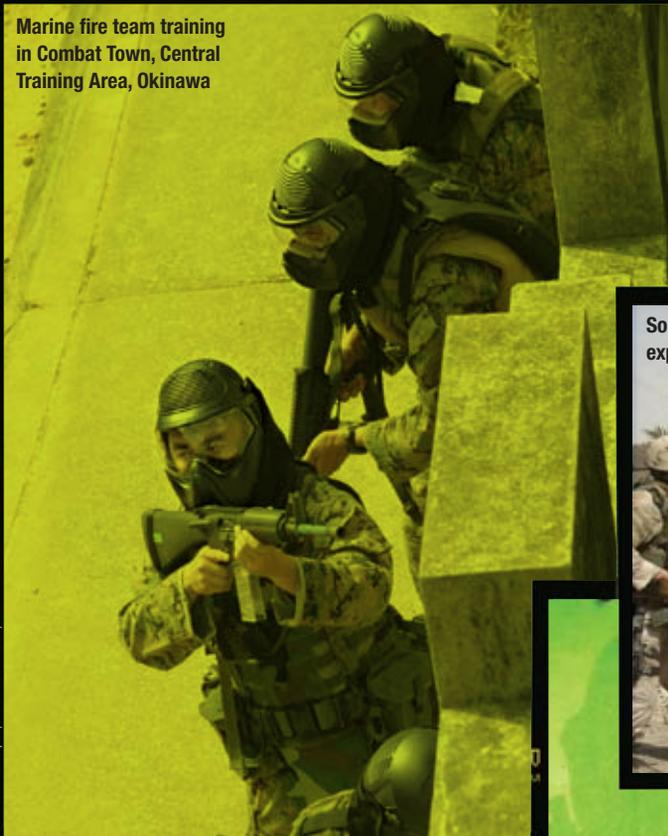


Marine fire team training in Combat Town, Central Training Area, Okinawa



U.S. Marine Corps (C. Warren Peace)

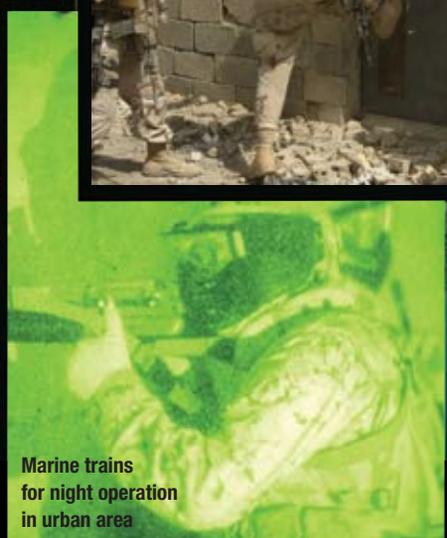
Soldiers searching for improvised explosive devices in Baghdad



Camp Victory Combat Digital (Jorge A. Rodriguez)

▲ Download as wallpaper at ndupress.ndu.edu

Marine trains for night operation in urban area



30th Space Communications Squadron (Barry A. Loo)

Where the Streets Have No Names Looking Past Operation *Iraqi Freedom* to Future Urban Operations

By STEPHEN R. DALZELL

In the ongoing debate over the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, some assume that if it had been done differently (more troops, different plans), then current conditions would be different (no insurgency, better economy). Others defend the invasion as executed but agree things have not gone according to plan. Although seemingly incompatible, both positions assume that the situation we are facing in the fourth year of Operation *Iraqi Freedom* was not inevitable and that

it is an aberration in terms of military operations. In fact, it is much more likely that the opposite is true. If we had avoided prolonged urban stability operations, it would have been because Iraq was exceptional. We need to learn the right lessons from current operations



because such operations will become the rule, not the exception, in the foreseeable future.

For years, U.S. doctrine and training (for example, military operations in urban terrain) have been based on the assumption that the setting for urban operations

Lieutenant Colonel Stephen R. Dazell, USA, wrote this essay while serving as Senior Service College Fellow at Tufts University. A recent graduate of the U.S. Army War College, his essay won the Strategy Article category of the 2006 Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Strategic Essay Contest.

would look like European cities—where some of the biggest obstacles would be to overcome removable rubble and service interruptions. Even after our experience in Somalia, we expected cities to have big buildings, extensive road networks, and existing infrastructure. That is not what we encountered in Iraq, however. How different was Iraq? Ask the Marines sent to rescue captured U.S. Soldiers in “House 13” on a certain street in Samarra: “As they made their way through a dusty warren of two-story mud-colored hutches . . . they found House 11. They found House 12. But no House 13. What they did see were more and more Iraqis swarming around.”¹

Now the United States is building better urban training areas, modeled on realities encountered in Iraq and Afghanistan.² Iraq’s oil wealth and stable regime set it apart from the environment that would be found in most of the world’s “at-risk” cities. Unlike Iraq—in which most urban areas were developed before sanctions and war led to decay—almost a quarter of the population in both sub-Saharan Africa and the Latin America/Caribbean region live in slums, which are defined by substandard physical conditions and/or the fact they were illegally built, and are therefore not integrated into conventional political and economic structures. There, U.S. Soldiers will not just be groping for “House 13”; they will be searching for a particular alleyway hidden among acres of plywood shacks.

Shantytowns and slums are the urban battlespaces of the future. The U.S. military must prepare for that environment by developing appropriate doctrine, organization, training, material, leadership, education, personnel, and facilities and giving the warfighter ways to process information and coordinate actions where all existing ground references are unintelligible to the outsider.

U.S. urban operations doctrine relegates civil-military operations to secondary chapters that could almost be subtitled, “How to keep the rabble out of your way.” Why, then, worry about cities at all? Cities matter because that is where the people are; a state does not win a war, stabilize a country, or secure the future until it succeeds with the urban population. Instead of wishing civilians away, we need to figure out how to win them over and help them.

Within weeks of seizing Baghdad, U.S. Soldiers recognized that their inability to address basic human needs and meet fundamental living requirements was turning

citizens against them. “We are dying for help from the NGOs [nongovernmental organizations], and we get zero from OCPA [Office of the Coalition Provisional Authority],” said one. “You can feel it out on the streets; people are frustrated, and we’re getting rocks thrown at us in neighborhoods where we never did before,” said another.³ In other cases, the stick was needed. U.S. forces found it necessary to make it clear to civilians that they were the center of gravity and could either prolong the insurgency or help coalition forces defeat it.⁴

The new urban environments reflect global changes, and those changes directly impact how the profession of arms does business. Industrial-age conflict saw cities as centers of industry and commerce—the joints and tendons of society. Cities were important primarily with respect to how they supported the clash between organized armies. But fourth-generation conflict is turning the focus to winning the cities, as that is where the combatants live and operate from. The best national strategies for combating terrorism integrate programs of urban development and political reforms with improved law enforcement.⁵ All focus on “winning hearts and minds” as much as changing the physical shape of the urban landscape.

To prepare strategically for these challenges, the United States needs the resolve to maintain hard-to-manage skills like civil affairs, psychological operations, and linguist/regional expertise in peacetime and rapidly integrate them with other units in time for effective operations. Urban operations doctrine needs to be rewritten to focus planners on cities as the positive objective of warfare. Hostiles need to be located, cities need to be controlled, citizens need to be provided for, and institutions must be created before victory can be declared.

General Charles Krulak, USMC, crystallized the reality of modern combat in his “three-block war”⁶ vision of Marines and Soldiers conducting combat, stability, and security operations simultaneously and in close proximity to each other. His insight, however, has failed to reshape either doctrine or planning. American leaders still discuss operations as comprising distinct phases, even when they know better. General John Sattler, USMC, who commanded the joint force in the battle for Fallujah in late 2004, reflected the standard mindset when he referred to his Phase IV as “the civil affairs phase.” At the same time, however, he recognized that “Phase IV—type

humanitarian and reconstruction activities” actually commenced during Phase III, combat operations.⁷

If Iraq challenged our military thinking, future operations in the least stable parts of the world may break it altogether unless we earnestly embrace the lessons to be learned. The United Nations estimates that the populations of less developed regions will grow at an annual rate of 1.3 percent between 2000 and 2020, with the percentage of residents living in urban areas increasing from 40 to 51 percent.⁸ These areas will continue expanding until they merge into huge bands of urban terrain. It will no longer be possible to think of cities as obstacles to be bypassed or key terrain to be seized in a single move. In the course of a conflict, a series of three-block wars will extend incrementally over the region, with low-level conflict flaring up repeatedly in areas behind the “front line” on our tactical maps.⁹

Current trends also give potential opponents the ability to escalate conflicts rapidly. No longer can U.S. forces deploy to conduct humanitarian missions without being prepared for unexpected escalations entailing security operations or even combat. We need to recognize the strategic importance of civilians and to create a new model for urban operations that fully integrates a wide range of potential activities. Anecdotal evidence suggests that in those Iraqi cities where the U.S. military was responsible for both reconstruction and security, with a focus on short-turnaround, high-impact projects, there was a more rapid increase in stability than where more complicated interagency and/or international efforts were attempted. Among other virtues, this multitasking type of military-led effort makes it clear that Soldiers on patrol are also providing the material benefits of peace and, potentially, the seeds of cooperation.¹⁰

U.S. strategists and planners need to develop means for monitoring actions and controlling forces in ways that recognize the independence of small units, thus breaking away from the sequential, progressive model of “phased activity” and our geographic understanding of coherent forward lines of troops and forward edges of the battle area. While many transformational initiatives seek to rethink the nonlinear battlefield, they still see the battlefield as the spatial array of military forces and miss the ways in which large groups of civilians, changing location, direction, behavior, and attitudes, will impact multidimensional military mobility. This confluence

of activity will require us to see the continuity of operations such that security efforts support relief, and both lay the foundation for future development.

Experience is alleged to be the best teacher, but first it gives the test, then the lesson. The U.S. military is going through a challenging learning experience in Iraq. The only thing more painful would be for us to fail to learn or to learn the wrong lessons. In some ways, the struggle to secure Iraq's cities is unique, but in others it provides a honing opportunity for future urban operations. That Americans will be tasked with patrolling streets in other developing countries at some point seems relatively certain, and the time to prepare for that future is at hand. **JFQ**

NOTES

¹ Peter Baker, "Rescuers Nearly Called Mission Off: Team of Marines Feared Ambush," *The Washington Post*, April 16, 2003, 1. One U.S. captive managed to get the Marines' attention from inside a building and was rescued.

² Michelle Volkman, "Welcome to 'Little Baghdad'," *Yuma Sun*, April 13, 2005, and James Hannah, "Mock Villages Provide Taste of Realism," Associated Press via *Army Times* online, August 1, 2005.

³ David Wood, "Absent Aid, Military Warns, Slums Becoming Tinderboxes," *Newhouse News Service*, June 26, 2003.

⁴ Dan Murphy, "An Iraqi City Becomes Turn-around Story," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 31, 2005; Ann Scott Tyson, "Ten Days in Tall Afar: An Exception, Not a Model That Is Easily Replicated," *The Washington Post*, March 26, 2006, B2.

⁵ For one example, see Stephen R. Dalzell, "Beyond 'Draining the Swamp': Urban Development and Counterterrorism in Morocco," upcoming publication by the Joint Special Operations University, Hurlburt Field, FL.

⁶ Charles C. Krulak, "The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War," *Marines Magazine*, January 1999, available at <au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/usmc/strategic_corporal.htm>.

⁷ John F. Sattler and Daniel H. Wilson, "Operation AL FAJR: The Battle of Fallujah—Part II," *Marine Corps Gazette* 89, no. 7 (July 2005), 22–23.

⁸ United Nations Human Settlements Programme, *The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements 2003* (London: Earthscan Publications, 2003), 246. The figures are even higher for the least developed countries, where a 2.4 overall growth rate will push urbanization levels up nearly 47 percent, from 25.6 percent of population to 37.6 percent. The security implications of this and other global trends are discussed in Richard P. Cincotta,

Robert Engelman, and Danielle Anastasion, *The Security Demographic: Population and Civil Conflict after the Cold War* (Washington, DC: Population Action International, 2003).

⁹ Richard J. Norton offers an even more dire image of the trajectory of urban development in his "Feral Cities," *Naval War College Review* 56, no. 4 (Autumn 2003), 97–106.

¹⁰ T. Christian Miller, "Sadr City Success Story," *The Los Angeles Times*, September 7, 2005, 1.

