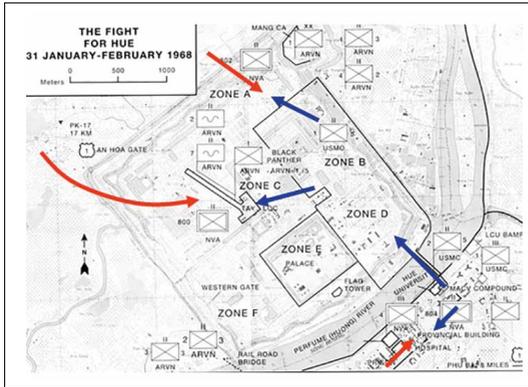
The US Marines suffered 147 killed, three quarters in the Citadel mostly relating to specific incidents such as the initial rushed attempt to retake the city. As

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2 *These were 2/12 Cavalry, 5/7 Cavalry, 1/7 Cavalry and 2/501 Infantry.*

3 *They would effectively use the Perfume River as a boundary*

4 *In one case the marines demolished the Joan of Arc Church, from which two furious but unarmed French and Belgian priests emerged.*



Map 1: The Battle for Hue. Jack Schulimson, Museums and Historical Division, USMC, 1997.

the battle lasted one month this was not actually a greater rate of attrition than was taking place elsewhere in Vietnam. The daily attrition rate was actually low. The ARVN suffered double this number of casualties, but NVA fatalities are disputed. The low figure is 2,400, the high figure is 8,000. Over 800 civilians were killed in the fighting. It was later claimed that as many as 5,000 had been massacred by the NVA. Although this latter figure was exaggerated, several mass graves were uncovered and there is no dispute that the NVA did execute a large number of civilians. Large parts of the city were destroyed (estimates vary between 40 and 80 per cent, or 10,000 buildings). The historic Citadel was not spared.

Ultimately, in a punch-up between the USMC and NVA, there was only going to be one winner. The will to win of the marines was a decisive factor. When the last government building was captured, the marines were ordered not to raise the Stars and Stripes, an order which they ignored to demonstrate their defiance.

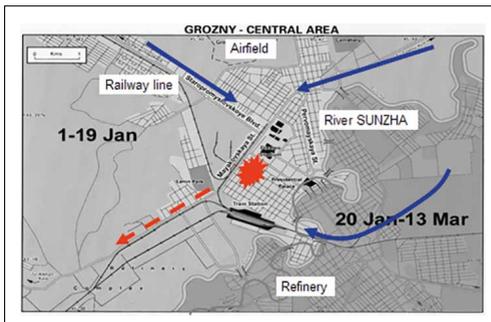


A Chechen boy stands in the street during the battle for Grozny. Mikhail Eustafiev  
Creative Commons Attribution License Wikimedia

## Grozny 1999-2000

The Battle for Grozny in December 1999-January 2000 took place in the Second Chechen War. Both sides had learned lessons from the first battle, not all good. The Russians faced a determined and skilled enemy. There was a long tradition of partisan warfare in the Caucasus and the Chechens had six years of experience fighting the Russian Army. After the first battle, they were confident. The maxim 'Let the situation do the organising' still held true. Sniping, the use of booby-traps, renegeing on ceasefire agreements, and hugging Russian forces (to provoke fratricidal engagements) remained the tactical staples. Unlike the first battle, the rebels made the mistake of creating fortifications which gave the Russians clear targets to attack. The Chechens possibly numbered 3,000 and were well led by the figures of Basayev and Ahkmadov (both now dead).

Although Grozny centre was a relatively small, a Soviet grid-style city, the urban sprawl spread out over 90 square miles, an impossible area to fully cordon. The centre was dominated by two features: the River Sunzha and the railway line that effectively divided the city into four quadrants. An oil refinery spread over south east Grozny and an airfield was located to the north west of the city. The city centre population was estimated to be 20,000. An important feature of the battle was that it was fought in unbelievably harsh weather. Another was a real sense of Russian outrage over the Chechen 'bandits', and a desire to exact revenge.



MAP 2: The Second Battle for Grozny 1999-2000 FMSO, Fort Leavenworth

Around 5,000 Russian troops were committed to Grozny, which was divided into quadrants (or 'a spider's web', to use the Russian term). The plan was to squeeze the rebels from three directions, destroying or forcing them to quit. The Russians used overwhelming firepower, employing, at squad level the RPO flamethrower to good effect. T-80U Main Battle Tanks were held in reserve and brought forward to batter rebel positions and only one of these was lost, the Russians had learned from the first battle.



*Violent, urban re-landscaping, Russian-style. Military Analysis.com/National Geographic.*

However, the Russian urban warfare weapon par excellence was the TOS-1 (Buratino), a T-72 chassis launching thirty 220mm thermobaric rockets in the direct fire role. Reputedly, it could collapse a multi-storey building with one salvo. Ten Pchela-IT UAVs were deployed but these struggled with the weather conditions. There was extensive air and aviation fire support: SU-24Ms flew between 25-60 daily sorties across Chechnya (a total of 8,000 eventually, or about half the strike sorties flown in *Operation Unified Protector*, Libya). A lack of tactical air controllers and laser guided bombs meant that there were several fratricidal engagements (one officer complained: ‘the pilots - it seems to me, have never hit a target yet’). Mi-24 Hind flew around half the strike missions but lacked basics such as GPS, night vision devices and secure communications. For the artillery and rocket forces, it was a world war-style slugfest. The Russians pounded Chechen positions (and their own positions) with 2S19 self-propelled gun, 2S3, self-propelled howitzer, the 2S9 anti-tank gun and the perennial BM-21 truck-mounted mobile rocket launcher. Scuds and OTR-21s were launched. Loyalist Chechen troops were also used under a former Grozny mayor called Gantamirov.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *He had been imprisoned for embezzlement but was given a chance to redeem himself in the traditional way by being sent to the front*



*A US Marine Corps (USMC) Marine M1A1 Abrams Main Battle Tank (MBT), 2nd Tank Battalion (BN), fires its main gun into a building to provide suppressive counter fire against insurgents during a fire fight in Fallujah, Iraq. US Dept of Defence*

The fighting eventually gravitated around Minutka Square, a canning factory, the bridges over the River Sunzha, and a prominent 12 storey government building. The lack of night-fighting capabilities and extreme weather meant that fighting was suspended in the hours of darkness allowing the Chechens to recover from the daily battering, but only for so long. After one month it became clear that the rebel position was untenable. A breakout was encouraged by some double-crossing and the cunning use of Electronic Warfare (EW). The tricked rebels stumbled into an anti-personnel minefield laid by helicopters and they were then shelled along with many civilians who had also decided to flee. Perhaps as many as 500 were killed or wounded in this awful episode that took place at night, in a snow storm. A Colonel Kukarin was awarded the Hero of Russia decoration for the successful ploy. Basayev lost a leg.

Officially, Russian Federation forces suffered 368 fatalities. Chechen fatality figures were claimed to be around 700 but more importantly the rebels were broken as an organised force. Several hundred civilians must have been killed or injured but official figures are lacking. The city centre was pulverized and Grozny would be awarded the dubious accolade of being the most destroyed city in the world by the United Nations. Ironically, one of the most flattened streets was 'Peace Street'. However, the fighting did not stop and a dirty war ensued in

Chechnya that claimed several thousand more lives. The reconstruction of Grozny was only finally started six years after the battle.

## **Fallujah 2004**

Operation PHANTOM FURY was launched in the winter of 2004 to deny the town of Fallujah as an insurgent safe haven. It followed an aborted operation in the previous year. The US 1st Marine Division (1 MARDIV)'s capture of Fallujah in many ways provides a textbook example on 'how to do' urban warfare.

Fallujah is demarcated by a Euphrates tributary to the west, a railway line to the north, and by two prominent routes which form a crossroads in the south east corner of the town. The town roughly occupies an area 20 square kilometres and is surrounded by a mix of desert and sparse cultivated areas. At the time, the town was also surrounded by well-known trouble spots: Ramadi, Habbaniyah and Al Amariyah.

Perhaps as many as 2,000 insurgents were based in Fallujah, although it is likely that several left for Mosul prior to the assault. The insurgents in the town belonged to several, sometimes competing groups and there was no overall commander and no attempt, even on the eve of battle, to coordinate actions. Motivations also varied greatly. Some fighters sought martyrdom but others were not so sure. Lastly, there were tensions between outsiders who were uncaring about trashing Fallujah, and local fighters who were more concerned over the destruction of their homes and other private property. Tactics included the use of snipers, mortars, mosques and similar 'protected' buildings as fire positions as well as IEDS. Scores of booby traps were discovered but these proved largely obvious and ineffective.

1 MARDIV committed around 5,000 troops to the operation, including the cordon forces and Iraqi forces. Two Regimental Combat Teams undertook the assault (RCT-1 and RCT-7). The beefed-up RCTs comprised three USMC battalions, one US Army battalion, three Iraqi battalions and an armoured squadron. Each RCT was supported by an engineer company, artillery battery, SEALs and other specialist troops. It is notable that the infantry-armour ratio was four battalions to one squadron, not counting the Iraqi battalions that played a support role.

There were many reasons for the success of Operation PHANTOM FURY: the planning, preparation and training were exemplary; a coherent plan was executed to evacuate and care for the civilian population although some civilians chose to remain behind; psychological operations, precision strikes, cordon and search operations, raids and feints were all conducted to ramp up the pressure on the insurgents. The Black Jack Brigade was used to seal the town;

and the eastern peninsula, hospital and bridge were also secured thus blocking the only escape route.

The assault was straightforward and relentless. Essentially, six battalion-sized units lined up at the north end of the town (roughly 500 metre frontages), breaches were made, and the units rolled through the town clearing each block methodically. Fire support was intensive. Over 6,000 artillery rounds and almost 9,000 mortar rounds were expended<sup>6</sup> representing a density of around 10 shells/mortar bombs per 100 metre block while 318 bombs and 391 rockets/missiles were also launched at the insurgents, or roughly one per 200 metre block. But these densities are misleading as the fighting took place at specific locations, so the true density of expended high explosives was much higher. As a consequence, the insurgents were battered.

On the streets, M1A2 tanks were used to demolish tough enemy positions, firing off 2,500 main gun rounds. As one participant put it, the tank was a marine's best friend. Around half of the city's mosques were used as fire positions and therefore attacked. TOW missiles and heavy machine guns were also used to blast enemy positions. Remarkably, there were no fratricidal engagements, a testament to the careful fire planning. There were 26 Tactical Air Control Parties (TACPs) operating in the town.<sup>7</sup> The reach of the USMC was extraordinary: F/A-18D Hornets were flying in from the USS *Kennedy* to attack Fallujah, all coordinated from Qatar.

US forces suffered just over 70 fatalities in the three week battle. As in Hue, this was not an especially greater rate of attrition than was being experienced elsewhere in routine operations. Civilian casualties are unknown but there is sufficient anecdotal evidence (locals obligingly led TV crews to film corpses) that many were killed despite efforts to persuade the civilian population to leave the town. Several hundred insurgents were killed or wounded.<sup>8</sup> Following the battle, a comprehensive stabilisation program was implemented although this had to overcome the hurdle of Sunni non-cooperation angered by the substantial destruction in the town (18,000 buildings were damaged or destroyed). Several years later, the anger remained. When President Obama announced the final withdrawal of US troops from Iraq in late December 2011 Fallujah residents celebrated by burning the Stars and Stripes and by waving photographs of dead American soldiers.

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6 *The artillery battery was a New York-based National Guard unit that set a record for the most shells fired in Iraq.*

7 *At the time, there were just 12 TACPs in the entire British Army.*

8 *Not all in good circumstances - controversial footage of a marine casually shooting a prone, unarmed and wounded insurgent did few favours for the Media Ops officer*

The Fallujah insurgents proved to be more wind than action. Some did fight tenaciously to death, but most did not. They were not actually that good. In a fight against the steamroller of two USMC regimental combat teams they were always going to be beaten.

## **Concluding observations**

The following lessons are offered from Hue, Grozny and Fallujah:

1. *Fighting in a town or city involves substantial destruction.* If you choose to fight in streets, you will damage and destroy those streets. In essence, this is no different to saying, if you choose to fight in woods and fields, you will damage and destroy those woods and fields, except that re-arranging earth and vegetation does not greatly trouble us, but violent, urban re-landscaping, for self-evident reasons, does.
2. *Command of the sky is key.* As in general warfare, the side that commands the sky will almost invariably win. The capability to bombard your enemy from the air with impunity cannot be overstated.
3. *Cities and towns are typically built on major natural features.* Examples include rivers which create obvious vital ground - the bridges.
4. *Cities and towns have iconic buildings.* The seizure of these buildings, usually badly damaged or destroyed, demonstrates 'winning'. Planting a flag is necessary. Nobody cares if you hold a suburb.
5. *Significant numbers of civilians are killed* - this is inescapable. In some cases, the enemy may deliberately massacre civilians (Hue). In a case like Fallujah where evacuation was attempted, civilians were killed anyway because they refused to leave. Many also surprisingly survive, despite the destruction rained on their heads.
6. *The civilian population may be unwinnable.* Even in favourable circumstances, soldiers struggle to make civilians like them. In a situation where soldiers are trashing civic spaces and (unintentionally) killing innocent people, it is even harder. There is no euphemism that makes palatable knocking down someone's home or killing someone's family.

7. *Street fighting does not necessarily result in significant military casualties.* Fallujah disproved the Stalingrad myth of street fighting. Hue was not excessively costly to the USMC. It is possible to take a town and not suffer a significantly greater casualty bill than would be suffered taking any other tactical feature such as Mount Longdon that cost just under a third of the fatalities suffered in Fallujah over three weeks, in just six hours fighting over a lump of rock.
8. *The defender does not necessarily enjoy an advantage.* The defender of an urban area is a trapped rat. Sooner or later, if the attacker has the will and means of destruction, the defender will lose. In this sense, urban warfare is no different to an old-fashioned siege.
9. *Denial of infrastructure, while desirable, does not win the battle.* None of the battles examined was won because modern infrastructure (electricity, water, gas) were cut off. Human beings are surprisingly troglodytic when pressed.
10. *A cordon is vital.* Establishing an effective cordon prevents resupply and dooms the trapped force. This requires a lot of manpower usually many more soldiers than the assaulting force. Equally, leaving open an escape route can encourage the enemy to quit as in Hue or Grozny.
11. *There are no 'No Strike' buildings.* Ultimately, if an enemy chooses to use a hospital, religious building, archaeological site or other normally protected feature as a military position, it will be attacked, damaged or destroyed.
12. *Highly destructive weapons are essential.* Weapons that can flatten blocks of flats in one blow; that can penetrate several floors before detonating; that can blast occupants of strong points, these are all valuable in street fighting. The lowest common denominator for achieving this destruction is just more high explosives, but science also offers more efficient ways, such as thermobaric weapons. The current fashion for smaller bombs may be illusory – you could end up just using more of them. Non-lethal weapons like gas remain unproven, notwithstanding their use in Hue.

13. *Reconnaissance is through fire.* For self-evident reasons, aerial reconnaissance can struggle in urban areas although it is still necessary. Mostly, the enemy is found by the point man, of the point platoon, of the point company bumping into that enemy.
14. *Urban fighting offers opportunities for cunning, nasty tricks.* These include the use of deceptive EW, mines, screening smoke and improvised weapons.
15. *Urban warfare demands a methodical approach.* There is little opportunity for élan in street fighting. It involves methodical, block by block, street by street fighting. Fire support coordination and control measures are vital in this respect.
16. *Urban fighting demands task-organised tactical groupings.* There are no perfect tactical groupings, every situation is different. Mostly, these have been based on an assault group, fire support group and reserve. The former have typically been heavily armed with weapons like grenades, explosive charges and automatic weapons.
17. *Urban fighting is an all arms battle.* Tanks and APCs with support weapons are only dinosaurs in street fighting if used in dinosaur-like ways such as the first battle for Grozny. If used smartly they win the battle for you. You don't need many, but you do need them.
18. *Urban fighting is a 24 hour battle.* Grozny was fought at world war tempo, with operations effectively stopping at night. Fallujah was fought as a conveyor belt of sub-units continuously fed to the front line. The pauses in Grozny allowed the rebels to recover. In Fallujah there was no respite.
19. *Ammunition expenditure is no more excessive than any other form of battle against a resisting, entrenched enemy.* The case that urban warfare demands higher ammunition expenditure rates is greatly over-stated. Following the attack on the Sir Galahad, the QM of 2 Scots Guards, overlooking the bluff when the incident occurred, had to indent for 18,000 rounds of 7.62mm, which is the ammunition the Guardsmen fired off at the five FAA A4-B Skyhawks led by 1st Lt Chacón who undertook the raid. Urban warfare does not have a monopoly on extravagant ammunition expenditure.

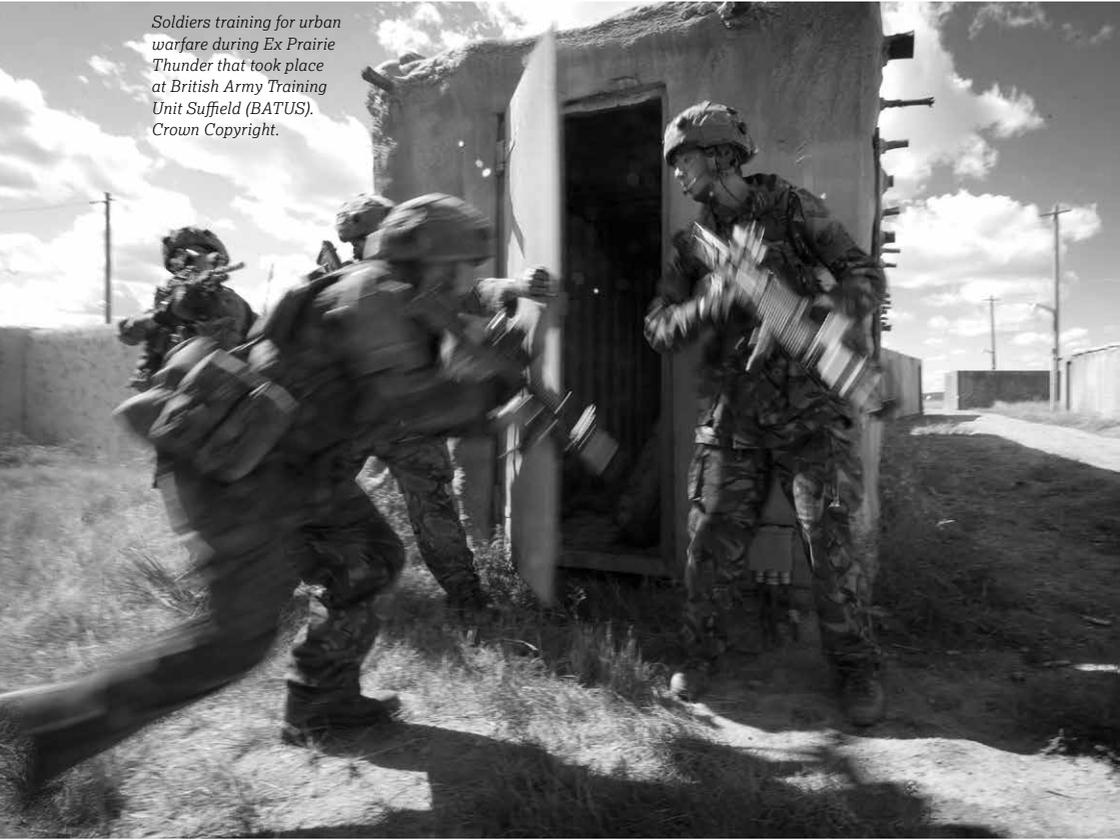


*Soldiers from 4 Mech Brigade training in urban warfare during Exercise Prairie Thunder. Crown Copyright.*



20. *At soldier level, 7.62mm is king.* Towns and cities self-evidently offer abundant hard cover. The standard NATO 5.56mm round offers inadequate penetration against an enemy using that hard cover. 7.62mm x 51 is the minimum requirement, 12.7mm is better.
  
21. *Lastly, training pays off.* Over the years, the USMC has invested significantly in urban warfare training. The pay-off was clear in Fallujah.

*Soldiers training for urban warfare during Ex Prairie Thunder that took place at British Army Training Unit Suffield (BATUS). Crown Copyright.*



# Urban Warrior meets Whitehall Warrior

*This article by Colonel 'Toffer' Beattie, Liaison Officer to US Army Training and Doctrine Command, originally published in BAR 154 Summer 2012, provides an analysis of Urban Warrior 3 and how it will help the British Army understand the nature of future urban conflict.*

*Among the gaps that need to be bridged before Britain's armed forces are ready to fight the wars of the future is the gulf of understanding between ministers and soldiers.<sup>1</sup>*

As part of the Army's ongoing campaign of research and experimentation, particular effort has been focused on the challenges of operations in urban and littoral environments. A series of events have taken place under the collective title URBAN WARRIOR, the most ambitious, URBAN WARRIOR 3, was an experimental CPX aimed at the brigade level complete with battlegroup lower controllers, an independent red team and a superimposed architecture designed specifically to capture and exploit available data.

As a result of this and related activity a bank of empirical evidence and observations is being created to help us understand what future conflict will look like, particularly in the complex urban arena where our capability development priorities should lie. In this respect the Army is beginning to display the required level of intellectual honesty and professional curiosity to face an uncertain future.

Yet despite this, I fear that we have either not properly identified or are failing to adequately resource what should be our *schwerpunkt*. For it is not as a result of earnest internal debates about wheels or tracks or suppression over precision that we will achieve the level of preparedness and capability that will be required for future operations. Rather it is by establishing and effectively communicating a clear, consistent and persuasive case for change in political and policy making circles. We will get nowhere until we have convinced the Whitehall Warriors.

In the *URBAN WARRIOR 3 Executive Report*, alongside eleven recommendations related to some form of capability development from our approach to training and experimentation, through understanding an application of operational art to our ability to re-invest in platform capabilities, was one saying that the Army should, 'recognise - and explain forcefully to those who doubt it - that it is more likely than not that it will be required to fight in a city within the next 10-15 years.' The main body of the report recognises 'gaps in understanding between politicians, officials and soldiers' which lead to a 'contrivance that fighting in urban environments is so difficult, unpleasant and removed from what policy envisages, that it is unnecessary to prepare for it'.

Closing this gap in understanding should be a more prominent theme in both AGILE and URBAN WARRIOR, and should form the core of a narrative to which the joint community, land forces and the Army are fully subscribed and for which all instinctively lobby.

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<sup>1</sup> Nusbacher L - *Bang in the City*

Politicians and policy makers can very easily persuade themselves that they are able to determine the course of world events to a far greater extent that either history or reasonable logic would support. It is perhaps understandable that faced with strategic balance of investment decisions, particularly in today's financial climate, policy statements and planning assumptions promise reassuring neatness and certainty. But of course a planning assumption is just that - an assumption. It is in no way prophetic, rather it is a description of levels of commitment that are plausible, affordable and politically sane. However, the moment that conflict is joined events unfold in unforeseen ways, even in the highly improbable event that the original intervention looked like something we had planned for - it's to do with other players having a vote.

The opening sentence of a RAND Corporation paper on urban operations reflects a certain dismissiveness amongst the military that too often characterises the way we communicate our profession to those outside the Army '*it is evident to virtually everyone that future military operations will include urban operations far more often than not...*'<sup>2</sup>

Why should it be evident to 'virtually everyone'? There are persuasive reasons why soldiers, politicians and policy makers, would wish it otherwise. So given our much vaunted capacity for innovation and manoeuvrism, why does the urban environment remain a 'proven inevitable'?<sup>3</sup> How does the maxim of fighting on ground of one's own choosing rather than that of the enemy sit with General Krulak's prediction that our enemies will not allow us to fight the son of Desert Storm, but will try to draw us into the step-child of Chechnya?

The justification for operations in the urban environment most often put forward is simply the scale and rate of urbanisation. *Global Strategic Trends 4* states that 'by 2040, around 65%, or 6 billion, of the world's population will live in urban areas.' This is inadequate. We can not expect policy makers to sign up to the highly unattractive prospect of operations in the congestion and clutter of urban environments simply because there is a lot of it - it is more nuanced than that. They must understand that 'urban areas are where politics, people, resources, infrastructure and thinking enemies converge'<sup>4</sup> and the significance of this. Reinforced by the unique and highly improbable circumstances of the Cold War we allowed a vision of conflict to emerge in our minds that airbrushed out most inconvenient complications. Indeed, we developed a doctrine characterised

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2 *Opening line of Preface to Glenn, Russell W. et al. Preparing For The Proven Inevitable : An Urban Operations Training Strategy For America's Joint Force. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2006, 358p*

3 *Ibid*

4 *FDT/2/1/1 dated 14 Nov 11. Lieutenant General Newton, Commander DT - Designing the Future Army: Ex URBAN WARRIOR 3 First Impressions Report.*



*The Ministry of Defence Main Building, London is pictured in the snow while to the right of the image is the statue of Major General Charles George Gordon. Crown Copyright*

by precision strikes on enemy platforms and command nodes, with little or no consideration for the view or will of the people for whom, or over who's land, we might fight. Perversely this aberrant view of conflict, though based largely on a conflict that never happened, has been tagged 'conventional'. We have lately relearned the relevance and reality of the full range of players involved in conflict: irregular forces, insurgents, local tribal and political leaders, criminals and opportunists, regular forces alongside hapless innocent civilians and have recognised that future '[conflicts] are likely to be defined more by the centrality of influence.'<sup>5</sup>

*All military action should be assessed by its contribution toward influencing the key conflict relationship and shaping the eventual political settlement. The perceptions, beliefs, attitudes and opinions of individuals and groups are fundamental to this outcome, so, influence is the guiding idea for the conduct of operations.*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> FCOC Paragraph 17

<sup>6</sup> JDP 3-40 Para 301.

Increasingly, meaningful influence will be only be achievable in urban areas. It is in cities that seats of government will be found alongside other organs of power and influence such as opposition parties, religious leadership, militias and gangs. Finally and most obviously, it is where most people live, so it is where most people can be influenced. To avoid urban areas would be to deny us the ability to influence. Anyone who believes we can park up outside urban environments and still achieve our operational and strategic goals should consider the impotence of the British brigade holed up in Basra Air Base, the consequent descent of Iraq's second city into chaos and the final ignominy of our lack of involvement in *Operation Charge of the Knights*.

The growth of cities, accompanied often by the proliferation of slums, will occur in many cases against the backdrop of poor governance, inadequate infrastructure and sanitation, endemic poverty and resource depletion. Such environments are the melting pots in which dissatisfaction and radicalisation can most easily breed. *DCDC's Global Strategic Trends* warns us that:

*Rapid urbanisation is likely to lead to an increased probability of urban, rather than rural, insurgency and that the worst affected cities may fail, with significant humanitarian and security implications.*



*British soldiers from B Company on patrol in the Nahr-e Seraj District of Helmand Province.  
Crown Copyright*

If state failure 'is set to be one of the dominant features of future conflicts'<sup>7</sup> as often as not it will be the failure of large urban areas that will catalyse the failure of the state. If future administrations find themselves forced to intervene as a result of, or in order to prevent, state failure, it is hard to envisage how cities, those areas that embody both cause and cure, could possibly be avoided.

One of the key elements of the URBAN WARRIOR 3 was a senior attendees day. As well as syndicates made up of senior officers across the joint community, one group was made up of very senior civil servants. We should reflect on what they were shown and what they might have taken away from their visit.

The scenario saw a very large brigade (circa 10 000, not including other land component or joint personnel) consisting of 8 battle groups operating in Southampton against a range of adversaries including near peer regular forces and irregular groupings. Regular forces from the neighbouring state had invaded the Southern Protectorate and had, by the start of the exercise, established a lodgement in the city. The indigenous army, the Southern Protectorate<sup>8</sup> National Defence Services, had been overwhelmed and had redeployed outside the city. The host nation police forces, the Southern Protectorate National Police Services, had been rendered ineffective as a result of the invasion. The purpose of the brigade's defensive mission was to 'protect critical infrastructure and the population of Southampton and support the defeat of [enemy] forces in the Southern Protectorate.'<sup>9</sup>

In terms of providing the backdrop to a military experiment, designed to identify the size and scope of the capability development challenge, the scenario was ideal. The highly capable, and entirely plausible, hybrid enemy provided a range of threats against which quick fixes or smoke and mirrors would not work and the size and density of the urban area ensured that the complexity of the terrain, both human and physical had to be grappled with. As a result a great deal was learned by those taking part - and by implication the Army as a whole - and invaluable pointers as to areas of priority and focus for future force development were seen. But was this the most effective influence tool for the target audience. Had I been a visiting senior civil servant, and assuming that I had not had time to become fully immersed in the exercise scenario and assuming that I was instinctively sceptical about the need to invest in urban capabilities for land forces I would have come away with some important unanswered questions.

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7 *FCOC - Deductions from context page 3*

8 *The Southern Protectorate – a fictional country with Southampton as its capital in whose support allied forces intervened*

9 *Exercise URBAN WARRIOR 3 Op HARBINGER – OpO 08/11 – I (UK) Mech Bde Mission.*



*Why were British forces operating alone? Whilst the combined joint task force was multinational, the fact that this was a brigade level activity meant that the multi-national challenge was largely one of coordination and de-confliction. Why was there no direct involvement by indigenous forces? ‘Writing out’ of the*



*Soldiers from D Squadron the Household Cavalry Regiment (HCR) in their Jackals providing security on highway 601 in Gereshek in Helmand during Herrick 13. Crown Copyright.*

exercise the Southern Protectorate security apparatus would have seemed to me at odds with the benefits that would be gained from some form of partnering or burden sharing. Whether to ameliorate our inability to generate conventional mass, to mitigate local and cultural unfamiliarity or to shore up the necessary campaign legitimacy (probably all three) how we use indigenous forces should be at the heart of our experimentation into future conflict and should be central to the narrative that emerges as a result.

Most importantly I would have asked *How did we get into this situation?* And it is here that we, the Army, need to become more sophisticated. Instead of inviting civil servants and politicians to peer through a window into the unfamiliar, bewildering and frankly terrifying world of urban operations at the tactical level, we should use vehicles such as URBAN WARRIOR 3 to explore how we might have got to that situation.

Unless we can demonstrate how a manageable, policy compliant and politically logical intervention can lead to a UK brigade fighting a near peer competitor in an area like Southampton, by playing out the complex political problems that demand hard choices, we will never receive the backing and investment that will be needed to succeed in future operations.



*Units from 4th Mechanized Brigade on Exercise Prairie Thunder at British Army Training Unit Suffield (BATUS) in Canada carry out a successful operation to take control of Hattar Village from insurgents enabling the local population to once again govern their village.*

# The Utility of Force - 5 years on

*This article by Major General Jonathan Shaw, originally published in BAR 156 Winter 2012, revisits General Sir Rupert Smith's book five years after it was published in the context of current thinking*

Five years after he wrote his book, *The Utility of Force*, General Sir Rupert Smith was invited by King's College London to review it. His views provide an interesting prism through which to view current operations. What follows is my representation of what he said, with all the caveats that implies.

His book was based on his reflections on his service, especially the latter period; experience-based, rationalised to a theory. He saw this as an iterative, dialectic process that continued to evolve.

His conclusion had been then, and remains now, that there has been a paradigm shift from industrial war to *War Amongst the People (WAP)*. The essential difference is that military force now creates the conditions for others to settle things it does not settle things on its own. The purpose of military force is to alter intentions, not to destroy things. This is not to say that there will be no big battles; it is to say that heavy weapons don't achieve the strategic result. Therefore our institutions have become unsuited to war; governance has thus become unsuitable to this new purpose. We no longer operate in a peace-crisis-war-resolution-peace sequence but in an era of enduring confrontations and outbreaks of conflict, to which the military must achieve their aims consistent with the wider aims of the confrontations. Institutional responsibilities and authorities need revising; WAP makes them unfit for purpose.

Indeed, Smith makes no claim to having identified a new paradigm; he observes that current institutions set up for one purpose are no longer fit for the current purposes they are faced with (COIN being a pan-government objective not a discrete military activity). Recent articles by Hew Strachan in *Survival* and *RUSI* chime with this.

As General Petraeus used to say in Iraq, *It's all about the politics*. The problem with the debate about troop numbers for Afghanistan is the lack of clarity on the political end state being pursued. Conflict goals can therefore not be aligned with confrontational goals.

The book identified 6 trends – not discrete but a melange that interact and overlap:

- *The ends of warfare are soft and malleable, conditional – the people – as opposed to the hard objectives of industrial warfare – destroying the enemy force. McChrystal's report focuses on the people, a manifestation of this trend.*
- *We conduct wars in non-state groupings (Hizbollah, multi-national alliances) which raises legal, C2, legitimacy issues to which we are struggling to adapt.*

- *We fight amongst the people: for protection, support, logistics, but also because command has become akin to being a producer of a roman circus, in which we compete with another producer for control of the narrative. Our task is to write and tell and act the most compelling story. Nasrullah won the narrative in 2006 Lebanon war – he was the producer; the Economist front cover proclaimed him the winner! McCrystal’s report has pages on strategic communications.*
- *WAP is timeless; military means can’t solve it. Timing is more important than the production.*



*Soldiers from the 9th/12th Royal Lancers help to keep open a section of Highway 1 that connects Kabul to Kandahar. One of the largest roads on the Asian Highway Network it is one of the most important routes in Afghanistan. Crown Copyright*

- *We can't reproduce military capability - we have to avoid loss. We have to be able to endure so we cannot commit to a total engagement - always limited by the need to sustain and endure. When he commanded the UK division in Iraq 1991, he knew he had the British army under command; there was no more.*
- *New uses are being found for our weapons, eg. the Apache is used for a different purpose than that for which it was bought. Opponents deliberately operate beneath the technology threshold of our systems. The enemy is a thinking being as opposed to the icon we saw him as in industrial warfare.*

Smith would not alter any of these trends. He wished he had emphasised the following four points, which he thinks deserve greater recognition and understanding.

1. *The paradigm shift has been in the form of war, not the nature of battle. Battle will stay as bloody as ever; it is the purpose of war that has changed. It is possible to win every battle and lose the war. Industrial war was essentially attritional. 'war/confrontation' has to be seen as distinct from 'battle/conflict'. The key linkage has to be of the conflict goals to the confrontation goals. The essence of command is to balance all lines of activity to the confrontation goals.*
2. *There is an important distinction between Defence and Security; they are not synonymous. Defence is the defeat or deterrence of a potent threat, a bilateral relationship with a unilateral outcome. It is based on objective judgements on threat and loss. Security is a condition in which measures are taken to prevent, or to warn of, perceived latent threats becoming patent. It involves subjective judgements on risk and reward, a unilateral judgement of one's own vulnerabilities. E.g. a car's crush bars are defensive measures; we drive securely, taking notice of the conditions but making subjective judgements of risk and reward. A battle/fight has defensive objectives; yet confrontation goals are to do with security – the achievement of a relationship entered into by each party on the basis of their own individual perceptions of vulnerability, risk and reward. In the theatre of confrontation, it is the people's sense of their own security that matters. People must feel secure on their own terms. Military battles must be won with an eye to enhancing people's sense of security. Terrorists' propaganda of their deeds are designed to get us to create a sense of insecurity – we must not co-operate.*

3. *The boundary between the conflict and the confrontation, what Smith calls the level of the fight is not a question of mass but of purpose. This is the same for opponents. Above the level of the fight, commanders orchestrate. In Iraq, Bosnia and NI, Smith commanded the same troop levels but had different levels of the fight. Iraq began at brigade level then went down to company level after a few days. Bosnia was primarily at the Battlegroup level. NI was at the 4 man patrol level. The currency is different either side of the level of the fight. In battle/conflict, the currency is bullets, firepower; in a confrontation, it is information. This in turn demands different networks: for industrial warfare, we need introverted networks. If we are to deal with information and network appropriately, we need extrovert, inclusive networks. We have yet to find the courage to open up our military networks.*
  
4. *Command of operations is still derived from industrial war: analyse the mission, parcel out the tasks and allocate them, create a top down master plan. This may still have some validity in conflict but won't work for confrontations. These need to be directed, can't be commanded. So aim for agreed objectives under agreed overall direction. The relationship between participants needs to be more a partnership than a binding contract. Our opponents already work this way; hence their C2 is hard to attack, with unforeseen and disappointing consequences when we do. We have yet to work out how we direct not command a campaign.*

## **Conclusion**

To understand our past and present, we need to recognise the paradigm shift. To respond to this, our institutions need to change to achieve success on a confrontation. We need to understand the conflicts in terms of their relation to the objectives of the confrontation. The military might be able to win conflicts but it will take wider government capabilities to resolve confrontations. The way the military wins conflicts has to be directly linked to the goals of the confrontation. Until we understand the utility of force like this, and make the necessary institutional changes, we shall continue to struggle.

Smith's ideas explain why classic campaign planning, as taught at HCSC and staff courses, is a conflict tool of limited applicability to confrontations; we do not control the end state or the levers/lines of operation. We have not adapted our language from *win/lose* conflicts to *shades of grey* confrontations, hence our problem with IO and messaging. We will need to retain the same range of capabilities as now, but the balance of investment will need to change. The activities will remain the same, albeit with altered frequencies; it is their purpose and context that has changed utterly.



*War among the people of Afghanistan.*

An M-198 155mm Howitzer of the US Marines firing at Fallujah, Iraq, during the Second Battle of Fallujah. US Marines, Wikimedia Commons.



# Operation NEW DAWN: Fallujah

*This article by Captain S. Shipley 1 RTR, originally published in BAR 158 Autumn 2013, looks at how British Armour and Infantry could co-operate in gaining entry to, and controlling an urban area.*

In Fallujah, the Americans showed what an effective use of Combined Arms Manoeuvre (CAM) could achieve.<sup>1</sup> The British should take note of this lesson and prepare now as *Future Character of Conflict (FCOC)* identifies a future conflict in an

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that in UK Doctrine this is termed All-Arms Manoeuvre.

urban environment as a most likely tasking. As such the focus here will be on two main areas essential to operating successfully within the urban environment: the tactical deployment of armour, and how best to work with the infantry. The goal will be to outline a suggested set of Tactics Techniques and Procedures (TTPs), using US Marine Corps 'best practise' as a starting point for future discussion.

## Deployment

At the troop level, the operations in Fallujah illustrate how tanks would work in pairs in a mutually supporting four tank troop. The front two tanks essentially work as the 'bullet catchers', drawing enemy fire to enable enemy positions to be identified and engaged, with all other assets stacking up behind the lead vehicles.<sup>2</sup> The evidence strongly indicates that having tanks in the lead is the correct decision and one that is an ideal starting block for TTPs. The benefit of having tanks lead is best shown by looking at some of their implied tasks:

*We cleared avenues of approach with well placed main gun rounds, using our M88 recovery vehicle to assist in the reduction of the obstacles . . . We identified strong points, RPG teams, mortar positions, and ambush sites. We walked artillery in front of us, very close, targeting areas where we received the heaviest contact. We moved quickly through the area, forcing the insurgents to flee ahead of us, and forcing them into the artillery that was falling to our south.<sup>3</sup>*

One important aspect a commander must consider is the balance between bringing enough tanks to bear to control the battlespace against the need to have depth. Depth is extremely important as it allows the two pairs to be mutually supporting. For example, when the insurgents attempt to outflank and encircle the lead tanks they would encounter the tanks and infantry (depth callsigns<sup>4</sup>) behind the lead tanks. However there are examples of commanders putting as many tanks forward as possible in an effort to increase the frontage. The main benefit of this is that it allows rapid penetration on multiple axes towards an enemy's centre of gravity- as with the USMC assault on Jolan Square<sup>5</sup> and maximises armour's ability to exploit.

This may raise questions for the RAC concerning three or four tank Troops. In Basra three tank Troops were utilised, with the Troop Leader being the lead

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2 Lowry R., *New Dawn: The Battles for Fallujah*, p100

3 Matthews, M., *A Study in Army and Marine Joint Ops*, [http://www.cgsc.edu/carl/download/csipubs/matthews\\_fajr.pdf](http://www.cgsc.edu/carl/download/csipubs/matthews_fajr.pdf), p53

4 *New Dawn*, p101

5 *Army and Marine Joint Ops*, p28



*A confirmed insurgent stronghold is hit after a strategic aerial strike during combat operations while US Marine Corps (USMC) Marines, 1st Battalion (BN), 8th Marine Regiment (1/8), search for insurgents and weapon caches during Operation New Dawn to eradicate enemy insurgents in Fallujah, Al Anbar Province, Iraq. US Marines, Wikimedia Commons*

callsign. Whilst this worked in Basra, this formation is arguably vulnerable, as there is limited tactical depth to it. The front vehicle (callsign) is vulnerable as a single target, and so its job of drawing fire may be too successful. Flank and rear depth for the 360 degree urban battle is also weaker than for a four vehicle formation, especially to the rear, when a single tank would then be covering two forward callsigns. The types of manoeuvre achievable using three tanks are also limited, especially when conducting more kinetic operations when the issue of balance becomes more important.

By working in pairs the Americans were able to employ simple fire and manoeuvre principles whilst maintaining more than adequate firepower. Whilst there is fierce debate about whether to use three or four tank formations it would be a brave commander who ignores the American success of working in pairs.

Command and control in CAM can be problematic. In Fallujah the American tanks worked in pairs with the troop leader and sergeant in charge of a pair each, but they came under the command of the Infantry which often led to Troop Leaders feeling they were being underused and having to go to higher command to request additional tasking.



*A U.S. Marine watches for anything suspicious from a building in Fallujah, Iraq, during Operation al Fajr (New Dawn) on Nov. 10, 2004. The Marine is assigned to 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, 1st Marine Division. US Marines Wikimedia Commons*

## CAM

The first failed assault on Fallujah proved that the infantry needed armoured support and similarly the second assault, although successful, showed that tanks were vulnerable to heavy casualties without infantry support.

*The enemy could swarm the armoured vehicles and hit them from all sides with RPGs and drop fire bombs and IEDs on the tanks from rooftops.<sup>6</sup>*

Ultimately an entirely new set of TTPs were developed as the infantry and armour learned to work with each other in this most difficult of terrains. As the Americans tried to clear the streets they discovered that lead tanks were best supported by Bradley Armoured Vehicles. This meant that the tanks would flush the enemy out and the Bradleys could employ their 25mm cannons and machine guns.<sup>7</sup> This provided the necessary depth and allowed the other pair of tanks

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p103

<sup>7</sup> Gordan, J., and Pirnie, B., 'Everybody Wanted Tanks: Heavy forces in Operation Iraqi Freedom', p3

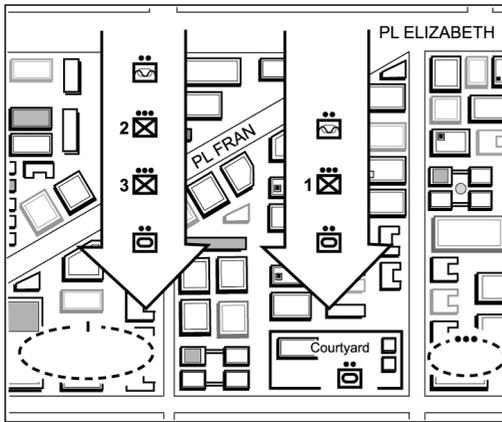


Figure 1<sup>8</sup>

to do the same on an adjacent street, thus taking the best of both formations as previously discussed. See fig 1 above.

This good basic demonstration of CAM was used effectively during Operation TELIC 9 by the Queen's Lancashire Regiment, whilst deployed with Egypt Sqn 2 RTR. They used 'combat-teams' (patrols consisting of one Challenger 2 and two Warriors) in a similar way to the American tactic in Fallujah.<sup>9</sup>

For the US Marines and US Army in Fallujah when working with dismounted infantry the primary considerations were security, control and simplifying CAM within an already complicated environment. Several approaches were taken to aid in this. Firstly, and contrary to established doctrine, the infantrymen were directed to stay behind the tanks and advance using same-axis-same-speed.<sup>10</sup> Secondly the infantry would often move along rooftops parallel to advancing armour<sup>11</sup> and as such deny the enemy one of its most potent avenues of approach. This proved highly effective, with the infantry blocking flank options for the enemy, and the tanks simultaneously drawing fire from the infantry and enabling both arms to identify and engage insurgent positions.

Thirdly, with such little training, the infantry and armour would have to develop understanding as they went:

8 Ackerman, Lieutenant E., 'Tank-Infantry Fighting in Fallujah', <http://www.2ndbn5thmar.com/tank/tirefs/tifallujah.pdf>, p5

9 Of note, whilst this tactic is in some unit Standard Operating Instructions (SOIs) it has yet to be codified in doctrine.

10 New Dawn, p73

11 Ibid, p11

*Trying to do mounted/dismounted operations on the fly, at night, and in contact just isn't easy, no matter who you are. It's even harder if you are a Marine unit that does not habitually do heavy/light operations.<sup>12</sup>*

Once there is an understanding of CAM the results can be very effective and enable more complex manoeuvres. A good example of this is the Infantry establishing overwatch of tanks from a building. Any attempt to assault the infantry position is countered by the tanks, which in turn are protected by the infantry. By attacking one, the enemy becomes vulnerable to the other. This allows friendly forces to engage the enemy on their chosen ground and dictate the tempo and nature of the engagement, becoming pre-emptive rather than reactive. See fig 2, below.

*After multiple enemy positions had been located, the Platoon Commander called the tanks over the company tactical net and moved them from their cold position to a hot position adjacent to the Platoon. [TTP 401] As the tanks moved down the street, the Marines provided security for them from their overwatch position. [TTP 201, TTP 202] While the Platoon suppressed the enemy positions, the Platoon Commander talked the tank section onto the targets. Using multiple techniques in combination - the clock method, target reference points, and 7.62 tracer to mark targets - the Platoon Commander oriented the tanks onto their targets and the tanks proceeded to destroy the enemy positions one after another. [TTP 301, TTP 302]<sup>13</sup>*

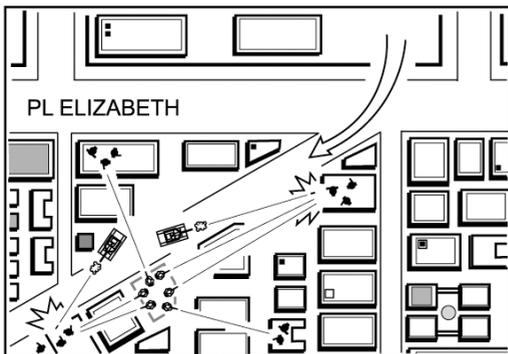


Figure 2<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Newell, Lieutenant Colonel, *Army and Marine Joint Ops*, p54

<sup>13</sup> *Tank-Infantry Fight in Fallujah*, p3

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p3

There can be no denying that the application of synergistic CAM can overmatch the enemy and in doing so reduce overall casualties, in particular those of the Infantry. Having sufficient understanding and facility to practise CAM, even at the Company/Squadron or Troop/Platoon level is essential for urban operations, as is arguably a common set of TTPs, as opposed to the current model of the RAC and Infantry writing their own separate publications however these two strands are being brought together under a common set of doctrine.<sup>15</sup> The Americans commonly understood TTPs and performed well in Fallujah. The British Army ignores these lessons at their peril.

## **Conclusion**

Unfortunately there is not the space to examine all the other relevant aspects of the use of armour in NEW DAWN, such as CASEVAC procedure, obstacle clearing and CSS support. The aim here was to use the operation in Fallujah as a starting block from which the British Army could develop a set of TTPs for using armour in an urban environment. It is not suggested that the British Army would be best served by copying these TTPs directly. Rather that we should develop common TTPs in a single publication; and that CAM is not about just being the only tool for the job<sup>16</sup> - but about giving the enemy a tactical dilemma with the use of complementing capabilities to achieve success. This will not happen without prior co-ordination, and work should now be done to enshrine some of these concepts in our doctrine and TTPs.

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- *J Gordan and B Pirnie, Everybody Wanted Tanks: Heavy forces in Operation Iraq Freedom, [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/jfq\\_pubs/1539.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/jfq_pubs/1539.pdf), Issue 39.*
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<sup>15</sup> *That set of doctrine is called Mounted Close Combat Doctrine and volume 1 is now in electronic format*

<sup>16</sup> *Army Doctrine Publication Operations*



*A U.S. ARMY M-109A6 howitzer from Alpha Battery, 3rd Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, sends a round down range during combat operations in Fallujah, Iraq. US Army Wikimedia Commons*



*US Airmen of the 386th Expeditionary Logistics Readiness Squadron load pallets of non-lethal aid onto a C-17 Globemaster at an undisclosed location in Southwest Asia for transport in support of Syrian Opposition Forces. The US government provides non-lethal aid to the opposition forces during the Syrian Civil War. Photo Sergeant George Thompson, USAF*

# The Battles for Aleppo: A Case Study

*Major MJ Suddaby SCOTS, provides an analysis of the battles for Aleppo, suggesting they are good examples of the future operations the British Army are likely to undertake.*

*The future [of war] may well not be “Son of Desert Storm”, but rather “Stepchild of Somalia and Chechnya.*

General Charles Krulak, USMC

As the Army begins the process of transformation it will no doubt consider what future warfare might look like. With globalisation and the shift to ever-expanding urbanisation, it could be postulated that fighting in the urban environment is more likely in the future than it has been in the recent past. Major Second World War urban conflicts still have much to teach us about the universal constants of urban warfare. However, it is the post-Cold War conflicts that seem most relevant to the future of warfare, fought, as they have been, in complex terrain, between hybridised adversaries and under the scrutiny of an interconnected world. The fight for control of Aleppo offers a possible insight into the type of future operations that the British Army is required to undertake.

Aleppo, a world heritage site and economic hub, is in a fist-fight between hybrid Regime and Rebel forces, each entangled within a wider civil war that has an obvious political dimension, but also a more opaque religious undertone. It is interwoven with re-emerging tribal frictions and is becoming dominated by non-state and regional proxy-state participants, each using the chaos to promote their own political and religious agendas, while the wider global community seeks ways to intervene without becoming embroiled. As each side adapts their tactics to this fluid situation, control of the city ebbs and flows as tribal alliances are made and broken. As such Aleppo is probably the most prescient illustration of where the shifting sands of future urban warfare lead.

### **Aleppo City<sup>1</sup>**

Aleppo is Syria’s largest city and its economic hub, with an estimated population, prior to the civil war, of 2,132,100,<sup>2</sup> living within 190 square kilometres, and lies 350 kilometres northwest of the capital, Damascus. The city is 120 kilometres inland from the Mediterranean Sea and 45 kilometres from the Turkish border to the north and west. Aleppo sits astride the north-south running Queiq River, which separates the old city in the east, from the new in the west. It is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world and was a strategic trading point along the ‘Silk Road’ that linked the Mediterranean with Mesopotamia and China. After the opening of the Suez Canal, Aleppo fell back on its heritage, souq-

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1 Source: UNESCO World Heritage Centre.

2 Source: 2004 Official Census.

markets<sup>3</sup> and medieval landmarks, to become one of the cultural capitals of the Middle East. Aleppo is a city with strategic and regional significance; is culturally symbolic, economically vital and central to the civil war, as *the battle of Aleppo may yet decide the fate of Syria*.<sup>4</sup>

### **Tribes<sup>5</sup>**

More than 80% of Aleppo's population is Sunni Muslim from Arab or Kurd ethnicities, and as a result of French colonial rule, Aleppo also has one of the largest Christian communities in the Middle East, making up approximately 12% of the population and reside in non-segregated quarters such as Judeidah.

### **Syrian Politics and Religion<sup>6 7 8</sup>**

When civil war broke out in 2011 it was, and is, a political struggle but where the protagonists are delineated along religious lines. President Bashar al-Assad is an Alawite Sect Muslim from the Kalbiyya tribe and hails from the mountainous village of Qardaha, north of Lebanon. The Alawite Sect is a minority<sup>9</sup> branch of Shi'a Islam and during French colonial rule were heavily recruited into the Army, giving them a power base, which since 1970, has allowed Syria to be ruled by the Alawite, al-Assad family. Add to this the complication that not only Sunnis,<sup>10</sup> but also Shiites view Alawites as un-Muslim because of their differing interpretation of Islam.<sup>11</sup> In simple terms, the Syrian conflict has become less about political freedom and more an opportunity for majority Sunnis to dominate minority Shi'a and Christian tribes that have lived together in peace for generations; with each faction backed by international players with their own agendas.

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3 *Aleppo still has the largest active covered Souq-market in the world, which runs approximately 13 km in length and trades in luxury goods from across the region.*

4 Kelly, Peter. 'Aleppo & The Shift Of The Killing Power'. *The Risky Shift.com*, Aug 13.

5 Source: UNESCO World Heritage Centre.

6 Gorzewski, Andreas. 'Religious divides deepen in Syria.' *Deutsche Welle*, Feb 2013.

7 Manfreda, Primoz. 'The Difference Between Alawites and Sunnis in Syria.' *About.com*.

8 Manfreda, Primoz. 'Religion and Conflict in Syria.' *About.com*.

9 Alawites make up approximately 12% of the Syrian population.

10 Sunnis makes up approximately 70% of the Syrian population, and 90% of the wider Muslim world.

11 Sunnis believe that the succession of the Prophet Mohammed correctly followed through his most pious companions. Shiites believe it should have been based upon bloodlines and Alawites imbue the Prophet's son – Ali bin Abu Talib – with divinity. They also celebrate Christmas and consume alcohol, which makes them un-Muslim in the eyes of the mainstream orthodox Sunni and Shi'a Sects.

**Syrian Protagonists<sup>12</sup>**

The Government, or Regime forces are made up of the Syrian Arab Army and Air Force, police, the Shabiha,<sup>13</sup> Lijan militias,<sup>14</sup> Hezbollah<sup>15</sup> and the recently formed Popular Defence Committees.<sup>16</sup> The Opposition, or Rebel forces comprise the Syrian National Coalition,<sup>17</sup> the Free Syrian Army,<sup>18</sup> Mujahedeen,<sup>19</sup> the Jabhat Al-Nursa Front,<sup>20</sup> the Ahrar ash-Sham,<sup>21</sup> as well as the nominally aligned Kurdish Popular Protection Front.<sup>22</sup> In addition, is the recent emergence of cyber-warfare through the pro-Regime Syrian Electronic Army that targets global Western and pro-Rebel servers and websites. Although this is an internal Syrian conflict, other regional players are exploiting the civil war to conduct a proxy-war for their own ends. Iran is backing al-Assad to maintain an arc of Shi'a northern states, while Saudi Arabia is backing the Opposition in the creation a Sunni arc of southern states: each as a counter to the other. Meanwhile the West is supporting the Rebels for humanitarian and democratic reasons, while Russia is supporting the Regime for trade and politics. The Christian minority is supporting the Regime as a block to a perceived threat from Islamic (Sunni) Turkey, who is in turn supporting the Rebels along religious and Western-affiliation lines. So, whilst the conflict was born out of a desire for political freedom, the complex human dynamic has seen a broad spread of tribal and religious factions converging. Add to this interference from non-state players and it becomes clear that the ongoing battles for Aleppo are far more complex than a simple popular uprising.

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12 Yazdani, Ipek. 'Rebels fighting against al-Assad rule fragmented, disorganized in Syria.' *The Huntingdon Daily News*, Sep 2012.

13 Ba'ath Party government enforcers.

14 Christian and Shi'a Muslim minority formed into militias.

15 Shi'a militant group, backed by Iran and based in neighbouring Lebanon.

16 Militia units made up of armed minorities protecting their communities and form part of the National Defence Force.

17 A political opposition council in alliance with the Free Syrian Army.

18 An armed opposition military force made up of defected members of the Syrian Armed Forces, and civilians.

19 Jihadists and foreign fighters, such as Chechens, Turks, Afghans, Libyans and Tunisians.

20 A Wahhabist (Sunni) Al Qaeda faction.

21 A Salafist (Sunni) faction.

22 A Kurdish faction, with ties to Turkey, who appear to be seeking to exploit the conflict for their own political ends.



*An FSA fighter engaged in a shootout in Aleppo. Photo Scott Bob, Voice of America, Wikimedia, released.*

### **The Battles for Aleppo<sup>23</sup>**

The situation in Aleppo remained largely contained between 2011 and mid-2012, with small anti-Assad rallies held and dispersed (often violently). Conflict was limited to Rebel bombings and localised reprisals. In July 2012 the situation changed when the Rebel coalition began a major offensive to capture Aleppo, in concert with gains made in Damascus.

### **The First Battle of Aleppo - August 2012 to May 2013**

Having consolidated their hold over most of the west and centre of the city, the Rebels were largely welcomed by the Sunni majority as liberators. So, when the Syrian Arab Army was ordered to retake the city, it realised two imperatives. First, was the need to minimise civilian casualties to facilitate the winning back of popular support. Second, was to employ elite, well-equipped forces in recognition of the symbolic and strategic importance of the city. The Republican Guard<sup>24</sup> was given the task of recapturing the west, while Syrian Special Forces were responsible for the centre, including the symbolically important and defensible Citadel.<sup>25</sup> The tactics were to form teams of around forty soldiers armed with automatic and anti-tank weapons and mobile phones, using armour, aviation and artillery in a supporting role only. The general in command was quoted as saying *we must take the terrorist-held areas, while minimising the destruction to the city*

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<sup>23</sup> *Because there is, as yet, no formal account of the conflict in Aleppo, information for this study is drawn from a broad base of media reports. This study is accurate up to Sep 2013.*

<sup>24</sup> *Exclusively Alawite, where a majority of the Army is Sunni, with mainly Alawite officers. The Republican Guard Division, 4th Division and Special Forces report directly to the Army Chief of Staff and are not part of 1,2, or 3 Corps.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ketz, Sammy. 'Urban warfare: In Aleppo, the battles for city blocks.' Times Online, Sep 2012.*

and keep the civilian population on our side.<sup>26</sup> This approach marked a shift in the tactics used previously, where artillery was employed first to ‘soften’ the Rebel-held areas before the infantry was sent in, and appears to echo lessons learned by their Russian allies in Grozny a decade before.

However, at this early stage Regime forces were unable to achieve two important goals. They could not isolate the city, to deny the Rebels access to materiel and manpower along their northern lines of communication from Turkey,<sup>27</sup> despite Regime control of the northern Minnakh Airbase.<sup>28</sup> Nor, despite the Regime’s understanding of urban warfare, could they fully dislodge Rebels from the densely-packed six-storey buildings and narrow criss-crossed alleyways that made up the Rebel-held Salaheddine, Izaa and Soukkari Districts. It is therefore likely that as the Republican Guard became increasingly frustrated at their lack of success against a mobile and popular Rebel force that their tactics became less sophisticated. The use of T-72 tanks unsupported by infantry allowed the Rebels to inflict significant losses, with Shashank Joshi, a research fellow at RUSI commenting that Rebel tactics, *are taking a serious toll on Regime armour, to a seemingly greater extent than is the case around Damascus.*<sup>29</sup> Rebel employment of snipers also created confusion amongst Regime forces, who observed that they were fighting a ‘ghost enemy’.<sup>30</sup> Also, the increasing use of indiscriminate shelling of Rebel-held areas, particularly in Salaheddine, also suggests a reversion to more traditional tactics to compensate for a lack of infantry mass and break the deadlock.

So, during the first battle of Aleppo, both sides were locked in a stalemate with Regime forces unable, despite increasingly unrestrained tactics, to make sizable gains against a unified coalition of Rebel forces that were able to use the urban terrain to their advantage. Amal Hanano, a Syrian journalist said this of Aleppo; *the death of a city is different. It is slow - each neighbourhood’s death is documented bomb by bomb, shell by shell, stone by fallen stone... the death of a city seems as if it can be halted, that the city can be saved from the clutches of destruction. But it is an illusion: the once-vibrant cities cannot be saved, so you watch, helpless, as they become ruins.*<sup>31</sup>

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26 *Ibid.*

27 Maclean, William. ‘Analysis: Syrian army faces tough battle in Aleppo.’ *Reuters*, Aug 2012.

28 *Sitting astride the Rebel lines of communication, just south of the Turkish border, the airbase was successfully under siege by Rebels.*

29 Maclean, William. ‘Analysis: Syrian army faces tough battle in Aleppo.’ *Reuters*, Aug 2012.

30 Pazira, Nelofer. ‘Syrian civil war: Inside the battle for Aleppo.’ *CBC News*, Sep 2012.

31 Hauser, Christine. ‘Aleppo’s History Under Threat.’ *The New York Times*, Dec 2012.



Doctors and medical staff treating injured rebel fighters and civilians in Aleppo.  
Photo Scott Bob, Voice of America, Wikimedia, released.

By the spring of 2013 the Republican Guard and Special Forces were withdrawn to Damascus and replaced with Sunni conscripts equipped with T-55 tanks, suggesting that as strategically significant as Aleppo was, al-Assad's priorities had switched back to the south. Tactics shifted again to shelling markets, and, for the first time, the use of air strikes, indicating that Regime forces were unable to identify Rebel targets and so attacked what they could see. During this battle Regime forces made gains, recapturing the important Citadel and the Christian neighbourhood of Judeidah, but at the same time the Rebels melted away from the western neighbourhoods to reoccupy areas cleared but not held by Government forces, effectively neutralising the Regime's gains through the application of snipers and insurgent tactics.

### **The Second Battle of Aleppo - June to August 2013**

On June 2nd Regime forces launched Operation Northern Storm in the open terrain north of Aleppo city.<sup>32</sup> The aim appeared to be to cut off the Rebel supply routes from Turkey and was dependent upon the Regime being able to break the siege of Minnakh Airbase and capture the heavily contested Shiite satellite towns of Nebul and Zahra from which to isolate Aleppo and launch a coordinated multi-axis assault into the north of the city.<sup>33</sup> The strategic importance of Operation Northern Storm

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32 Durfee, Liam, McCormick, Conor & Peisch, Stella. *The Battle for Aleppo*, Institute for the Study of War. Jun 2013.

33 *Ibid.*

was twofold. First, it would assist in the isolation of Aleppo, allowing Regime forces to attack the city from the north and south simultaneously, and second, it would cut off Rebels from their Turkish supply lines and fragment Rebel operations across the country.<sup>34</sup> The timing of this offensive was likely based upon successes in Homs Province, the injection of fresh fighters from the Iranian-backed Lebanese Hezbollah<sup>35</sup> and the newly formed National Defence Forces.<sup>36 37</sup>

A major factor in this change in strategy seems to be the success of the battle for al-Qusayr, where the Regime adapted their tactics to establish control of the open terrain surrounding the Rebel-held urban area. By breaking the siege at Wadi al-Deif Airbase, Regime forces were able to dominate the open spaces, allowing them to capture the satellite towns of Shamsin and Shinsar.<sup>38</sup> Once these towns were pacified the Regime was able to isolate al-Qusayr, conduct preparatory shelling before sending in irregular Hezbollah fighters, supported by regular Regime infantry. Ground forces, attacking on multiple penetrative thrusts, were then able to drive the Rebels into the centre, limiting their freedom of movement and isolating them from resupply and reinforcement,<sup>39</sup> forcing their withdrawal.

Another dimension to this offensive has been the Regime's ability to successfully exploit fault lines within the Rebel coalition, demonstrating that it understood how to lever tribal frictions to its benefit. The Kurdish Popular Protection Units, controlling the Shiekh Maqsood neighbourhood and areas surrounding the town of Ifreen, to the northwest, increasingly came into contact with Rebels in the territory bordering Turkey, through which the Rebel lines of communications run.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, Regime attacks against the Kurdish group ceased, suggesting that Kurdish and Regime interests were aligning, further fracturing the delicate Rebel coalition.<sup>41</sup> Also, attempts by the Iranian-backed Popular Defence Committees to broker ceasefires with the Rebels were deliberately disrupted by the Regime, ensuring that the militias remained loyal.<sup>42</sup>

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34 *Ibid.*

35 *But who were under domestic pressure to return and therefore their involvement was likely time-limited.*

36 *Made up of minority, mainly Shi'a and Christian, Popular Defence Committee militias.*

37 *Durfee, Liam, McCormick, Conor & Peisch, Stella. The Battle for Aleppo, Institute for the Study of War. Jun 2013.*

38 *Ibid.*

39 *Ibid.*

40 *Ibid.*

41 *Ibid.*

42 *Ibid.*

On June 9th, as fighting for the northern satellite towns of Nebul and Zahra began in earnest,<sup>43</sup> an Aleppo boy was killed by a Rebel faction for allegedly insulting the Prophet Mohammed.<sup>44</sup> This is presumed to have been the action of extremist foreign fighters and is likely to have further damaged relations within the increasingly uneasy Rebel coalition. On June 12th a Rebel leader requested lethal aid from America, stating that without it Aleppo would likely fall to the Regime, suggesting that the offensive was beginning to affect Rebel resupply.<sup>45</sup> By July 9th the Rebel response to the tightening Regime stranglehold came in the form of a siege of the Regime-held west of Aleppo, where Rebels began blockading western routes into the city used by civilians, effectively targeting the population, in an attempt to weaken the resolve of the Regime.<sup>46</sup> When civilians attempted to cross the front lines to buy food they were targeted by snipers, indicating that the Rebels had begun to see civilians caught in opposing territory as tacit supporters of the Regime, as if neutrality of non-combatants was no longer an option. The main crossing point in Bustan al-Qasr became known as ‘The Crossing of Death’<sup>47</sup> as Rebels used their control of the civilian food supply as a weapon. A Rebel commander was reported as stating that the tactic was aimed at government forces, but also to pressure civilians to leave the western part of the city.<sup>48</sup>

By this time the former unity of the Rebel coalition, a source of strength against the militarily superior Regime forces, was beginning to fracture. As the battle dragged on it appeared that the differing aims and motivations, particularly between the native Free Syrian Army and the jihadist fighters of the Jahbat al-Nursa Front, were becoming exposed.<sup>49</sup> Sectarianism had become a defining feature of the conflict as indigenous Rebel commanders were assassinated and the natural pluralism of the Syrians was challenged by Al Qaeda-inspired Sunni fighters intent on forcing Sharia law onto the unfortunate civilians caught within

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43 Legge, James. ‘Syria civil war: President Bashat al-Assad’s forces plan assault on rebels in Aleppo.’ *The Independent*, Jun 2013.

44 *Ibid.*

45 Durfee, Liam, McCormick, Conor & Peisch, Stella. *The Battle for Aleppo, Institute for the Study of War*. Jun 2013.

46 Solomon, Erika. ‘Syrian rebel blockade in Aleppo leaves thousands hungry: activists.’ *Reuters*, Jul 2013.

47 *Ibid.*

48 Mourtada, Hania & Saad, Hwaida. ‘Tightening Siege by Syrian Rebels Stirs Anger.’ *New York Times*, Jul 2013.

49 Ghafour, Hamida. ‘Syria: A year after the Battle of Aleppo, city still in crisis.’ *The Star.com*, Jul 2013.

the Rebel-controlled districts of the city.<sup>50</sup> The main Regime-Rebel crossing at Bustan al-Qasr was seized by Al Qaeda-backed fighters, who then blocked all food travelling into Regime controlled districts, illustrating that factions within the Rebel coalition have different motives, with each group fighting for control over money, territory or weapons.<sup>51</sup>

On 6th August Rebels captured the strategically important Minnakh Airbase, north of Aleppo, effectively ending the threat to Rebel supply lines from Turkey.<sup>52</sup> The final act was to destroy the command bunker by a suicide bomber, suggesting that jihadists played a major role in the operation.<sup>53</sup> It was also reported that the two key northern towns of Nebul and Zahra had fallen to Regime forces but that most of the open terrain around Aleppo, as well as large swathes of the city itself, still remained under Rebel control.<sup>54</sup> This suggests that Operation Northern Storm failed to break the deadlock. In Aleppo, Bustan al-Qasr had become the only crossing point for civilians to gain access to markets,<sup>55</sup> with Regime snipers shooting those risking the trip.<sup>56</sup> Rebel control of the crossing continues to shift between foreign jihadists and local brigades and unlike the unity demonstrated in the capture of Minnakh, the Rebel-controlled areas of the city have begun to break up into fiefdoms, as criminality replaces idealism.

On August 21st, Damascus was shelled with what was believed to have been chemical agents: an event heavily covered by international media, shifting focus away from Aleppo. It seems that the Regime's risky move to break the stalemate in Aleppo failed and the situation remains largely unchanged a year after the first battle commenced, with the exception of an erosion of the increasingly uneasy alliance of Rebel factions, the use of the civilian food supply as a military lever and the widespread indiscriminate targeting of civilians.

## Observations

Notwithstanding the unresolved nature of these battles, there are nonetheless germane observations that can be drawn thus far, which serve to highlight the changing nature of urban warfare.

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50 *Ibid.*

51 *Ibid.*

52 *Owels, Khaled Yacoub & Karouny, Mariam. 'Syria rebels strike Assad's stronghold, seize airport.' The Daily Star, Aug 2013.*

53 *Ibid.*

54 *Ibid.*

55 *Smith, Hannah Lucinda. 'Aleppo: a city where snipers shoot children.' BBC News, Aug 2013.*

56 *Ibid.*



Map of Syria created by the Central Intelligence Agency in 2004, Wikimedia, ID g7460 ct001190

**Doctrine and Tactics:** An immediate observation is how both forces have adapted their doctrine and tactics as the battles for Aleppo have taken unanticipated paths. The lessons learned by the Regime during the battle of al-Qusayr are a case in point. Regime forces realised that to control the urban environment they needed first to dominate its surrounds, isolating the Rebels before attacking in a phased manner, with targeted indirect fires, in conjunction with experienced irregulars supported by follow-on infantry. In the same way, the Rebels adapted by morphing from a ground-holding posture to a more fluid guerrilla approach, once they recognised that they needed only avoid defeat, while the Regime required a quantifiable victory.

- **The Siege:** *During the first battle, Regime forces failed to invest the city, which allowed continued resupply of Rebel forces from Turkey. This is very likely to have contributed to the Regime's inability to consolidate their early successes. In the second battle, and after lessons learned from al-Qusayr, Regime forces recognised the need to isolate Rebel forces, which was partially successful. However, the successful siege by Rebel forces of Minnakh Airbase negated the Regime's ability to successfully dominate the open spaces to the north, which would have cut off all Rebel forces throughout Syria. The controversial tactic of laying siege to the civilians located in Regime-held territory may prove to be counter-productive as it is unlikely to cleanse the area of non-combatants. Aleppo proves the need to effectively isolate an urban environment before conducting operations within it. Regime forces failed to recognise that need in the first battle and then were unsuccessful in their investment during the second. Rebel forces were far more effective in the application of this tactic both at Minnakh and against civilians.*
- **Clear and Hold:** *During the first battle, the Regime employed fewer, but better trained and equipped (as well as more loyal) troops, in the hope that small, well-motivated teams could break Rebel control of the city. However, despite a clear understanding of the nature of urban tactics, Regime forces were unable to hold what they had cleared; presumably due to a lack of mass. This, coupled with a city left open allowed the Rebels to simply reoccupy those areas cleared, negating much of the gains made and in effect, causing the protagonists to simply swap sides of the river-delineated city. The Rebels were unable to dislodge the larger Regime forces, but equally the Regime lacked the mass to capitalise on their gains. The need therefore to hold ground taken, albeit manpower intensive, is clear.*

- Armour:** *The need for a combined arms approach to the employment of armour in the urban environment is as evident in Aleppo as it has been in almost every examination of modern urban warfare. However, a notable change in recent conflicts, including Aleppo, is the paradigm shift in the perception of armoured power and its vulnerability to amateur combatants. Peter Kelly<sup>57</sup> suggests that the modern urban battlespace has given the hybrid adversary the opportunity to exploit the vulnerability of armour, particularly when tanks become isolated from their infantry protection because the fear factor has gone. Kelly likens this recent phenomenon to the seismic shift that took place at the Battle of Agincourt, 1415, when the French Knight aristocracy (the invulnerable armoured cavalry elite of their day) were defeated by poorly trained, low-birth peasants armed with longbows. Kelly argues that the modern day equivalent is the amateur insurgent armed with a cheap, prolific rocket propelled grenade, but who more importantly, has lost the fear to use it against the elite military might of the state. The utility of armour in the urban environment is undisputed, but one of its most powerful attributes - psychological 'shock effect' - may have been lost forever.*
- Small Team Tactics:** *The Rebels ably demonstrated just how effective small teams conducting hit-and-run tactics can be in convoluted city spaces. Complex ambushes and sniper fire did much to sap the will of Regime forces, forcing them to change tactics, from those that were initially working to a more heavy-handed and ultimately counter-productive approach. During the first battle, the Regime's use of small, mutually supporting and well-coordinated teams cleared more of the city than at any other time. But, despite this these tactics were perceived to be failing, which was possibly because they were employed without follow-on forces to hold cleared areas. These elite forces were also withdrawn and replaced by less well trained Sunni regulars, which is likely to have allowed the Rebels to exploit this roulement to force the Regime back into more comfortable and indiscriminate stand-off tactics that played well to discredit them.*

**Force Multipliers:** During the first battle both forces lacked mass to achieve a decisive victory. Despite the Regime putting two elite divisional-sized forces<sup>58</sup> into the city, they were still unable to hold ground and turn a methodical

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57 Kelly, Peter. 'Aleppo & The Shift Of The Killing Power'. *The Risky Shift.com*, Aug 13.

58 *The Republican Guard Division and possibly up to the three special forces brigades available.*

clearance into victory. Equally, the much smaller Rebel force lacked the mass to reinforce any tactical successes. For the second battle, the Regime sought to mitigate this with a sizable Hezbollah<sup>59</sup> force of experienced irregulars and locally raised militias. To confront this, the Rebels switched tactics and utilised jihadist extremist terror tactics as their own force multiplier. The Regime's successful exploitation of factional dynamics worked to isolate elements of the Rebel forces and keep the local militias in line, whilst Rebel control of the food supply, are also examples of less tangible attempts at force multiplication. The fact that the Regime was unable to multiply its force to create the mass necessary to capture Aleppo does not denude from its necessity. Dedicated follow-on forces, intelligence and surveillance feeds, coordinating and combining arms, within an achievable endstate are all methods of force multiplication which the Regime could have applied to Aleppo.

**Command and Control:** During the first battle Regime forces demonstrated sound battlespace management and applied control measures to avoid fratricide. They decentralised command to small, distributed teams who were able to exploit tactical successes and the limited use of indirect fires suggests that restraint and competent command authority was being exercised. The Rebels also achieved notable unity despite their tribal structure, working in concert to achieve operational objectives, such as the capture of Minnakh Airbase. However, Regime forces, despite sound command and control, were unable to leverage it into actions that lead to operational success. Rebel forces demonstrated a better understanding of operational art, while Regime forces were unable to turn well-orchestrated tactical actions into decisive operational effects.

**Logistics:** It is a well-established fact that urban warfare consumes far greater level of manpower and materiel than operations in other types of terrain. During Operation Northern Storm, Regime forces were able to successfully disrupt, if only temporarily, the flow of logistics to Rebels in Aleppo, demonstrating how dependent even a hybrid force is on resupply. It becomes clear therefore that logistic support is a strategic issue, whether to maintain combat capability, or prevent a humanitarian crisis (or indeed create one). If the Regime had been successful during the second battle in isolating the Rebels from their supply chain, it is likely that Aleppo would now be under Government control. Indeed, the lines of communication from Turkey are so

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59 *Possibly up to 2,000 men, with their experience and loyalty acting an additional force multiplier.*

critical to the Rebel coalition that severing them could have delivered the Regime a strategic success. In modern urban conflicts logistics is becoming less the simple enabler and more a strategic effect in its own right.

**The Human Space:** The second battle clearly demonstrated just how much of a living, social organism a city really is: even in war. A year after intense fighting and a significant element of the city's population remains. Conventional Regime forces have evolved to become hybrid as they have absorbed non-state players and civilian militias. Shi'a and Christian minorities have reluctantly taken sides to protect themselves in confirmation of Hills' view that no city is neutral,<sup>60</sup> meanwhile, Rebels deny food to civilians, while Regime forces attack them. Rebel factions are dissolving into criminal gangs, while extremist religious doctrine is being forced onto an unwilling populace as more jihadists flock to the fight. And in amongst all this, students go to school and shopkeepers open their shutters. Aleppo proves beyond doubt just how tough a conventional, even indigenous force can find operating amongst such an inestimable web of human loyalties, fears and desires. The idea of 'war amongst the people'<sup>61</sup> was never more apt than when applied to urban spaces.

The observations from the battles for Aleppo help to provide an insight into challenges faced by Armies when required to operate in the urban environment.

The key outcomes from this case study are; the effectiveness of investment, the need for follow-on forces, the will and resources to see the operation through; adaptive tactics that are specific to the environment, coupled with a defined endstate; and the ability to influence the population.

Aleppo represents a very real glimpse at the nature of the future battlespace, within a fourth generation context, where the technical superiority of Armies are blunted and where popular support is more critical than a decisive victory at any cost. This case study offers insights into the likely direction of future warfare that paints a picture of increasing layers of complexity where the intended transparency of the revolution in military affairs does not reach.

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60 Hills, Alice. 'Deconstructing Cities: Military Operations in the Urban Era', *The Journal of Conflict Studies*, 2002, p 101.

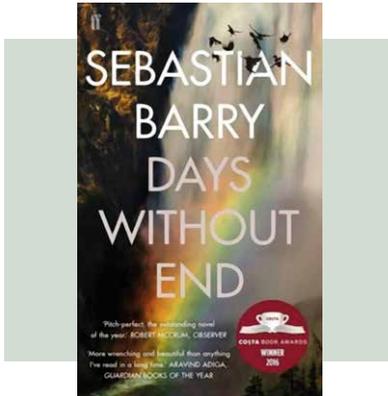
61 Smith, Rupert. *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern Age*. 2005. In it he suggests that 'Industrial War' ending with a clear winner is over, to be replaced by wars amongst the people, where there are no clear victors or decisive outcomes.



*Wounded civilians arrive at a hospital in Aleppo during the Syrian Civil War, October 2012.  
Photo Scott Bobb, Voice of America News, Wikimedia*

## Days Without End

Sebastian Barry



**2016, Faber & Faber, pbk, pp 259,  
ISBN 978-0-571-27701-8, £13.99**

This is a fictional account of what it was to have been involved in the US military, both before, during and after the civil war. The focus is on Corporal Thomas McNulty, Troop B, 2nd Cavalry, together with his comrades, sergeants and commanders, especially Major Neale, his squadron commander. As with a *Long Long Way*, (Barry's narrative of junior command and leadership in the context of the First World War), this account is also about leadership and ethics in the context of the US's first ever counter insurgency against the Indian population and then in the more conventional war with the Confederates.

During the former, the notion of ethical conduct is all but absent. This was simply an unwritten agreement that 'an eye was for an eye, a tooth for a tooth', which involved the wholesale massacre of entire communities as well as tribal groups and cavalry sub-units, revenge being the order of the day. The Christian church took no part at all beyond prayers over the burial of the dead cavalrymen – the bodies of dead Sioux Indians desecrated as a norm so as to 'prevent' any afterlife..

Within the conventional war that typified the Civil War the rule

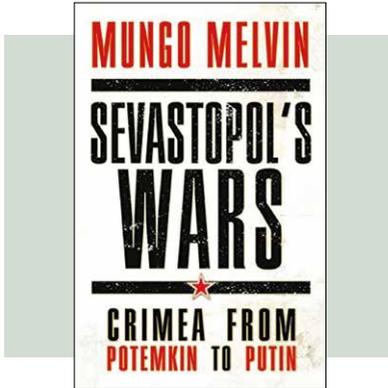
of law of armed conflict as is now accepted appears almost absent. The Confederates are massacred in their thousands and do as much against the Unionists. Prisoners of war are treated with the utmost harshness, including summary executions of entire black units (by the 'Rebs'/Confederates), starvation, a complete absence of medical attention to the wounded and very little in the way of shelter at sub-zero temperatures. Unsurprisingly, disease was rife.

Sebastian Barry tells all this as if he was indeed Corporal McNulty, of Irish origin. He speaks in the language of the mid-nineteenth century. McNulty is a homosexual transvestite, with a very deep love for his 'buddy' John Cole. There is a remarkable tolerance of sex, whether with Indian squaws or with other troopers - nobody seemed to mind too much - perhaps little has really changed? So in all, this is a fascinating social portrayal of those times. True or false? I have no idea but Barry's research seems to me to be most convincing. As with *A Long Long Way*, this is well worth a read.

**David Benest**

## Sevastopol's Wars: Crimea from Potemkin to Putin

Mungo Melvin



**Osprey, 2017, hbk, pp 752,  
ISBN 978-1-4728-0794-6, £30**

This city has been destroyed twice. Sevastopol was founded by Rear Admiral Thomas Mackenzie, a former midshipman in the Royal Navy, on behalf of Catherine the Great at the time of the annexation of Crimea in 1783. After its second destruction in 1941-4, Crimea was granted to Ukraine after World War 2 in 1954 and then re-annexed by President Putin in 2014 for the Russian Federation, much to the delight of its current residents. Leo Tolstoy cut his teeth as a writer there when serving as an artillery officer in the Russian Army - a perfect example that the pen can indeed be mightier than the sword.

This is an account of the place of Sevastopol in three major conflicts: the Crimean War of 1853 -6; the Russian civil wars of 1905 and 1917; and its part in the Second World War 1941-44. The book divides into four parts accordingly: first the founding of Sevastopol; then the Crimean War; Part 3 examines Sevastopol as a city of revolution; and Part 4 examines the period of Soviet rule and Nazi occupation. This has been a huge undertaking and Major General (retired) Mungo Melvin has every right to be very proud of his achievement. BAR readers will, I hope, forgive me if I focus on the British dimension to this epic.

The Crimean war can hardly be portrayed as our finest hour. Our senior military leadership under Lord Raglan was weak. Melvin is judicious in his claim that the political aim of invading Crimea as a 'grand raid' was about as vague as the purpose behind the 'raid' on Darwin and Goose Green in 1982 (p 139). Or in Raglan's words, 'The descent on the Crimea is decided upon more in deference to the views of the British government than to any information in the possession of the naval and military authorities, either as to the extent of the enemy's forces, or their state of preparation'.

It has to be emphasised that the Crimean war was in essence a French-led conflict (120,000 troops), with the British Army playing second fiddle (30,000). Fifty nine regiments have the battle honour 'Sevastopol' emblazoned on their colours to this day, the Brigade of Guards alone having lost some 2,162 lives. Conditions, especially in the winter months were appalling, given the denial of adequate shelter, clothing, rations, medical support and organisation. A British railway was built, to be precise the Grand Crimean Central Railway, so as to overcome these huge logistic problems and given the appalling state of the roads. The British casualty figures suggest that 40,462 is the total: 2,755 killed in action; 1,847 died of wounds; 17,580 died of disease; and 18,280 were wounded in action. Small wonder that the Army Staff College was established as a direct consequence in 1858 so as never again to endure such a calamity.

Episodes such as the *Charge of the Light Brigade* (pp 197 - 201) have grown in notoriety through the media. Melvin provides a more exact interpretation, the 'blame game' all too evident as senior officers (Raglan, Lucan, Cardigan) did their best to pass the buck downwards to the luckless Captain Louis Edward

Nolan. British casualties (278, of which 156 killed of a total strength of 673) compare also to Goose Green, in total 255, admittedly on both sides. As the French commander, Bosquet, was to remark: '*C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre. C'est de la folie*', (It's magnificent, but it isn't war. It's madness).

The 1854 battles of the River Alma (we won, 20 September), Balaklava (inconclusive, 25 October) and Inkerman (an allied bloody victory, 5 November) are all analysed in detail as are the major bombardments of Sevastopol on 17 October 1854, 9 April, 6 June, 17 June, 17 August and 5 September 1855, together with the Russian withdrawal on 9 September, perhaps the only manoeuvre of their war that was achieved with any degree of efficiency.

Other notable visitors to Sevastopol were British in the employment of the Russian Empire, included John Upton, a British civil engineer, who did much for its design between the 1830s and 1851. Charles George Gordon, later martyred in Khartoum, was also present as a young Engineer officer, deeply critical of all he saw. And all this was being reported by William Russell of *The*

*Times*, with a circulation of 40,000 each day, granting for the first time direct public exposure to the many iniquities of this war. In more recent times both Winston Churchill (and later his wife, Clementine) and Field Marshal Alanbrooke visited during the Yalta conference of February 1945. The latter's remark was apposite: 'it was very strange how history can repeat itself under a different guise'.

The Royal Navy also deserves a mention for its part in the period 1918/19 at the termination of the First World War. But as Melvin (pp 385 - 398) makes very clear 'half-thought-through and half-hearted measures may often result in complete failures'. That said, the exile of the surviving members of the Russian royal family was achieved, as well as the evacuation of the German occupiers. Order was a serious consideration - enter the Royal Marines on 1 December 1918 from nearby forts on Internal Security (IS) duties; British forces not seen in Sevastopol since the Russian withdrawal of 1856. Support for the 'White' Russians against the Bolsheviks was assured - to some extent. But once more, the French, albeit 'weak and wobbly' (and Greeks) held the ring, not the British. But by 15 April 1919, Bolshevik troops had entered Sevastopol regardless. Hence the next battle for Sevastopol, led by the Royal Navy over 15/17 April 1919, occupying a defence line in complete

reversal to that of the allied attacks of 1854-5, RN close air support much in evidence. The French mutinied in support of the Reds. British troops were 'neither engaged nor risked at Sevastopol' (p 397). But mutiny also broke out on British ships.

There is much here of great military interest, such as the devastating effectiveness of the Anglo-French rifled small arms (the Minie), the scale of the artillery counter-battery duels and the vital role played by the Royal Engineers. Senior officers were found wanting on both sides, notably Prince Menshikov, the Russian commander-in-chief, dismissed in February 1855 and Lieutenant General Sir John Fox Burgoyne, the strategic advisor to Raglan, recalled to London in February 1855 also.

General Melvin tells this and so much more with tremendous aplomb and a close eye out for the more bizarre aspects of coalition warfare, for the many distortions on both sides so as to 'save face' when things went wrong, as they often did. His cross referencing to more recent times is often illuminating. His maps and illustrations are excellent. In all this is a cracking read and must go to paperback at the earliest opportunity.

**David Benest OBE**

**The views expressed herein (including editorial content) are those of the author concerned and do not necessarily conform to official policy.**

