EXCUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Urban warfare is not a new phenomenon. The U.S. Army saw urban combat in the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Civil War, and elsewhere. Starting with World War II, overall armed conflict began to occur around centers with a high population density. This new backdrop for conflict has caused a whole new set of challenges, especially in an era of public scrutiny. The "Army's capacity to engage, fight, and win major urban combat operations will determine the success of future operational and strategic endeavors."[1]

Purpose

To illuminate best practices to execute urban operations in Iraq, AWG identified lessons learned from modern urban warfare from 1980 to the present. AWG's lens was similar to JFCOM's 2004-06 joint experiment Urban Resolve: "How can [the U.S. Army] fight in urban terrain against an intelligent, determined, well-equipped adversary and win quickly without unacceptable casualties to ourselves or our allies, unacceptable civilian casualties, or unacceptable destruction of infrastructure?"[2] To that end, AWG looked at the following examples:

- British operations in Northern Ireland (1980-98)
- Israeli Defense Force (IDF) operations in Lebanon (1982-2006)
- The Siege of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-95)
- The Battle of Mogadishu, Somalia (1993)
- Russian operations in Grozny, Chechnya, Russia (1994-95 and 1999-2000)
- U.S. operations in Baghdad and Fallujah, Iraq (2003-04)
- Lebanese Armed Forces operations in Nahr al-Bared, Lebanon (May-Sep 2007)
- The Russo/Georgian War, Georgia (2008)
- IDF operations in the West Bank, Israel (2014)
- The Second Battle of Donetsk, Ukraine (2014-15)

Lessons Learned

Strategic:

- Urban operations are seldom short-lived or low-cost.[3]
- Civilian casualties are a major concern in urban operations. However, concerns over collateral damage (civilian casualties and property damage/destruction) generally decline as friendly military casualties increase.[4]

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[1] (Felix, et al. 2015)
[2] Ibid.
[3] (Marine Corps Intelligence Activity 1999)
[4] Ibid.

- Units must adapt for urban operations: task organizing as appropriate (including enabler integration), equipping beyond MTOE authorizations, and reducing soldier load to increase mobility and agility.[12]

IMPLICATIONS

- Civilians will be on the urban battlefield. Commanders must balance operational necessity with minimizing civilian casualties and collateral damage.
- Urban operations frequently result in higher casualty rates. Commanders must plan appropriately to mitigate this. However, commanders should not allow casualty rates to reduce attempts to limit civilian casualties.
- Urban operations are resource- and Soldier-intensive. Commanders must plan adequate quantities and types of forces to successfully conduct urban operations. Because urban operations are fast-paced, violent, and stressful, commanders must plan for the relief or replenishment of forces.
- Urban operations are a combined arms fight. Commanders should use armor and infantry together. Indirect and air firepower should be used to support ground fighting. Appropriate enablers, such as engineers, should be used to ensure freedom of movement for maneuver forces.
- Urban operations are multi-domain. Adversaries will use all aspects of physical and virtual domains to mitigate friendly technological and other advantages. Commanders must do the same.
- Urban operations are often a decentralized fight. Small-unit commanders must be resourced and empowered to operate independently based on mission command.
- Enabling efforts such as information operations and intelligence are often more than just supporting but instead vital to the success of urban operations.
- Urban operations do not end upon completion of hostilities. Commanders must plan for post-operation support to the populace, to help ensure a return to normalcy for civilians in the urban centers.

[12] (Marine Corps Intelligence Activity 1999)

perceptions will be formed in the first 100 days of a campaign, and they will be critical to military success.[16]

- Countering insurgencies, especially in urban environments, requires vigorous, proactive action across all lines of government activity to address the causes of major unrest as soon as it is apparent, to prevent disorder turning into an insurgency, terrorism, or civil war. This requires not only a pan-government comprehensive approach, but also a single campaign authority so that responses are coordinated effectively.[17]

- Urban operations require developing first-rate intelligence structures, processes, and capabilities so that military operations may be intelligence-led and non-military initiatives properly planned and directed. Effectiveness will be judged by what can be gathered and by how well the product is shared and used.[18]

- Pre-deployment training, relevant to the environment, is a must. There is value in a dedicated operational training system with the right team of quality instructors who frequently visit the operational theater to ensure troops are trained appropriately and have confidence in their preparation. It is important, however, that this pre-operational tour training is complemented by further education, related to the theater and the campaign, for commanding officers, company commanders, and key staff officers.[19]

[16] (Operation Banner: An Analysis of Military Operations in Northern Ireland 2006, 8-15)
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.

Operational:

- Appropriate doctrine is essential for urban operations. Based on prior urban operations in the 1960s and 70s, the IDF developed doctrine for urban warfare that focused on using armor, either in the lead or supporting infantry. However, the IDF favored using armor above infantry, which meant the IDF did not adjust their task organization to provide enough infantry to conduct urban operations.[23]

- Appropriate training for urban operations enhances unit success and soldier survivability. While the IDF developed excellent training for urban operations, not all Israeli soldiers received it. "Units with such training better understood the hazards of fighting in a city and appeared more confident than units without such training." However, only the regular army received this training; the reservists, who represented the majority of the fighting force, did not. As a result, reservists performed poorly and suffered more casualties.[24]

- Rules of engagement (ROE) may cause conflict in balancing minimizing civilian casualties with minimizing friendly casualties and completing the mission. The IDF had difficulties balancing the ROE with the nature of urban operations. IDF commanders had to minimize civilian casualties while simultaneously minimizing their own, but urban operations made it difficult to accommodate both. As a result, ground commanders often found ways around the ROE because there was no method for enforcement. As fighting continued, concerns over civilian casualties decreased as IDF casualties increased. Ground commanders determined that maintaining fast operational tempo while avoiding IDF casualties meant using artillery and close air support, even at the expense of collateral damage.[25]

- Urban operations are fast, violent, and stressful. The intensity and tempo of combat operations in urban environments resulted in high stress levels for IDF soldiers, effectively burning them out. Ten to 24% of IDF soldiers suffered psychological problems resulting from their combat experience.[26]

- Noncombatants present a unique obstacle in urban environments. First, there is a strategic imperative to minimize civilian casualties which often impacts military operations. Second, noncombatants often do not behave sensibly. For instance, the IDF found large numbers of civilians who refused to leave their homes despite the ongoing combat. Third, when noncombatants do flee, they often interfere with military operations. For example, 30,000 noncombatants fleeing Tyre clogged roads and prevented the IDF from attacking PLO strongpoints. Similarly, noncombatants fleeing Beirut slowed IDF operations into the city.[27]

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[23] (Marine Corps Intelligence Activity 1999)
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

- Urban operations need not stop during nighttime. The IDF conducted limited night operations in urban terrain. First, they had a limited number of night vision devices. Second, their soldiers frequently slept during the night to recover from the highly stressful urban operations during the day.[35]

Israeli-Hezbollah War: 2006

Background

On 12 July 2006, Hezbollah launched diversionary rocket attacks against various military positions and towns, including Zar'it and Shlomi. Simultaneously, they infiltrated the border into Israel near Zar'it, attacking an IDF patrol and killing three soldiers, wounding two, and capturing two. Hezbollah had carried out their threat of seizing Israeli soldiers to swap them for four Lebanese prisoners held by Israel. Because Hezbollah launched their raid from Lebanon, the Israeli government held the Lebanese government responsible.[36]

Israel initiated with artillery and airstrikes against key roads and bridges, military bases, and rocket and missile stockpiles. In response, Hezbollah fired around 4,000 rockets, mostly Katyusha 122mm rockets, into Israel, with approximately one-quarter striking Israeli cities and urban areas. When Israel ceased airstrikes against Lebanon, Hezbollah ceased rocket attacks; likewise, when Israel resumed airstrikes, Hezbollah resumed rocket attacks.[37]

Israel also launched a ground invasion into southern Lebanon. Hezbollah countered with guerilla-style warfare, mostly in urban areas, using small, well-armed units. These elements were trained and equipped to more effectively fight in the urban environment. One Israeli soldier is quoted as saying the Hezbollah fighters "are nothing like Hamas or the Palestinians" and "trained and highly qualified", which "kind of surprised" the IDF.[38] Hezbollah focused simply on inflicting losses on the IDF, assuming that this would defeat Israel's public will.[39]

The war ended following the approval of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701 on 11 August 2006. UNSCR 1701 called for the disarmament of Hezbollah, the withdrawal of the IDF from Lebanon, and the deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces and a UN security force in southern Lebanon. By 01 October 2006, most of the IDF had withdrawn from Lebanon. Between 1,200 to 1,300 Lebanese, mostly civilians,

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[35] (Marine Corps Intelligence Activity 1999)
[36] (Wikipedia n.d.)
[37] Ibid.
[38] (Erlanger and Oppel 2006)
[39] (Wikipedia n.d.)

on operations in close urban warfare. This limited the IDF's advantages in weapons and technology.[44]

- Telegraphing plans, using predictable avenues, and unnecessarily delaying allows adversaries time to prepare defenses. The IDF unnecessarily delayed their ground operations, allowing Hezbollah to adequately prepare its defenses. For instance, Israel waited for two weeks—until the signing of a cease-fire that would bring in a multi-national peacekeeping force—to begin an offensive toward the Litani River. Hezbollah, anticipating this, used the time to prepare ambushes along predictable lines of attack that resulted in significant IDF armor losses and casualties, including 34 soldiers in the last two days of the war.[45]

- While air power is useful in urban operations, it cannot win the fight by itself. The IDF initially thought they could use air power alone to achieve their strategic and operational goals. However, air power by itself was not effective, especially in urban environments. An asymmetric threat such as Hezbollah presents few lucrative targets for air attack. The IDF specifically focused on targeting Hizbollah leadership, fighting forces, and weapons which were all hidden in populated areas, which negated the potential advantage of air power (given collateral damage concerns). Air power must support ground forces to clear and hold urban environments.[46]

- Adversaries will use civilian patterns of life in an urban environment to their advantage. Hezbollah used normal civilian life to shield their activities. They were easily able to mask their patterns of life, including weapons movements, using civilian activities and traffic. IDF intelligence, including IMINT, was often unable to differentiate between Hezbollah and civilian activity in a timely manner, especially without supporting HUMINT.[47]

Tactical:

- Adversaries are adapting their task organization and adopting mission command appropriate to the urban environment. Hezbollah organized their fighters into "small, self-sufficient teams capable of operating independently and without direction from high authority for long periods of time". This was different from the typical hierarchal command structures seen in the Middle East. However, it is much more appropriate from the urban environment, offering flexibility to proactively adjust or rapidly respond to IDF operations.[48]

- Understanding that tanks are effective in urban environments, adversaries will use anti-armor weapons to defeat them. Hezbollah effectively used anti-armor

[44] (Cordesman, Sullivan and Sullivan 2007)
[45] Ibid.
[46] (Kreps 2007)
[47] (Cordesman, Sullivan and Sullivan 2007)
[48] Ibid.

SIEGE OF SARAJEVO: 1992-1995

Background

Following the death of President Josip Broz Tito, Yugoslavia collapsed into various republics desiring independence. As these countries began to develop, underlying ethnic tensions found new purpose as groups vied for power; eventually, this tension developed into armed conflicts. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, unlike Croatia and Serbia, no one ethnic group had a majority to gain control of the government. As fighting broke out between ethnic groups in Bosnia, Sarajevo became the focal point because it was the symbolic center of the country and nexus for Bosnian highways.[51]

In the history of modern warfare, the siege of Sarajevo is the longest siege of a capital city, lasting three times longer than the Battle of Stalingrad. For 1,419 days, the civilian population of Sarajevo, along with the Bosnian government defense forces (ARBiH) stationed in the city, were subjected to indiscriminate shelling by Serbian forces. When the siege lifted on 29 February 1996, thousands of buildings were destroyed and the infrastructure decimated. The National and University Library of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a major cultural center for the Balkans, had been intentionally bombarded with incendiary shells in an attempt to destroy all that it contained. Even more horrific was the number of casualties sustained: 13,952 people, including 5,434 civilians, were killed, an average of ten people per day.

Lessons Learned

Strategic:

- Urban centers can be leveraged by adversaries for strategic messaging. The Serbian leadership saw Sarajevo not only as a military objective, in and of itself, but also as a tool to curry international support. The Serbians left roads to Sarajevo open to allow international aid in to gain international favor.

Operational:

- The size of urban environments makes it difficult and resource-intensive to clear and hold. The urban terrain in Sarajevo made peacekeeping almost impossible due to the need to control so many buildings and other key terrain in the city. The number of peacekeepers needed to accomplish this would be prohibitive.[52]

Tactical:

- Urban fighting usually results in high casualty rates, which often prompts adversaries to resort to indiscriminate, highly-destructive indirect fire. Serbian forces did not engage in a street-to-street fight for the city due to the high

[51] (King n.d.)
[52] Ibid.