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RE-EXAMINING TOMORROW'S BATTLEFIELD: TAKING THE FIGHT INTO THE CITIES

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Americans and our allies are not the only ones glued to the television lately! One can be sure that enemies of the United States not directly engaged by the invasion of Iraq have likewise been watching intently—and learning. Now, more than ever, the U.S. military's overwhelming dominance in Iraq has guaranteed that future adversaries will pursue every conceivable asymmetric advantage to offset their conventional and technological inferiority.

The U.S. Armed Forces are vulnerable on a number of fronts. Enemies are sure to exploit domestic sensitivities about friendly and enemy casualties, manipulate the media and world opinion when possible, and leverage political tensions within and outside multinational coalitions. Likewise, terrorism involving noncombatants is a vulnerability that is difficult to overcome, as illustrated by the 9-11 attacks, the use of human shields and guerrilla-style ambushes at checkpoints in Iraq, and the recent car bombings in Saudi Arabia and Casablanca. Similarly, the use (even the mere threat) of Weapons of Mass Destruction such as the U.S. anthrax attacks in 2001 will continue to pose a significant challenge to military forces. Beyond these tactics, however, is the broader medium for armed confrontation, the venue that will provide the greatest advantage to the enemy relative to U.S. capabilities and vulnerabilities: Urban Warfare.

Combat in cities is ideally suited for America's enemies. Urban Warfare is relatively cheap and low-tech, making it particularly appealing to non-State actors and unconventional forces. Offensive action relies on speed and synchronization, which are lost in such restrictive terrain. Even U.S. technological advantages can be largely diminished by ruthless urban chaos. Urban terrain favors the defender¹ and counters most (if not all) of the U.S. military's advantages: Line of sight is extremely limited for target acquisition, mutually-supporting fires, and communications; operational depth needed for synchronization is virtually absent; and inevitable collateral damage impedes the attacker while effectively enhancing the defender's cover, concealment, relative mobility, etc.

A review of recent warfare confirms that "no modern force has achieved strategic-level victory through an offensive campaign waged in an urban environment."² The attacks of 9-11 and the tactics seen in Afghanistan and the Philippines demonstrate that the enemy will "employ a method that exploits the social dimensions of strategy to offset the disadvantages in the technical dimension."³ For all the physical challenges cities pose for conventional forces, urban warfare entails a social and cultural component that makes it the enemy's fight of choice—and we are not ready!⁴

Mobility, the classic advantage of guerrillas, will likely be replaced in cities by a well-fortified tenacity to break the will of U.S. support.⁵ Judging from the extraordinary caches of arms and ammunition stockpiled throughout Baghdad, for instance, urban combat is sure to entail a level of chaos and multidimensional complexity not easily dealt with.

Avoiding cities—the mantra of militaries since Sun Tzu—will not be an option for the U.S. military. As long as the urban environment represents a relative U.S. weakness, one can be sure enemies will exploit it. Nor will Service "jointness" be a panacea for the urban challenges the U.S. Armed Forces will face in cities. Unlike anything seen in the Agrarian or Industrial Ages, future urban warfare must be waged not by military tactics alone, but by a closely coordinated interagency strategy. General B. Bell, the U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR) Commander, correctly warned that the U.S. must "restore symmetry to the asymmetric threat."⁶ Restoring symmetry, however, will not be enough: the U.S. must achieve overwhelming dominance in the urban environment just as it has for all conventional threats.

The military's preoccupation with classic fire and maneuver—even when executed as a joint operation—must give way to a full recognition and commitment to the future urban battlefield. History provides numerous lessons⁷ that illustrate the unique social and strategic complexities of urban warfare that must be heeded:

- Interagency insight is critical to understanding the social, political, and cultural dimensions of the situation and for developing political-military strategy (Chechnya).
- Well-considered informational operations are essential to steer the population in desired ways (Hue/Saigon).
- Infrastructure must be considered in a social and cultural, as well as a physical, sense (Lebanon).
- Little about urban warfare is low-intensity (i.e., Low Intensity Conflict) or small scale (i.e., Small Scale Contingency), in spite of the way it is represented in Army and Joint Service doctrine. (Lebanon)
- Inroads are needed to better understand and manage the operational and strategic basis of urban operations. (Lebanon)
- Urban Rules of Engagement (ROE), Information Operations (IO), national interests, and Center of Gravity analyses all need considerable attention given future urban challenges. (Lebanon)
- Urban combat is too complex to be viewed from a static template; the broad scope of social-cultural variables thwarts off-the-shelf solutions. (North Ireland)

- Even the most benign urban situations often shift when one or more combatant groups perceive movement from neutrality, and it only takes a (mis-)perception to create an explosive situation. (Beirut)

- Solid intelligence and cultural understanding are the key to restraining invading forces, winning hearts and minds of the population, and achieving the subsequent de-escalation of urban tension. (LA Riots)

- Decentralization of tactical operations and NCO leadership at ground-level have great potential as force multipliers. (LA Riots)

Until recently, Army (even Joint) doctrine regarding Military Operations in Urban Terrain (MOUT) was very limited. Tactics such as kicking-in doors, clearing rooms, and conducting building-by-building assaults represented the bulk of the literature. Encouragingly, recently released Joint and Army doctrine⁸ appropriately emphasizes the need for the Interagency to assist in winning the urban battle. Still lacking, however, are the specific means to integrate and resource the interagency effort in support of or supported by U.S. military forces. Much more needs to be done to thoroughly develop an interagency-centric urban warfare strategy.

“If only they'd come out and fight like men.”⁹

"Knowledge will be a key enabler in future urban combat operations; a significantly greater level of situational awareness than can be achieved with current C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications and Computer Systems, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance)."¹⁰ The Future Combat System (FCS), Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT), and Units of Action (UA)/Employment (UE) being developed for 2015 and beyond are inadequate for the future urban threat we face. The Reconnaissance, Surveillance, and Target Acquisition (RSTA) Battalion of the SBCT, for instance, is well suited for conventional operations, but wholly insufficient for urban fighting. It lacks the means to gather and process the broad scope of social and cultural information needed to prosecute urban warfare, as well as the ability to reach back to the strategic resources of the federal government in order to fully understand and manipulate the social factors of the urban environment. While Special Forces certainly help, the Department of Defense (DoD) alone has insufficient capacity to address the complexities of urban combat.

The DoD needs more intelligence, processed in new ways, to understand—in fact, to capitalize on—the social and cultural dimensions of urban warfare. "Diplomatic and high-level human intelligence efforts are needed to garner the support of informal groups within a large city."¹¹ As seen in Iraq, "city populaces can be influenced to help force an enemy out of an urban area."¹² DoD needs different technologies, rules of engagement, expertise, and new doctrinal paradigms. Frankly, fighting in cities will entail more than DoD, alone, can provide. Urban warfare must be waged by the Interagency.

Bureaucratic stovepipes among federal agencies (as seen in the intelligence and law enforcement communities following 9-11) must not block effective warfighting strategy. Clausewitzian doctrine holds that war is the continuation of politics by other means, that "the ends of war are not slaughter and destruction, per se, but the achievement of rational goals."¹³ Urban warfighting strategy requires systematic consideration and use of all the instruments of policy: the political/diplomatic, economic, and informational, as well as the military.

Recent doctrine advocating interagency participation in urban warfare insufficiently addresses the heretofore never successfully overcome complexities of the urban environment. Regrettably, "Better Business Practices" is DoD's sole legislative objective regarding the Interagency.¹⁴ The absence of specific mechanisms for integrating interagency capabilities needs immediate attention. Flatter military organizations will demand decision-making at lower levels¹⁵ and access to a level of social insight well above the expertise and experience of tactical decision makers. Currently, urban warfighting doctrine provides no means for coordinating the inputs of what, by necessity, must include: the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Departments of State, Treasury, and Justice, and perhaps the Departments of Agriculture, Labor and Health and Human Services.¹⁶ These agencies, leveraged against a particular urban environment, can provide valuable intelligence, analysis, and strategies needed to save lives and be successful.

Urban warfighting strategy must integrate the uniquely relevant capabilities of each of the instruments of national power. The CIA has a unique capability for providing human intelligence inside cities, as well as paramilitary assets that can be used ahead of conventional military forces to infiltrate and to better understand and *prepare the battlefield*. Fully integrated employment of the CIA, for instance, would serve as a sophisticated deep-attack asset to assist military commanders in locating critical, highly mobile targets as well as providing essential information to minimize injury to soldiers and noncombatants. Likewise, the Department of State (DoS) has unique capabilities and resources. DoS's extensive network and liaison with academia provides a ready means for better understanding cultural issues and social customs and norms and for anticipating likely responses that noncombatants will have to foreign (and guerrilla) influences. A DoS representative, for example, would be expected to alert military forces to relevant social histories and specific cultural sensitivities associated with the region, e.g., native women in burkas, dogs or cattle running loose on streets, ongoing local animosities, or unorthodox religious practices—all subtle cultural nuances having potentially huge operational consequences if not appreciated by military forces until too late.

The Department of Treasury (DoT) has the unique capability of shoring-up financial systems in crises, preventing banks from otherwise inevitable collapse in cities engulfed by fear and uncertainty. The DoT can inject capital, even substitute currency, to ensure that the population remains on the side of the invader. During Phase IV (Stability and Transition Operations), DoT has forensic accountants that can track the flow of money to help identify and block critical sources of financial support to unconventional enemy forces at large. These are things that DoD cannot—and must not—do.

The Department of Justice (DoJ), including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), has unique law enforcement capabilities. Cities cannot effectively function without the *rule of law*. The DoJ provides unique expertise in setting-up law enforcement systems needed to regain control over unlawful behavior (looting, black marketing, insurgency coercion, organized crime, etc.). The DoJ works with existing civil authorities and manages essential functions to assure noncombatants that they will be protected from unlawful action. The FBI has extensive intelligence and tracking mechanisms (as used in the Global War on Terrorism). Experts in law enforcement, not military forces, are best for tracking down key leaders of an insurgency.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has experience preventing humanitarian assistance disasters, managing refugee camps, and providing shelter, potable water,

food, sanitation, and basic medical care—all essential services not well-suited to the principle role of military forces engaged in urban combat.

Combat in cities—unlike anything seen in the conventional warfighting environment—demands an interagency solution. Expertise and ready-access to the vast resources of the federal government are essential to achieving U.S. dominance in urban environments. Absent this interagency approach, urban noncombatants will be slow to align with U.S. forces and will be most susceptible to enemy persuasion. The inevitability of urban conflict demands that DoD and the Interagency allocate resources and develop coordination mechanisms and doctrine to ensure U.S. dominance over the asymmetric threat.

Conclusion

Regrettably, the tragic absence of an interagency coalition could not be more evident than it is in Iraq today. Notwithstanding what appears, so far, to be clear allied dominance and a "surprisingly inept Iraqi response,"¹⁷ recent incidents in Al Hillah, Fallajah, An Najaf, and Baghdad demonstrate that U.S. soldiers are under more stress and in more danger fighting off guerrilla-style attacks than they were during the invasion itself. Fortunately city-fighting, block-by-block, has not been necessary in Iraq, but even in Phase IV of operations, victory is far from won. Over 30,000 Kurdish guerrillas remain outside their Kurdish provinces, 5,000 of Saddam Hussein's most vicious Mujahideen Khalq remain unaccounted for, and an undetermined number of radical Fedayeen have escaped U.S. capture.¹⁸ Intelligence and cultural persuasion, more than door-to-door searches will be essential to winning in Iraq as well as in future wars.

A re-examination of urban warfare is needed—a new strategic warfighting paradigm and mandate for change. It is utterly frightening to consider *what could have been*—and *what may still be*—given the extraordinary caches of arms and ammunition that are being found stacked to the ceilings in cities throughout Iraq. The urban environment provides advantages to adversaries that U.S. forces can ill afford. The classic role of the infantry in cities (kicking-in doors and searching room-to-room) must give way to intelligence, information operations, and strategic applications of the Interagency (out-thinking and influencing minds). Cities, our future battlefields, demand a shift in warfighting strategy beyond the scope of the U.S. Department of Defense. Preparing for the future requires a broader concept for National Security; it requires a practical, resourced, and exceedingly well-trained interagency fighting force, rather than a theoretical interagency concept or a military force expected to do it all.

The views expressed in this academic paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense, or any of its agencies.

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ENDNOTES

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- ¹ Steven Alexander, "Urban Warfare: US Forces in Future Conflicts," Military Review, Jan-Feb 2002, 83.
- ² Alexander, 84.
- ³ Chaos as Strategy, Parameters, Summer 2002, pg 48.
- ⁴ Paraphrased from Robert Leonard's provocative thesis and statement that "Urban Warfare is the fight of the future-the very near future-and we are not ready" cited in "Urban Warfare In the Information Age," Army, Apr 2003, 39.
- ⁵ Thomas Kahn, "Strategic Analysis to Hear the Thunder," Military Intelligence Professional Bulletin, Jan-Mar 2002, 5.
- ⁶ B. Bell, General (USAREUR Commander), in an address to the Army War College Class of 2003, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, 1 May 2003. Cited with permission.
- ⁷ These historical summaries are derived from Soldiers In Cities: Military Operations On Urban Terrain. Michael Desch, Editor. Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute. October 2001.
- ⁸ Doctrine for Joint Urban Operations, Joint Publication, JP 3-06 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff), Sep 2002, and Urban Operations, Army Field Manual, FM 3-06 (90-10) (Washington, DC: Department of the Army), 22 Nov 2002.
- ⁹ Remarks from a frustrated military officer to journalists in Jan. 1996 in Peter Liotta's "Chaos as Strategy," Parameters, Summer 2002, 52.
- ¹⁰ Robert Hahn and Bonnie Jezior, "Urban Warfare and the Urban Warfighter of 2025," Parameters, Summer 1999, 77.
- ¹¹ Alexander, 84.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ The classic connection between politics and war is from Clausewitz's On War, as quoted by Eiler, "The Man Who Planned Victory," American Heritage, 34 (1983), 39.
- ¹⁴ DoD's current legislative priorities were presented by the Office of Congressional Legislative Liaison to the Army War College Class of 2003, at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, 7 May 2003.
- ¹⁵ Norman Cooling, "Are We Operationally Prepared to Win a Street Fight?" Marine Corps Gazette, Jul 2001, 15.
- ¹⁶ As suggested by Leonard, 41.
- ¹⁷ Thomas Ricks, "What Counted: People, Plan, Inept Enemy," The Washington Post, 10 Apr 2003, A01.
- ¹⁸ Peter Ford, "Multitude of Militias Pose Threat to Democracy In Iraq," Christian Science Monitor, 25 Apr 2003, 7.