



Letter To The Editor

Planning Engineer Support for an Urban Attack

I originally wrote "Planning Engineer Support for an Urban Attack" (published in *Engineer*, July 1998, and reprinted in *Engineer*, January-March 2003) to provide options with the technology and doctrine fielded to table of organization and equipment engineer units. Since I left the Joint Readiness Training Center, the Army has developed new doctrine and equipment to address some of the challenges I discussed. We have learned well from our experiences in the Balkans and Afghanistan. Notably, the sensor arrays now in development through the Infantry Center and in testing with the Special Operations Forces community mitigate the need for explosive entry during precision-strike military operations on urbanized terrain (MOUT). Remotely controlled breaching equipment has improved mobility and reduced the need for explosive breaching in many cases. Unmanned aerial vehicles and improved intelligence dissemination systems have greatly improved our situational awareness, reducing the need for "brute force" approaches. Indeed, the entire Army is making great strides in addressing the MOUT challenge.

Given that the world continues to urbanize, we must continue to develop new techniques to meet a wide range of MOUT tactical problems. Lieutenant Colonel Funkhouser and Major Kirkton ("Doctrinal Changes in Urban Operations," *Engineer*, January-March 2003) rightly state that we have an obligation to reduce collateral damage as a way to protect civilians and maintain legitimacy for our operations in the host nation. I would add that the complex three-dimensional

battlespace of a large city, such as Seoul or Baghdad, presents a broad range of tactical problems for the maneuver commander—high population density, complex terrain, and dispersed-but-lethal military opponents. The supporting engineer soldiers have a responsibility to prepare a broad range of solutions to these tactical problems, some of which may be quite destructive. For example, explosive mine clearing may be appropriate in engagement areas like urban parks, and explosive-entry techniques may be required to gain access to enemy-held buildings. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict provides rich examples of improvised obstacles supporting small groups of determined opponents and demonstrates that excessive force can have significant unintended consequences. We must balance the risk of collateral damage with mission accomplishment, force protection, and proportionality. Excessive force risks escalation and violates the principles of legitimacy and restraint that are the foundation of successful smaller-scale contingency operations.

In any case, good mobility/survivability support contributes to maintaining initiative and momentum. Detailed mobility/survivability planning and preparation is essential in every environment. It must address the needs of the entire tactical force—from tooth to tail. Resupply and ground casualty evacuation routes, movement corridors for armored support forces, and a variety of assembly areas must be thoroughly planned and resourced. Engineer support to dismounted infantry platoons and companies in urban environments must remain prepared to clear a variety of reinforcing obstacles, including breaching buildings.

This is a superb discussion topic that should rightly take place in the pages of our professional publication.

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