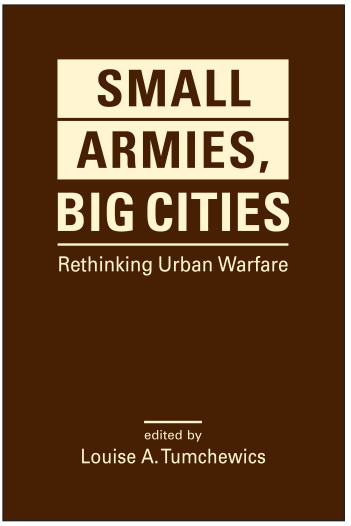
EXCERPTED FROM

Small Armies, Big Cities: Rethinking Urban Warfare



edited by
Louise A. Tumchewics

Copyright © 2022
ISBN: 978-1-955055-30-7 hc

LYNNE RIENNER PUBLISHERS

1800 30th Street, Suite 314
Boulder, CO 80301 USA
telephone 303.444.6684
fax 303.444.0824

This excerpt was downloaded from the
Lynne Rienner Publishers website
www.rienner.com

Contents

1 Fighting Wars in Cities 1
Louise A. Tumchewics

Part 1 Urban Warfare

2 Urban Arenas of War 7
Wendy Pullan

3 The Evolution of Urban Warfare 27
Paul Latawski

4 The Totemic Value of Cities 57
Alex Neads

5 Operational Advantages and Limitations 83
Louise A. Tumchewics

6 The Power of "Place" 105
Patrick Finnegan

7 Civil-Military Relations and Ethics 133
Matthew S. Wiseman

Part 2 Operational Art

8 Influence Operations 157
Steve Tatham

9 Siege and Intrusive Operations 177
John W. Spencer

10 Drone Warfare 197
Paul Lushenko and John Hardy

11 Surrogate Warfare 221
Tyrone L. Groh

12 Mass and Maneuvers 243
Louise A. Tumchewics

Part 3 Conclusion

13 Conducting Urban Warfare in the Twenty-First Century 261
Andrew Graham

Bibliography 291
About the Authors 317
Index 319
About the Book 329

1

Fighting Wars in Cities

Louise A. Tumchewics

THE WORLD'S URBAN AREAS, WITH THEIR MAZES OF DENSELY POPU-lated residential spaces, streets and alleyways, unseen layers of sewers and subways, sturdy concrete walls, soaring skyscrapers, and sprawling shantytowns, present challenges for military operations. The multiple dimensions of urban spaces—horizontal, vertical, subterranean, and, increasingly, virtual—are imbued with historic, cultural, religious, social, economic, and political significance, presenting a dynamic complexity that the physical austerity of arctic, desert, or jungle warfare does not provide.

The perils and pitfalls of urban operations have been recognized for millennia. Military theorists from Sun Tzu onwards have cautioned against operating in built-up areas, advising it only as a last resort. This sage advice has typically been followed by militaries, who have preferred throughout history to fight in open terrain. This principle continues in contemporary doctrine, where fighting in cities is presented as a last resort rather than a first option, and armies continue to organize and equip for fighting in unconstrained areas.

Over the past three decades, however, we have witnessed a number of urban battles—Sarajevo, Grozny, Baghdad, Mosul, Fallujah, Marawi, Sadr City, Raqqa, Idlib, Aleppo, and most recently, Mariupol, among many others—that have reemphasized the inherent difficulties of operations in built-up areas. These battles have demonstrated the ferocity and destruction that have characterized urban operations throughout the ages. In the past ten years, mobile phones and social media platforms have brought a real-time global audience to these urban battles, allowing the world to witness the intense suffering of civilians whose neighborhoods and even homes become battlefields.

Professional Western armies such as those within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) observe international humanitarian law (IHL), also known as the laws of armed conflict. Respect for laws and norms surrounding the protection of civilians and cultural sites and for the restrictions on the methods and means of warfare inform armies' rules of engagement.[1] IHL does not prohibit urban operations. However, reconciling urban warfare with the observance of IHL is particularly difficult. Urban landscapes, with dense infrastructure and civilian populations, complicate efforts. Yet difficulty does not eliminate responsibility of respecting IHL. As has been demonstrated most recently in Syria and Ukraine, operations executed without due consideration for IHL, and the indiscriminate use of explosive weapons, turn the urban battle into a humanitarian catastrophe.[2]

Armies may find themselves confronting the myriad difficulties of urban operations more often because urban battles may become more common as a greater percentage of the world's populations moves to cities and towns. Trends in global demographics indicate that the process of urbanization, which started with the Industrial Revolution, is rapidly accelerating. The population living in cities, high-density places of at least 50,000 inhabitants, has more than doubled over the last 40 years, going from 1.5 billion inhabitants in 1975 to 3.5 billion in 2015. It is projected to reach 5 billion and almost 55 percent of the world population by 2050.[3] Future conflicts, whether counterinsurgencies, peer confrontations, or near-peer confrontations, are likely to incorporate an urban element.

Military establishments and academics are aware of this demographic development and the potential implications for contemporary armies. There has been a relatively recent expansion in literature on the multiplicity of challenges posed by urban operations, by scholars and practitioners alike.

Alice Hills's landmark interdisciplinary study of urban warfare, *Future War in Cities: Rethinking a Liberal Dilemma*, highlighted the diversity of military operations in urban areas and the need for Western military forces to develop an integrated, multidisciplinary conceptual framework for understanding the strategic challenges of operations in urban areas.[4] Hills's subsequent writings make a case for considering the strategic dimension of urban operations, rather than focussing narrowly on the tactical.[5]

Michael Evans's writings also encourage Western military analysts to engage with urban studies experts to develop a more sophisticated understanding of urban dynamics within the realm of strategic studies. This interdisciplinarity will enable development of doctrine for urban operations, incorporating appropriate rules of engagement that conform to international humanitarian law. He also refutes the contemporary military focus on megacities, arguing that medium-sized cities with strategic importance and their own myriad complexities may present challenges as significant as their megacity counterparts.[6]

Other authors, such as Louis Di Marco, Alec Wahlman, and Colonel John Antal, and studies conducted by the RAND corporation and US Marine Corps,

have drawn upon historical case studies to explore the heterogeneity of urban operations and describe the tactical challenges of close-quarters combat, not unlike the contents of this book.[7] Anthony King looks into the changing—and unchanging—tactics and characteristics of urban battles of the twenty-first century to examine the evolution of urban operations.[8] Charles Knight discusses the prevalent use of high explosives in modern urban combat and changing attitudes toward force protection and civilian casualties.[9]

Stephen Graham, a geographer, critiques the securitization of urban space and militaries' technology-based approaches to resolving urban security issues.[10] David Kilcullen's writing discusses how cities—particularly the megacities of the developing world—provide havens for guerrilla and insurgent forces.[11] He considers the city a system, and he proposes models for an approach to urban control operations.

The complexities of urban warfare have also stimulated robust debate and discussion in professional military education platforms such as the Modern War Institute at West Point, the independent War on the Rocks and *Small Wars Journal*, and the Australian Army's Cove, to name but a few. The growing body of literature on various aspects—strategic, operational, and tactical—of urban operations is a fertile ground for increasing our conceptual appreciation and understanding of this physical and human environment.

The steady expansion of urban areas around the world contrasts with the continued reduction in the size of NATO member states. Our reference points for modern urban operations are often the seminal battles of World War II—Stalingrad, Berlin, Aachen, Manila, Hue, or Grozny—battles involving vast armies or army groups. But what about smaller armies? How have they fared in urban battles? How did they find advantage in the urban environment? And what lessons from these historical experiences have continuing relevance for today's professional armies? These are the questions we seek to answer in this book.

Defining Terms

Small is a relative term, particularly when it comes to armed forces. For the purpose of this book, we define *small* as a division (10,000) or less. This may not be the entire deployable army but can also be a unit from a larger force, such as a battle group or brigade combat team that has limited recourse to the resources of its parent force. *Small* can also refer to an army's range of capabilities and budget, typically limited when mass is also restricted. *Army* in this book refers to an organization armed and trained for war on land, though not specifically the armed force of a nation-state or political party, thus allowing us to explore the experiences of non-state actor groups. Battles included in the book were selected for their geographic and chronological variety and relevance to the research questions at

hand. Although there is a long chronology of urban operations, the time span for this book is limited to the past seventy-five years for greater familiarity, access to primary sources, similarity to current military structures and capabilities, and similar observance of laws of armed conflict (LOAC) and IHL, as set out in the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols.

The definition of *urban* varies widely according to country, with some considering an agglomeration of 200 people to be an urban area, whereas others consider 50,000 to be the threshold. In early 2020, the United Nations (UN) endorsed the Degree of Urbanisation methodology as a means of comparing urban areas around the world.[12] Using this method of classification, some of the examples in this book would be considered cities (populations of 50,000 or more), while others would fall in the category of towns or semi-dense areas (populations of 5,000).[13]

Urban operations can include any of the many missions that fall within the full range of military operations: humanitarian aid operations, peace support operations, policing, counterinsurgency, or counterterror operations, against unconventional forces or violent extremist organizations, or a major combat operation against a peer or near-peer adversary. The case studies in this book are limited to insurgency and counterinsurgency operations and major combat operations. This reflects the character of urban conflicts over the past 75 years, the time period from which our cases were selected.

Structure of the Book

This book is not intended as a complete history of urban operations, nor as a guidebook to future urban operations. Rather, it aims to inform and stimulate thinking on how small armies have fought in cities, reflecting on the enduring nature and changing character of urban conflict through a number of case studies. Focusing first on the particulars of urban warfare then on the operational arts, the chapters unfold as follows.

In Chapter 2, Wendy Pullan introduces the city as a collection of social, cultural, and personal spaces, infused with layers of meaning and identification beyond grid references. She discusses the characteristics inherent in urban spaces that make them so inhospitable to military forces, and the consequences of conflict on the fabric of the city and the social terrain.

Although cautioned against in military theory and doctrine, there is a long history of urban operations. In Chapter 3, Paul Latawski provides an overview of urban operations from medieval sieges to the present day. He explores the major historical trends in urban warfare, the development of theory and doctrine for urban warfare, and the impact of technology on urban warfare.

Alex Neads discusses the totemic value of cities in Chapter 4, and how the symbology of authority invested in certain key elements of a city outstrips the practical benefit of fighting in, or holding, urban terrain.

Focusing on the battle for Donetsk Airport in 2014, he illustrates how the strategic value of a city, or a piece of ground, can initially draw in a force, and how the reason for fighting becomes expanded to encompass other political aspirations and meanings, leaving an armed force with little option but to continue a battle of attrition.

Urban counterinsurgency presents a particular challenge to contemporary armies, and one that is anticipated to persist. Looking at the case study of the Battle of Marawi in Chapter 5, Louise Tumchewics discusses the advantages that the defender can find in urban environments and, conversely, the limitations the urban environment presents to irregular forces.

The themes of insurgency and counterinsurgency continue in Chapter 6, in which Patrick Finnegan addresses the role of space and identity in urban operations, focusing on the case study of the small Northern Irish town of Crossmaglen. Though relatively small, Crossmaglen was a complex, closed society that presented an enduring challenge to security forces. Drawing on interviews with former Provisional Irish Republican Army members and security force personnel, he explores the social intricacies of the town and the role of "place" in shaping identity and giving legitimacy to a cause.

Numerous historical examples indicate that urban operations can inflict high numbers of civilian casualties. In Chapter 7, Matthew Wiseman highlights the importance of managing the civil-military relationship in cities to advance outcomes and reduce casualties. He looks at the Battle of Groningen and how the relationship between civil authorities and military leadership contributed to consideration of targeting, weapons used, the maintenance of civil order, postbattle reconstruction, and transition to peacetime civilian leadership.

Civilian populations and adversaries are the primary intended audiences of influence operations. Steve Tatham discusses the importance of influence operations to achieve the desired political outcome of an urban campaign in Chapter 8. He explains how influence operations incorporate more than the transmission of information. They can involve physical actions, political influence, and legal changes. Moreover, influence operations extend well beyond the kinetic phases of an operation. They encompass outcomes, population movements/resettlements, regenerations, political transitions, and the creation of historical narratives. Tatham mines the case studies cited earlier in the book as well as contemporary examples from Syria and Iraq to demonstrate where influence operations have succeeded or failed, and what capabilities armies require to conduct successful influence operations.

Then, in Chapter 9, Maj. John Spencer (retired) posits that nonkinetic intrusive operations, such as the use of T-walls in Sadr City, interrupt the flow of hard and soft systems within a city to achieve outcomes without engaging in house-to-house battles. He outlines the capabilities required for nonkinetic intrusive operations based on the 2008 experience in Iraq and details how these operations could be better integrated with influence operations

(described in the preceding chapter) to achieve desired outcomes while sustaining fewer casualties.

Technology is often promised to replace mass, increase precision, and reduce or even eliminate the requirement for frontline personnel and attendant risks, an attractive prospect when there is political aversion to the use of force. Lt. Col. Paul Lushenko and John Hardy explore the utility and limitations of drone strikes in urban operations in Chapter 10.

In Chapter 11, Tyrone Groh discusses the use of proxy or surrogate forces to compensate for armies' lack of mass, an appealing solution for armies seeking to increase mass while minimizing risk. He considers the interaction among armies, their proxies, and the social terrain and addresses how surrogates can be used to maximize advantage.

Recounting the Battle of Jaffa, Louise Tumchewics questions in Chapter 12 whether there are alternatives to mass in maneuver operations in urban spaces. She discusses command and control compression in the urban environment, and how training can amplify the abilities of a relatively small force.

Finally, in Chapter 13, Lt. Gen. Andrew Graham incorporates the lessons and theory from the previous chapters and his reflections on his own experience as a corps commander in Iraq to offer suggestions for urban campaigning in cities of any size in the twenty-first century.

Notes

1. Antouly, "Urban Warfare," 110.
2. "Conduct of Military Operations in Urban Areas," International Humanitarian Law Research Initiative, Harvard University, May 2004, 1.
3. OECD, "Cities in the World: A New Perspective on Urbanisation," https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/d0efcbda-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/d0efcbda-en.
4. Hills, *Future War in Cities*.
5. Hills, "Deconstructing Cities: Military Operations in the Urban Era"; Hills, "Fear and Loathing in Falluja."
6. Evans, "Future War in Cities"; Evans, "Case Against Megacities"; Evans, *City Without Joy*.
7. DiMarco, *Concrete Hell*.
8. King, *Urban Warfare in the 21st Century*.
9. Knight, "Urban Warfare Capability: A Background to the Challenges and a Call for Professional Debate."
10. Graham, *Cities Under Siege*; Graham, *Cities, War, and Terrorism*; Graham, *Vertical*.
11. Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains*.
12. Lewis Dijkstra, Ellen Hamilton, Somik Lall, and Sameh Wahba, "How Do We Define Cities, Towns, and Rural Areas?" *Sustainable Cities* (blog), World Bank, March 10, 2020, https://blogs.worldbank.org/sustainablecities/how-do-we-define-cities-towns-and-rural-areas.
13. Ibid.