

Divisions in Large-Scale Urban Battles: The Essential Headquarters

A Monograph

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Abstract

Divisions in Large-Scale Urban Battles: The Essential Headquarters, by MAJ Nicolas Fiore, US Army, 58 pages.

The 2017 *National Security Strategy* and the US Army's *FM 3-0 Operations* formally directed the US Army to prepare for large scale combat operations (LSCO) against adversaries with peer military capabilities. LSCO campaigns in this context will likely center on controlling a globally-connected, regionally-dominant large city (population two hundred thousand to two million people), where the possibility of high casualties and collateral destruction pose a strategic risk to US legitimacy and a tactical challenge to employing joint firepower. US task forces will overcome these challenges and mitigate the risks of LSCO urban battles by assigning an Army division to both defeat the peer adversary and seize control of the city without destroying it. Case studies of the Russian Army in Grozny (1994) and the US Army in Baghdad (2003) indicate that divisional roles in planning, commanding, and controlling LSCO are essential to winning urban battles. With the right operational approach, a US division can avoid the high casualties and physical destruction that historically characterized urban combat, and convert tactical control of the campaign's decisive city into strategic success.

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The military education at Fort Leavenworth’s Advanced Military Studies Program and Command and General Staff Officer’s Course, complemented by civilian education at Dartmouth College’s Tuck School of Business, provided me the intellectual tools for a project of this magnitude and complexity. I am grateful to the Army for paying for these opportunities and to the Soldiers who have carried my share of the load while I was at school—I hope some portion of this paper is of value to you. I also owe special thanks to the School of Advanced Military Studies especially Anthony Carlson, Glen Clubb, Peter Schifferle, Bruce Stanley, Jacob Stoil, and my classmates in Seminar 9. I will endeavor to be just as helpful to other authors in the future.

My wife Melinda deserves more credit than I can briefly assign here. Thank you, Love.

Acronyms

3rd ID	Third Infantry Division (Mechanized), United States Army
JTF	Joint Task Force
LCC	Land Component Command
LOC	Line of Communication
LSCO	Large-Scale Combat Operations
MRB	Motorized Rifle Brigade, Russian Army
MRR	Motorized Rifle Regiment, Russian Army
NSS	National Security Strategy of the United States of America
ROE	Rules of Engagement

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I. Introduction: The US Army Often Fights Urban Battles

History instructs that for a variety of reasons, cities have always been targets for attack by adversaries.

—General Donn A. Starry, foreword to *Breaking the Mold*

The 2017 National Security Strategy and the US Army's new *FM 3-0 Operations* formally reintroduced the context in which the US Army may soon conduct large scale combat operations (LSCO) against adversaries with peer military capabilities.¹ The two documents direct the Army to prepare for scenarios of great power competition and conflict, which may increasingly center on globally-connected, regionally-dominant large cities. Great powers normally fight decisive land battles to control cities because cities contain valuable—often essential—concentrations of power, people, and resources. The US Army has a long history with urban warfare, from the Continental Army's 1775 inaugural campaign to besiege British forces in Boston to the 2017 liberation of Mosul from Islamic State. Urban warfare is important enough that the Army even has a dedicated field manual for urban operations—no other terrain category currently merits its own doctrinal publication.² Still, the Army's clear planning preference is to avoid fighting in cities whenever possible, even though the historical record, global trends in urbanization, and current doctrine require US Army maneuver headquarters to plan and prepare to execute LSCO on urban battlefields.

Since World War II, sweeping improvements in operational reach, mass urbanization, and the proliferation of irregular warfare increasingly compelled modern armies to fight in cities despite strategists' aversion to the high casualties and collateral damage that characterize urban

¹ Donald Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: White House, 2017); US Department of the Army, *Field Manual (FM) 3-0, Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017).

² US Department of the Army, *Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 3-06, Urban Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017).

combat.³ After the Cold War, Russia and the United States both tried new operational approaches intended to capture Grozny and Baghdad intact.⁴ The Russian Army's first assault on Grozny failed, so the Russian military reverted to their traditional firepower-centric approach to dislocate the Chechen rebels. Ten years later, a better-prepared US military captured Baghdad with fewer than expected casualties but at great risk to friendly forces.⁵ Most recently, the major battles of the Syrian Civil War and the war against Islamic State clearly demonstrate that neither the Russian nor American armies can avoid urban battle. Although both forces achieved their strategic objectives, visual media from Aleppo and the liberation of Mosul reminded the world how destructive urban battles can still be.⁶ International reporting broadcasted countless civilian casualties, broken homes, and ruined neighborhoods, fueling widespread criticism of the Russian and American use of firepower to support their local partners' urban tactics. American military strategists questioned whether American voters, policy-makers, and military leaders will continue to accept such high levels of casualties, collateral damage to infrastructure and private property, and the concomitant reconstruction expense to US taxpayers.⁷

LSCO Adversaries May Prefer Urban Battles

From a historical perspective, the devastation of Mosul's urban center was quite normal, but LSCO doctrine expects US Army and allied land forces to replicate the exceptionally low-destruction of the Battle of Baghdad, even when fighting peer adversaries.⁸ The potential

³ Roger J. Spiller, *Sharp Corners: Urban Operations at Century's End* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2001), v-27.

⁴ Russell W. Glenn, *Combat in Hell: A Consideration of Constrained Urban Warfare* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1996), 9-11.

⁵ Gregory Fontenot, E. J. Degen, and David Tohn, *On Point: United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004), 336-37.

⁶ Thomas Arnold and Nicolas Fiore, "Five Operational Lessons from the Battle for Mosul," *Military Review* 99, no. 1 (January 2019): 56-71.

⁷ Gian Gentile, et al., *Reimagining the Character of Urban Operations for the U.S. Army: How the Past Can Inform the Present and Future* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017).

⁸ John Spencer, "The Destructive Age of Urban Warfare; or, How to Kill a City and How to Protect It," Modern War Institute, March 28, 2019, accessed March 29, 2019,

adversaries named in the 2017 NSS each contain many globally-significant large cities where LSCO could occur, or a LSCO campaign could focus on controlling the capital of nearby buffer state. The buffer states where opposing national interests are more likely to flare up into military conflicts are often regions organized around one dominant, globally-connected large city (see Figure 1 for a depiction of potential LSCO campaign urban objectives).

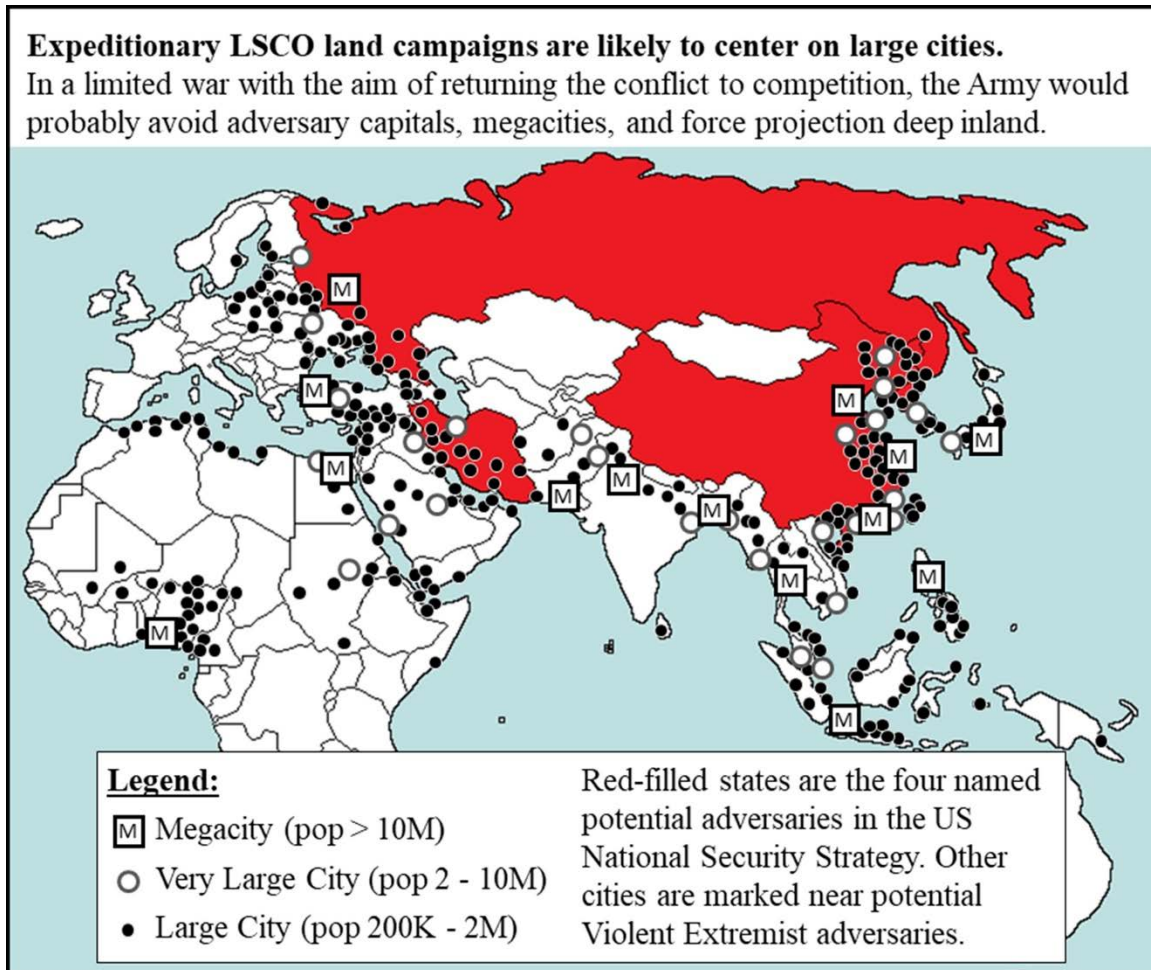


Figure 1. Map of large cities in potential LSCO conflict areas

Source: Adapted from visualization by *The Economist* and the UN's annual World Urbanization Prospects. *The Economist* Data Team, "Daily Chart: Bright Lights, Big Cities," *The Economist Online*, February 4, 2015, accessed February 20, 2019, <http://www.economist.com/node/21642053>; UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *2018 Revision of World Urbanization Prospects* (New York: United Nations, 2018).

<https://mwi.usma.edu/destructive-age-urban-warfare-kill-city-protect/>; The 2017 US NSS names four peer adversaries: China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea. Trump, 2.

These large cities may constitute essential LSCO campaign objectives in a limited war to force a strategic settlement by liberating friendly populations or threatening an adversary's control of their own state and the means to continue the conflict. Large cities may also become attractive battlefields to an adversary willing to invite urban destruction as part of a cost-imposing strategy to deter US military intervention or disrupt US use of joint firepower by taking advantage of the United States' strict adherence to the Laws of Land Warfare.⁹ Campaign planners may prefer to completely avoid cities, but may require urban infrastructure for joint logistics or may not be able to spare enough combat power to operationally fix and strategically isolate bypassed urban adversaries.¹⁰ In the context of the new NSS and *FM 3-0, Operations*, the US Army will need ways to win LSCO urban battles without accepting asymmetric risk to the mission, force, and nearby civilians.

A LSCO urban battle is a multiple-phase combat operation against a peer adversary to control a large city.¹¹ LSCO peer adversaries, through a combination of qualitative and quantitative capabilities, can contest and even dominate domains in an effort to defeat and destroy US Army forces.¹² If an adversary is not able to favorably contest the US Army in the field, either generally or after a tactical defeat, then the adversary may consolidate in a city to prepare for

⁹ The US Army's manual on the Law of Land Warfare specifically constrains commanders' use of military force in urban battles, and exhorts the commander to exceed the minimal requirements of Distinction, Proportionality, Military Necessity, and (preventing) Unnecessary Suffering when planning to use military force near civilians and non-combatants. US Department of the Army, *Field Manual (FM) 27-10, The Law of Land Warfare* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1956), sec. 39-45.

¹⁰ Glenn points out that even bypassed cities can become resource magnets for the operational-level commander. Russell W. Glenn, *Heavy Matter: Urban Operations' Density of Challenges* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2000), 11.

¹¹ The United Nations Statistics Division classifies "cities" by population and density. In order to describe division-sized urban objectives, this paper will define "large cities" as Dense Urban Environments with a population between 200,000 and 2,000,000 people, that present a military problem too deep and dense to be solved by a single brigade action, but not so deep that the military problem requires its own campaign. United Nations Statistics Division, Demographic and Social Statistics, "Population Density and Urbanization Standards and Methods," in *Demographic Yearbook 2016* (New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2016), paras. 96-99; *ATP 3-06, Urban Operations*, 1-3.

¹² US Army, *FM 3-0, Operations*, 1-9.

urban battle.¹³ A LSCO adversary who is determined to fight an urban battle against US forces has already accepted the risk to their forces, civilians on the battlefield, and the high collateral damage associated with urban combat. The US commander, however, is bound by law and military ethics to establish rules of engagement (ROE) that minimize noncombatant deaths and wanton destruction. The US operational approach must seek to restrict the use of firepower to manage damage to the physical environment: the structures, private property, ecology, and interstitial systems that sustain life in a dense urban environment.¹⁴ Recognizing historical US policy restraints, even adversaries with a vital post-conflict interest in a theater's cities are likely to seek urban battles as legitimate ways to improve the correlation of forces and achieve their strategic objectives. Ruthless adversaries may even seek a high-attrition, high-destruction battle to inflict harm on concentrations of civilians and destroy their city as Syrian President Bashar Assad destroyed Aleppo from 2012-2017.¹⁵ Against such adversaries, US commanders should expect to fight LSCO urban battles with dual objectives of defeating a peer adversary force while protecting the city from civilian casualties and collateral damage. The first US tactical echelon capable of achieving both of those goals in a LSCO urban battle is the division.¹⁶

¹³ John Spencer, "Stealing the Enemy's Urban Advantage: The Battle of Sadr City," Modern War Institute, January 31, 2019, accessed February 20, 2019, <https://mwi.usma.edu/stealing-enemys-urban-advantage-battle-sadr-city/>.

¹⁴ Interstitial systems connect and support life and activity within a city, commonly including: water, food, energy, communications, transportation, manufacturing, economic, commercial, and entertainment systems. Donn A. Starry, "Foreword" in *Block by Block: The Challenges of Urban Operations*, ed. William G. Robertson and Lawrence A. Yates (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College Press, 2003), viii; Michael Batty, "Cities as Complex Systems: Scaling, Interactions, Networks, Dynamics, and Urban Morphologies," in *Encyclopedia of Complexity and Systems Science*, ed. Robert A. Meyers (New York: Springer, 2009), 1042-43.

¹⁵ United Nations Human Rights Council, "Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic" (New York: UN General Assembly, 2017), accessed February 20, 2019, http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/34/64; Amnesty International, *Left to Die Under Siege: War Crimes and Human Rights Abuses in Eastern Ghouta, Syria* (London: Peter Beneson House, 2015), 51, accessed February 20, 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde24/2079/2015/en/>.

¹⁶ US Department of the Army, *Field Manual (FM) 3-94, Theater Army Corps and Division Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), 6-1.

US Divisions Fight Offensive LSCO Urban Battles

The US Army expects divisions to fight offensive LSCO battles in large cities defended by determined peer adversaries. Assuming the Army will not conduct LSCO within the United States, these Army divisions must be part of an expeditionary joint task force (JTF). Expeditionary forces take time to deploy, so the Army will likely be conducting offensive operations within the theater to regain the initiative, dominate the adversary, and consolidate gains through stability operations. Although field armies and corps could also be assigned extremely large urban objectives, such as megacities, these larger urban objectives would presumably be subdivided and assigned to subordinate divisions as maneuver headquarters. A US Army corps executing a campaign that culminated in an urban battle might use one division to defeat the defender in the field, another to invest and then assault the urban objective, and a third to deter additional adversary forces from coming to the relief of the city's defenders.¹⁷

Within this strategic context, US Army divisions preparing for LSCO operations can ignore the phantom of combat in a mega-city. Operations to control a megacity would be daunting, and would require a vastly larger military organization with very different capabilities than any permutation of the current Total Army force. Also, Michael Evans pointed out that operations are much more likely to occur in one of the thousands of large cities than in one of the two dozen megacities.¹⁸ Finally, if the contemporary US Army were deployed to a megacity, then military objectives would be circumscribed to specific geographic areas. Ultimately each division would be assigned its own "large city" within the megacity.

In a LSCO campaign, the division commander and staff should focus on defeating the peer adversary and leave planning the tactical aspects of non-combat/stability urban operations to

¹⁷ Each of the two maneuver corps in the 2003 invasion of Iraq committed one division to fight the decisive Battle of Baghdad, while the other two divisions remained engaged in the field. Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, 245-47.

¹⁸ Michael Evans, "The Case *Against* Megacities," *Parameters* 45, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 33-43.

follow-on or subordinate units. Divisions' immediate priority after defeating a regular adversary is to consolidate combat power for pursuit and exploitation operations against the adversary's main forces, and to defeat remnants of bypassed adversary forces before they can reorganize for a counterattack.¹⁹ Doctrinally, the corps headquarters plans for and prepares to consolidate gains following the tactical success of its subordinate divisions so that the lead divisions can focus on winning the close fight. Although stability operations are logically more common than combat operations, the division is not a tactical maneuver headquarters in stability operations. Historically, US brigades served as the senior tactical maneuver headquarters in counterinsurgency, constabulary operations, and other stability operations with support from their supervising division. Therefore, in an urban battle where divisions are the senior tactical maneuver headquarters, the division commander and staff should focus on managing the combat to set conditions—by avoiding civilian casualties and infrastructure destruction during the battle—for follow-on brigades from another division in the corps, or from host-nation security forces, to execute successful stability operations in the newly secured consolidation area.²⁰

Historical Operational Approaches to Urban Battle

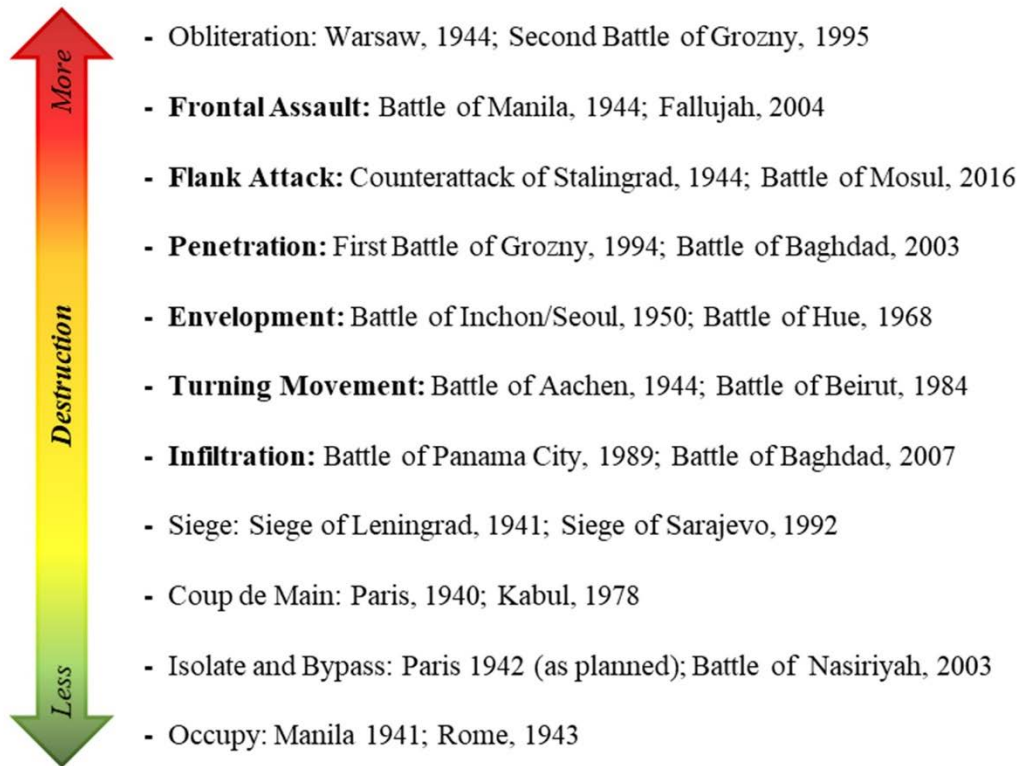
The operational environment and the commander's understanding of the division's comprehensive purpose in attacking a city will drive their operational approach for an urban battle. US Army doctrine lists six traditional forms of maneuver as frameworks for arranging tactical actions in the offense (shown in bold in Figure 2), but US commanders should also consider the four less-destructive options (toward the the bottom of Figure 2) if adequate time and forces are available to accomplish the strategic objective.²¹

¹⁹ US Department of the Army, *Training and Doctrine Command Pamphlet (TP) 525-3-8, The U.S. Army Concept for Multi-Domain Combined Arms Operations at Echelons Above Brigade, 2025-2045* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2019), 56.

²⁰ US Army, *FM 3-0, Operations*, 8-13.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 7-21.

Operational Approaches to Attack a Large City: Commanders planning for an urban battle craft an approach to maneuver against the adversary to achieve the required strategic effect within policy constraints on time, risk, and destruction.



Bold text denotes the six traditional US Army forms of maneuver.

Figure 2. LSCO attackers used a wide variety of approaches to win urban battles
 Source: The author.

Urban battles typically follow a historical campaign pattern that begins with fighting in the field and ends with one of the combatants consolidating control of the city to enable follow-on operations.²² In the classic Jominian formulation of an offensive expeditionary campaign, the line of operations leads from a base of operations toward a decisive objective—often the adversary’s capital.²³ The adversary deploys from that base and the defender accepts a decisive field battle in the frontier to protect the threatened city. If the attacker wins the field battle, then the defender

²² DuPuy Institute, *Measuring the Effects of Combat in Cities Phase I* (Fort Belvoir, VA: Center for Army Analysis, 2002), 5-6.

²³ As translated by Halleck, Baron Antoin de Jomini’s *Art of War* described the standard archetype for an offensive land campaign: win the war by defeating the adversary’s army in the field and seizing their capital. H. W. Halleck, *Elements of Military Art and Science* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1846), 56.

should concede the war and negotiate the terms of peace to avoid further battles. In Desert Storm, the US Army executed this type of field-centric operational approach and avoided urban battle, but the successful conclusion of the war depended on a credible US capability to resume the attack on Basra and Baghdad, and on President Saddam Hussein's ability to reframe the war as a strategic victory for Iraq.²⁴ The absolutist regimes contemporary to Jomini were able to publicly concede defeat and even cede territory without losing their mandate to govern. Governments today, however, are unlikely to survive the public's reaction if they capitulate after a defeat in the field while the state still has the means and will to resist.²⁵ LSCO adversaries are more likely to retreat toward the nearest large city to reconstitute their defense and prepare for an urban battle.

Although the LSCO urban battle takes place within the larger context of the joint task force's campaign, the division will need its own operational approach to arrange defeat and stability mechanisms in time, space, and purpose. US joint forces can operate in a position of technological advantage outside of the city—which will help the division dislocate the peer adversary from the field, isolate remaining adversary forces inside the city, and shape the urban battlefield to create favorable conditions for an assault. The JTF's supremacy in integrated joint firepower will help the division dominate a small portion of the defenders perimeter to penetrate, but the decisive point of the battle occurs after the successful breach, when an assault element inside the city must destroy the adversary's defensive cohesion through synchronized action in multiple domains. As the attack progresses, consolidation operations will require continuous efforts to effect civilians and isolated adversary remnants using the four stability mechanisms.²⁶

Table 1 shows the author's attacker-centric, chronologically-arranged conceptual structure for an

²⁴ Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *The General's War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, & Co., 1995), 480.

²⁵ Even autocratic regimes, and their selectorates, must consider the people's passion in order to avoid loss of electoral confidence, domestic unrest, and coups. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, et al., *The Logic of Political Survival* (Cambridge, MA: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2003), 405-07.

²⁶ US Department of the Army, *Army Doctrinal Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2016), 2-3.

urban battle, starting with the defeat of the adversary field army and culminating with decisive exploitation actions to completely defeat the defender’s military cohesion and prevent them from preserving control over any portion of the city sufficient to re-establish defense in depth.

Table 1. Historical event template for an urban battle

	<u>Attacking a Large City</u>	<u>Defending a Large City</u>
<i>Phase 0, Open the Campaign</i>	Defeat defending field army <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure line of operation to the city • Neutralize adversary army-in-being to prevent relief of city’s defenders 	Prevent urban battle <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If suitably advantageous, attempt to defeat attacker away from city • Else, trade space for time, withdraw to the city to preserve combat power
<i>Phase I, Approach</i>	Invest the city <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encircle adversary forces in the city to interdict their lines of communication • Establish consolidation area, basing and durable LOC for prolonged siege • Negotiate to avoid siege and assault 	Concentrate forces within the city <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disrupt and harass attacker's approach • Remove all available terrain- and population-sustainment into city • Proximity to population for protection • Negotiate for time and external relief
<i>Phase II, Siege</i>	Prepare an assault <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain encirclement and LOC • Reconnaissance to gain understanding • Shape the battlefield to prepare for the assault, degrade adversary resistance, and influence civilian support 	Prepare to defend <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect and conserve military capabilities to sustain duration of resistance • Disrupt attacker's preparation, attrit offensive capability when economical • Negotiate for time and external relief
<i>Phase III, Assault</i>	Assault to breach perimeter <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliberate breaching operations • Maintain command and sustainment of forces that enter the city • Establish a foothold to sustain reach 	Attrit attacking forces <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kill zones reinforced by obstacles • Maintain integrity of obstacle system • Counterattack to stop penetrations and restore defensive depth
<i>Phase IV, Exploit (Decisive)</i>	Destroy adversary cohesion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seize essential objectives • Destroy defender's interior lines • Create information effects that defeat adversary’s credibility and confidence 	Preserve control <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-establish a perimeter to maintain unit cohesion and interior lines • Trade space for more opportunities to attrit the attacker
<i>Phase V, Consolidate</i>	Consolidate against remnants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear city of organized defenders, prevent transition to insurgency • Impose control and order on city, disrupt population support to adversary • Follow-on forces assume stability role • Consolidate gains and combat power to resume and sustain offensive operations 	Minimize losses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capitulate: Negotiate for protection of combatants, civilians, and property • Denial: Obliterate value from the city to degrade the attacker's prize • Insurgency: Transition to irregular defense; disrupt consolidation of gains but not enough to invite obliteration

Note: This event template can assist the study of most urban battles, and will be used as an analytical framework to structure tactical actions in the Grozny and Baghdad case studies.

Source: The author.

The urban battle begins in *Phase I, Approach* when the defender abandons the field to consolidate their main force within the city to defend its perimeter. Once the attacker identifies that only a disruption force remains in the field, the attacker will deploy a division to approach and invest the city while other forces deploy to protect the siege against external relief. If the attacker can encircle the city, they will gain the operational initiative by monopolizing the ability to deploy additional capabilities to the battlefield, and the attacker can leverage the city's suburban transportation network to gain movement and distribution advantages.

In *Phase II, Siege* the attacker develops a siege that shapes the battlefield, the adversary, and friendly forces by improving the terrain, targeting adversary capabilities, and preparing maneuver units for the eventual assault. The defender prepares to repel that assault by constructing shelters that protect and sustain combat power for the duration of the siege, as well as tactical obstacles in engagement areas to attrit the attacker's assault forces. The defender can also use regular and irregular spoiling attacks in the attacker's close and consolidation areas to disrupt their preparation activities, influence negotiations, and even shift the correlation of forces until it is so unfavorable that the attacker must quit the siege.

Phase III, Assault begins when the attacker assesses that conditions are most favorable to assault the city. This decision is influenced by mission considerations (including policy, time available, and weather) and by the success of both friendly and adversary shaping operations in altering the correlation of forces. Although a prepared defense will significantly attrit the assaulting force, as long as the attacker enjoys external freedom of maneuver they can deliberately concentrate overwhelming force at any breach site and will penetrate the defender's perimeter. However, the modern urban density creates depth in large cities that enables defensive delay tactics, so it is more difficult for the attacker to completely penetrate the defensive perimeter in a way that automatically defeats the cohesion of the adversary's defense. The attacker must resource the assault for rapid and sustainable follow-on operations to exploit the breach, otherwise the defender can use protected internal lines to concentrate combat power to

counter-attack the penetrating force, establish a new defensive perimeter, and force the attacker to prepare another costly deliberate assault.

The fight to control the interior of the city in *Phase IV, Exploit* is the operationally decisive phase of the urban battle. When the attacker finally breaks the defender's interior lines and seizes essential objectives, the previously integrated defense will fragment into several unsupported positions without purpose, which the attacker can reduce at leisure. Conversely, if the defender can consistently withdraw and establish a new cohesive defense, then they can trade depth for fresh opportunities to attrit the attacker until the costs of successive assaults forces the attacker to quit the siege, or until an external force can come to the defender's relief.

Phase V, Consolidate is the conclusion of the battle. Whoever controls the city must consolidate gains in order to enable follow-on operations and translate the outcome of the battle into the campaign's desired strategic effect. Whoever loses the urban battle could choose to capitulate and negotiate with the attacker as in Aachen and Stalingrad (both 1942), or they could choose to destroy the city to deny it to the attacker as in Moscow (1812) or Mosul (2017). In recent US Army urban battles in Iraq and Afghanistan, the JTF decisively defeated adversaries in *Phase IV, Exploit* only to conduct years of *Phase V, Consolidate* stability operations against insurgent adversaries who continued to contest the Army for control of the city and its people.

II. Case Studies: The Division's Essential Role in Urban Battles

The Army consists of the first infantry division and eight million replacements.

—Sebastian Junger, *War*

American division commanders and their staffs develop an operational approach that can defeat the adversary and achieve the military objective at the least cost to the friendly force.²⁷ In an urban battle, US commanders should expect that their operational approach must also minimize civilian casualties and physical destruction. Divisions prefer to find and disrupt the adversary at distance, but divisional reconnaissance and intelligence systems are significantly less effective when the adversary's forces are masked by an urban area and joint firepower is constrained by policy and military ethics. As a result, divisional maneuver within the city is less like a deliberate attack and more like a movement to contact that relies on planning, command, and control to gain information and maneuver brigades to defeat the adversary.²⁸

The following case studies illustrate comparable operational approaches via two modern urban battles: the Battle of Grozny (1994), and the Battle of Baghdad (2003). In each battle, a technologically advanced military attempted to use LSCO to seize control of a strategic city using penetrating raids to defeat a degraded adversary without incurring high casualties and widespread destruction. The Battle of Grozny was a tactical catastrophe that forced the Russian Army to re-attack with a different operational approach. Conversely, the Battle of Baghdad was operationally successful in defeating the adversary regime, but it may have been strategically premature.

These case studies may be similar in scale, mission, and operational environment to urban battles that US Army divisions may conduct as tactical maneuver headquarters in future LSCO campaigns. The cities involved were large, systemically important to the global energy economy, and composed of modern structures serviced by integrated interstitial systems. The

²⁷ Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 214.

²⁸ US Army, *FM 3-94, Theater Army Corps and Division Operations*, 7-11.

attacker conducted expeditionary LSCO and committed a division of combat power to execute the campaign's decisive battle. The defenders possessed regular land and air forces, but were overmatched in the field so they incorporated irregular forces into a hybrid-capability organization to defend the decisive capital city using a cost-imposing strategy. The defenders' tactics were similar to US Army Opposing Forces doctrine, and in the dense urban environment they were able to strongly contest the attacker in multiple domains, resulting in a decisive urban battle to defeat the adversary forces for control of the city.²⁹

Russian Tactical Group North in the Battle of Grozny, December 1994

The Battle of Grozny started with a New Year's Eve assault intended to conclude Russia's first post-Soviet LSCO campaign, restore control over Chechnya Province, and assert Moscow's sovereignty over the Caucasus.³⁰ In 1994, Chechnya's capital, Grozny, was a city with a largely-Russian population of 500,000 people, several oil refineries, and a location astride the major trans-Caucasus transportation routes.³¹ Grozny's central district encompassed a range of Soviet-era concrete buildings that measured up to a dozen stories tall in a grid-pattern layout. Neighborhoods were segmented by the small but steep-banked Sunzha River, a railroad, and a dozen large boulevards that irregularly connected Grozny's central district to the rest of the city and Chechnya's hilly countryside.³² Russian armored columns assaulted Grozny on December 31, 1994, but after two days of bloody urban combat the Chechen rebels repelled the Russian attack and annihilated two motorized brigades of Russia's "Tactical Group North."

²⁹ The US Army's TC 7-100 series manuals describe contemporary hybrid adversary organization, strategy, and tactics. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss hybrid adversary urban operational approach. US Department of the Army, *Training Circular (TC) 7-100, Hybrid Threat* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010).

³⁰ Timothy L. Thomas, "The 31 December 1994 - 8 February 1995 Battle of Grozny," in *Block by Block: The Challenges of Urban Operations*, ed. William G. Robertson and Lawrence A. Yates (Fort Leavenworth, KS: 2003), 174.

³¹ Louis A. DiMarco, *Concrete Hell: Urban Warfare from Stalingrad to Iraq* (Oxford: Osprey Press, 2012), 152.

³² Thomas, 162.

In the following six weeks, Russian forces reverted to a firepower-centric “Stalingrad-style” operational approach that overpowered Grozny’s Chechen defenders but also inflicted heavy civilian casualties and widespread destruction upon Grozny.³³ Russia eventually dislocated the Chechen forces south from the city and forced them to continue the war as guerillas and terrorists, but Grozny was in ruins and half her people had fled. The Chechen rebels had proven that they could contest the Russian military, and Russia would fight two more campaigns before a cease-fire agreement ended the war in strategic stalemate two years later.³⁴

The conflict began in 1991 during the breakup of the Soviet Union. Chechnya’s president, Dzhokhar Dudayev, declared the province’s independence from the Russian Federation, but Moscow did not respond with force until several political and security crises in 1994 precipitated a military intervention to crush Dudayev’s rebellion.³⁵ The Russian campaign began with airstrikes to destroy the Chechen air force and intimidate the Chechen population. The airstrikes were followed by a three-axis ground invasion to converge on Grozny, envelop and destroy Dudayev’s rebel regime, and then re-establish law and order under the Russian Federal Constitution (*Phase 0, Open the Campaign*).³⁶ The Russian invasion took weeks longer than expected due to difficulty organizing the expeditionary force, generally low unit readiness, and personnel shortages. Local opposition increased as the task force maneuvered through Chechnya, but the Russians reached the outskirts of Grozny on December 25, 1994 (*Phase I, Approach*).³⁷

³³ Pontus Siren, “The Battle of Grozny,” in *Russia and Chechnia: The Permanent Crisis*, ed. Ben Fowkes (London: MacMillan Press, 1998), 118.

³⁴ Stasys Knezys and Romanas Sedlickas, *The War in Chechnya* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), 116-19.

³⁵ Anatol Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 84-93.

³⁶ Thomas, 164.

³⁷ Olga Olikier, *Russia’s Chechen Wars 1994-2000: Lessons from Urban Combat* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2001), 10.

Dudayev knew he could not defeat the Russian Army in the field, so he used an information campaign to encourage civilian protests that obstructed the invading task force's progress toward Grozny. Russian ROE restricted the use of force against unarmed civilians, so the mechanized columns spent days trying to bypass the unrest.³⁸ During the delay, the rebels prepared to defend Grozny as the decisive battle of their cost-imposing strategy to force Russia to recognize Chechen independence. At the outset of the war, Dudayev only controlled a battalion-sized regular army, but the Russian invasion provoked Chechen nationalism and thousands of Chechen light-infantry militia mobilized to repel the invaders.³⁹ Some of the militia harassed the invading Russian columns using partisan tactics, while the rest concentrated to defend Grozny.⁴⁰ Instead of constructing obstacles for a perimeter defense of the city, the Chechen rebels organized a mobile defense where companies of militia could establish temporary ambushes in dense urban terrain along likely avenues of approach (*Phase I, Approach*).

The Russian Army closed within ten kilometers of Grozny's center by December 28 and consolidated their position by seizing both airports, the oil refinery, and key blocking positions to isolate Grozny from all directions except the south. Two southern roads leading to impassable mountains were left open to allow civilians and fighters a way to escape the heavy bombardment (*Phase II, Siege*). The Russian task force commander had originally planned to conduct several weeks of siege and precision bombardment to support cabinet-level negotiations with Dudayev's regime, which would also buy the Army time to reconnoiter and prepare for an assault. Under pressure to rapidly close the already-prolonged conflict, satisfied with light opposition in Grozny's exurbs, and unwilling to risk giving Dudayev more time to reinforce the city, the Russian Minister of Defense ordered the task force to forgo the siege and accelerate the assault.⁴¹

³⁸ Knezys and Sedlickas, 71-72.

³⁹ Ibid., 65-66.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 76-78.

⁴¹ Ibid., 90-93.

The Russians intensified their bombardment and hastily organized an assault on Grozny with a reinforced motorized division of combat power. Five brigades from several different tactical groupings would each attack along a separate axis to seize Grozny's key terrain—the provincial government center, train station, main hospital, and a major road interchange—then consolidate the ten-square-kilometer central district to enable follow-on clearing operations.⁴²

Group North, a division-sized tactical group of three motorized brigades commanded by Brigadier General Pulikovsky, was tasked to seize the two most-central objectives: the train station and the provincial government center (an eleven-story building with Dudayev's command bunker in the basement, also known as the presidential palace).⁴³ These objectives represented essential civilian infrastructure, but were not associated with adversary forces or combat tasks.⁴⁴ Over the previous week, elements of Group North had fought several skirmishes to seize and defend Grozny's northern airport, but Pulikovsky anticipated little resistance once his columns penetrated the city's perimeter.⁴⁵ He did not alter the restrictive ROE, which forbid all Russian soldiers (regardless of weapon system) to fire until fired upon, nor did he request preparatory air support within the city or coordinate with the other groups' staff.⁴⁶ Pulikovsky assigned the 131st Motorized Rifle Brigade to seize the train station and the 81st Motorized Rifle Regiment to surround the government center. The two brigades would begin the attack at dawn, simultaneous to the other groups' attacks, but each brigade maneuvered independently. Both brigades would

⁴² Thomas, 167-69.

⁴³ Konstantin Pulikovsky was a General-Major in the Russian Army, the equivalent of a US Brigadier General. Tactical Group North consisted of one Russian Army brigade and two motorized regiments. Russian brigades usually had additional combat battalions and headquarters that were better staffed for independent operations than Russian regiments. The author thanks Lester Grau, US Army Foreign Military Studies Office, for pointing out these distinctions.

⁴⁴ Siren, 120.

⁴⁵ Thomas, 169.

⁴⁶ Oliker, 15.

attack with two battalions of primarily BMP-2s in column without supporting reconnaissance in the lead, infantry for flank security, or accompanying light artillery.⁴⁷

Contrary to Russian expectations, the Chechen rebels had not organized a perimeter defense of Grozny (*Phase II, Siege*). They knew that Russian armor could easily penetrate linear obstacles at the edge of the city, and Chechen forces did not have the heavy weapons required to contest the Russian Army and Air Force at fixed positions.⁴⁸ The Chechen plan was significantly influenced by a battle in the previous month against a Russian-reinforced brigade of anti-Dudayev Chechen paramilitaries. The paramilitaries advanced to the government center and surrounded it, then Dudayev's forces surrounded and destroyed them with anti-tank weapons fired down from building windows.⁴⁹

In the month leading up to the December 31 battle, thousands of Chechen militia had joined Dudayev's regular forces against the Russian invasion. Dudayev accepted that the Russians could eventually push him out of Grozny, but he decided that a staunch defense of the provincial capital would allow his information campaign to paint the battle as a Russian pyrrhic victory. Two thousand lightly-armed Chechen fighters prepared company-sized ambushes along the approach routes to the government center.⁵⁰ Each company was an independent and self-sustaining, but the Chechen army chief of staff coordinated their efforts, supported them with artillery, and maneuvered the Chechen regular battalions as mobile reserves.⁵¹ Chechen intelligence had captured the Russian maneuver plan and compromised Russian communications, which gave the Chechen commander the initiative against the unsuspecting Russian attackers.⁵²

⁴⁷ Knezys and Sedlickas, 96-97.

⁴⁸ Lieven, 109.

⁴⁹ Knezys and Sedlickas, 46-50.

⁵⁰ Lieven, 95.

⁵¹ David P. Dilegge and Matthew van Konyenburg, "The View from the Wolves' Den: The Chechens and Urban Operations," in *Non-State Threats and Future Wars*, ed. Robert J. Bunker (London: Frank Cass & Co., Ltd., 2003), 172-73.

⁵² Olikier, 18-19.

The four Russian tactical groups attacked into Grozny at dawn on December 31, 1994 (*Phase III, Assault*). By noon, only Group North still pursued its objectives.⁵³ To their rear, one group secured the main hospital, but the other two groups could not force their way into the city center—a warning that the Chechen defense was stronger than anticipated.⁵⁴ Group North's two brigades, however, experienced only light resistance. They reached their objectives in good order, but without the infantry necessary to clear the surrounding area and unaware that the other tactical groups had failed to even fix the Chechens in the adjacent sectors (*Phase IV, Exploit*).

The Chechen commander spent the morning repositioning his forces for a counter-attack. At 1300 they ambushed the 81st MRR's lead battalion at the government center, and after two hours sustaining heavy casualties the 81st retreated north through a series of additional ambushes.⁵⁵ The Chechen mobile force then moved southwest to the train station and concentrated to attack the 131st MRB (see Figure 3). The 131st belatedly transitioned to an all-around defense, but could not effectively return fire from their armored vehicles against Chechen infantry in the neighboring buildings' higher floors. During the night, the 131st ran low on ammunition and its commander attempted a breakout to get his wounded back to the base. The attempt failed, as did a battalion-sized dawn relief mission, hastily-organized by the brigade's assistant commander. Since the Chechen rebels anticipated relief efforts, they strengthened an outer cordon to keep the Russians out while the inner cordon reduced the 131st at the train station (*Phase V, Consolidate*). At the end of their second day fighting in Grozny, the brigade was physically and psychologically unable to retain their objective. That night, the remaining hundred soldiers of the 131st attempted to sneak out on foot, but all of them were captured or killed.⁵⁶

⁵³ DiMarco, 158.

⁵⁴ Carlotta Gall and Thomas de Waal, *Chechnya: Calamity in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 208.

⁵⁵ Dilegge and Van Konyenburg, 173.

⁵⁶ Knezys and Sedlickas, 96-101.

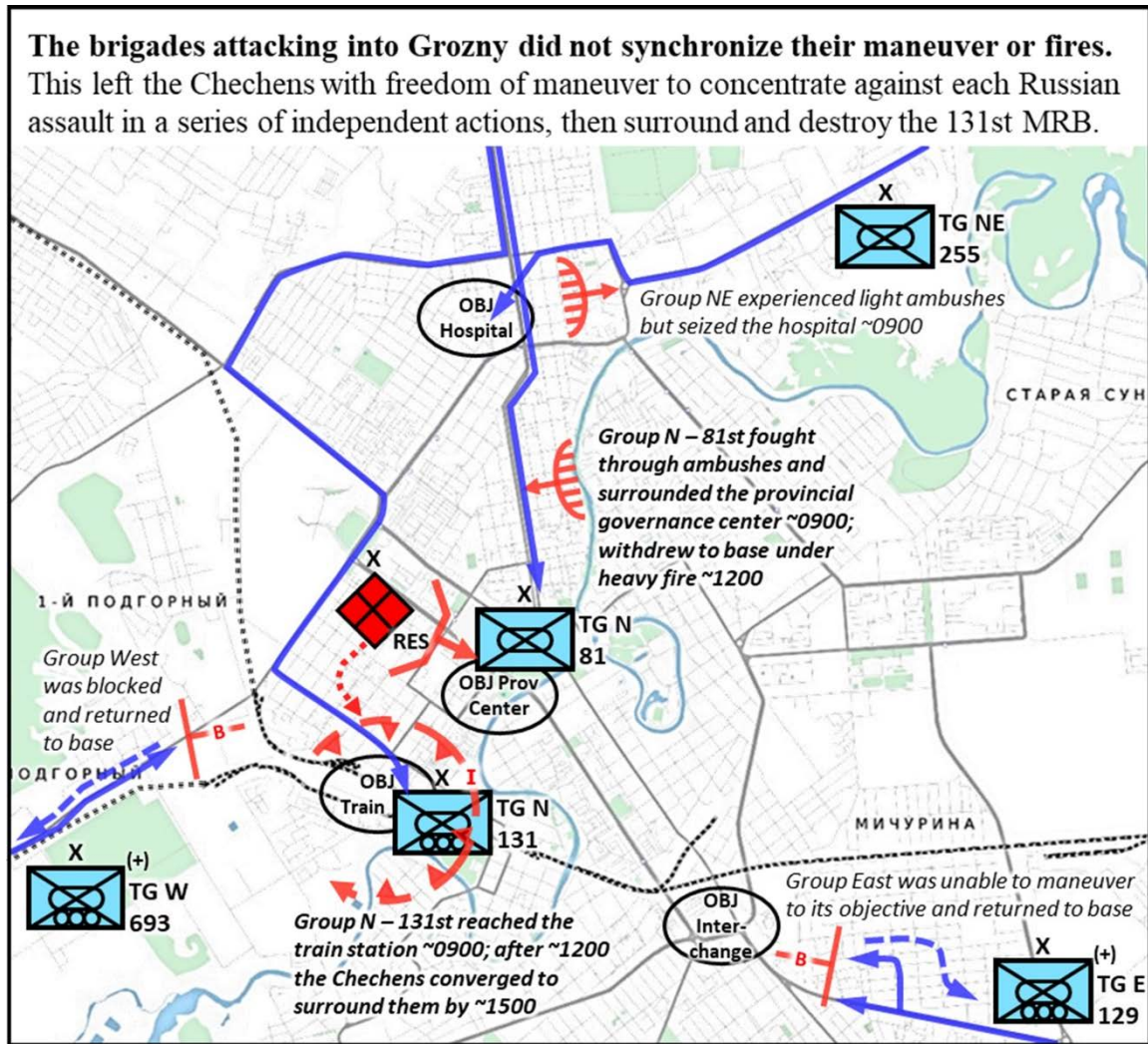


Figure 3. Four un-synchronized Russian brigades assaulted Grozny on December 31, 1994
 Source: The author.

The first Russian attack on Grozny was a catastrophe: one brigade annihilated, another so attrited that it had to be reconstituted, and the Chechens remained in control the central district. The three most common explanations for the Russian defeat at Grozny are that the Russian force was not properly manned and trained, the Chechen mobile tactics were superior, and that Russian armor was generally unsuited to urban combat.⁵⁷ Although these statements are true, they may

⁵⁷ Russian Army General Vorobyev inspected the task force in early December, 1994 and declined its command. He detailed severe problems with Russian operational readiness and tactical preparations in his report, reprinted in Knezys and Sedlickas, 81-85. Tourpal Ali-Kaimov, the Chechen chief of intelligence during the first Battle of Grozny, described the simple but effective Chechen urban tactics in a statement printed by Dilegege and Van Konyenburg, 179. Gott argues that Russian mechanized vehicles have a more-limited vertical firing arc and are lightly armored on top and in the rear to save weight, making

not be a complete explanation. Within a week the same Russian task force—its Army units reorganized under a new tactical commander—resumed offensive operations against the same Chechen rebels and achieved the original Russian objectives. This suggests that the first attack failed primarily due to poor planning, command, and control.⁵⁸

General Pulikovsky's Group North did not execute divisional functions for its brigades, beginning with planning the operation. The Russian task force commander decided to forego siege operations on December 22, and approved the assault plan on December 26, which left Group North at least four days to plan and synchronize their division-sized operation.⁵⁹ Russian strategic intelligence indicated low threat-levels inside Grozny, so Group North may have treated the operation more like a movement than an attack.⁶⁰ The one hundred kilometer movement from the campaign's staging area had been difficult due to low equipment readiness, poor communications interoperability, and inadequate maps.⁶¹ To address these difficulties, operations briefs focused on movement routes and organization of the armored columns without emphasis on adversary forces.⁶² The two brigades planned to depart simultaneously, but Pulikovsky imposed no control measures to ensure that the two attacks were mutually supporting, or to coordinate the Group North attack with the other groups' attacks. Group North also lacked a decision support system that could have informed all adjacent commanders that a brigade was in trouble and might require immediate assistance. Finally, Pulikovsky neither organized his own group reserve force, nor required the brigades to maintain internal reserves to mitigate risk.

them potentially less suited to urban combat than their US equivalents. See Kendall D. Gott, *Breaking the Mold: Tanks in the Cities* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006), 84-86.

⁵⁸ Raevsky reports that the commanders of Group West and Group East were relieved for poor performance during the December 31 attack. Andrei Raevsky, "Russian Military Performance in Chechnya: An Initial Evaluation," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 8, no. 4 (December 1995): 685; Oliker, 22-23.

⁵⁹ On December 22, 1994, General Pavel Grachev, the Russian Defense Minister, took operational command of the task force and ordered it to attack as soon as possible. Knezys and Sedlickas, 90.

⁶⁰ Gall and de Waal, 208.

⁶¹ Oliker, 10-12.

⁶² Lieven, 91-92.

Of the four tactical groups, only Group North did not contain an organic division (or higher) headquarters among its task-organized units. Unless General Pulikovsky was assigned a separate, formally trained and organized headquarters to augment the group's three brigades, Group North lacked the staff that normally would have executed divisional planning functions and liaised with the other groups' headquarters.⁶³ Even if a regular division headquarters was assigned to assist Pulikovsky in Group North, the Russian Army had not exercised at the division level since 1992. Whatever ad hoc staff Pulikovsky did have could not have been well-trained.⁶⁴ In these inadequate circumstances, Group North's two combat brigades—also under-manned and composed of volunteers from across the Russian Army—attacked into Grozny without an effective division headquarters and staff to plan, control, and support their mission.⁶⁵

Accounts of the battle do not indicate that Group North fulfilled the minimum roles of a division headquarters during the battle, as outlined in US doctrine.⁶⁶ The group did not send ground or air patrols into Grozny ahead of the main body—or coordinate with special forces detachments already inside the city—to assess adversary strength and confirm the national-intelligence estimates prior to the assault.⁶⁷ Basic division-level reconnaissance could have assessed that the objectives were unsuitable even for parking battalions of armored vehicles—much less for fighting a close-quarters battle—and indicated the need to reorganize the order of battle with additional infantry.⁶⁸ Instead, each brigade stripped its third battalion of personnel to

⁶³ Group West contained the 19th Motorized Division headquarters, Group Northeast contained the 8th Army Corps headquarters, and Group East contained the 104th Paratrooper Division headquarters. Knezys and Sedlickas.

⁶⁴ Charles Blandy and David Isby, "The Chechen Conflict: No End of a Lesson?," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Special Report no. 11 (September: 1996).

⁶⁵ See ADP 6-0 for a brief description of commander and staff minimum responsibilities to command and control operations. US Department of the Army, *Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-0, Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 10-12.

⁶⁶ US Army, *FM 3-94, Theater Army Corps and Division Operations*, 6-13.

⁶⁷ Lieven, 104.

⁶⁸ Olikier, 14.

fill combat vehicle crews in the two battalions that would conduct the assault. Remaining personnel and infantry secured bases and conducted work details, which explains the lack of infantry in each armored column.⁶⁹

General Pulikovsky also failed to control his maneuver elements as the battle developed. When the 81st MRR first came under heavy fire at the government center, Group North did not maneuver additional forces to assist it, even though two battalions of the 131st MRB were less than a mile away. At a minimum, Pulikovsky should have notified the 131st Brigade commander of the situation and directed him to deploy security and transition into a defensive posture. Once the 81st began its retreat at 1500, all commanders should have anticipated and planned for the Chechens to mass on the remaining brigade at the train station.

By this time both brigades were nine hours into the battle, running low on fuel and ammunition, and unable to evacuate rising numbers of wounded soldiers. Even without adversary contact, both brigades would have been low on fuel, but no account of the battle mentioned the combat logistics patrol Group North should have already staged to deliver supplies and evacuate casualties. There is no mention of combat power dedicated to escort, direct, and protect a logistics convoy, and it is hard to imagine the Russian Army resupplying either brigade on objective even under light harassing fire.⁷⁰ In the absence of dedicated medical evacuation vehicles, all casualties were evacuated in and on top of combat vehicles using break-out tactics. These armored personnel carriers offered little protection, provided no treatment on the move, and were targeted and destroyed by the Chechen rebels enroute to medical care.⁷¹ Both brigade commanders cited high casualties and low ammunition as the reason they eventually withdrew from their objectives.⁷² Although this account of the Battle of Grozny focused on Group North and its two

⁶⁹ Knezys and Sedlickas, 56-57; Lieven, 104-05.

⁷⁰ DiMarco, 158-161

⁷¹ Lieven, 110.

⁷² Gall and de Waal, 10-11.

brigades, all of the groups' attacks culminated quickly on December 31. It is unlikely that any of the groups planned for and resourced the operational reach necessary to sustain deep positions in central Grozny even against light resistance.

Group North also failed to concentrate and prioritize its supporting artillery assets.⁷³ Properly supported, the encircled Russian units could have held their positions, directed close fires to attrit the surrounding Chechen fighters, and declared the battle a tactical stalemate—at worst—until the January 3 follow-up attack could relieve them. Although both brigades were in danger of being overrun for hours, neither brigade commander received effective close fire support. The breakout attacks and relief missions were not covered by artillery and smoke. Fragmented bands of soldiers reported being lost in the city, but no illumination was fired to assist in urban navigation.⁷⁴ The Russian task force dominated Grozny's air domain, but Group North did not successfully employ the task force's airpower and artillery supremacy to support the only two Russian maneuver brigades fighting on the ground in central Grozny.⁷⁵

Ultimately, during the afternoon of December 31, the Russian task force, and most-notably Group North, failed to exploit its earlier success at penetrating Grozny's central district. The task force commander overconfidently expected that a demonstration of Russian force would compel the Dudayev regime to surrender without requiring his defeat in combat.⁷⁶ All tactical groups attacked simultaneously, without prioritization of effort and with no reserves held at the task force-, group-, or brigade-level.⁷⁷ The task force was not responsible for providing an assault exploitation force and tactical reserve, and both brigades were too consumed with their mission to set aside mobile forces for a reserve. If Group North operated as a division maneuver

⁷³ Oliker, 15-16.

⁷⁴ DiMarco, 160-62.

⁷⁵ Lieven, 104.

⁷⁶ Siren, 120.

⁷⁷ Lieven, 104.

headquarters, they should have organized a tactical reserve but did not—they also may not have had the capability to directly command and control a maneuver unit. As a result, the only relief attempt Group North sent was an ad hoc effort organized as a last resort by the 131st MRB's deputy commander. He led a doomed patrol of forty various armored vehicles from the group's support area, but without the concentrated support of the task force or Group North, the relief column suffered the same fate as the 131st Brigade's main body.⁷⁸

The Russian Army's December 31 attack on Grozny should have been commanded by a single division-level headquarters. The theater task force proved incapable of concentrating and prioritizing the support of four non-contiguous brigades, each nominally commanded by a separate general's tactical group. Absent a dedicated battle command headquarters, the four tactical groups were also unable to cooperate in effective support of each other.⁷⁹ The Russian Army committed a total of 6,000 combat soldiers and 350 armored fighting vehicles to the assault—approximately the combat power of a US mechanized division—against a Chechen strength of 2,000 light-infantry militia.⁸⁰ Even in Grozny's dense urban environment, that sized force—properly commanded and supported by joint firepower—should have been sufficient to defeat the Chechens. Instead, after breaching the city's perimeter and seizing three of its four objectives by noon, the Russian task force failed to exploit its the initial tactical achievements and gave the Chechens time and to regroup. The Chechen counterattack on Group North inflicted more than one thousand casualties, destroyed one hundred combat vehicles, and dislocated the Russian Army from the city by the close of the battle's second day.

⁷⁸ Lieven, 99-100.

⁷⁹ On January 3, 1995, two tactical group commanders were relieved and the remaining Russian land forces were reorganized under a single tactical maneuver headquarters, which commanded Grozny for the rest of the battle. Raevsky, 685.

⁸⁰ Lieven, 101-3.

US 3rd Infantry Division (Mechanized) in the Battle of Baghdad, April 2003

The seven-day long Battle of Baghdad was the decisive battle of the American LSCO campaign to remove Iraqi President Saddam Hussein from power and eliminate the risk that he would use weapons of mass destruction to destabilize the Middle East.⁸¹ Baghdad is a city of five million people, divided roughly in half by the Tigris River, with a generally radial pattern of modern roads. The campaign plan synchronized two US corps invading along parallel axes leading to Baghdad, where each corps committed a mechanized division to attack one half of the city.⁸² Each division destroyed two Iraqi Republican Guard divisions in their approach to Baghdad from April 3 to 6. Then, with little preparation, the US Army's 3rd Infantry Division (Mechanized) penetrated the Iraqi Special Republican Guard's area defense of western Baghdad from April 5 to 7 to dislocate the regime from its command and control centers. The Iraqi defense disintegrated on April 8 when the regime's break-out attack to the north failed and 1st Marine Division attacked across the Diyala River to enter eastern Baghdad on a broad front. On April 9, the two divisions linked up at the Tigris River and it became clear to Saddam Hussein's regime, the Iraqi people, and international audiences that American forces controlled Baghdad and had won the LSCO phase of the war.⁸³

During planning, American strategic and operational commanders agreed that seizing the "regime district" in western Baghdad was one of the campaign's military objectives because control of those key government headquarters in the heart of the city could defeat the adversary regime without requiring US forces to clear every city block.⁸⁴ Unwilling to execute a deliberate,

⁸¹ Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, xxiii.

⁸² Williamson Murray and Robert H. Scales, Jr., *The Iraq War: A Military History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 89-96.

⁸³ Bing West and Ray L. Smith, *The March Up: Taking Baghdad with the 1st Marine Division* (New York: Bantam Books, 2003), 231-32.

⁸⁴ William Wallace and Kevin C.M. Benson, "Beyond the First Encounter: Planning and Conducting Field Army and Corps Operations," in *Bringing Order to Chaos: Historical Case Studies of*

firepower-centric, attritional approach to seizing the city, the Joint Task Force directed 3rd ID to attack Baghdad—but avoid house-to-house fighting—and seize only the critical nodes and infrastructure that might weaken the regime and hasten its collapse. To reinforce the campaign’s strategic restraint on the use of force, 3rd ID was not augmented with additional forces to clear and hold the large city’s urban terrain, and would not receive the replacements required to support high-attrition tactics.⁸⁵ The campaign plan did include an operational pause for several days to refit 3rd ID and allow the US Air Force more time to attrit the Republican Guard divisions outside of Baghdad. Also, the rest of the JTF would set conditions for the urban battle by first defeating Iraq’s mobile forces and securing 3rd ID’s ground supply lines back to the theater port of entry before ordering 3rd ID to approach Baghdad (*Phase 0, Open the Campaign*).⁸⁶

The pre-invasion plan directed 3rd ID to establish a loose cordon of operating bases outside Baghdad to invest the city.⁸⁷ Over several weeks, the division would then conduct raids into the city, interdict Iraqi units trying to escape, and eventually clear the city once the Iraqi Army was defeated.⁸⁸ Strategically, this ground pressure, combined with airstrikes, would force the Iraqi regime to capitulate and accept US-led regime change. The 3rd ID division commander, Major General Buford C. Blount III, expected to face a sophisticated city-defense strategy in which elite Republican Guard units and Fedayeen paramilitaries would block the approaches to key facilities in western Baghdad’s riverside regime district. From April 3 to 4, however, 3rd ID’s 1st and 2nd Brigades attacked over intact roads and bridges to rapidly seize their base objectives against ineffective resistance (*Phase I, Approach*). Intelligence and imagery reported that there

Combined Arms Maneuver in Large-Scale Combat Operations, ed. Peter J. Schifferle (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Army University Press, 2018), 6-9.

⁸⁵ Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, 47-50.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 241-45.

⁸⁷ Joel D. Rayburn and Frank K. Sobchak, eds., *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War, Volume 1: Invasion, Insurgency, Civil War 2003-2006* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, 2019), 59.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 99.

were no integrated obstacles on the major highways, and coalition airstrikes were so effective that Iraqi soldiers were deserting in large numbers. Blount concluded that the Iraqi defense of Baghdad was much weaker than anticipated, and with control of the international airport 3rd ID could sustain offensive operations with unexpected freedom of maneuver.⁸⁹ He also realized that a deliberate siege might not be necessary to set conditions for a successful assault. Blount preferred to retain the initiative and not give Saddam Hussein weeks to conduct an information campaign to inflame global public opinion against the blockade of Baghdad's five million civilians. Departing from the campaign plan, Blount decided to conduct a "thunder run"—a heavily-armored reconnaissance in force—on April 5 to assess if it was possible to penetrate Baghdad's defenses with minimal risk.⁹⁰ On the other side of the Diyala River, 1st Marine Division had not yet invested the eastern half of the city but Blount could order 3rd Brigade to attack north on the following day, April 6, to complete the operational isolation of Western Baghdad (*Phase II, Siege*).⁹¹

Before the April 5 thunder run, Saddam Hussein feared a military coup more than US attack, which structurally undermined the defense of Baghdad by a hybrid grouping of various regular army and paramilitary organizations.⁹² For weeks they anticipated deploying in concentric perimeters for a long siege and deliberate clearance by US light infantry. Iraqi commanders were completely surprised by 3rd ID's mechanized reconnaissance in force. After studying the battles of Mogadishu and Grozny, Iraqi military planners did not expect the US Army to expose its tanks to street fighting inside the city. In the absence of a cohesive central command, Iraqi commanders

⁸⁹ Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, 331-36.

⁹⁰ Jim Lacey, *Takedown: The 3rd Infantry Division's Twenty-One Day Assault on Baghdad* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2007), 205-06.

⁹¹ Rayburn and Sobchak, 100-101.

⁹² In the week before the invasion, many of the Iraqi irregular and militia forces moved from Baghdad to defend other cities in the south. It is unclear how many returned to Baghdad by the time that 3rd ID attacked in April. *Ibid.*, 69-75.

used couriers to re-establish the city's defenses, constructed hasty barriers, and demolished the eastern Diyala River bridges before 1st Marine Division could cross into eastern Baghdad.⁹³

The northern encirclement attack on April 6 was also successful, but against tougher—if still ineffective—Iraqi resistance. The two attacks validated that General Blount could change his operational approach from a deliberate siege to a series of rapid penetrations to physically and psychologically dislocate the regime. If thunder runs could continue to penetrate western Baghdad's defenses with minimal casualties, the information effect that Saddam Hussein could not control his own capital would be devastating to the regime. Instead of waiting for reinforcements and allowing the Iraqis to improve their paltry engagement areas, Blount ordered a second, much larger, raid to attack a little deeper along a different axis on April 7.⁹⁴

Colonel David Perkins, the brigade commander who commanded both thunder runs, decided to further modify the division's operational approach. If it were feasible, Perkins not only wanted to attack deeper into western Baghdad than General Blount intended, he also wanted to seize and hold his objective instead of conducting a raid and withdrawal. During the first thunder run, Perkins assessed that the Iraqi defense of western Baghdad was ill-prepared and uncoordinated. Iraqi forces were not systematically organized into integrated, obstacle-supported kill zones and counterattacks were small and sporadic. He judged that his brigade could penetrate the Iraqi defense without a deliberate breaching operation and sustain at least ten hours of combat in central Baghdad. If resupplied on the objective, the second thunder run could even retain the regime district where most of the essential government buildings were located. The information effect alone could cause Saddam Hussein's regime to collapse, and without those key facilities the defenders' ability to command and sustain the defense of Baghdad would disintegrate.⁹⁵

⁹³ David Zucchini, *Thunder Run* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 135-48.

⁹⁴ Anthony E. Carlson, "Thunder Run in Baghdad, 2003," in *16 Cases of Mission Command*, ed. Donald P. Wright (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2013), 108-09.

⁹⁵ Zucchini, 72-82.

In response to 3rd Brigade's April 6 attack to isolate Baghdad from northern Iraq—and unaware that 2nd Brigade was preparing for another thunder run—the Iraqi Republican Guard concentrated a combined-arms brigade in eastern Baghdad and counterattacked 3rd Brigade at dawn on April 7 in an attempt to reopen the Iraqi line of communication to reinforcements north of the city. 3rd ID responded with rapidly massed artillery and airstrikes to support 3rd Brigade's effort to block the Iraqi breakout at a bridge over the Tigris River. Both sides struggled to control the essential bridge, until the second thunder run began and inadvertently spoiled the Republican Guard's ability to reinforce their breakout attempt.⁹⁶

The second and decisive thunder run commenced on April 7 with a hasty pre-dawn breach to clear lanes through a hastily-laid minefield (*Phase III, Assault*). Although dismounted sappers removed the mines covertly and the attack began as planned at dawn, the minefield indicated that Iraqi generals anticipated a second raid and had improved their perimeter defense of western Baghdad.⁹⁷ The division used long range rockets to target high payoff targets such as Iraqi fire support and air-defense artillery, and massed a self-propelled howitzer battalion to suppress each key intersection along 2nd Brigade's route ten minutes ahead of the moving armored column.⁹⁸ The division artillery denied the Republican Guard's use of these key terrain features as defensive roadblocks, and forced Iraqi infantry to harass the column with ineffective small-unit ambushes from bunkers and buildings near the road. The Iraqis launched uncoordinated counterattacks with light weapons, but without a well-prepared combined arms defense supported by integrated obstacles and artillery the Iraqis had no hope of stopping the mechanized formation. 2nd Brigade penetrated twenty kilometers in two hours to seize the regime district at the heart of Baghdad, and then fought all day and night to defend their foothold against Iraqi counterattacks. General Blount had to commit his reserve battalion to reinforce Colonel

⁹⁶ Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, 374-76.

⁹⁷ Zucchini, 97-101.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 103-04.

Perkins and resupply 2nd Brigade so they could retain the regime district until morning. At dawn, international media reported that the US Army had defeated the Iraqi Republican Guard inside its own capital, and the Saddam Hussein’s regime began to collapse (*Phase IV, Exploit*).⁹⁹ Figure 4 is map of the battle with heavy lines showing the actions on April 7, the decisive day of the battle. Solid lines show actions that occurred in the days leading up to the decisive point, and dotted lines show consolidation actions afterwards.

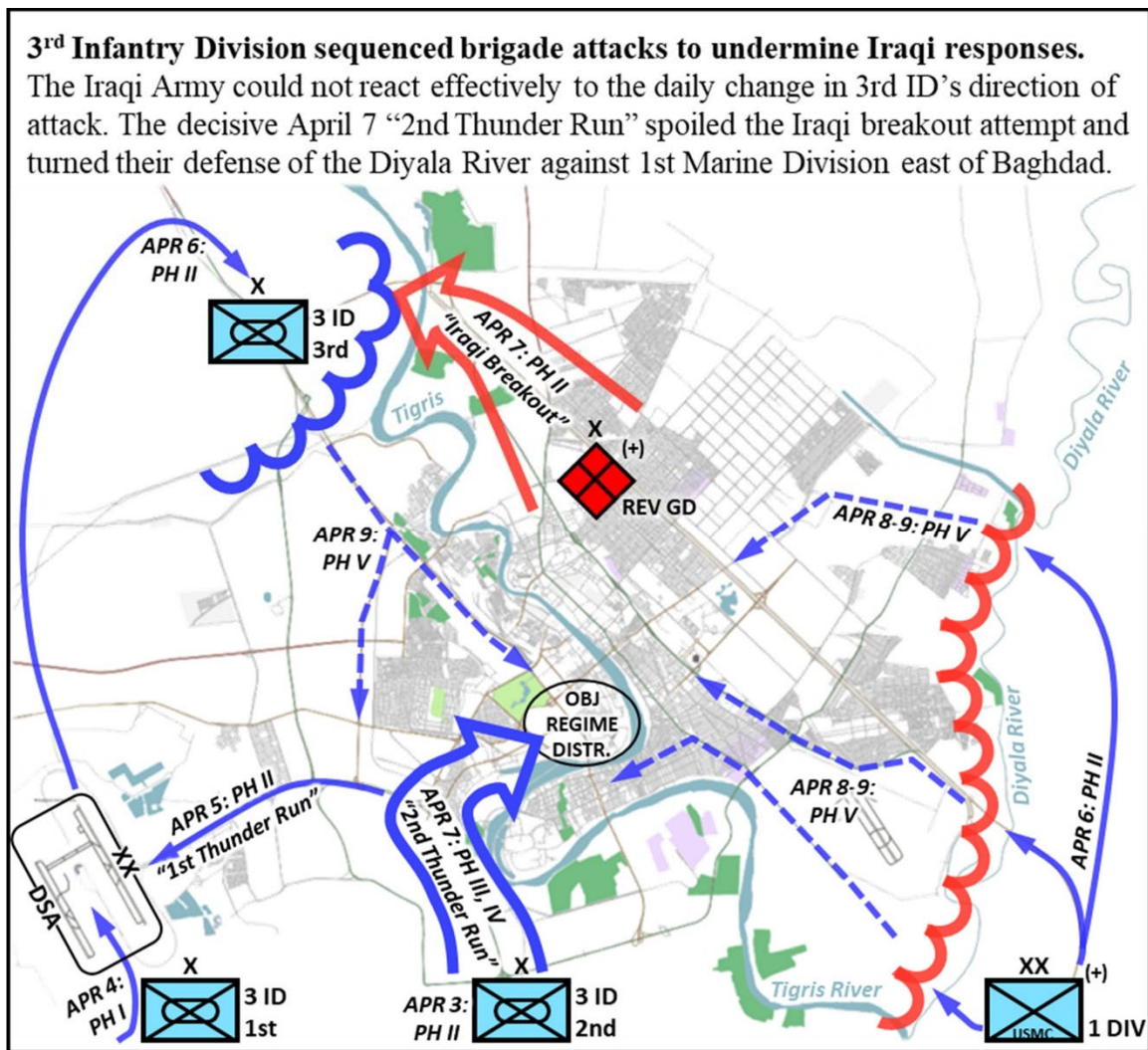


Figure 4. 3rd ID’s daily attacks spoiled the Iraqi Army’s defense of Baghdad
 Source: The author.

⁹⁹ Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, 352-54.

Thousands of Iraqi soldiers and militiamen counter-attacked in small groups until the morning of April 8, but 3rd ID retained both the encirclement of western Baghdad and the decisive foothold in the central regime district.¹⁰⁰ The Iraqi military command proved unable to re-establish a perimeter to defend the rest of the city, and as early as April 7, some Iraqi units began disbanding to pursue guerilla warfare. Iraqi forces continued to melt away on April 8 and 9 when 1st Marine Division crossed the Diyala River into eastern Baghdad and linked up with 3rd ID at the Tigris. On April 10, the Marines and 3rd ID began consolidation operations to clear Baghdad, re-establish order, and prepare for the next combat operation.¹⁰¹ In a seven-day urban battle, two US divisions dislocated Saddam Hussein's regime from Baghdad and rendered the Iraqi regular military irrelevant. President Saddam Hussein was not captured, however, and his regime never formally capitulated. The regime's key leaders reorganized the surviving soldiers for a guerilla campaign that soon returned him to strategic relevance (*Phase V, Consolidate*).¹⁰²

In terms of the ground campaign's operational approach, a division proved to be the appropriate echelon for the mission to seize half of Baghdad. 3rd ID's thunder runs undisputedly succeeded at the operational level: they defeated Saddam Hussein's regime, seized Baghdad with less-than-expected civilian casualties and collateral destruction, and destroyed the Iraqi military's capability to conduct LSCO against the JTF.¹⁰³ However, 3rd ID did not capture enough of the regime's key leaders, remaining military personnel, and equipment in *Phase IV, Exploit* and *Phase V, Consolidate*, which created conditions for the adversary to continue resistance through irregular warfare.¹⁰⁴ Perhaps the original campaign plan's slower, more-deliberate operational

¹⁰⁰ Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Twitty's experience is typical of these small counterattacks by ad hoc platoon and company-sized groups armed with rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, and sometimes supported by vehicle-borne suicide bombers. Instead of using assembly areas to organize, they often drove or ran indiscriminately into lethal US engagement areas. See Zucchini, 195-97.

¹⁰¹ Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, 377-78.

¹⁰² Murray, 252.

¹⁰³ Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, xxiii and 378.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 241.

approach to seizing Baghdad would have better mitigated the insurgency that erupted in 2004.¹⁰⁵ US strategic and operational commanders assumed that risk when they chose not to forbid the aggressive raids, and General Blount and Colonel Perkins each took maximum advantage of their higher commanders' intent when planning and executing the thunder runs.¹⁰⁶ No amount of US soldiers would have been sufficient in *Phase V, Consolidate* to pursue and process the hundreds of thousands of armed but disorganized soldiers and militia outside of Baghdad who scattered across the country after the Battle of Baghdad, and later reconstituted themselves as insurgents.¹⁰⁷

Some elements of General Blount's operational approach were extremely contextual and may not be replicable, especially his *Phase II, Siege* decision to forego the planned siege and deliberate assaults. The open and largely unpopulated terrain near western Baghdad's regime district and the radial highway network that 3rd ID used to get there favored mechanized forces' mobility, protection, and firepower. On April 7, routes were intact because Saddam Hussein refused to allow his military to destroy bridges and overpasses.¹⁰⁸ In contrast, eastern Baghdad's dense grid road network, fewer wide boulevards, and more multiple-story residential zones would have been less favorable to thunder run tactics, especially after the defenders destroyed the bridges over the Diyala River and two long canals that segmented that half of the city. 1st Marine Division consumed two days to prepare their opposed crossing of the Diyala River and conducted a deliberate, broad-front movement to contact once they entered eastern Baghdad.¹⁰⁹ If 3rd ID had deliberately besieged its half of the city, the Iraqis could have demolished the main roads and bridges in western Baghdad and created enough time to organize a better defense that may have required similarly deliberate attacks to seize and clear western Baghdad.

¹⁰⁵ The campaign originally planned for 70-120 days of combat, including time to negotiate with the Iraqi regime, but the actual fighting took only 20 days. See Rayburn and Sobchak, 103.

¹⁰⁶ Lacey, 230-33.

¹⁰⁷ Walter J. Boyne, *Operation Iraqi Freedom* (New York: Forge Press, 2003), 161-63.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 326-27.

¹⁰⁹ West and Smith, 190-205.

It should also be noted that in *Phase III, Assault* the Iraqi military was explicitly unprepared to defend Baghdad inside the city's urban environment.¹¹⁰ Even as the US divisions approached Baghdad during the two-week ground campaign, Saddam Hussein forbid his military commanders to plan, coordinate, or rehearse Baghdad's defense.¹¹¹ Senior Iraqi commanders knew that the conceptual plan to defend Baghdad was irrational because it failed to prepare the layers of defensive obstacles that could have created the depth necessary to preserve cohesion and interior lines in *Phase IV, Exploit*. They made no attempt to withdraw the Republican Guard armored divisions into the city where their artillery and firepower could have engaged American armor at close range. Also, Iraqi regular soldiers and militia fighters were not trained, equipped, or sustained for urban combat.¹¹² The Iraqi commanders' dysfunction once the Americans invested the city accelerated the desertion rate in Iraqi Army units, although politically and religiously motivated militias continued to fight until the end of the battle.¹¹³ In future LSCO urban battles, the Army should expect to fight better trained, equipped, and commanded professional soldiers and motivated militia fighters.¹¹⁴

Finally, 3rd ID's division headquarters played a pivotal, but unsung, role in preparing for and then exploiting the thunder runs' tactical success. Most historical literature on the 2003 Battle of Baghdad focuses on the unit-level combat narrative, or the policy/strategy failure as the US-led coalition failed to transition to post-LSCO stability operations, but even an indifferent reading

¹¹⁰ Biddle assessed that the US invasion owed much of its success to Iraqi military incompetence. In the Battle of Baghdad, Biddle specifically pointed out the Iraqi failure to destroy bridges to slow down the coalition and the decision not to use the Republican Guard in an urban warfare environment. Stephen Biddle, "Speed Kills? Reassessing the Role of Speed, Precision, and Situation Awareness in the Fall of Saddam," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 30, no. 1 (February 2007): 3-46.

¹¹¹ Lacey, 159.

¹¹² Gregory Hooker, *Shaping the Plan for Operation Iraqi Freedom: The Role of Military Intelligence Assessments* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2005), 70-71.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 78-79.

¹¹⁴ Darran Anderson, "The Grim Future of Urban Warfare," *The Atlantic*, December 11, 2018. Accessed February 20, 2019. <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/12/technology-will-make-war-even-worse/577723/>.

between the lines shows that 3rd ID's role in planning, commanding, and controlling the battle was essential to the coalition's rapid victory. General Blount prioritized and sequenced efforts, division cavalry maneuvered to secure flank approaches, and divisional artillery shaped the deep and close battlefield.¹¹⁵ Divisional sustainment also distributed thousands of tons of supply to sustain the intensity and tempo of the attack at the end of the coalition's operational reach.¹¹⁶

General Blount also sequenced his brigade attacks for maximum effect: every day a different brigade seized a new objective in Baghdad from a different direction than the day before. This sequencing maintained pressure on Saddam Hussein's regime and spoiled the defenders' response to the previous day's attack by creating a new dilemma each morning. 3rd ID's measured tempo also ensured that the headquarters could concentrate divisional resources in support of that day's main effort and maintain a mechanized battalion as the division commander's maneuver reserve at the airport. This reserve could respond to any threat in the western Baghdad within two hours. This mitigated the risk that an element of 3rd ID could be cut off deep in Baghdad the way Somali militia concentrated to defeat the US mobile column in the 1993 Battle of Mogadishu. Blount's reserve proved essential on April 7 when it escorted 2nd Brigade's logistical resupply convoy into central Baghdad to exploit the penetration's tactical success. Without that resupply and the extra battalion of reinforcements, Colonel Perkins' brigade could not have stayed in central Baghdad and the second thunder run would have had no more strategic effect than its predecessor.

Historically, *Phase IV, Exploit* is decisive in urban battles because after penetrating the defensive perimeter the attacker gains an opportunity to destroy the defenders' interior lines, cohesion, and prevent the establishment of a new perimeter. General Blount recognized that the tactically successful *Phase III, Assault* attacks to encircle Baghdad, seize its airport, and even the

¹¹⁵ Boyd L. Dastrup, *Artillery Strong: Modernizing the Field Artillery for the 21st Century* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2018), 150-67.

¹¹⁶ Lacey, 260-61.

first thunder run inflicted heavy casualties but did not significantly impact the regime's will to fight.¹¹⁷ LSCO penetrations have proved effective at destroying adversary capabilities, but ineffective at convincing adversaries to negotiate a resolution to the conflict. In LSCO urban battles using thunder run tactics, information operations should convincingly explain why mechanized raids intentionally withdraw instead of retaining terrain. The second thunder run toppled Saddam Hussein's regime because it was nested with a global information and psychological operation that convinced enough Iraqis that continued LSCO to defend the city of Baghdad—and the regime that claimed to defend it—was futile.

¹¹⁷ Zucchini, 72-73.

III. Conclusion: US Divisions in LSCO Urban Battles

Cities have been the dominant focus of military operations for most of human history, and a fundamental purpose of armies has been defending or attacking cities. Attacking defended cities has been one of the most difficult and potentially costly military operations. Unfortunately, although strategists have advised against it and armies and generals have preferred not to, the nature of war has required armies to attack and defend cities, and victory has required that they do it well.

—Lieutenant Colonel Louis DiMarco, PhD,
Attacking the Heart and Guts: Urban Operations Through the Ages

These case studies represent LSCO urban battles where division's performance had decisive strategic effects. The two Russian Army brigades in Tactical Group North seized but could not retain two operationally significant objectives inside Grozny; Group North's failure to anticipate and defeat the Chechen counterattack prolonged the conflict by at least two years. The US 3rd Infantry Division (Mechanized) defeated Saddam Hussein's regime by controlling a small portion of Baghdad, even though his Iraqi government still retained control of the preponderance of the city, country, and Iraqi military forces. Despite the decisive outcome of each of these LSCO urban battles, both the victorious and the defeated continued to contest each other for several years to consolidate or regain control of the capital city, because both Baghdad and Grozny dominate their region and are strategically essential concentrations of national power.

In the globally-connected 21st century, large cities will likely emerge as the capstone objectives in LSCO campaigns, especially when an expeditionary theater contains few (often only one) large cities of strategic and global-economic importance. These large cities are the intermodal nexus that connect all domains—in some regions, non-physical domains may only exist in large cities.¹¹⁸ International media predominately report from these large cities; this “urban bias” causes domestic and international audiences to conflate the attacking division's tactical battle to control the urban objective with the strategic success of the joint task force's

¹¹⁸ Spiller, 22-27.

campaign.¹¹⁹ These audiences are increasingly sensitive to the graphic, often individualized, depictions of civilian suffering and environmental destruction that characterize LSCO urban battles. American taxpayers are also concerned that they will end up paying to reconstruct cities that unintentionally became an urban battlefield. All of these factors increase the campaign value of large cities, but also highlight the extent that civilian casualties and physical destruction can undermine US strategic legitimacy and incur an extensive post-conflict reconstruction obligation. In this operational context, if the JTF commander frames the operational problem as a LSCO campaign to dominate a peer adversary, the campaign plan will require a US division to seize the decisive urban area intact and without strategically significant casualties and destruction.

Expeditionary divisions may not even have the means to conduct deliberate, firepower-intensive urban battles. In World War II, several divisions cooperated to seize large cities, which were often already damaged from months of strategic bombing.¹²⁰ US doctrine states that expeditionary JTFs will include fewer land-domain soldiers than the major wars of the 20th century, and will operate under more-restrictive ROE with more pressure to resolve the campaign rapidly.¹²¹ In addition, coalition partners may not be able to sufficiently supplement US division capabilities. The 2016 “By-With-Through” operational approach used in Mosul may be too slow to achieve limited strategic objectives and too destructive to support conflict resolution at the campaign’s end.¹²² By-With-Through also requires a capable partner who may not be available in a LSCO campaign: either the partner’s land forces were defeated earlier in the conflict and may require reconstitution, or they will be preserved for consolidation and stability operations.

¹¹⁹ Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 38-48.

¹²⁰ DiMarco; Robertson & Yates.

¹²¹ Michael E. O’Hanlon, *The Future of Land Warfare* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2015), 7-18.

¹²² Joseph L. Votel, “The By-With-Through Operational Approach,” *Joint Forces Quarterly* 89, no. 2 (April 2018): 40-47.

It will be up to the division commander to develop the city-specific operational approach that can accomplish the mission within the campaign's strategic and operational context. Whereas the division's higher headquarters will conceive of the battle as a single discrete event in the broader campaign, and the divisions' subordinate brigades and battalions will encounter select phases individually as they fight for tactical objectives in sequence, the division will be responsible for all six phases of the urban battle described in Table 1. Only the division will plan, command, and control several phases of the urban battle simultaneously, with the ability to anticipate transitions and exploit tactical success to achieve the campaign's strategic objectives.¹²³

During *Phase 0, Open the Campaign* the division will execute close operations to defeat the adversary field army and secure a line of communication to the urban objective. Although the primary task during this phase is to neutralize the adversary's regular-force capability to defend the city, the division should also use this time to improve their understanding of the upcoming urban battle. When the adversary regular forces decide they are unable to oppose the United States in the field, they will likely transition to a new strategy to defend the city. The staff must understand the adversary's capabilities, intent, and tolerance for civilian casualties and physical destruction within the city. The division commander should clarify higher commanders' intents and stakeholder interests while planning the division's approach. Time exists for these planning and preparation activities: in both Grozny and Baghdad, the expeditionary task force paused for several days before renewing the attack to isolate their urban objective. In 1994, Russian precision airpower alone was insufficient to retain the operational initiative while the Russian Army generated combat power for the attack on Grozny. To retain the initiative during the

¹²³ A quote from the Mosul II study indicates that LSCO divisions will play an essential operational-level role maneuvering tactical units to control strategically important cities: "The [JTF's] counter-ISIS campaign recognized urban centers as intermediate staging bases (ISBs) in a 'city hopping campaign,' but did not define how clearing each population area of ISIS control enabled mission accomplishment ... [the JTF] policies, theater setting efforts, and operational systems proved inadequate to set [tactical] conditions for urban combat." David Kogon, *The Coalition Military Campaign to Defeat the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria AUG 2016 – 05 SEP 2017*, US Army Campaign History: CJTF-OIR, Declassified: September 3, 2017, 6. In author's possession.

operational pause in the 2003 campaign to capture Baghdad, other divisions conducted offensive operations to fix Iraqi forces and attention.¹²⁴

Once the adversary has decided to cede the area outside the city, the division can maneuver to invest the city in *Phase I, Approach*. The division must seize a position of advantage that can dominate the city's external terrain and sustain operations to encircle adversary forces and interdict their lines of communication and support. In both Grozny and Baghdad, the division seized a high-capacity airport with good road access to the city. Airports were vital staging areas because they possessed robust infrastructure and ground access that enabled the task forces to sustain nearby tactical units. The Grozny airport also helped Russia gain and maintain air and artillery dominance, but the Baghdad airport was too contested to support US strike operations during the Battle of Baghdad. As urban battles experience more domain convergence, controlling a large airport will be essential to field the volume of aerial platforms necessary to interdict adversary maneuver through and between domains.¹²⁵ In LSCO urban battles, airports may be even more important assets that allow a theater to rapidly deploy or reconstitute critical capabilities, or deliver large volumes of humanitarian aid from outside the theater on short notice.¹²⁶ In the future, divisions should also expect to maneuver forces in multiple domains directly from the airport to interdict the defender's lines of communication and separate defending combatants from non-combatants. Division staff should use this maneuver as reconnaissance to test assumptions about the urban environment, the adversary, and friendly forces because interactions during this phase will better represent the decisive urban combat than the field battles that opened the campaign.

¹²⁴ Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, 256-281.

¹²⁵ US Army, *TP 525-3-8, The U.S. Army Concept for Multi-Domain Combined Arms Operations at Echelons Above Brigade, 2025-2045*, 19-22.

¹²⁶ See US Army, *FM 3-0, Operations* for discussion on extending unit endurance at the end of the JTF's operational reach. US Army, *FM 3-0, Operations*, 1-23.

The division's goal in *Phase II, Siege* is to shape the battlefield until the Army's position of advantage becomes a position of dominance. As the division seizes key terrain in advance of the main assault, every maneuver action is both a reconnaissance in force to gain understanding and also an opportunity to reposition striking power. In Grozny, Group North did not conduct aerial, ground, or even special reconnaissance to confirm the task force's framing of the Chechen adversary. The group also planned to simultaneously retain both of its initial objectives, depriving its brigades the freedom of action to exploit opportunities or respond to threats. In Baghdad, three of 3rd ID's first four attacks were adversary-focused raids that generated information and additional offensive opportunities. Only the April 4 attack on the airport and the April 7 second thunder run intended to seize and retain terrain. General Blount controlled the tempo of the battle, he created information in the OE and then integrated the division's new tactical positions into 3rd ID's operations process. The Iraqi defenders tried to respond to 3rd ID's operations but were consistently caught out of position, and 3rd ID successfully sustained the dislocating effect of the daily brigade-sized attacks without culminating at the end of the JTF's logistical reach.

The US joint force is designed for LSCO against a peer adversary in the field, where joint firepower and protection advantages can mitigate risk to the force, but the Army should not enter an urban environment until adversary forces have been reduced to below-peer capabilities. The US division may not enjoy 3:1 numerical advantage—if the city is hostile, the adversary will certainly outnumber US forces—but by this point in the campaign, the adversary army should be a hybrid force with dis-integrated command and support capabilities, and no longer able to mass an effective counterattack.¹²⁷ US divisions confronted by an adversary as dangerous as the Iraqi Army of March 2003 (at the beginning of the war) should use echelons-above-brigade

¹²⁷ US Army, TP 525-3-8, *The U.S. Army Concept for Multi-Domain Combined Arms Operations at Echelons Above Brigade, 2025-2045*, 56.

capabilities to shape the battlefield and attrit the adversary until they are as fragile as the Iraqi Army of April 2003 (when 3rd ID rapidly seized Baghdad to end the LSCO phase of the war).

Traditional divisions employed, integrated, and synchronized massive lethal and non-lethal effects to degrade and disintegrate adversary capabilities. Current urban environments offer the defender significant protection in the form of dense structures and proximity to civilians, which together degrade the Army's reconnaissance and precision-strike targeting system. Future division shaping efforts should use cross-domain maneuver as a way to elicit adversary reactions that help to distinguish adversary forces from civilians and their property.¹²⁸ In addition to attriting adversary capabilities to make the correlation of forces more favorable prior to the main assault, shaping effects should also seek to isolate the adversary from civilians and the support they can offer. In Grozny, Russian airstrikes and Chechen propaganda isolated Group North from the tens of thousands of friendly civilians who could have materially assisted the Russian attack. In Baghdad, US forces concentrated collateral damage in low-population areas to separate noncombatant residents from the most-lethal effects of the battle, and used precision-strike capabilities to target Iraqi forces as they left protected positions to counter-attack 3rd ID. Finally, US maneuver and firepower are information operations that should be planned, commanded, and controlled for maximum influence on friendly, adversary, local, and international audiences.¹²⁹ In Grozny and Baghdad, the ability to kill adversaries and seize urban terrain was not decisive. Both battles were decided when information generated by combat undermined key audiences' confidence in the Russian and Iraqi ability to retain key terrain.

When battlefield conditions are favorable for *Phase III, Assault* the division can commit maneuver units into the main battle area. Outside the city's perimeter, a US division enjoys

¹²⁸ US Department of the Army, *Training and Doctrine Command Pamphlet (TP) 525-3-6, The U.S. Army Functional Concept for Movement and Maneuver 2020-2040* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), 15-31.

¹²⁹ Kogon, 52-56

considerable tactical advantage and can mass combat power and effects at the time and place of its choosing—a LSCO assault will penetrate any area the adversary defends. However, once the attack is committed, the defender will use interior lines to concentrate against the relatively few attackers inside the city—whose warfighting capabilities are now disadvantaged by the urban environment—and counterattack to regain the operational initiative.¹³⁰ The assaulting brigade can anticipate this adversary reaction but is not resourced to counter it, so division planning and preparation to sustain the assaulting brigade at reach is essential in a LSCO urban battle and may have been the deciding difference in both Grozny and Baghdad.

The division’s operational approach should also seek to decrease risk to civilian life and property when planning the attack. The Russian Army imposed an overly strict ROE when they attacked Grozny to reduce the risk of civilian casualties, but the operation began in the morning during peak civilian presence. In contrast, 3rd Division attacked before dawn when civilians were less-exposed, and tactical commanders adjusted weapons-control restrictions to the local threat as the battle escalated on April 6 and de-escalated after April 9. Additionally, commanders can concentrate destruction in some neighborhoods while leaving others intact. General Blount used 3rd ID’s tactical initiative to limit fighting to non-residential sectors of Baghdad, whereas Russian forces ultimately damaged the entire city of Grozny one block at a time by constricting the Chechen rebels’ linear perimeter.¹³¹

In planning for *Phase IV, Exploit*, the division must identify a series of right-sized objectives for subordinate units to attack and develop decision support tools that help identify when to progress with the next tactical action. Each objective should require less than a battalion of combat power to retain: the tactical objectives in Grozny each required at least a battalion to secure, leaving very little combat power free to sustain successful attacks, much less exploit them

¹³⁰ Arnold and Fiore, 64-66.

¹³¹ DiMarco, 162-64.

to defeat the defender in depth. In contrast (with the exception of Baghdad International Airport), each of 3rd ID's daily brigade attacks seized several company-sized objectives, leaving the bulk of that brigade free to sustain operations and prepare for the next mission. *Phase IV, Exploit* can continue concurrently with other phases until organized resistance is destroyed or dislocated.

Phase V, Consolidate is a period of military consolidation of the battlefield in preparation to continue offensive LSCO, which is different from the transition to stability operations after the conflict has returned to competition.¹³² With essential services restored, large cities can provide local security and governance partners to control the city, raw materiel that can be incorporated into JTF logistics, and contracted labor. It will be easier to restore essential services and consolidate gains if the division's operational approach avoided the city's interstitial systems and left local governance intact, at least in a large proportion of neighborhoods. The Russian Army's operational approach in Grozny intended to avoid damaging key interstitial and governance systems, and planned to transition local security responsibility to several brigades of national police in order allow the Army to pursue the Chechen rebels after the battle. After defeating the Republican Guard in Baghdad, 3rd ID redeployed the division's combat power north to restore the defensibility of the city against counterattack, while the corps used specially prepared civil affairs units to begin stability operations. In both battles, the stability units had a completely different operational approach from the combat units, reflecting the differences in mission, capabilities, and ROE. If a US division must transition rapidly from urban LSCO to a follow-on stability mission in the same city, the division commander will also need to drastically reorganize the division's capabilities and develop situational rules for the use of force tailored to the day's mission, geographically linked to different neighborhoods, and even cyclically adjusted to the time of day.¹³³

¹³² US Army, *FM 3-0, Operations*, 8-1.

¹³³ Glenn, *Combat in Hell*, ix, 12, 36. Glenn, *Heavy Matter*, 12, 23, 32-34.

The LSCO campaigns described in the US Army's new *FM 3-0, Operations* expects divisions to fight and win urban battles against a peer-adversary. Tactical success will require divisions to effectively plan for the battle, then prepare, command, and control forces to achieve decisive strategic effects.¹³⁴ Cities are natural strategic objectives, and globally-connected large cities dominate the regions where the US Army expects to conduct expeditionary warfare. When the JTF assigns one of these cities to a division, the commander and staff must develop their own operational approach to the anticipated urban battle, possibly while the division is already conducting combat operations to approach the city. More movement to contact than deliberate attack, the division must maneuver in multiple domains to improve understanding, control the tempo of the battle, and shape the battlefield in order to defeat the adversary and still seize the city intact.¹³⁵ The operational approach should concentrate destruction in a few areas and spare the rest, and the information narrative must plausibly explain all coalition and adversary actions in a way that increases credibility and confidence in the JTF at the adversary's expense. Finally, the division commander must win the battle in a way that the division's combat power is not required for immediate stability operations, but can immediately maneuver to exploit opportunities, fight the next battle, or redeploy to the next LSCO campaign.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ US Army, *FM 3-0, Operations*, 1-5.

¹³⁵ This sentence is a paraphrase of the VOTE (Visual the operational environment, dictate Operational Tempo through maneuver, synchronize and integrate Effects) urban operational approach used by Operation Inherent Resolve in the second and third phases of Battle for Mosul (2017). Kogon, 88.

¹³⁶ US Army, *FM 3-0, Operations*, 1-38.

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