

TRAINING MILITARY LEADERS FOR URBAN IRREGULAR WARFARE

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Abstract: *The operational environments of future armed conflicts will be marked by military actions taken in densely populated areas. Skyscraper buildings, interconnected basements, blocked access ways, close range strikes, or lacks of combat support are some of the challenges that future military leaders have to face in future military conflicts. The paper aims to explore the challenges of large urban agglomerations where military leaders will conduct land forces actions by analyzing elements of combat power.*

Keywords: urban irregular warfare, combat power, warfighting functions, military leadership

1. Introduction

A report published in 2018 by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) confirms that over 55% of the world's population lives in urban areas, and estimates show that by 2050 this urbanization will rise to about 68% [1]. The US Army defines urban operations as “*those operations across the range of military operations planned and conducted on, or against objectives on a topographical complex and its adjacent natural terrain, where man-made construction or the density of population are the dominant features*” [2]. The irregularity and conducting of military action predominantly in the densely populated area are the main features of the recent armed conflicts that oppose regular forces of state coalitions and combatants who do not belong to the regular armed forces of nation-states. *Irregular warfare, including civil war, is the commonest and most widespread form of conflict,*

accounting for roughly 83 percent of wars since 1815, and there is no reason to suspect that this pattern will change in the future [3]. Choosing irregularities instead of conventional ones is done as a result of asymmetry and to compensate the military inferiority by sizing forces into small structures that are too mobile for powerful but slow regular structures. Moreover, the agility of the irregular forces is multiplied by knowing and exploiting the physical terrain that has moved from the open space to the “urban jungle”. Last but not least, the efforts of the regular forces to “find and destroy” the enemy is difficult due to the invisibility offered by urban human shield protection. *Non-state armed groups include insurgents, terrorists, pirates, smugglers, gangs, bandits, and organized crime networks, but may also include the state sponsors of such groups, or government organizations (usually special forces and intelligence services) who adopt similar methods themselves* [4]. These realities and

features captured in the warfare environment require the preparation for future urban operations and training military leaders to be effective while conduct actions inside the “densely populated areas” or “Megacities”. Current military thinking tends to present the megacity and dense urban environment as challenging, intimidating, and as a source of anxiety for military commanders who contemplate its operational environment [5]. The paper aims to explore the challenges of large urban agglomerations where military leaders will conduct land forces actions by analyzing elements of combat power. **Combat power** integrates all the capabilities that a military structure can use at one time and contains eight elements: *leadership, information, mission command, movement and maneuver, intelligence, fires, sustainment, and protection*. Successful deployment of military operations in urban environment and their integration into the battlespace is essential to achieve the unity of effort [6], a principle that can be accomplished by applying the combat power in a most efficient way. The US Army describes the last six elements as warfighting functions and all commanders apply combat power through the warfighting functions using **leadership and information** [7].

1. Mission Command

Understanding the operational environment is based on identifying the effects that urban has on warfighting functions. “*The mission command warfighting function is the related tasks and systems that develop and integrate those activities enabling a commander to balance the art of command and the science of control in order to integrate the other warfighting functions*” [8]. It represents the exercise of authority by commanders through clear and precise orders during the conduct of military operations. Urban irregular conflict, like any other type of military conflict, is gained by commanders' initiative and their ability to adapt faster than the opponent to the challenges of the operational environment. Urban conflict requires centralized planning, mission orders, and highly decentralized execution. General (Ret.) Stanley McChrystal describes the model used while he was driving the military in Afghanistan [9]. Abandoning the reductionist hierarchy of decision-making is based on the creation of network of networks that include all military structures or their representatives. Team of teams uses a management style where military units operate as a network with a shared consciousness and each leader is empowered to execute (see figure no. 1) [10].

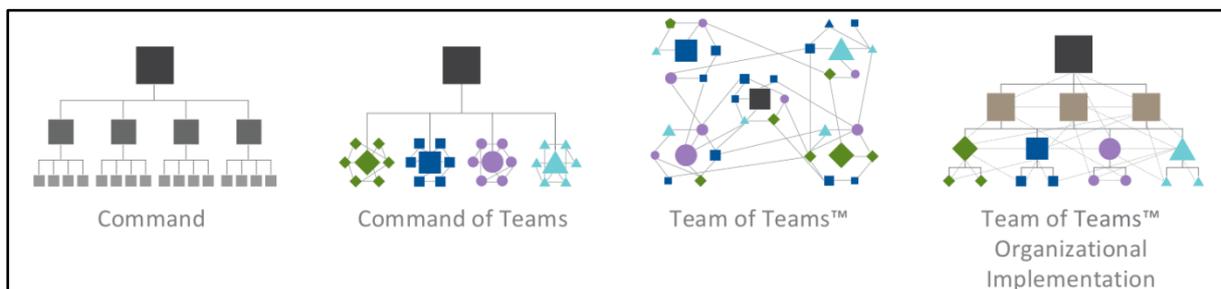


Figure no. 1 – networked team of teams

The implementation of these teams and networks requires time, trust and sharing of information between commanders at all levels of operation. Moreover, this concept of shared consciousness has to overcome the mental barriers of decision making only

by the superior hierarchical factors. But once realized and put into practice, this concept streamlines execution by eliminating approval of the higher echelon in the context in which the subordinate leader confronted with the problem is

empowered to act. It gets access to decision-making not only because it has direct access to all the information in the field, but also because it has had access to similar previous situations whose solutions have been shared within the network. This freedom of decision is fundamental in the context of the urban environment marked by irregularity and is based on the character, competence and professionalism of subordinate leaders. Lack of a correct decision can lead to extremely serious incidents, but taking these risks is necessary and should be encouraged to gain the flexibility and the advantage of being one step ahead of the opponent. Effective performance of Mission Command depends on the proper functioning of communication systems used for real-time coordination and control of forces or other secondary issues such as receiving reports, transmitting orders, aerial support or medical evacuation requests, etc. Urban structure, density of buildings, materials, population, obstacles, high rise buildings and underground spaces are factors that affect radio communications. Blocking or intercepting messages made by the opponent is another risk factors. Effective communication can be ensured through:

- Setting the command posts based to the advantages of the urban environment;
- encryption of communications;
- using retransmission or message routing through parallel channels;
- identification and use of local communication systems with the understanding of the risks of interception by the opponent;
- use of satellite communications or air traffic platforms where available;
- the use of visual signs and signals in order to command and coordinate ground forces if radio communications are broken.

2. Movement and Maneuver

“The movement and maneuver warfighting function is the related tasks and systems that move and employ forces to achieve a position of advantage over the enemy and other threats” [10].

Mobility of forces is the strength of the opponent. Knowledge and exploitation of urban infrastructure favors irregular forces in terms of movement in combination with fire. Inside the megacities, hostile forces have a relative freedom of maneuver as they blend in with the local population. Urban architecture directs forces to the mobility corridors of existing streets and alleys. They become hot spots and are used for hit and run attacks or even ambushes in a complex system. The blocking of mobility corridors or narrow architecture of heavily populated areas restricts armored access. Lessons learned from Mogadishu-Somalia eliminate the use of transport helicopters as a result of their vulnerability to ground-based attacks using man-portable air defense systems (2 Black Hawk helicopters were shot down using RPG 7). Movement and maneuver will be mostly dismounted and soldiers will move slowly because they have to transport not only the ballistic protection equipment, food, water, weapons and ammunition required, but also specific rope, grappling hooks, ladders etc.). Rapid change of direction or relocation of forces to other targets is difficult. At the same time, it is necessary to divide the forces for building-to-building and room-to-room searches while the basement system can allow the agile opponent to escape from security cordon and envelop the military forces. In the 2004 Fallujah urban battles, US land forces had to clear three times somewhere between 15,000 and 20,000 buildings.”*After the initial sweep, the thugs got in behind us, so we doubled back to attack south to north and cleared the same buildings again. Then after we secured Fallujah, we went through every building a final time to make sure we cleaned out all the caches” [11].*

Another urban irregular conflict issue is one regarding the freedom of movement of the opponent by hiding among the masses of refugees leaving the conflict zones. They either do it in the first phase to escape the encirclement of security cords, or decide to throw the weapons when they realize that chances are not favorable and claim to be lazy civilians who finally accept to evacuate the conflict zone. In Fallujah military forces have warned the local population about the violence that will follow and the possible casualties who will be registered among the population who decide to stay in Fallujah. It was an effective information operation. A small number of civilians remained within the city, about 1,500 people out of a total of about 250,000 inhabitants. Most of the remaining were active supporters of insurgent groups, but the hypothesis of conducting cordon and search operations within mega-capacities that can not be evacuated becomes much more complicated in terms of movement and maneuver. *Chief of Staff of the Army, Strategic Studies Group* study related to megacities like Dhaka (Bangladesh), Lagos, (Nigeria), Bangkok, (Thailand), or Mexico City (Mexico) shows us that the chaotic urbanization in some urban areas can completely restrict the access of military vehicles inside them [12]. Infantry remains the main effort in urban actions, but the challenges of mobility and countermobility require the presence of specialists from other specialties such as engineers, explosive ordnance disposal (EOD), military police or even CBRN if there is suspicion that the opponent has weapons of mass destruction. Leadership creativity in using available materials and equipments (such as hesco walls or bulldozers) or concealing actions for surprising the opponent (such as bypassing main streets and using secondary ones or creating breaks to access buildings in order to avoid booby traps or IEDs) remains the key element of urban mobility.

3. Intelligence

The intelligence warfighting function is the related tasks and systems that facilitate understanding the enemy, terrain, weather, civil considerations, and other significant aspects of the operational environment [13]. The process of collecting, filtering, analyzing and disseminating timely, accurate and relevant information helps military leaders to reduce the fog of war by understanding the operational environment. In the specific case of urban areas, commanders and staff have to forget the simple Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB), focused on pure analysis of military factors, and adopt the complex analysis of the operational environment. This requires a detailed examination of not only the variables of the METT-TC (Mission, Enemy, Terrain and Weather) missions, but also of the operational factors specific to the PMESII-PT domains (Political, Military, Economic, Social, Infrastructure, Information, Physical Environment, and Time). Moreover, the analysis of all mission variables and operational factors that can influence the environment should not be limited to extracting them on separate lists or graphic materializing on an overlay, but to identifying the connections between them, the decisive points and the centers of gravity. In analyzing the operational environment specific to the heavily populated areas, the identification of all threats is important, but identification of centers of gravity is vital for the effective implementation of COAs. The total control of urban areas is not feasible because it requires enormous resources but identification and focus on key terrain control can be a affordable option. Terrain, Obstacles, Cover and Concealment (OAKOC) analyzes certainly identifies high-rise buildings in urban areas as key points as they can be used to install observation posts or even snipers firing position. But only OAKOC analyze it is not enough to understand the urban environment as a whole. The identification of civil

considerations (ASCOPE) and the node-link analysis of the PMESII systems associated with the adversary and other relevant actors should complement OAKOC's analysis in the military decision-making process. Creating a more realistic view of the operational environment allows for the development of effective COAs that take into account elements such as strengths, weaknesses, key nodes, COGs, and other

factors (as show in figure no. 2) [14]. This complex analysis of the urban environment allows the identification of the key points specific to the military domain and other key terrain based on its functional, political, economic, or social significance. In this respect, mosques, schoolyards, power stations, refugee camps and places of worship may be key terrain as well.

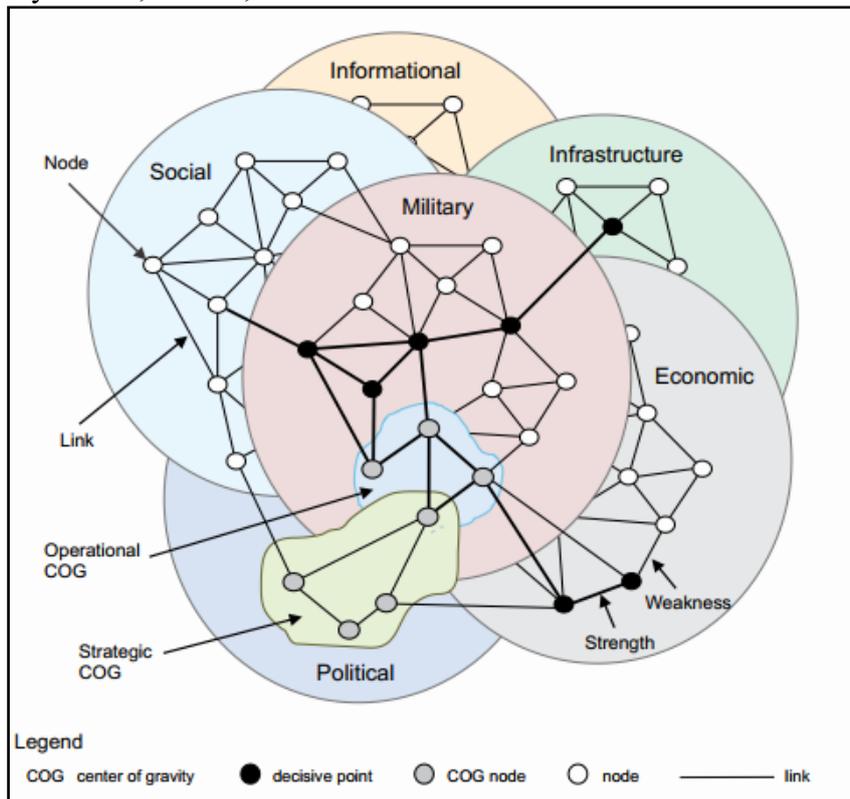


Figure no. 2: Systems Perspective of the Operational Environment

The ability of military leaders to understand the operational environment and adapt to information received in real time depends on the information flow and permission to make the decision in a timely manner (like the team of teams management system previously discussed in the mission command). The diversity and complexity of factors that have an impact on the operational environment make it impossible to create patterns that can be imported from one urban area to another, from a conflict country to another. The unique character of every operational environment is generated by its individual and common effects of each element such as physical and human

terrain, infrastructure, society, culture, religion, climate, political, economic or military system, and many other local, regional or even international factors. *The intelligence warfighting function studies each urban area individually to determine how it works and understand its complex relationships* [15]. The efficiency of IMINT, SIGINT or GEOINT technical sensors is reduced during missions in urban areas and HUMINT-specific ones become a priority. The inability to find and identify the opponent hiding behind the human walls remains the main obstacle for military leaders in setting up and conducting irregular fighting. But this impediment is

amplified by the impossibility of military forces to adapt in real time to changes due to interference in the communications system. Urban infrastructure reduces or shortens the flow of information between sensors and shooters, which makes the decision of the leaders to be delayed and the reaction of the forces to be ineffective. Collecting information from members of local communities should not be done through torture or other forms of coercion, but by their voluntary participation. A majority population reluctant to share information about the opponent is a totally different subject to be considered separately, in the context of the legitimacy of foreign forces, and this issue can not be solved by force. Technological advances (communications, satellite, video cameras, drones, sensors, surveillance systems, facial recognition equipments etc) must be used during urban actions and BIOMETRICS procedures become extremely useful in the difficult task of identifying and separating insurgents of innocent civilians. In the context of technology dependence, it is necessary to be aware of the short-circuiting of the information flow due to the interruption of the radio links / GPS signals during the underground actions, or due to a lack of signal in the case of unfavorable weather conditions or even due to the jamming actions performed by the opponent. Urban terrain features can force ground forces to act in the absence of informational support or even in the absence of radio link with the higher echelon. This should not lead to a weakening of the tempo or loss of the initiative, but the preparation of forces to act independently and based on the information available to that point. Last but not least, intelligence must take into account the current migration of the society into the online environment and the global expansion of the Internet. Cyber threats (cyberweapons, online attacks, social disinformation, online manipulation, etc.) are a real threat to all armed conflicts.

4. Fires

The fires warfighting function is the related tasks and systems that provide collective and coordinated use of Army indirect fires, air and missile defense, and joint fires [16]. The urban environment and the density of the local population significantly affect the engagement of artillery or close air support as a result of the difficulty in identifying targets accurately. The solution of target acquisition with the use of reconnaissance assets (Special Forces) is still difficult to perform due to the problem of collateral victims among the local population. The use of artillery during the Battle of Fallujah took place when the majority of the non-combatant population was evacuated from the city. Urban struggle in the absence of innocent civilians becomes less complicated because it benefits from close air support of aircrafts, indirect fire of artillery (above buildings and friendly forces) and the fire power of armoured APC, MRAP or tanks. But the real world shows us megacities surrounded by inaccessible, poverty and unhealthy slums. These areas are inaccessible to the armored vehicles and the population is impossible to evacuate safely. In urban fights smoke from burning old car tire can block the visibility of ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance) platforms. Lack of visibility and information will freeze out the air support. The difficulty to see and adjust artillery firings limits indirect fire support. All of this because of an old cheap used car tire.

5. Sustainment

The sustainment warfighting function is the related tasks and systems that provide support and services to ensure freedom of action, extend operational reach, and prolong endurance. Logistics is planning and executing the movement and support of forces [17]. Localization of operations in the urban environment facilitates logistical support by exploiting the local, regional or even national transport system (naval ports,

airports, railway stations). The ability to support logistics in large-scale and long-distance military operations must be based on that city's water, fuel, electricity, and food supply systems. This is still a reason to help governmental, national and local authorities in their effort to protect and expand social, administrative and rule of law services. Soldiers, contractors, and supply lines act through a hostile environment. Logistics convoys are considered "soft target" and predilection targets of irregular forces. Case Study of The 507th Maintenance Company [18], caught in ambush due to a wrong turn at an intersection near Al Nasiriyah-Iraq, confirms the existing challenges to logistical support.

6. Protection

The protection warfighting function is the related tasks and systems that preserve the force so the commander can apply maximum combat power to accomplish the mission. Force protection is preventive measures taken to mitigate hostile actions against personnel (to include family members), resources, facilities, and critical information [19]. Protection makes us think to concrete or hesco walls that provide the security needed by the military forces inside their Forward Operation Bases (FOB). Or Mine Armored Protected Ambush (MRAP) armor, body armor, helmet, gloves, goggles and shields used in cordon and search urban missions. But the irregularity aim people and leaders must extend the concept of protection beyond their military forces. The protection of the population must be in the hands of all commanders and the implementation of a new principle, **the responsibility to protect people**, can and must include the citizen in the concept of the survivability. The winning of irregular conflicts, mainly carried out in the urban environment, can be achieved only in the context of the total and permanent protection of the local population.

5. Conclusions

The predictability of future operational environments becomes utopian in the context of multitude of factors, systems, and domains that influence upon armed conflicts. The fluidity of forces and adaptability of leaders to the operational environment remain the only constant of military operations, regardless of the nature or the place in which they take place. Even if it is difficult to make realistic estimates of future armed conflicts, one assessment that can not deny is the urbanization of the world and increased likelihood of military action inside densely populated areas or even megacities. Unfortunately, we avoid going deep into the study of this specific urban skills and still focus on training on open-field warfare styles. This mentality needs to be changed because **irregularity replaces conventionality** and urbanization moves population from rural to urban areas. Certainly the effort to create megacity size urban training center is impossible to achieve. But we can train on module and have to start develop more and more skills to prepare our liders for urban fights. Because the future war will mostly take place in populated or even heavily populated areas. The real understanding of the operational environment will enable leaders to become aware of and eliminate certain cognitive biases [21]. It refers here in particular to those that deform the efficient **multi-domain solution** of urban challenges by applying strictly military methods. Leaders must understand that the city is a true system of systems and depends on the proper functioning of the component parts (political, economic, social, informational, infrastructure etc). The projection of elements of combat power during the urban irregular actions must take account of all these factors because the challenges of the cities go beyond the military sphere of action.

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