

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION TO JOINT URBAN OPERATIONS

*To ensure the US military has the ability to effectively operate on the urban battlefield, the CINCs and Services must continue to expand their present efforts of study and understanding of the urban environment and must develop an integrated approach that optimizes key warfighting capabilities for future operations on urban terrain.*

Defense Planning Guidance: FY 2000–2005

### A. Scope and Purpose

In light of the wide range of recent operations conducted in urban areas, the US Armed Forces have focused their attention on the unique challenges of joint urban operations (JUO). To meet these challenges, the US military has begun to rigorously examine urban operations from an operational level—the perspective most applicable to the joint force commander (JFC) who must lead US military personnel in these complex undertakings. **This Handbook is a primer on joint urban operations. It provides JFCs, their staffs, and other interested parties with fundamental principles and operational-level considerations for the planning and conduct of joint urban operations. Although the handbook is not a doctrinal publication, it is consistent with joint and Service doctrine. Joint Publication (JP) 3-06, “Doctrine for Joint Urban Operations,” when published, will provide joint doctrine for JUO.**

JP 3-0, “Doctrine for Joint Operations,” states that a JFC will consider the following prior to and during a joint operation: preparation of the theater, isolation of the enemy, movement to attain operational reach, special operations, protection of forces and their freedom of action, control of space, and constant assessment of the physical environment. The application of each of these fundamental considerations in JUO is significantly different from their application in other operational environments. This is true for two reasons.

**First, urban areas complicate military operations in ways that other environments do not.** The three-dimensional, man-made geography and the presence of large noncombatant populations in urban areas present unique challenges to a JFC undertaking an urban operation. These challenges include impediments to maneuver and the application of firepower, due to the density of man-made construction and the possible need to minimize collateral damage. In the urban environment, a JFC must develop and employ innovative concepts and capabilities to overcome these challenges. For example, non-lethal weapons may be particularly useful in the urban setting by providing the commander with the flexibility to adapt a more fluid approach to urban areas and allowing subordinates the freedom of action to employ measured military force to accomplish their mission.

The influence of the complex social, cultural, and political systems, which guide the daily lives of urban inhabitants, compounds the physical difficulties associated with urban operations. For example, failure to understand the nuances of social interaction between the noncombatant populace of Mogadishu and the various clans that vied for control of the urban area seriously hampered the United Nations' (UN) ability to negotiate between these elements during UN Operations in Somalia (UNOSOM I and UNOSOM II). The JFC should recognize that military involvement with noncombatants can create both opportunities, such as improved human intelligence (HUMINT), and dangers, such as civilian hostility and violence.

Each urban area has its own distinctive geographic, political, military, diplomatic, economic, demographic, and cultural characteristics. It is important to note that each of these factors changes from an operation in one urban area to another. For example, in the initial forced entry plan into Port-au-Prince during Operation RESTORE DEMOCRACY in 1994, the US specifically targeted the urban area's telecommunication nodes to impede the communication ability of Haitian leaders. Such an action would have meant little during American involvement in Mogadishu, wherein Aideed supporters lacked access to telecommunications systems and often used drums to send messages throughout the urban area.

**Second, the inherent complexity of urban areas yields numerous decisive points that a JFC can exploit in order to threaten the enemy's center of gravity.** A JFC may accomplish objectives in an urban environment through a wide variety of means. A JFC responsible for evicting an enemy force from an urban area could consider choosing from a number of decisive points, or any combination of these, upon which the enemy depends. For example, the JFC could cut off an enemy's power supply by shutting down specific parts of an urban electric grid in a manner that affects the enemy while maintaining the supply of power in noncombatant areas.

When targeting decisive points, the JFC must be aware of the significant concerns regarding the proportionality of applied force and its impact on noncombatants. Fortunately, the JFC can choose from a diverse joint Service arsenal to accomplish mission objectives. Among many other options, the JFC could: strike telecommunication nodes with air assets; use psychological operations (PSYOP) and civil affairs (CA) units to influence the urban area's populace; employ non-lethal technology against key facilities to disrupt normal operations; and/or, if circumstances require it, insert ground forces into the urban area to confront the enemy. Again, it is imperative that the objectives, and the means used to achieve them, meet the test of proportionality (i.e., incidental injury or collateral damage must not be excessive in light of the military advantage anticipated by an attack).

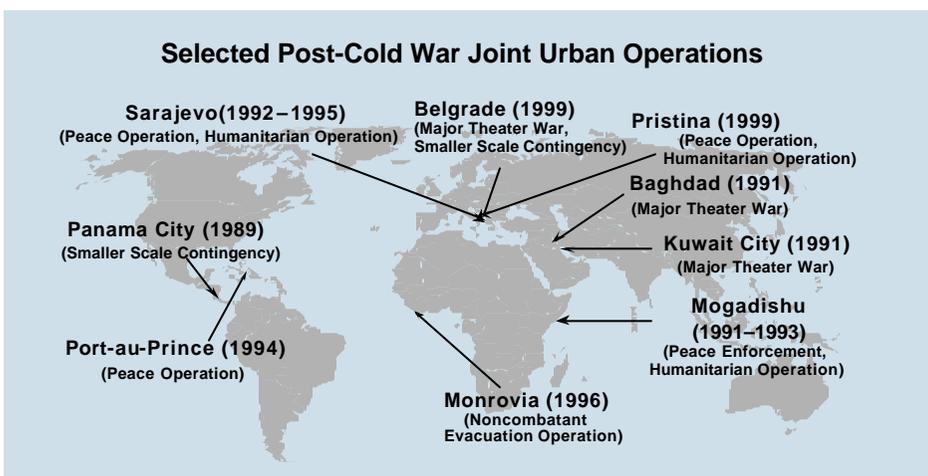


Figure I-1. Selected Post-Cold War Joint Urban Operations

### Joint Urban Operations

Joint operations planned and conducted across the range of military operations on or against objectives on a topographical complex and its adjacent natural terrain where man-made construction and the density of noncombatants are the dominant features

Figure I-2. Joint Urban Operations

## B. Basic Terminology

**JUO** are all joint operations planned and conducted across the range of military operations on or against objectives on a topographical complex and its adjacent natural terrain where man-made construction and the density of noncombatants are the dominant features. By definition then, the two key characteristics that make urban environments more complex than other environments are man-made construction and the density of noncombatants. **JUO** include all joint military operations conducted within, in the immediate vicinity of, and/or in the airspace of a designated **urban area** (to include the space underneath urban areas comprising sewers, utility and subway tunnels, etc.).

Technically, urban areas denote plots of land wherein population density equals or exceeds one thousand people per square mile (approximately three square kilometers), and in which an average of at least one building stands per two acres of land. This broad definition encompasses the shantytowns of developing countries, villages, small towns, suburbia, aggregate networks of urban areas such as Los Angeles County, and major metropolitan areas such as Tokyo. **However, a better practical definition for a JFC is that an urban area is any locale in which man-made construction and a large noncombatant population are the dominant features, have important operational and tactical implications, and may have strategic significance.**

### The Urban Area

- Population density equals or exceeds one thousand people per square mile (approximately three square kilometers)
- An average of at least one building per every two acres
- A practical definition: any locale in which man-made terrain and a large noncombatant population dominate operational considerations

Figure I-3. The Urban Area

JUO encompass the full range of military operations, from military operations other than war (MOOTW) to major theater wars, including actions such as ground forces entering an urban area to defeat an enemy force, humanitarian assistance for noncombatants within an urban area, and/or air strikes against forces trying to capture or subdue an urban area. For example, during the US military campaign in the Persian Gulf War, aerospace power was used to destroy command and control (C2) assets in Baghdad; Patriot missiles were used to defend Tel Aviv from Scud attacks; and ground forces were used to evict Iraqi forces from Khafji.

### C. The Role of Urban Areas in Military History

The US military has a long history of conducting urban operations, from the Revolutionary War (Boston and New York), to armed intervention in Beijing during the Boxer Rebellion, to recent noncombatant evacuation operations (NEOs) in Sierra Leone and Albania. Military leaders have traditionally viewed urban areas as high-value objectives to be held against or captured from enemies for several reasons:

- Urban areas historically evolve in strategic locations
- Urban areas often hold symbolic value that military forces can exploit to produce political effects
- Influential governmental/societal decision-making nodes are generally concentrated in urban areas

### **Historically Strategic Locations**

Urban areas often evolve in strategically important locations. Many urban areas were originally situated to facilitate defense and/or exploitation of key geographical chokepoints and lines of transportation and communication, such as ports and overland trade routes. As these urban areas prospered, their population and strategic importance grew. Some of these urban areas have survived and have become extensive urban areas, supporting suburbs, residential areas, financial districts, etc. These urban areas still have the ability to dominate sea and land lines of communication, enhancing their value as military objectives. For example, Budapest, the capital of Hungary, owes its location in part to the long-held strategic value of the fertile basin that it occupies on the west bank of the Danube River.

Due, in part, to the urban area's critical geographical value, the Soviet Red Army fought to seize Budapest from German forces during World War II. The role of strategic geography in the Battle of Budapest cannot be understated: the urban area was the gateway to routes to key locales, such as Vienna, southern Bavaria, and southwest Hungary, where Germany held its last crude oil plants in Europe. The geographical value of the urban area, in turn, made Budapest politically important to the Russians and helped reinforce the German decision to defend Budapest at great cost.

### **The Symbolic Value of Urban areas**

Urban areas also often hold symbolic political, social, and/or cultural value. Military operations can target urban areas in order to exploit this symbolic value to attain broader campaign objectives. While Budapest was strategically significant, its value as a political symbol to both Nazi Germany and the USSR made it one of the most contested territories during the war. Germany tried to hold the urban area at great cost because, as the capital of Germany's sole remaining European ally, it represented one of the Nazi's last political footholds in Eastern Europe. Its loss would have significantly undermined Nazi political and military credibility and morale.

Similarly, Stalin believed that the seizure of Budapest, along with the capture of Vienna, would increase his bargaining power at the upcoming Allied Summit in Yalta. He regarded Soviet occupation of these important urban areas, both commonly viewed as European political and cultural capitals, as essential to enhancing the USSR's apparent contributions to the war effort. In both cases, Budapest's symbolic value was an overriding factor in the decisions to conduct urban operations.

Non-state actors, such as terrorists, provide another example of the symbolic importance of urban areas in military operations. They can exploit the social, political, and/or religious importance of an urban area by striking high-visibility urban targets. Hamas' repeated bombings of civilian Jewish targets in Jerusalem is an example of this phenomenon. Tupac Amaru's capture of the Japanese Embassy in Lima, Peru in 1997 is another example.

### **The Concentration of Decision-Making Nodes and the Strategic Center of Gravity**

Urban areas generally function as the social, economic, and political centers of societies and often represent strategic centers of gravity. Important commercial, state, and cultural sites, such as religious and cultural centers, government offices, embassies, factories, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), among others, are usually located in urbanized areas. This concentration of important societal centers increases the importance of urban areas in military campaigns. Urban areas facilitate formal and informal civilian and military interaction and can offer ready access to important resources, such as labor, water, technology, information, etc. Moreover, military forces can exploit the critical nodes within an urban area to influence a larger campaign effort and control the enemy's center of gravity. For example, during the planned 1994 invasion of Haiti, the US military focused on Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince. Due to the concentration of key governmental command and communication nodes within the urban area, control of the Haitian capital would, in effect, result in control of the country.

## **D. The Inherent Challenges of Joint Urban Operations**

Military leaders historically have perceived urban areas as strategically significant locations. Changes in the strategic environment, such as global media, post-Cold War international political turbulence, and the emerging importance of non-state actors, have complicated the planning and execution of urban operations in significant ways. The combination of these two factors has made it impossible to ignore the challenges of operating in an urban area.

Accordingly, JUO are often unique in light of the significant physical challenges and complex social characteristics of urban areas. These inter-related characteristics may include, but are not limited to:

- Increasing rates of urbanization
- Challenging terrain, shores, and waterways
- Presence of noncombatants
- Presence of civil government institutions
- Presence of NGOs
- Presence of local and international media
- Potential sources of host nation support (labor, construction material, and medical supplies)
- Complex social, cultural, and governmental interaction that supports urban habitation
- Location of key transportation hubs

### **Increased Rate of Global Urbanization**

Demographic and population trends indicate that the world is urbanizing. Consider the following indicators of urbanization:

- Over the past forty years, the number of urban dwellers has more than tripled, growing from 737 million in 1950 to about 2.5 billion in 1993

- In 1970, there were only three urban areas in Asia with more than eight million inhabitants; at current rates of growth, Asia will contain more than seventeen urban areas with more than eight million inhabitants by 2010
- While it required 150 years for the population of New York City to reach eight million people, Mexico City and Sao Paulo each gained that many citizens in 25 years
- According to UN estimates, the urban population of developing countries increases by about 150,000 per day; projections indicate that if this trend is constant, three-fifths of the world's population—five billion human beings—will live in urban areas by 2015

**Given the current rate of urbanization, the potential of US forces operating in urban areas is likely to increase.** Urbanization can enhance political stability by generating industrialization and economic growth which can yield jobs, a higher overall standard of living, and an educated, relatively satisfied populace that is unlikely to foment civil unrest. On the other hand, poorly regulated urbanization can result in a weak infrastructure, a fragile economic base, and a general lack of resources, making it difficult to absorb new inhabitants. Accordingly, this can encourage the creation of a restless, hostile population with few options for improving its standard of living and in which rival socio-economic classes and ethnic groups exist in close proximity to one another.

In addition, rapidly growing urban areas can magnify and aggravate pre-existing intra-state cleavages, spreading unrest and potentially facilitating regional instability. Disturbances in a single key urban area can affect an entire nation, and possibly even other regions. Under the right conditions, this has the potential to result in an explosive situation. Urbanization is especially problematic in the developing world, wherein the resources necessary for urban growth are relatively scarce, intra-state conflict is more frequent, and the rate of urbanization is disproportionately large.

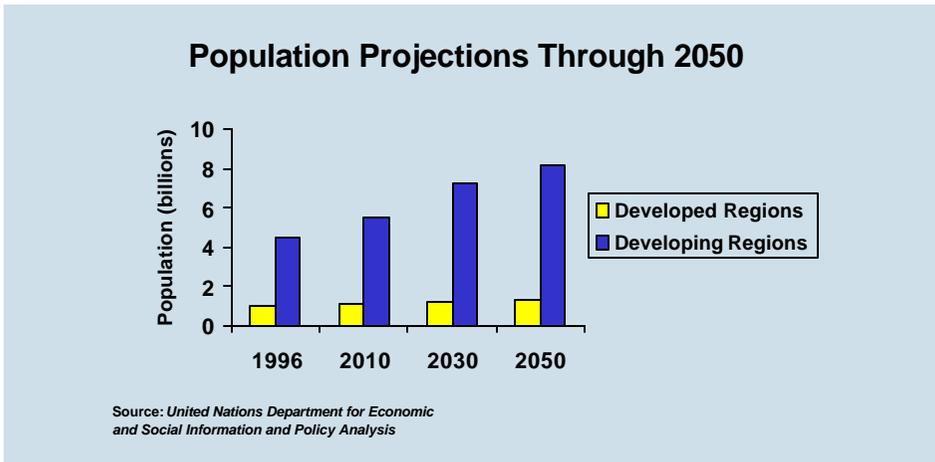


Figure I-4. Population Projections Through 2050

Events in the urban area of Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, India during the early 1990s illustrate how conditions within an urban area can generate trans-regional violence. The Hindu and Muslim communities of India had often launched terror attacks against each other, mirroring ethnic antagonism in other parts of the country. However, ethnic tension came to a head in 1992 with the destruction of the Babri Masjid Mosque in Ayodhya by a local Hindu group. This singular act exacerbated national Hindu-Muslim rivalry, causing a massive wave of violence that spread throughout India. Of the 1,500 lives consumed by this violence, 95 percent were killed in urban areas. The violence struck Ahmedabad and Bombay most seriously, with acts of murder, rape, and arson occurring months after the demolition of the Mosque. Surat, Calcutta, Bhopal, and Bangalore suffered from similar atrocities.

### Urbanized Terrain

Urban areas, from major metropolises to suburban developments to shantytowns, share some common physical attributes that influence military activity. Urban areas possess all of the characteristics of a “natural” landscape coupled with man-made construction. This combination of natural terrain and artificial infrastructure provides a variety of places for opposing forces to hide and strike, hinders observation and communication, and impedes fire and movement. Adversaries may be able to exploit these characteristics to thwart the advanced

technological capabilities and superior training of the US military, negating, to some degree, precision strike and dominant maneuver capabilities. The JFC should consider the importance of unit boundaries, troop exposure, and weapons effects; however, the challenge of planning and conducting joint urban operations goes well beyond terrain consideration.

### **The Presence of Noncombatants in Urban Areas**

What most distinguishes urban areas from other operational environments is that urban areas can be viewed as dynamic organisms that exist for and by virtue of the people that inhabit them. As in all organisms, urban areas are composed of “systems of systems”—multiple, inter-related systems of streets, buildings, governments, communications, law enforcement, culture, transportation, etc. Striking any one of these systems can have unintended collateral effects on another, inter-related system, just as striking one building within the closed confines of an urban area can impose collateral damage on a nearby “friendly” building.

The JFC should understand how interconnected electric power, water distribution, sewer, and sanitation systems can affect noncombatants in an urban area. The same infrastructure that serves the JFC’s operational area also sustains the lives of urban-dwelling noncombatants. The residents of an urban area depend upon this infrastructure for survival. Damage to urban power, water, and transportation systems may dramatically affect the livelihood, if not the lives, of local inhabitants. Infrastructure damage could potentially create a refugee situation that the commander would have to address immediately, as well as increase the cost of rebuilding the country’s infrastructure during post-conflict operations.

In some cases, such as humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping operations, the safety and well being of the urban area and its inhabitants are fundamental objectives of the operation. The JFC may be required to protect infrastructure and the lives of noncombatants for a variety of practical reasons. In a situation in which the JFC may be required to engage enemy forces in combat within an urban area, callous treatment of noncombatants may discourage civilians from providing US forces with invaluable HUMINT assistance and may

even encourage civilians to support anti-US forces within the JFC's area of responsibility (AOR). Furthermore, local and international media coverage of US forces may focus on the suffering of innocent civilians, jeopardizing domestic and international public support for the JUO or bringing undesirable international pressure to bear on US policy.

The adversary may not hesitate to use human shields or human barriers to delay, deny, or deter the JFC's maneuvering and targeting efforts. In this case, non-lethal weapons may provide a more flexible means of response in order to protect friendly forces, influence the actions of the enemy and noncombatants, and minimize collateral damage. Further, the JFC should consider using non-lethal weapons if restrictions on lethal weapons are implemented due to noncombatant and collateral damage considerations.

The JFC should also consider extensive coordination with civil government, local and international NGOs, and other social and cultural institutions. These organizations may help facilitate relations between the host nation, the military, and the local populace and can be potential sources of host nation support (labor, construction material, medical supplies, etc.). **How and to what extent** the JFC protects the urban infrastructure and noncombatants will vary depending upon the JFC's mission and campaign plan. **However, JFCs must always be cognizant of the interdependence between the urban area and the lives that it sustains.**

### **Vignette: Collateral Damage and the Use of Force**

#### **Hue, Vietnam: Tet Counter-Offensive**

The battle for Hue illustrates the tension inherent in modern urban combat between minimizing one's own casualties and minimizing collateral damage. In the battle for Hue in 1968, the US clearly made the decision in favor of low US casualties, eventually lifting all restrictions on the use of firepower except for the prohibition of targeting historically significant buildings and religious shrines. Ultimately, this decision contributed to extensive collateral damage in Hue and failed to prevent extremely high US casualties in the high-tempo urban battle. In part, this was due to the enemy's defensive use of the urban area's imperial fortress, which forced US Marine Corps and Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) forces into costly house-to-house fighting. Hue illustrates how the defender's use of urban terrain features can provide a significant advantage in the urban environment. Although tension between minimizing one's own casualties and minimizing collateral damage is inherent to all combat, the advantage of the defender in urban combat may significantly exacerbate that tension, presenting extremely difficult trade-offs for the JFC. The difficulties experienced by the Marines and the ARVN in Hue demonstrate the challenge and importance of finding the right balance between those trade-offs.

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