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“People Make the City,” Executive Summary

Joint Urban Operations
Observations and Insights from
Afghanistan and Iraq

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Summary

Introduction

Today's strategic environment implies an obligation to preserve innocent life when possible and to rebuild that which war destroys. Somalia and East Timor, Afghanistan and Iraq: Recent contingencies demonstrate that cities, towns, and villages are the primary focus of that destruction and reconstruction. It is there that national and local economies are centered. It is from those concentrations of humanity that governance originates. It is men and women in urban ports, airfields, or warehouse complexes who distribute aid in times of need. It is from cities that modern communications come and to cities that students go to obtain higher education. Urban areas are the keys to nations "because that's where all the people are,"¹ and it is people who make nations just as they make cities.²

The objective of this study was to reveal tools that will better enable military and civilian alike to meet national policy objectives best through more effective conduct of urban combat and restoration.

¹ Lau (1998).

² This turn of phrase and the title of this monograph derive from the following quotation: "Men make the city, and not walls or ships with no men inside them" (Thucydides, 1972, p. 530). Thucydides uses "men" to distinguish between his soldiers (and other individuals to a lesser extent) and what are felt to be the less important, nonhuman components of the city that he addresses. "Men" still pertains to coalition soldiers in its modern application (and, by extension, those in other organizations aiding in the recovery and transition of Afghanistan and Iraq), but now the expression encompasses individuals of both sexes who serve in military (and other) organizations.

To do so, the study drew heavily on written material and interviews pertaining to OEF (Afghanistan) and OIF. Written information used includes thousands of pages of hard-copy and electronic material, much of it from military personnel still serving in theater at the time of its writing. Interviews included those with members of the U.S., UK, and Australian armed forces and civilians working to reconstruct Iraq. The military personnel represent the four service arms and both regular and special operations organizations.

The time frame for the study corresponds to two collection phases. Phase I was conducted from October 2003 to April 2004, while phase II was conducted during three months, from July 2004 to September 2004. The results of a third phase of the study will be published under separate cover.

Three Overarching Synthesis Observations

Drawing from both the written sources and the interviews, we present three overarching observations that are particularly relevant in demonstrating the character or influence of joint urban undertakings.

The "Three-Block War" Is the Reality During Modern Urban Operations

Former Commandant of the Marine Corps General Charles Krulak once described urban operations in terms of what he called the three-block war. A unit operating in a built-up area could find itself providing support to the indigenous population (block one), helping to restore or maintain stability (block two), and fighting an armed foe in force-on-force combat (block three). Further, these events could occur simultaneously and on contiguous blocks. The metaphor was found to be a valid one by those in the field. Marine and soldier, U.S. and UK service representative alike recalled General Krulak's model and declared that it accurately depicted the scope of challenges that a force finds itself confronting in villages, towns, and cities during combat operations. The difficulty is that military forces are not staffed or equipped to handle concurrently the myriad tasks encompassed by the three blocks.

Therefore, the three-block war not only presents a planning challenge, but also constitutes a resource-allocation nightmare.

The Importance of Orchestrating Urban Military and Civil Activities in Support of Strategic Objectives Is Fundamental to National and Coalition Success

Given that these modern ground forces are allocated personnel and materiel sufficient only for combat or supporting forces conducting a fight, the activities of other agencies capable of bringing further elements of national power to bear should be well orchestrated with those in the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD). This was not the case during early operations in 2003 Iraq. The delineation of responsibilities and orchestration of capabilities between DoD and other federal, nongovernmental, or private volunteer organizations was unsatisfactory. Improvement on the part of all participants is called for.

Urban Operations Increasingly Characterize the General Character of U.S. and Coalition Undertakings

World urbanization (approximately half of the world's population now resides in urban areas) and the force-projection character of the U.S. armed forces increasingly means that virtually any military action will involve activities in built-up areas. Ports and airfields are fundamental to force projection. Urban operations are almost inevitable, as these are often adjacent to, or embedded in, larger urban areas and, in fact, are inherently urban in character themselves. Further, the importance of cities as social, economic, diplomatic, cultural, transportation, and other types of hubs means that coalition objectives will generally require military forces to conduct operations in these areas. The complexity of such undertakings—dealing with heterogeneous demographic groups, maintaining infrastructure support, and coordinating media requirements, to name but three—is far greater in densely packed urban environs. Therefore, this concentration of demands will also come to be the norm for military and other leaders. However, there is good news amid these challenges. Such density and complexity are rarely found in any other type of environment. Thus, a force qualified to meet such demands is likely able to apply its expertise and accomplish its missions virtually anywhere.

Twenty-Five Synthesis Observations and Insights

Beyond the three overarching observations, we provide 25 other observations and highlights organized using the joint urban doctrine operational construct of understand, shape, engage, consolidate, and transition (USECT). These five phases of an urban operation were introduced to joint doctrine in the September 2002 JP 3-06, *Doctrine for Joint Urban Operations*.³ Their definitions are summarized as follows:

- **Understand**—Understand the nature of the conflict, the enemy, the battlefield, and the nature of the indigenous population and culture.⁴
- **Shape**—Create favorable conditions for the engage and consolidate phases. Influence the strategic setting, control of the physical environment, civilian population, and red options in ways favorable to friendly-force success while increasing blue options.⁵
- **Engage**—Take action against a hostile force or to influence a political situation or natural or humanitarian predicament favorably.⁶
- **Consolidate**—Protect what has been gained. Restore security and infrastructure.⁷
- **Transition**—Return control to civilian authorities.⁸

Here, we list the observations and insights in list form; the main document expands on each one.

³ Joint Chiefs of Staff (2002).

⁴ Joint Chiefs of Staff (2002, pp. II-8–II-10).

⁵ Joint Chiefs of Staff (2002, pp. II-10–II-11). The authors found that shaping activities are better envisioned as beginning before the initiation of operations and continuing through the transition phase rather than being seen as supporting only the engage and consolidate elements of the USECT framework. *Red* and *blue* refer to enemy and friendly forces, respectively. The nomenclature is drawn from the colors used to represent the adversarial forces during most U.S. military exercises.

⁶ Joint Chiefs of Staff (2002, p. II-12).

⁷ Joint Chiefs of Staff (2002, pp. II-12–II-13).

⁸ Joint Chiefs of Staff (2002, p. II-13).

Observations and Insights: Understand

- At a minimum, transition to civil authority, not actions on the objective, should be the point from which to initiate backward planning; it will often be necessary to look even deeper in time.
- It is essential to consider the second- and higher-order effects of actions taken during urban operations. Those effects can be counterintuitive.
- Studies of former urban operations, most notably OEF and OIF, demonstrate that there is a need to modify U.S. joint and service intelligence processes and organizations, acquisition, training, support procedures, and doctrine.
- Irregular warfare, like urban operations, is very much influenced by noncombatants. Lessons from the former can be of value in addressing the latter.
- Decentralization, and therefore good junior leadership, is essential to urban operations mission accomplishment. However, decentralization can make it more difficult to gain compliance within one's own force, especially in the normally highly heterogeneous urban environment.
- Urban combat operations confront commanders with a “dilemma of force.”

Observations and Insights: Shape

- Shaping of noncombatant, enemy, and other urban perceptions should be designed, war-gamed, and conducted as a campaign.
- Management of expectations is critical to successful shaping.
- Cultural understanding is key to every aspect of urban operations success.
- The extent to which the military is to be a social-engineering tool should be determined prior to operations.
- There is a call for an effective way of measuring shaping effort effectiveness.

- The United States needs to assess initial indigenous population perceptions better. Its forces should be prepared to react appropriately to changes in attitude.

Observations and Insights: Engage

- “Speak softly and carry a big stick” is sometimes good advice during urban operations, though the stick has to be applied with good judgment.
- Regular–special operations force fratricide in urban areas remains a significant threat.
- Contractors play a fundamental role in urban operations. Their status and roles require better definition.
- The effects of urban environments on vehicle design, aviation operations, and system acquisition in general have for too long received insufficient attention.

Observations and Insights: Consolidate

- The greatest obstacles to accomplishing strategic objectives may come after urban combat.
- The U.S. military could better capitalize on the expertise of coalition members.
- Money and its management are key to urban operations success.
- The organization or alignment of military and civil reconstruction organizations should parallel that of their indigenous counterparts.
- Consolidation should begin when urban operations are initiated, which, given the prevalence of urban operations, is cause to reconsider the traditional perceptions about command functions.

Observations and Insights: Transition

- Coalition members should be aware of possible “mutinies” by some indigenous elements as established departure dates or other critical events approach.

- Though it may not be feasible because of political constraints, urban stability operations should be driven by an end state, not an end date.
- Beware the insurgency-to-criminal evolution.
- Balance short- and long-term perspectives. The challenges of today may be veiling those of tomorrow.

Selected Tactical Observations and Insights

The focus of this analysis is at the operational and strategic levels. However, some tactical observations have direct operational or strategic impact; in fact, in some cases, they underlie the operational and strategic implications discussed. The full list of such observations is included in the main document organized by the USECT construct; here, we highlight one example from each, with the exception of Transition:

- Vehicle tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) differ in an urban environment (understand).
- Maneuver units need to be more comfortable with human exploitation teams (HETs) and psychological operations (PSYOP) capabilities (shape).
- Urban engagement ranges are short; training should reflect this (engage).
- The intimidation value of any method erodes quickly with use (consolidate).

The Street Ahead: How the Past Should Influence Preparations for the Future

This concluding section considers how the joint urban doctrine, integrating concept, master plan, and those events might be modified given the observations and insights collected and analyzed in this research effort. It covers three areas: (1) the concept and master plan for fundamental conceptualizations of urban operations and related approaches

to addressing the future; (2) how those approaches influence service, joint, multinational, and interagency cooperation and what changes might be beneficial; and (3) specific elements meriting inclusion in future drafts of the concept and master plan.

Concept and Master Plan Conceptualizations and Approaches

JP 3-06 is generally well conceived, but its orientation is too adversary-centric. We are not arguing for devoting less attention to finding ways to defeat an urban foe. Rather, we suggest that the scope of the concept be expanded to account better for those aspects of the three-block war (or, at the operational level, of stability and support operations) that may not include a foe or in which enemy activity is not of preeminent importance.

A second area that would benefit from such broadening is that involving conceptualization of the urban environment itself. The doctrine, concept, and related materials recognize the mutual importance of the *physical* topography (used here to refer to inanimate elements of the environment, such as buildings and infrastructure hardware) and urban *human* features, but the focus is too great on the former.

Third, the doctrine as outlined in JP 3-06 and the concepts created for implementing it and carrying it forward in time (USECT) are little alike, even though they have a lot in common. A superior construct may come along. But until that time, it would be helpful to employ the USECT construct to simplify what is inherently an already extremely challenging undertaking, given the inherent complexity of urban environments.

Finally, urban areas are nodes, center points with tentacles that reach out to influence areas beyond their limits. Those tentacles range from physical manifestations (such as roads, tracks, and air routes) to less concrete manifestations, such as economic influence and political governance. Although this is common knowledge, few military sources investigate the nature of these beyond-the-city relationships and their influences on combat and postcombat operations. Recent events in Brčko, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in Baghdad offer excellent case studies that would serve both joint urban doctrine and future concepts well.

Orchestrating Service, Joint, Multinational, and Interagency Resources

The importance of interagency cooperation is directly related to these dual elements of human primacy and cities as network components. However, there is too little guidance for the numerous agencies that have vital roles in seizing, controlling, and restoring urban environments. Although the lack of interagency guidance is frequently little more than an annoyance or point of disgruntlement in other environments, it is a crippling shortfall in towns and cities.

Many of the changes suggested by urban operations during OEF and OIF, such as making major modifications to current intelligence procedures, should be joint and interagency cooperative efforts. In particular, the full development of shaping campaigns as a concept and the actual writing of those campaign plans requires service and interagency collaboration. Developing concepts for determining and modeling second- and higher-order effects and fielding those concepts facilitating backward planning from an end state as defined in terms of strategic and transition-driven objectives will likewise demand knowledgeable oversight and involvement by multiple agencies and services.

Specific Areas in Need of Attention

Drawing on the research, we highlight five specific areas in need of attention:

- There is a need to expand the concept of consolidation to one that overlaps all aspects of preparation, execution, and postcombat activities during an urban operation.
- Shaping campaigns should incorporate the capabilities of entire commands in support of civil affairs and related efforts to win the indigenous population's trust and confidence.
- Military training and education should be expanded to include greater instruction on phase 4 responsibilities.⁹

⁹ Phase 4 incorporated the postcombat aspects of U.S. Central Command's (USCENTCOM's) campaign plan, with phase 3 being the primary combat phase. Use of "phase 4" in discussions about OIF therefore generally refers to stability or support matters related to Iraq's recovery.

- Command and staff functions should be adapted to meet the demands of urban operations complexity and density better.
- Systems should be designed, developed, and acquired that are better suited for urban operations. Specifications should keep urban operations in mind.