Chapter One
INTRODUCTION

The likelihood that U.S. military forces will fight in cities is increasing. There are many reasons for this trend: continued urbanization and population growth; a new, post–Cold War U.S. focus on support and stability operations; and a number of new political and technological incentives for U.S. adversaries to resort to urban warfare.

As urbanization rapidly increases around the globe, urban conflict is also likely to rise. When rural populations migrate to cities, the guerrilla forces that depend on them for food, information, concealment, and general support must follow.\(^1\) Press attention is easier to get in the city for terrorists seeking media exposure.

The realities of the post–Cold War security environment and the current goals of the U.S. National Security Strategy make it more likely that our military forces will operate in cities. The end of the Cold War has already produced a dramatic increase in U.S. deployments for peace, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief operations. Between 1945 and 1989, the Army conducted two large peace operations—Dominican Republic and Egypt—and since then no fewer than six such operations (Iraq, Somalia, Haiti, Macedonia, Bosnia, Bosnia, Bosnia).

and the Sinai). At the same time, support and stability operations frequently take place in towns, villages, and cities because political, economic, and cultural nodes are located in urban areas.

There are several political incentives for U.S. adversaries to fight in cities. Many adversaries believe that the American public has an antiseptic view of war, an unrealistic expectation that it can be waged with minimal casualties. The memory of the clean “Nintendo” victory during the Persian Gulf War is still fresh. The recent victory of Operation Allied Force in Serbia was achieved without a single American combat casualty. Adversaries believe that the U.S. public’s misplaced confidence in high-technology weapons increases our sensitivity to casualties. This sensitivity is viewed as an Achilles heel because the infliction of a sufficient number of American casualties has the potential to undermine domestic political support for military action. This is especially true for operations that the American public perceives as involving less-than-vital national interests.

Fighting in cities offers an adversary a way to inflict higher casualties. The presence of noncombatants in urban areas usually requires more stringent rules of engagement (ROE), which prohibit or limit the effectiveness of heavy weapons such as tanks, artillery, and airpower. Adversaries can use cities to avoid these heavy weapons and “even” the odds of facing U.S. military might by fighting infantry-versus-infantry battles.

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3 NATO’s 33,000-sortie, 11-week air campaign scored a near-perfect safety record, with no pilot losses due to hostile fire. Columnist Bradley Graham wrote that the focus on minimizing casualties altered tactics and strategy. Minimizing casualties played a part in the decision to hold ground troops out of the fight, to rely on air strikes, and to keep attack planes at altitudes above 15,000 feet during the early weeks of the campaign, out of range of some Yugoslav air defenses. See Bradley Graham, “War Without ‘Sacrifice’ Worries Warriors,” The Washington Post, June 29, 1999.


5 Hypothetical adversaries in high-level wargames are already exploring the advantage of using an asymmetric strategy to fight future U.S. forces. In recent Army After Next
An enemy’s desire to avoid U.S. heavy forces will only increase as the
U.S. Army completes its Force XXI modernization to a more lethal
force. Because urban warfare is primarily an infantry fight, it is a
form of warfare that lends itself least to the application of advanced
technology. Force XXI will not significantly increase the lethality of
the average infantryman, and infantrymen remain vulnerable to
enemy small arms fire. Force XXI modernization will increase the
firepower of armor and artillery, but in many cases large-caliber
cannons and rockets are not discriminating enough for the ROE
typically exercised on the urban battlefield. Even when these
weapons can be used, they require dismounted infantry protection.

On top of this, the main advantage that Force XXI modernization is
seeking to provide—superior situational awareness—is seriously
degraded by urban terrain. The radios, computers, sensors, and
communications equipment that make up the Force XXI tactical
internet use wireless transmissions to establish situational awareness
among mobile users. Buildings, walls, and other obstructions in
urban terrain reflect, absorb, and block communications signals.

Given the demographic trends, political incentives, and technologi-
cal limitations described above, it is imperative that doctrine be
sound. At the present time, U.S. doctrine on urban operations—also
called military operations on urbanized terrain (MOUT)—is based in
part on historical case studies that occurred 18 years or more in the

wargames, Red military forces sought to use urban terrain to fight blue forces. See
Sean D. Naylor, “A Lack of City Smarts? War Game Shows Future Army Unprepared

The U.S. Army is currently being modernized into Army XXI, a more lethal, digitized
force. Heavy platforms benefit the most from this digitization, light forces less so. For
example, airpower and heavy ground forces have added a plethora of precision-
guided munitions (PGMs), enhanced sensors, and C4I systems, whereas dismounted
light infantrymen have only so much muscle to carry their basic load. The benefits of
standoff precision fire accrue mostly to those platforms with the communication and
information capability necessary to call for real-time support.

The most effective way to conduct MOUT is with combined arms teams of infantry,
armor, and engineers, but in tactical situations tanks should primarily be used as a
supporting arm for the infantry because of the threat of rocket-propelled grenades
(RPGs). Tanks should be used to seal off city blocks, repel counterattacks, and provide
covering fire along streets. During movement, tanks should move behind their own
infantry at a distance beyond the range of enemy antitank weapons. See Timothy L.
Thomas, “The Battle for Grozny: Deadly Classroom for Urban Combat,” Parameters,
Summer 1999.
past.\(^8\) For example, the Marine manual *Military Operations on Urbanized Terrain (MOUT)* outlines lessons drawn from 22 battles in “modern” urban warfare history between 1943 and 1982. This is in part attributable to the MOUT manual’s reliance on one particular report, *Modern Experience in City Combat*, by R. D. McLaurin et al. (1987).

Many authors are suggesting that it is time to update these lessons on MOUT by looking at more recent historical cases.\(^9\) Lessons from urban operations that predate the early 1980s may be irrelevant or less important today.\(^10\) Urban operations now seem more probable in missions other than conventional large-scale war—missions that


Introduction

are variously labeled low-intensity conflicts (LIC), operations other than war (OOTW), support and stability operations (SSOs), and small-scale contingencies (SSCs).

For example, research based on MOUT before 1982 implies that the number one factor explaining attacker “success” is isolation of the defender. But experience within the last ten years indicates that isolation of the defender may no longer be feasible. Rising urban populations and a decline in U.S. force structure make it increasingly difficult to isolate very large cities.11

Political considerations that restrict the use of combat force now complicate urban operations. World War II combat was usually high intensity, with little regard for noncombatant casualties, but today restrictive rules of engagement (ROE) often limit the application of power when noncombatants are present.

The objective of this monograph is to conduct an exploratory case study analysis to determine whether recent changes in the nature of urban operations are significant and what, if any, the policy implications are for U.S. Army doctrine. Three recent urban operations—Panama in 1989, Somalia in 1992–1993, and Chechnya 1994–1996—were chosen because they capture the possible range of political constraints.12 This analysis concentrates on the key factors that determined the outcomes, with an emphasis on what is significantly “different” today. To determine how different, the lessons of the current three cases are compared to the lessons of 22 urban battles

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11Russell Glenn highlights the Seoul example: in 1950, U.S. and South Korean forces recaptured Seoul when the Army’s end strength was approximately equal to that city’s population, about 1,000,000 people. Today the Army’s strength is half that, while Seoul’s population is about 13 million. See Russell Glenn, “. . . we band of brothers”: The Call for Joint Urban Operations Doctrine, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, DB-270-IS/A, 1999, p. 12.

12Current Army doctrine arbitrarily defines three levels of MOUT that capture the level of political constraint: surgical MOUT, precision MOUT, and high-intensity MOUT. “Precision MOUT” is urban combat under significantly more restrictive ROE than high-intensity MOUT, and “surgical MOUT” includes operations that have a “surgical” nature, such as special-purpose raids, small strikes, and other small-scale combat actions. The scale of combat and the severity of political constraints differentiate between these levels.
fought between 1942 and 1982.\textsuperscript{13} The methodology of this work is the multiple-case study, an approach that will allow us to make analytic generalizations.\textsuperscript{14}

For any research design, the author must know beforehand what questions to ask, what data are relevant to those questions, and how to analyze the results. For the case study approach, there are five components of a research design that are especially important:\textsuperscript{15}

1. The study's research questions
2. Its propositions
3. Its units of analysis
4. The logic linking the data to the propositions
5. The criteria for interpreting the findings

The primary research question is: What are the dominant factors influencing success in recent urban warfare, and how do they compare to lessons learned from past urban battles? In other words, have urban operations changed significantly?

The unit of analysis for each case study is defined to be a combat action that occurred in an urban environment. For the cases analyzed here, the focus is on:

\textsuperscript{13}In \textit{Modern Experience in City Combat} (1987), R. D. McLaurin et al. distilled lessons from 22 urban conflicts ranging from Stalingrad to Beirut. Because this report served as the basis for historical lessons that appeared in the official manual \textit{Military Operations on Urbanized Terrain (MOUT)}, it can serve as a baseline with which to make comparisons.

\textsuperscript{14}The multiple-case study should follow a replication logic, not a sampling logic. The three case studies contained in this report are not meant to be a sample, and any conclusions that derive from them are not generalizable in a statistical sense. What they do represent are three experiments that may be generalizable to a theoretical proposition. These three cases can be thought of as three experiments in different settings. The purpose of this monograph is to explore whether certain assumptions about the changing nature of urban operations are valid. Sample size is irrelevant because a sampling logic is not used. See Robert K. Yin, \textit{Case Study Research}, Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1988, pp. 5–10.

\textsuperscript{15}This section is based on the case study approach outlined in Yin, \textit{Case Study Research}, op. cit.
• Operation Just Cause, 1989; specifically, the urban operations that occurred in cities, towns, airports, and bases throughout Panama in December.

There are several reasons why these cases were chosen:

• All three cases are “modern” in that they all occurred within the last decade. These cases may offer historical lessons that are more relevant for U.S. urban operations doctrine in the post–Cold War environment.
• At least one side in each instance is a “conventional” force armed with modern weapons, either U.S. or Russian.
• A sufficient amount of literature and data exist to conduct a case study.
• They are similar to standard MOUT cases looked at in the past in that combat occurred and casualties were incurred on both sides; the essential unit of analysis—“the urban battle”—remains the same.
• Each case represents one of three classifications of MOUT as defined by U.S. doctrine: high intensity, precision, and surgical. These classifications cover the spectrum of combat action within the MOUT environment (see Table 1).

Several supplemental research questions also motivate this work:

• For these three cases, are there common, significant factors that affected the outcome? Do these modern MOUT factors differ substantially from the significant factors found during earlier urban operation experiences? What variables are critical to attacker or defender success?

Table 1

Three Classifications of MOUT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Study</th>
<th>Type of MOUT</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mogadishu firefight, October 3, 1993</td>
<td>Surgical</td>
<td>MOUT is conducted by joint special operations forces; typical missions are special-purpose raids, small precision strikes, and small-scale personnel seizure and recovery operations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operation Just Cause, December 19–20, 1989</td>
<td>Precision</td>
<td>MOUT is conducted by conventional forces to defeat an enemy intermixed with noncombatants. Strict ROE limit collateral damage and noncombatant casualties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battles for Grozny, December 1994–February 1995, August 1996</td>
<td>High intensity</td>
<td>MOUT occurs over large built-up area such as an entire city; involves extensive destruction of the infrastructure, large conventional forces, less restrictive ROE.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- How did the presence of larger numbers of noncombatants affect the course of operations?
- How did ROE affect the course of battle? Did they have a significant impact?
- Did any technologies or weapons make a profound difference?
- What role did aerospace play?
- Were combined arms, joint, or multinational teams crucial?
- What role did the media play?
- What were the critical nodes or centers of gravity?

The following theoretical propositions relate to the research questions above:

- Political, technological, and social developments in recent years have changed the way urban operations are justified and waged by democratic nations. Information technology, recent historical precedents, asymmetric responses to the growing conventional
military dominance by the United States, changing standards of morality, and the shifting political justifications for the use of force have combined to exacerbate a longstanding geostrategic problem for conventional powers—how to wage restricted urban warfare while keeping casualties below some threshold of public tolerance.

• In the last decade, the following factors have all become relatively more significant: the presence of the media, the presence of noncombatants, ROE, information operation tools such as psychological operations (PSYOP), public affairs (PA), civil affairs (CA), and political-military strategy.

• Other important factors for urban operations—such as situational awareness, intelligence, airpower, surprise, technology, combined arms, and joint operations—have not changed in significance.

• Airpower has proved to be a mixed blessing for urban operations at the lower end of the intensity scale, especially because air-delivered munitions are still not discriminate enough to deal with the presence of noncombatants.

The remainder of the monograph is organized as follows. Chapter Two describes each case study in detail, starting with U.S. peace operations in Somalia (1992–1993), proceeding to Operation Just Cause (Panama, 1989), and finishing with the Chechen War (1994–1996). A cross-case analysis follows in Chapter Three, beginning with an outline of the lessons from past MOUT experience, based on other scholars’ prior research of 22 urban battles between 1942 and 1982. An analytic framework is then presented to explain how broad changes over the last couple of decades may be driving significant changes in urban operations. Specific factors important to urban warfare are then addressed individually, especially with regard to how they affected the three very recent urban operations. The factors are noncombatants, ROE, the media, PSYOP and civil affairs, political-military strategy, situational awareness and intelligence, airpower, technology, surprise, combined arms, and joint operations.